



Meet Victoria's New Youth Poet Laureate – Maita Cienska

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC – At last night's Council meeting, Maita Cienska (pronounced *My-ta Chen-ska*) was announced as Victoria's newest Youth Poet Laureate. Serving as a champion for youth and the literary arts, Victoria's Youth Poet Laureate seeks to inspire and engage local youth to share their stories through both the written and spoken word.

"I would like to congratulate Maita Cienska on her appointment as the City of Victoria's Youth Poet Laureate for 2017," said Mayor Lisa Helps. "It is important that youth have a voice in our community, and I look forward to our new Youth Poet Laureate inspiring local young people to express themselves."

A 19-year old Vancouver Island poet, Maita Cienska has composed poems as a form of expression since middle school. For the past few years Cienska has been on a self-journey to explore her independence and immerse herself in creativity. During this time, she has released the album *Fumble*, won two *Slams*, tied for *Slam Champion of 2015*, served as a judge at *Victorious Voices* in 2016, and performed at a range of local events including *(Poetry) Slam by the Sea* and the Victoria Writer Society's literary series *Water Feature Night*. Cienska volunteers with Global Shapers Victoria, a city-based hub for young leaders and the Red Cross' *Beyond the Hurt* bullying and harassment prevention program. Cienska is in the midst of publishing her first book of poetry.

"As Youth Poet Laureate, my vision is to break poetry into new spaces with youth who may not have been exposed to this boisterous art form," said Maita Cienska. "I want to be a part of a movement that reaches out to youth and increases understanding."

A "Call for Nominations" open to Capital Region poets 14 – 24 years of age was held in the fall. Applicants were required to have an established body of work (written or spoken word) and to have been recognized for notable contributions in their career. Submissions were evaluated by a peer committee comprised of representatives of the literary and poetry community. The Greater Victoria Public Library coordinated the selection process.

"Maita's creativity and leadership will encourage young people in our community to put pen to paper and express themselves through the written word," said Maureen Sawa, CEO of the Greater Victoria Public Library. "We look forward to partnering with Maita and giving youth opportunities to cultivate the art of creative writing."

Mentored by Victoria's Poet Laureate Yvonne Blomer, the Youth Poet Laureate will create and present new works to Victoria City Council and Youth Council, conduct poetry readings at City and Greater Victoria Public Library events, and organize a community youth poetry event during their one-year term.

The Youth Poet Laureate is an honorary one-year term position from January 1 to December 31, 2017. In addition to the year-long mentorship, the position receives a \$1,750 honorarium and \$1,000 of project funding. The Youth Poet Laureate position is funded by the City of Victoria and the Greater Victoria Public Library.

Victoria was the first municipality in Canada to have a Youth Poet Laureate. For more information, visit: www.victoria.ca/poetlaureate.

ATTACHMENT: Photo of Maita Cienska

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