

WE SPEAK

A CELEBRATION OF
SPOKEN WORD



Aishé
Keita

FEATURING



Monique
Franklin



MAY 1, 2026

Aishé Keita is an actress, director, traditional storyteller, teaching artist and healer. She is the Co-artistic Director of Ase Theatre and Co-founder/Director of Nile's Edge Healing Arts Center. Committed to healing, theatre, and African spirituality, Aishé creates intersections in all she does in pursuit of community liberation, connection, healing, and joy.

Monique Franklin (Verbal Oasis) is a poet, performer, scientist, and mother from Rainier Valley. She has been referred to as "The Unofficial Poet Laureate of South Seattle," "The Billie Holiday of Spoken Word," "The Verbal Manifestation of Nina Simone's Soul," "The High Priestess of Prose, Poetry and the Art of Storytelling," and "The Soul Seamstress." As a performer, you can find her poetry commingling with the ancestors, musicians, vocalists, and dancers.

2026 WE SPEAK emcee & pre-show talk host **Olisa "Spyc-E" Enrico** is the founder and Executive Director of Asé Theater. She is a hip-hop and theatre artist, ritual practitioner, and educator working at the intersection of story, memory, and transformation. Her work is rooted in truth-telling, pulling from lived experience, ancestral knowing, and the body as archive. For over two decades, she has held space for young people to access their voice through hip-hop. Her practice invites artists to break form, reclaim narrative, and move with intention.



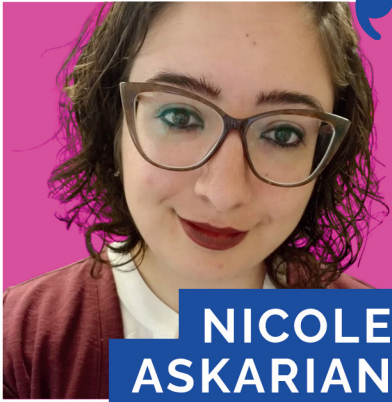
Olisa Enrico

WE SPEAK emcee &
pre-show talk host

2026 COMPETITION

FINALISTS

Edmonds Center for the Arts' annual WE SPEAK Poetry Slam Competition invited poets of all ages from across the Puget Sound region to step forward and share their voices. This year, seven talented artists were recognized by the competition juror panel for outstanding performance submissions.



**NICOLE
ASKARIAN**

Poet since I learned how to hold a pencil, wielding words that sting and stories that linger. I grew up on the history of the ancients, steeped in Persian folklore and German tales, and I am a fierce advocate for those—and myself—who often go unheard, finding truth and fire in the unexpected.

CONGRATS, FINALISTS!

Sheila Tallmon is a musician, dancer, hiker, poet, speaker, mentor, and all-around joy-seeker. Her community-building career spans decades in the youth development she now has the honor of working with seniors at the Lake Ballinger Center.



**SHEILA
TALLMON**

Nilima Pahari is an American-born Nepali student and a sophomore at Henry M. Jackson High School. Her work centers on the power of identity and voice, shaped by her experiences navigating community and self-expression. She is deeply committed to social justice and advocacy, using both her art and her leadership to uplift marginalized voices and challenge systems that silence them.



**NILIMA
PAHARI**



**SCARLETT
SCOTT**

Scarlett Scott is a returning finalist who has been writing and performing spoken word poetry for the last four years. She's also been performing stand-up comedy since age 6. She looks forward to a career in special education for elementary school students, to help kids like her recognize their talents and thrive.



**JASPER
RHODES**

Jasper Rhodes is a high school senior whose passion for creative expression has been evident since early childhood. Jasper returns for his third year performing at WE SPEAK. He's excited to continue his creative journey, shaped by years of dedication, vulnerability, and artistic exploration.



**ANYA
MCCULLOUGH**

ECA STAFF RECOGNITION

and PALAK KUMAR