FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Murray, KY—Students in grades 6-12 across the region participated in a writing contest corresponding with *To Kill A Mockingbird*. This Pulitzer Prize award-winning novel is one of the books in the national reading initiative called The Big Read.

The Big Read initiative in our region was sponsored by the Luther F. Carson Center and its partners Murray State University’s (MSU) Office of Regional Stewardship & Outreach and MSU’s Teacher Quality Institute (TQI). Based in historic downtown Paducah, the Carson Center is the nonprofit performing arts center serving the Four Rivers Region.

The National Endowment for the Arts Big Read initiative was created to restore reading to the center of American life. Six High School and Middle School writers won cash prizes and the possibility of publication. Four schools submitted a total of 82 fictional pieces or essays: Murray and Paducah Tilghman high schools, and Reidland and Paducah middle schools.

The first-place winner in the High School division was Spencer Holbrook, 10th-grader from Murray High. His teacher is Laurie Edminister. Honorable mentions in this category included Griffin Watson (9th grade, Paducah Tilghman) and Catherine Miller (9th grade, Paducah Tilghman). Their teacher is Hema Ramachandran.

The winner of the Middle School division was Kaylee McCollum, an 8th-grader from Reidland Middle. Honorable mentions were presented to Shelby O’Connor (8th-grade,
Executive Director Gina Winchester of the MSU Office of Regional Stewardship said, “Initiatives like the Big Read are so important in furthering the education of the students in our great region.” She continued, “Our office was more than happy to partner on such a noble cause and we are very pleased to see the students taking advantage of this great opportunity.”

The young writers had the choice of writing a fictional piece or an essay. The fictional piece required the students to analyze the first few paragraphs of the novel and identify the key elements used by the author, Harper Lee. Following their analyses, students wrote 150 words of their own novel, along with a compelling title, to correspond with their own insights. Those students who wrote essays selected a quote from the novel, created a thesis related to the quote, and explained what readers can learn from this classic novel.

Entries were judged on effectiveness, original thought, and clear, concise writing. Constance Alexander, judge and Faculty Scholar in Arts & Humanities with MSU’s TQI, said, “The diversity of ideas expressed in students’ writings was impressive, and selecting just six for special recognition was a difficult task.”

The winning essays will be posted on the website of the Carson Center. To read the winning essays and for more information on the Big Read, please visit: http://www.thecarsoncenter.org