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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GUERIN PREP STUDENT MASTERS WORDMASTERS

Izik Alequin, a junior at Guerin College Preparatory High School, is one of the three top-ranked eleventh graders in the entire country in this year's WordMasters Challenge, a national competition for high school students requiring close reading and analysis of many different kinds of prose and poetry.

More than 53,000 students from 46 states and four foreign countries entered the Challenge this year. Alequin is one of three eleventh graders earning the top score of 36 out of 40 for the year-long challenge.

Alequin competes in the Gold Division contest, which includes both eleventh and twelfth graders. In the overall division, only two other students—both seniors—scored higher than he did.

"I am pleased and amazed at Izik's win. He is the only student from a Catholic high school to achieve this high honor," said Marilyn Skowron, Guerin Prep English teacher who has moderated the WordMasters Challenge the past seven years.

Skowron attributes Alequin's success to his own natural talents and because, as he himself attests, he reads a variety of genres. "As a Nolan Scholar here at Guerin Prep, Izik also has been encouraged to be open to challenges and to be a creative thinker."

She said that she is proud that Guerin Prep gave him the opportunity to shine. All Guerin Prep students enrolled in the school's regular and honors college-prep program as well as those in the Nolan Scholars Program compete in the challenge, which consists of four tests being administered throughout the school year.

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Alequin got off to a great start in the first meet of the year when he earned a perfect score on the text of a short story by Kay Boyle. He was one of only 63 eleventh graders to receive a perfect score.

In the year's second meet, which was a poetry challenge focused on a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, Alequin earned honorable mention by making only two mistakes. This placed him among the 147 highest-scoring eleventh graders in the entire country.

Alequin made only one mistake in the third meet for which he analyzed contrasting essays from the *New Yorker* and the *New York Post*. Guerin Prep's Senior Rhiannon Taylor earned a perfect score for this meet.

In the final competition of the year, students analyzed an excerpt from Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*. Alequin's performance put him in the highest honors category of the year-end cumulative standings of the WordMasters Challenge.

Skowron explained the kind of preparation the students are given for the challenge. "The students get a list of specialized vocabulary words that will be used in the passages and in the questions (usually between 30-60 words) for each meet. Our teachers usually have the students look up the meaning of the vocabulary words for use on the contest."

She explained that they also draw on what they are being taught everyday in their English classes. "Some of the literary terms are already known through study in English classes. English teachers teach students every day how to read the different formats – short story, essays, poetry, etc. Students apply the skills they learn in English class to the contest. After the contest, teachers lead discussions on what the students thought about the passages."

The premise behind the WordMasters challenge is that attentive reading and sensitivity to language are among the most important skills students acquire in school. Students are given questions much like the verbal SATs and the Advanced Placement exams that ask students both to recognize the emotional and/or rational logic of a piece of writing and to notice the ways in which a writer's style shapes and shades his meaning.

"I find this contest to be of great value in preparing students for tests like the ACT, SAT, and AP tests," Skowron said. "WordMasters challenges students to pay closer attention to what they read – preparing them for the rigors of college reading."

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