



CALL FOR POETS: ETHERIDGE KNIGHT MURAL PROJECT

[Indiana Humanities](#) and the [Indy Arts Council](#) seek to commission an Indiana poet to write an original poem inspired by the life, career, and legacy of Etheridge Knight to accompany a new portrait mural to be installed in the late spring/early summer of 2023. The goal of the poem is to provide a literary perspective on the legendary status of Mr. Knight, and to help viewers understand his enduring impact on Indianapolis and the world.

COMMISSION AMOUNT: \$2,000

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Sunday, April 2, 2023, 11:59 p.m.

HOW TO APPLY: [Apply here.](#)

About Etheridge Knight

Etheridge Knight was born in Corinth, Mississippi in 1931. He dropped out of high school while still a teenager and joined the US Army to serve in the Korean War. Wounded by shrapnel during the conflict, he returned to civilian life with an injury that led to drug addiction. Knight was convicted of robbery in 1960 and served eight years in the Indiana State Prison. While in prison, Knight began to write poetry, and he corresponded with, and received visits from, Black literary luminaries such as Dudley Randall and Gwendolyn Brooks. His first collection, *Poems from Prison* (1968) included the following text on its back cover: "I died in Korea from a shrapnel wound, and narcotics resurrected me. I died in 1960 from a prison sentence and poetry brought me back to life." Knight was an important contributor as one of the poets and artists connected to the [Black Arts Movement](#), and his work should be read in the context of that movement's goals to inspire collective action and develop Black cultural identities distinct from dominant white power structures. Knight went on to attain recognition as a major poet, earning both Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award nominations for *Belly Song and Other Poems* (1973). Knight's honors and awards included fellowships and prizes from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Society of America. In 1990 he earned a bachelor's degree in American poetry and criminal justice from Martin University in Indianapolis. He died in 1991. For more information about Etheridge Knight's life and work, please visit the [EKFreePeoplesBe website](#).

About the Mural

The mural will be installed in June 2023 in downtown Indianapolis. The community stakeholders for this mural include Butler University, who holds the Etheridge Knight Archive and manages EtheridgeKnightFreePeoplesBe, the Etheridge Knight legacy

initiative. The Knight Family enthusiastically supports the project. The mural artist and design will be publicly announced on April 19, 2023 along with the commissioned poet.

POET SELECTION & COMMISSION INFORMATION

Review and Selection Process

Applications will be reviewed by a conflict-free panel that includes scholars, literary artists, and community representatives. One applicant will be identified by the panel for the mural and awarded the commission. **Please note: we are not asking you to complete the poem to apply.** Applicants are asked to provide a statement of interest and a selection of previous work in order to be considered. After selection, the poets will have time to research, write, and workshop the poem.

About the Poetry Commission

The poem should provide additional insight and the poet's personal perspective on Mr. Knight. Selections from the poem will be posted alongside the mural, with hopes that visitors to the mural will read and reflect, finding further connection and inspiration in Mr. Knight's life and legacy through the written word.

The commissioned poet may write their poem in their primary language. If that language is not English, the poet should provide an English translation. Both the original language and the English translation will be displayed on the mural signage.

The poem must be completed by June 1 and will be unveiled alongside the mural at the dedication ceremony on/around June 30.

Commission Fee and Terms

The selected poet will receive a \$2,000 stipend, with half the stipend paid at the outset of the project, and the second half paid upon delivery of the final poem. The stipend includes compensation for the finished poem, a videotaped reading/performance, and a live performance at the mural dedication. Further compensation for additional program participation will be negotiated with the individual poet.

How to Apply

- Provide a brief statement describing your interest in the project and your preliminary vision for the poem. Here are a few questions you might consider addressing in the statement:
 - Why do I want to take on this project?
 - What do I find compelling about these individuals' life and work?
 - What do I hope readers would take away from my poem?
 - How can poetry help readers get a better understanding of Etheridge Knight's life, in a way that complements the mural?
- Provide writing samples: 5-8 previous poems to help reviewers get a sense of your poetic style and approach. You can upload them individually, or you can collate them into a single Word or PDF document and upload that document.

Apply using [this form](#) before midnight on Sunday, April 2, 2023. Applicants will be notified of the committee's decision in mid-April and will be provided with additional resource materials for reference.

Questions?

- For more information about the poetry competition and how best to apply, contact Megan Telligman, mtelligman@indianahumanities.org or 317.616.9409.
- For more information about the Bicentennial Legends mural initiative, [visit the project website](#) or contact Julia Moore, jmoore@indyarts.org or 317.624.2556