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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**National History Day Honor for Masterman Student  
from Philadelphia Novelist**

Philadelphia, PA—March 16, 2017—At the awards ceremony at the National Constitution Center at 1 p.m., the contributions and achievements of a National History Day student, Emma O’Neill-Dietel, will be recognized with an award from Janet Benton. Benton, a historical novelist and documentary writer, donated a career consultation to the NHD program. Emma O’Neill-Dietel, a senior at Masterman High School, has been selected to receive the award.

O’Neill-Dietel began participating in the National History Day program in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, when she entered a project on Maya Angelou and won first prize in Individual Exhibits. This prize made Emma a member of Philadelphia’s delegation to the NHD Pennsylvania State Finals. She has continued supporting Julia R. Masterman’s NHD participation and this year was co-teacher of the National History Day class with her teacher Liz Taylor.

Ms. Taylor, describes O’Neill-Dietel as “a wonderful student” and “a terrific writer who is interested in a career in writing.”

“As I am about to enter college, I am curious about making a living as a writer, careers in writing, and what type of education would best support such careers,” says O’Neill-Dietel, a playwright, poet, and fiction writer. She looks forward to speaking with Benton about “how she has meshed history and writing as a career.”

National History Day is a year-long endeavor aimed at enabling students to engage deeply with learning in the humanities and STEM. In addition to taking part in classes, students do projects that must include original research in archives, and they present their projects at a district competition.

Historical fiction plays a unique role by building compassion and understanding of past issues and lives, connecting them effortlessly to issues and lives in the present. For these reasons, NHD teachers and the national training program use historical fiction to train teachers and students.

Janet Benton made this donation to National History Day to celebrate Nan A. Talese/Doubleday's May 16 release of her novel, *Lilli de Jong*, set in Philadelphia in 1883. Lilli de Jong is a young Quaker woman who gives birth at a charity for unwed mothers (based on an actual institution downtown). Despite facing severe prejudice and financial ruin, she decides to try to keep her baby. The novel is in the form of her diary. An excerpt and praises from bestselling authors and reviewers can be found at [www.janetbentonauthor.com](http://www.janetbentonauthor.com). Scenes occur in many historic institutions of Philadelphia, such as the old Broad Street Station and Blockley Almshouse, the Unitarian Church at 2125 Chestnut Street, and neighborhoods such as Germantown, Rittenhouse Square, West Philadelphia, Center City, and South Philadelphia.

Ms. V. Chapman-Smith of National Archives at Philadelphia, a lead organizer for Philadelphia's National History Day, says, "Benton's career represents not only a relevant example of how history can be a strong discipline supporting creative work, but also a great example to students, showing that professional writers in our community can be resources to them. Through National History Day, we try to help our students see the real possibilities of realizing their dreams, and Ms. Benton offered us this opportunity to do this for Emma, as well as to recognize Emma's outstanding role in helping her school have a strong presence in our program,"

National History Day (NHD) is a distinguished national program in the Humanities and the recipient of the 2011 National Humanities Medal, our nation's highest award in the Humanities. Every year, over 800,000 students nationwide participate in this program, which culminates in a national competition in Washington, D.C. Every year, Philadelphia selects about 70 students from its district competition to send to the Pennsylvania NHD State Finals. Students selected there then represent the Pennsylvania in the National Finals. On March 15 and 16, nearly 600 students will gather at the National Constitution Center for the Philadelphia district competition.

The Philadelphia NHD program partners, some 40-plus cultural institutions, make this program available to Philadelphia students and fund student participation at the national and state levels. This opens access to this distinguished program to students from all neighborhoods, making Philadelphia unique among all the nation's NHD programs.

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