ELEMENTS OF ORAL INTERPRETATION

Definitions: Oral Interpretation is NOT Acting

Oral Interpretation is the use of a speakers voice, facial expressions, gestures, stance, and posture to portray the emotion and meaning of a literary selection to an audience.

The literary selection may be a cutting from a novel, may be a short story, may be a cutting from a play, could be a monologue, might be a poem or combination of short poems, or could be a reader’s theatre with a group of students. It can be humorous or serious and can have one or more characters.

1. Considerations for a Oral Interpretation Selection
   1. Three Touchstones of Quality Literature (Lee/Gura)
      1. Universality: The ideas expressed in the literature are potentially interesting to everyone because they touch on common experiences
      2. Individuality: A fresh approach to a universal subject. The author’s approach makes an old theme new.
      3. Suggestion: The listeners/readers are not told everything—we are left to complete some of the associations through our own backgrounds and imaginations.
   2. Additional Selection Considerations
      1. How timely is the selection? Choose contemporary themes.
      2. If it is for a speech team competitor, was the selection used by another competitor last season? Avoid material that has been performed in the past year.
      3. Can you understand and relate to the themes presented in the literature?
      4. Do you need permission to use the selection (are there copyright considerations?)
2. Analyzing the Oral Interpretation Selection
   1. Elements of Analysis
      1. Know the meanings of the words.
         1. Denotative Meanings: Dictionary Definitions
         2. Connotative Meanings: Associations, common connections, slang
         3. Allusions: references to other things
      2. Examine the organization of ideas.
         1. Logical Climax
         2. Emotional Climax
      3. Identify the persona—who is relating the experience?
      4. Identify the locus—where does the action take place?
      5. Examine the intrinsic factors in the selection.
         1. Unity
         2. Harmony
         3. Variety
         4. Contrast
         5. Balance/Proportion
            1. Symmetrical
            2. Asymmetrical
      6. Consider the author’s style.
         1. Paragraphs
         2. Sentences
         3. Tone
         4. Rhythm
      7. How are the details Synethesized into a whole?
3. Writing Oral Interpretation Introductions
   1. Elements which must be included in the introduction
      1. Provide relevance for your listeners. Identify the “universal” theme. Illustrate how this selection applies to our lives.
      2. Identify the author and title of the selection.
      3. Set up the selection and characters for the listeners.
   2. Additional Introduction Considerations
      1. “Teasers”
         1. Relevance to audience and selection
         2. Length - should be brief
         3. Interest – will it capture audience attention
      2. Delivery – the introduction is just the student speaking directly to the listeners. The performer is not “in character” at this point and should just be themselves and be conversational in delivery. The speaker should pause after the introduction to allow the listeners time to shift gears and prepare for the performance.