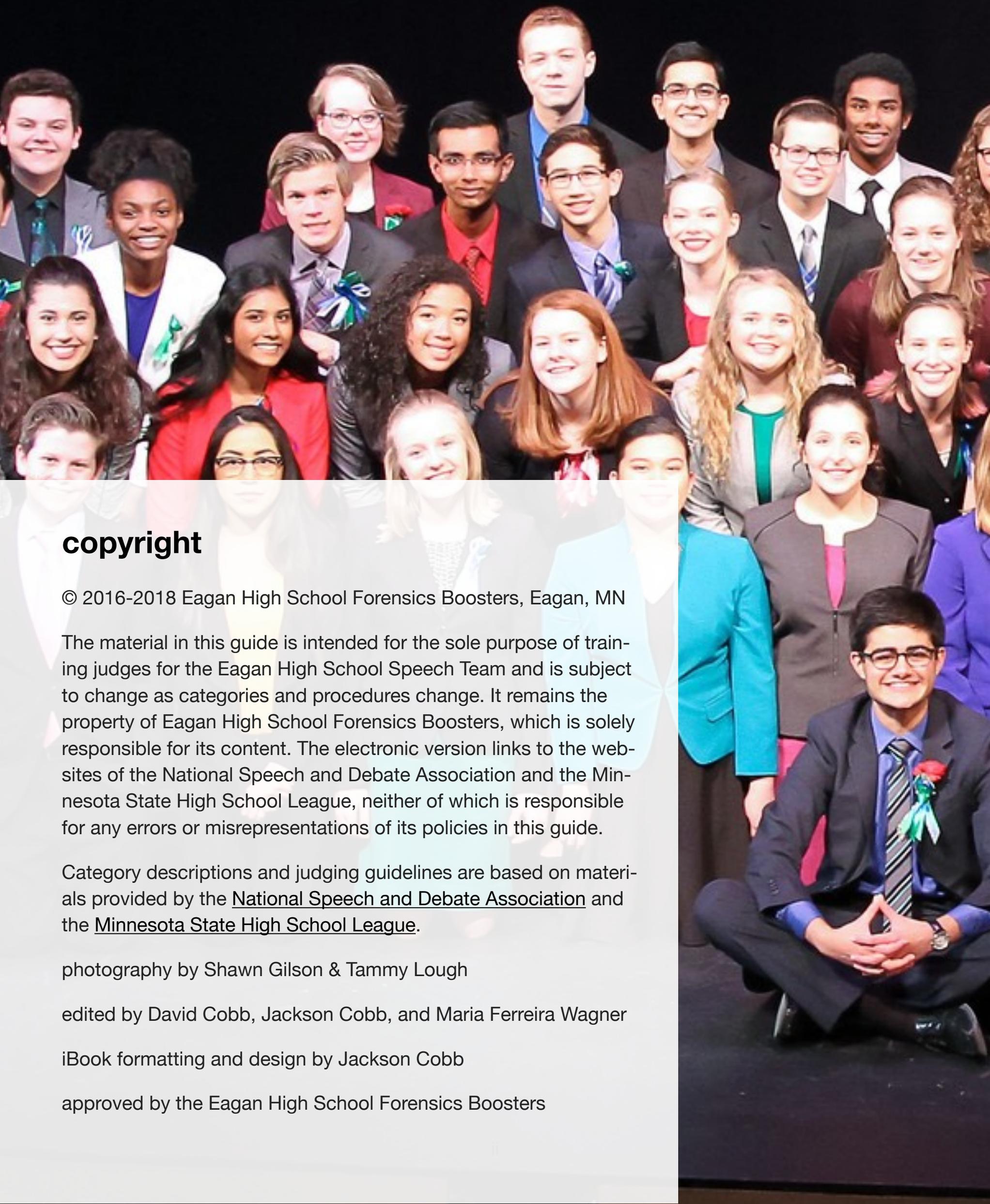


speech judge handbook

2017-2018



eagan
speech



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The material in this guide is intended for the sole purpose of training judges for the Eagan High School Speech Team and is subject to change as categories and procedures change. It remains the property of Eagan High School Forensics Boosters, which is solely responsible for its content. The electronic version links to the websites of the National Speech and Debate Association and the Minnesota State High School League, neither of which is responsible for any errors or misrepresentations of its policies in this guide.

Category descriptions and judging guidelines are based on materials provided by the National Speech and Debate Association and the Minnesota State High School League.

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thank you for being a judge for eagan speech!



You're about to discover one of the most amazing things about Minnesota in winter. Just when your friends are saying they can't wait for their trip to Florida, you're telling them you can't wait for your next chance to judge speech.

There's nothing like seeing 1,500 high school students who woke up at 6:00 a.m. on a subzero Saturday, all dressed in suits, their shoes shined, talking intently to walls, getting ready for their first round of competition.

It fills you with hope for the future, chases away the winter blahs, and instills confidence that the world is going to be in good hands.

How can this be? You make it happen.

For every six entries we send to a tournament, our team is required to send a judge. That's you. If we don't send enough judges, either our kids can't compete, or we pay the tournament to hire others to have all the fun. So we train and send you.

It takes a lot of hard work for our kids just to make the team, and then countless hours preparing their material, practicing, working with coaches and teammates, and developing skills to prepare for their first tournament. By being a judge, you are giving these students a chance to hone their craft not only for a season of competition, but for life.

The training you are about to receive, from the resources in this handbook to shadowing an experienced judge at your first tournament, will not only help our team compete; it will change the way you read the news, listen to a politician, watch a movie, appreciate a great comedian, and digest a sermon. It may even improve your professional life.

Here's to another great season for the Eagan High School Speech Team, thanks to you!



1

a day in the life of a speech judge

1. Bring with you: this Judge Handbook, several pens, paper for your cheat sheet, and a timer for timing each round. Most judges use the clock app on their phone (set on silent, not vibrate).
2. Arrive at least 45 minutes before the first round. Check in immediately at the team's tables with either Maria Ferreira Wagner or David Cobb to receive your judging packet. If you are going to be late or can't show up, text or call immediately with your name and your ETA.
3. After check-in, review your judging packet carefully. It usually includes a tournament schedule, map, and instructions. As soon as your first round is posted, re-

view the category descriptions and judging guidelines in this handbook. Attend the Judges' Meeting if the tournament host has scheduled one.

4. Find the Judges' Lounge. Each tournament typically provides breakfast and lunch for the judges at no cost. This is your home base for the day. It's also where the tournament manager will look for substitute judges if needed.

5. Find Ballot Pickup. This is where you will get your ballot before each round. If you don't see a ballot with your name on it, return to the Judges' Lounge in case you're needed as a substitute. If you're not needed, ask another judge if you can observe their round.

6. Find your room as soon as you pick up your ballot. Review room etiquette for what to do and say and how to conduct the round. Start the round on time.

7. THE GOLDEN RULE: Act like you know what you're doing even if you don't. Never admit to a competitor that this is your first tournament or first time judging a particular category. Let them assume you've done this before.

8. Immediately after the round, deliver your critique sheets and signed ballot to Ballot Drop. Do not leave until a volunteer verifies your ballot has been filled out correctly.

9. Check at Ballot Pickup for your next round, or if you have a round off, return to the Judges' Lounge. Repeat steps 6-8.

10. You might not be scheduled to judge every round during the tournament. However, it is vital that you remain at the tournament site until final rounds are posted. Once you have verified you are not scheduled to judge a final round, you may leave for the day.



2

room etiquette

Judges and competitors engage in a familiar dance that makes each round run smoothly. By modeling respectful, consistent patterns of behavior, you become the host whose quiet authority creates a safe and comfortable space. Always maintain your integrity and treat competitors with dignity.

1. As a judge, you set a tone of mutual respect in the round. You are in charge
 - but not overbearing. When competitors arrive, welcome them politely, but don't converse. When you speak to them, be professional; they're preparing for the round just like you are. Your behavior and attitude create an atmosphere where each competitor can do their best.

2. Arrive on time and make sure the room is ready. If desks need to be moved, you may ask students to help arrange things properly. They know how.

3. Students in most categories wait in the hall until the judge invites them in to the room. Open the door when it's okay for competitors to enter and let them know they can come in. Ask the last one in to close the door before the round begins. Sit front and center with enough space around you to write critiques without students seeing. You may ask students to move if they sit too close.

In draw categories, the first student will be waiting outside. In Discussion, competitors will be at the table before you arrive. Sit outside the circle and do not, under any circumstances, interject.

4. As students get settled, ask them to fill out their critique sheets with their name, code, and the title of their speech before handing them to you. In draw categories, you will pick up the critique sheets with your ballot. Fill in the competitor's name and code before the round. They will hand you the title, question, or cutting they drew; you will fill it in.

5. In non-draw events, take attendance of competitors. If any students are absent, check the ballot for double-entries marked as XE, 2E, or DE. Then offer any double-entered students the chance to speak first. Otherwise, follow the ballot order.

6. Start on time. From your seat, welcome them to the tournament, round, and category. Remind them to turn off their phones. Wish them a good round and announce the first speaker.

7. Once the speaker is ready, make eye contact, ask if time signals are needed (in draw categories, they usually are), and start the timer when they begin.

8. During the speech, write a detailed critique (see [writing critiques](#)) but also be a responsive audience member. Laugh at the funny parts. If you are moved, show it. Remember to give time signals if the speaker asked for them.

9. After the speaker finishes, lead the applause. If a speaker is double-entered, they will politely ask to be dismissed to their next round. Always grant that request.

10. Finish the critique quickly, ranking as you go (see [ranking](#)

speakers). Then announce the next speaker.

11. At the end of the round, thank everyone for their hard work. Then dismiss them, wishing them well in the tournament.

12. Finish your last Critique Sheet quickly. Complete the Ballot (see sample ballot), making sure you've ranked and rated everyone and signed everything. Go straight to Ballot Drop.

13. In the halls, respect boundaries. Don't talk about performances you've judged in earshot of students. *Judges are not permitted to converse with students outside of rounds.*

14. If you aren't judging and would simply like to observe a round, you can usually sit in. Ask the room judge if you can observe. The judge will most likely say yes. If another judge asks to observe a round you are judging, do the same. Finals are sometimes standing-room only, so get to any final you want to observe early.

15. If you suspect a rules violation, discuss it with the Tab Room manager after the round. Judges don't have the power to disqualify speakers.





3

writing critiques

Why write a critique sheet?

Critique sheets are the only “live” teaching tool the student and coach have to work with after the round. In rare cases, your critique sheet may be the most coaching a student gets.

In your critique, you should at least answer these three questions:

1. What worked well for the audience and what didn't?
2. In what specific ways can the piece be made better?
3. Why was the competitor given their rank? Include this explicitly at the end if it's not alluded to in your critique.

What do I write?

In PA categories, briefly outline the student's thesis or topic and the steps used to illustrate or argue it. How clear were the transitions? How well did the intro set up the problem or topic? What evidence supported the argument, and what evidence didn't connect as well? Was it cited properly? How engaging was the teaser or introduction? In Discussion, note the flow of the argument and who contributed which questions or evidence used to complete the assigned task. See [judging guidelines](#).

In Interp categories, what made you care about the characters? Not care? What drew you in? Did their characters have clear motivations? Could you follow their thoughts and emotions? Which vocal and physical effects helped you know what was going on, and which ones hindered your ability to follow the story? See [judging guidelines](#).

Always indicate why you ranked a speaker where you did. Maybe the top three were separated by a slim margin. There's something to praise in every performance, but don't let purely positive comments outweigh constructive ones. Let each speaker know what they can do to be better next time.

Can I write down suggestions about voice and body language?

Yes, of course. Tone, volume, pitch, tempo, articulation, clarity, use of special vocal effects, character voices and postures — all of this is fair to evaluate. If you notice something that stands out (good or bad), quote a phrase or describe the action that's happening so the student knows which part of the speech you're referring to. If you were able to keep all eight characters straight, offer praise. If you couldn't, suggest cutting down the cast or finding a way to make each one more distinct. If a Discussion student is using a bullying tone, that's worth noting. But so is using a calm tone of voice to bring the discussion back to the point. Note what they do well and what needs work.

What about profanity — expletives and epithets?

When you judge a speech that includes offensive language, you may comment on it in context. When students cut drama, poetry, prose, or duo pieces, they make choices about which of the author's words best conveys their interpretation. If the original author used racial epithets or expletives to a particular effect, the student working with their

coach may decide to use them, too. Was it used effectively to express an emotion, punctuate a scene, highlight a conflict? In short, treat the use of profane or offensive language objectively, just as you would any other choice of language. It should never be used in a PA event, unless quoting a source.

What if I disagree with the speaker?

This will happen, especially in PA categories. Speakers may argue for a conclusion you disagree with. That's fine. You're not judging their conclusion—you're judging how well they got there. Your personal political, religious, or moral beliefs should never come into play. You should only consider whether the speaker's position is supported with analysis and evidence.

Can I comment on a competitor's appearance?

Not unless their clothing significantly restricts their movement or their hair restricts the judge's ability to see facial expressions. Saying more than this is generally inappropriate.

Can I comment on behavior of competitors in rounds?

Yes, especially if they are doing something disrespectful or distracting.

What about scripts?

Scripts are required in some categories but avoided in most. If a student is using a script, as long as it is neat, it's technically fine. However, if the script gets in the way of making eye contact or otherwise delivering the speech well, you may certainly note this in your critique and rank accordingly. In Extemp Reading and POI, the student is required to have the passage in-hand and will ordinarily carry it in an open binder. In this case, they are supposed to look at the page once in a while.

What about time limits and signals?

Mark the elapsed time on each student's critique sheet whether they ask for it or not. It helps them know how they did at pacing their speech. It's not up to you to disqualify a student for going over time. However, if a competitor exceeds the grace period for an event, they cannot be given the 1. See [event timing](#).



sample critique sheet

tap to enlarge

Speech Critique Sheet

10:41

Event: Dramatic Interpretation Student Name/Code: Devon Jacobs AJ12

Title of Selection: The Tricky Part by Martin Moran Round: 2

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JUDGE: Please write constructive comments below. Circle the rank and rating. DO NOT RETURN CRITIQUES TO STUDENTS. Turn in critiques with your ballot at ballot drop.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS:

You have happy feet—stay put unless you have a reason to move them. It makes you look nervous and a bit scattered.

Well-crafted teaser. Work on your transition into the intro. It was a bit abrupt.

When your character goes to the hospital, embody his desire and hatred more. Show us his inner conflict.

Good intensity and energy with the youthful part, but make sure your movement isn't flailing. Keep movements crisp and clean.

As a tall guy, you need to watch out for acting downward toward the floor. We lose your face.

Give the car accident at the climax more breathing room. Let us see that and be horrified by it.

Take more time with the ending. Let it sink in more. Maybe elaborate on "the sun."

Work on crafting your character's motivations. Why is he telling this story? Why now? Why here? These are important questions to ask yourself as you continue to form this piece. Overall, nice job. Get it under 10:30 and you're the 1 in this round.

Rank: 1 (2) 3 4 5 6 7 Rating: 100 99 (98) 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 88 87 86 85

Judge Name: Karen Smith School Code: BP6



4

event timing

All categories are timed. Extemp Speaking, Extemp Reading, Impromptu, and Storytelling are seven minutes. All others are ten minutes except Discussion, which is 60. At some tournaments, you are expected to offer a 30 second grace period after a speaker's time is up. Most judges time using their phones (on silent, not vibrate).

If a speaker asks for time signals, offer them "two down." You will hold up 2 fingers with 2:00 left, 1 at 1:00, a C shape at :30, and a fist at 0:00. No signals are given at the end of a grace period.

Some competitors may ask for as much as five down, but you're the judge. Offer what you can reasonably do while still writing a good critique.

Creative Expression	10 min
Discussion	60 min
Dramatic Interpretation	10 min
Duo Interpretation	10 min
Extemporaneous Speaking	7 min
Extemporaneous Reading	7 min
Great Speeches	10 min
Humorous Interpretation	10 min
Impromptu	7 min
Informative Speaking	10 min
Original Oratory	10 min
Poetry Interpretation	10 min
Program Oral Interpretation	10 min
Prose Interpretation	10 min
Storytelling	7 min



5

ranking & rating speakers

Speakers are usually ranked from 1 to 5, with 1 being the best in the round. Some tournaments rank all the way out to 7. Speakers are also given a unique rating from 100 to 85, with 100 signifying a perfect performance. No two speakers can be given the same rating.

Rank as each person speaks. It can be helpful to use a cheat sheet to help you with this. A sample of one kind of cheat sheet is on the next page.

The sample ballot in this chapter shows how rankings and ratings appear in the final ballot turned in at Ballot Drop. *Always sign your ballot.*

GS

Eagan Wildcat Invitational Ballot
Round 1, Section A, Lecture A (9:00 AM)
Judge: A6 (Chanhassen)

A6

#	Code	Name	Rank	Rating
1	G1	Aekta Mouli	2	97
2	C2	Jackson Cobb	4	93
3	Q2	Daniel Reynolds	1	99
4	B1	Emily Albert-Stauning	3	96
5	E2	Mila New	6	90
6	S1	Amanuel Teshome	5	92
7				
8				
9				
10				

Judge's Signature: Don Crabtree



6

categories and judging guidelines

Categories, also known as “events,” generally fall into one of two areas: Public Address or Interpretation. In Public Address events, speakers tend to organize and present information to persuade or inform an audience. In Interpretation events, speakers perform an interpretation of an existing text or original story.

The category descriptions in this chapter are adapted from the MSHSL 2017-18 Rules and Policies Bylaws for Speech and the NSDA High School Unified Manual.

Things to Look for in Public Address Categories

In Public Address categories, speakers organize, analyze, and present information to persuade or inform an audience. These speeches generally teach the audience something new or expose the audience to new ways of thinking about a topic. PA teaches speakers the value of thorough research, thoughtful analysis, and conversational delivery.

Delivery of PA speeches should be sincere, pleasant, and convincing. Steps can be taken at appropriate transitional points in the speech. Gestures should enhance the presentation of the speech. The competitor's face should express involvement, concern, enthusiasm, etc.

Sources should be cited: not, "The New York Times says that you can travel to Cuba now," rather, "According to an article written by Peter Baker published in the New York Times in January 2015, the Obama administration announced new regulations easing decades-old restrictions on travel to Cuba."

Although not encouraged, the use of a script is optional. It may not be used as a prop.

Overall Judging Guidelines

- An attention-getting intro is used in most PA events. Did they link it clearly to their topic? Did they articulate their thesis?
- Did the speaker use a roadmap in the intro to outline the points of their speech?
- Is the speech clearly organized?
- Is delivery fluid and conversational? Good delivery consists of pitch, tone, and pacing that match the content of the speech.
- Are sources properly cited? The author, publication, and date should be included.

Overall Sample Comments

- Your articulation is precise; now work for more vocal variety.
- Cite your sources completely. Don't say, "The Wall Street Journal said..."
- You are a very poised, comfortable, engaging speaker and you communicated your ideas to the audience very clearly. You made great eye contact throughout the room.
- Try to put more conviction in your voice. Show us that you believe in what you're saying.

Discussion

In Discussion, up to eight discussants participate in small group problem-solving and are judged on their contributions to the group effort, knowledge of the topic, and skill in relating to the group. This method of discussion seeks consensus rather than majority rule. The focus of this event should be the encouragement of cooperation and critical thinking to arrive at the collective goal of better understanding and problem solving.

While there is an overall theme for the season, this is still a draw category in that the discussants do not learn the exact task they are to solve until the judge gives it to them and the round begins.

The discussants should control their own process of inquiry. Emerging leadership from within the group should develop. Management of time for that round should remain the responsibility of the discussants themselves. *At no time should a judge become a part of the discussion.*

The 2017-18 topic: The Movement of People: How Mobility Has Impacted Society and Culture.

Time Limit: 60 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. You will probably find the group already at their table talking informally with each other when you arrive. Do not enter into conversation with the competitors.
2. At the scheduled start time, hand them their task which you received at Ballot Pick-up. *This is your last interaction with the group.* Begin your timer. The round has now begun.
3. The discussants will then read the task and try to solve it within a one hour time limit. Your job is to judge how well they have accomplished their goal and to determine who contributed most to the group's success. *This isn't always the person who talks the most.*
4. Discussants will have already researched the larger topic so you can expect them to be well-informed. Once they have clarified their task, one of them will suggest they review their research, usually kept on laptops or in file folders. They will then consult and organize their sources for five minutes. One of the discussants will call the group back to order for the discussion to begin.
5. Your job as the judge is to listen, evaluate the discussion, and make group and individual comments on the critique sheet as the group is discussing. For an individual comment, write down the discussant's name followed by a comment for that student on the critique sheet. The critique sheet will be duplicated later so each discussant will receive all your comments.

6. Most rounds will last 40-50 minutes. Some may be much shorter, depending on the knowledge and skill of the discussants, but a round that lasts less than 40 minutes might suggest that the group did not actually engage in enough analysis to complete the task.
7. When ranking discussants in the round, take into consideration the social dimensions of the group interaction. You might ask yourself:
 - Who was the more positive leader in the round?
 - Who provided strong, credible information to help the discussion progress, and whose information was less credible or relevant to the task?
 - Who asked helpful, thought-provoking questions?
 - Who reflected a deep understanding of major issues?
 - Who reflected a respect for the dignity and worth of other participants (and who did not)?
 - Who exhibited the best active listening skills?

Sample Comments

- Samantha—Good job of taking the leadership role. You did a nice job trying to draw Thomas into the conversation.
- Thomas—You need to contribute to the discussion more. I'm still not sure where you stand on this issue.
- Jack—That was a really helpful New York Times article about climate change. You provided information needed to complete the second part of the task.
- Group—At times, you all seem to be drifting off task. Thanks to Julie for leading the group back to the task.
- Group—You addressed the first two parts of the task well, but you failed to look at the last part of the task: environmental impact. That part was vital to solving the problem at hand.

Extemporaneous Speaking

Speakers are presented with a choice of three questions related to international or domestic current events. They each receive 30 minutes to prepare a persuasive speech answering the selected question. Speakers may consult articles and evidence they gather prior to the contest, often using laptops.

The speaker will usually give you the slip of paper they drew containing their question. Write this on the critique sheet. If a competitor asks for time signals, give them. See [event timing](#).

Speakers may use an index card while delivering the speech as a brief reference tool, but not as a script.

The speaker is responsible for strict adherence to the question drawn, well-chosen information relative to the question, clear organization of the material, and effective delivery.

[Click here for the 2017-18 list of subject areas.](#)

Time Limit: 7 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. The Judge should consider the quality of information presented by the speaker and the speaker's use of that information to support a thesis.
2. Things to look for:
 - Intro—Usually, there is an attention-grabbing introduction including the question drawn by the speaker. Did they articulate the question and give a clear roadmap in their intro?
 - Analysis—Did the speaker clearly analyze each point supporting their argument? Was the argument coherent and logical? Was delivery of the argument fluid and clear?
 - Sources—Did the speaker support analysis with relevant, credible, and timely sources? Were all of them cited properly?

Sample Comments

- You focused more on your first point than your other two. Show more evidence in your later points to strengthen your argument. Cite your sources properly!
- Give us a brief explanation about how the problems in Peru began. This would help those of us who aren't familiar with the region.

Great Speeches

The speaker's goal is to persuade the listener of the greatness of a single speech or anthology of speeches related by author or common theme. They will support their argument by performing selections from the speech (or speeches) throughout their analysis.

The speaker must include information about the speaker, subject, original audience, and occasion in their introduction. They will often use a rhetorical model as the basis for their analysis.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judging should be on the speaker's ability to present material in a manner that informs the audience of the greatness of the speech.
2. Things to look for:
 - Material—How well did the speaker choose and edit the material? Were they sensitive to the author's ideas and purpose?
 - Rhetorical Analysis—How well did the speaker explain and analyze the rhetorical model used and the author's reasoning for using it? How did the author maximize the impact of the speech for their audience?
 - Impact—Why was the speech important? What impact did it have on its audience, and what rhetorical devices did the writer use (i.e. emotional appeal, logic, figurative language, repetition)?

Sample Comments

- You summarized first-wave feminism quite well. Nice job.
- I had trouble separating your analysis from the text of the great speech. Find a way to better distinguish between your voice and Susan B. Anthony's.
- Why is this speech still important? You showed how it was relevant in 1940, but you didn't explain how it remains relevant to modern audiences.
- Your rhetorical model didn't seem appropriate for the context of this speech. Perhaps including an economic theory about class conflict would support your argument better.

Impromptu Speaking

Speakers have seven minutes, in total, to select a topic from the three provided by the judge, brainstorm their ideas, outline, and deliver a speech. Unless otherwise specified by local tournament rules, the speech is then given without notes. It may be light-hearted or serious. It can be based on prompts that range from nursery rhymes, current events, celebrities, organizations, and more.

As the judge, you will provide the speaker with three quotations. Then allow about 30 seconds for the selection of the quotation before the start of the official seven minute time limit. Each of the speakers in a round will see the same three quotations before selecting one.

Most speakers will take several minutes to compose their speech before they begin delivering. This means speeches will often be only three or four minutes in length.

Time Limit: 7 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Organization—Is there a clear structure to the speech? Are transitions effective? Does it develop naturally from point to point?
2. Analysis—Is the prompt directly and effectively addressed? Does the speaker justify their ideas and establish significance to their points?
3. Delivery—Are voice, movement, and expression used well? Is the speaker confident?

Sample Comments

- Your argument held together well and your structure was easy to follow.
- You kept my attention when you made the jump from Jiminy Cricket’s wishing on a star to the inherent racism in the occluded verses of the Star Spangled Banner.
- I wasn’t sure you understood the context of the quotation from Antigone.

Informative Speaking

The purpose of Informative Speaking is to inform and educate, *not persuade*, the audience about a relevant and relatable topic. Informative speeches should be original and factual.

In Minnesota, speakers customarily use visual aids (VAs) to engage their audience. Visual aids should contribute to the audience's understanding, emphasize relevant information, and provide a creative outlet that augments the content of the Informative speech. Visual aids are normally presented on foam board on an easel. In some cases, three-dimensional and electronic visual aids may be used. Audience participation is not permitted.

Maximum set-up time is two minutes. Setup time is not considered in the overall timing of the speech. Expedient take-down is expected.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider quality of thought, composition, organization, delivery, and effective use of visual aids.
2. Things to look for:
 - Relevance—Is the topic timely? Why should the audience care? Is the thesis clear?
 - Relatability—How well does the speaker connect the audience to the topic? Is the evidence logically presented? Was the speech delivered conversationally? Were the visual aids engaging and effective?
 - Originality—There are few truly original topics. Has the speaker educated the audience in an inventive and clearly organized way? Is their approach new and exciting? Did you learn something new?

Sample Comments

- Be careful. When you said “Coke is just better than Pepsi” without citing a source, you seemed to be advocating, not just informing.
- The labels on your bar graph VA are too small—they're impossible to read from a distance.
- Your intro grabbed my attention. Who knew plastic straws could be so interesting?
- You taught me something I didn't know before. Very good job.

Original Oratory

The intent of Original Oratory is to inform or persuade the audience on a topic of significance. This speech showcases the student's voice and passion for a relevant topic. Speakers should provide insight and guidance but are not expected to solve the great problems of the day.

An Oratory is not simply an essay about a topic—it is a well researched, logical, and organized presentation which uses evidence, reason, emotional appeal, and often humor to convey a message. In an effective Oratory, the speaker will try to influence the audience's beliefs, attitudes, or feelings about a specific topic. Effective speakers will generally deliver each point of their argument from a different spot at the front of the room.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider persuasiveness of the speech and effectiveness of delivery.
2. Things to look for:
 - Importance—What's at stake? Is the topic significant? Is it timely?
 - Relatability—How does the speaker make the topic relatable to the audience? How conversational is the delivery? Are consequences of inaction established?
 - Credibility—Is the speech clearly organized (grab interest, state thesis, establish problem, propose solution, etc.)? How effectively are examples used? Are all sources properly cited?
 - Originality—How do the problem and solution relate to the speaker's personal experience? What does the speaker bring to the table?

Sample Comments

- Talk *to* us, not *at* us. Your delivery is too “speechy.” It needs to be more conversational.
- I'm having problems following the structure of your speech. Maybe explain the problem more fully before moving on to its effects. Then the solution will make more sense.
- Your use of humor seemed misplaced. Joking about suicide is never funny.
- Cite your sources properly. The New Yorker didn't “say” anything—Andy Borowitz did.
- It's clear you really care about this topic. You made me care, too. Good job.

Things to Look For in Interpretation Categories

Interpretation categories are all about telling stories that reflect humanity. At their best, these stories reveal truths about the way the world works and the complexity of human nature.

These categories challenge speakers to embody characters with narratives distinctly different from their own. What does a character want? How do they overcome obstacles and build relationships? What, at their core, makes them human? How do they react to other characters and circumstances? An effective interp piece will answer these questions—whether it’s humorous, dramatic, or both.

In Interpretation events, students tell an original story or interpret a cutting from an existing text. Original stories are written by the speaker. Cuttings generally come from books, scripts, or anthologies but can, in some circumstances, draw from other published material.

All interp pieces contain a speaker-written introduction which conveys the major themes of the piece and cites the title and author. The structure of the piece often follows a narrative arc.

Many interp pieces incorporate “tech” as a way to tell stories physically. Tech can include pantomime, blocking, choreography, and sound effects. It’s most heavily used in humorous events.

Scripts are required in Extemporaneous Reading and Program Oral Interp. They are prohibited in Storytelling. Although not encouraged, the use of a script is optional in Creative, Drama, Duo, Humor, Poetry, and Prose.

Overall Judging Guidelines

1. Characters—Is each character believable and distinct? Are they well-developed and relatable? Can you always tell who’s talking? Are transitions between characters clear?
2. Blocking—Can you tell what the performer is doing in the scene? Can you tell where they are? Is there a reason for the character’s movement?
3. Cutting—Do you understand what’s happening? Is the storyline easy to follow? Does the sequence of events make sense?

If a student does something funny, laugh. If they move you, show it. In short, be a good audience member. It helps students perform at their best.

Creative Expression

Originality is the key to Creative Expression. Unlike other Interp categories, Creative requires speakers to write and interpret their own material. This material is often humorous, but it can also be serious. Most Creatives take the form of a story; the best ones also have an identifiable style, tone, and theme.

Speakers will often use pantomime, impersonation, and multiple characters to tell these stories. They may also include a “teaser” before delivering their introduction. Published material can be quoted, but the majority of the speech should be original.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider the creativity of both the writing and the performance.
2. Things to look for:
 - Writing—How well does the story hold together? Is the plot compelling? Is there a clear theme? Is there a character arc? How was conflict introduced and resolved? This is a form of creative writing; you should judge the quality of the composition.
 - Characterization—How is each character fully fleshed out? Does each have an individual personality? Does each serve an identifiable purpose? Do they react to each other?
 - Blocking/Tech—How effectively does the student use facial expression, body language, and movement within the space? Are pops clear?
 - Originality—How imaginative is the speaker’s interpretation? Is it clever? New? Does it say something that needs to be said?

Sample Comments

- About halfway through your piece, your theme becomes easily identifiable. Up until that point, I was a bit lost. Introduce your primary theme early on—in the teaser or the intro.
- The teacher seemed rather one-dimensional. Giving her emotions other than anger would make her more relatable.
- It was difficult to distinguish between your characters. Each needs its own distinct physical characterization. You have the voices down, but each character looks the same.
- Your story was original, clever, and captivating. Thank you for steering clear of the traditional “journey” storyline.

Dramatic Interpretation and Prose Interpretation

Dramatic Interpretation and Prose Interpretation are meant to make the audience feel something. Good performances focus on suspending an audience's disbelief by portraying a realistic, emotional, and well-motivated character. The best performances take the audience on an emotional journey.

Dramatic Interpretation uses any published selection of dramatic literature (plays, radio plays, television plays, or screenplays).

Prose Interpretation uses any published selection of prose, fiction or non-fiction.

Time Limit (both): 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider the speaker's ability to convincingly embody and effectively tell the story of a character and the conflicts they face.
2. What to look for:
 - Motivation—What is this character trying to achieve? Why are they telling this story? Why here? Why now? Why to this audience?
 - Characterization—Is the main character believable? What makes them tick? How does the character react to the environment and situations around them? Do their facial expressions, physicality, and vocal qualities seem naturally motivated?
 - Blocking/Tech—Are all movements realistic and believable? Do they serve a purpose?
 - Cutting—How is conflict clearly established and developed? How does the conflict build to a climax? Is a new stasis established at the end? Does the story make sense?

Sample Comments

- Well-crafted teaser. Work on your transition into the intro. It was a bit abrupt.
- Practice your drink tech with an actual glass. Right now you're spilling whiskey everywhere.
- I felt your character's pain toward the end. She was clearly suffering from a great loss.
- Work on honing your character's motivations. Why is he telling this story? Why now? Why here? These are important questions to ask yourself as you continue to form this piece.

Duo Interpretation

In Duo Interpretation, two competitors team up to deliver an interpretation of a published play or story. Using off-stage focus, speakers convey emotions and environments that highlight relationships and interactions between characters. Duos need energy, intensity, and cohesiveness of interpretation between partners.

In Duo, partners are not allowed to touch or make any eye contact outside of the introduction. They will often use conventions from Dramatic and Humorous Interpretation to distinguish between characters and transition between different parts of the story. Performances generally include a teaser before the introduction.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider the speakers' ability to effectively tell a story together.
2. Things to look for:
 - Motivation—What is each character trying to achieve? Are their intentions clear? Why are they saying the things they're saying? Why here? Why now? Why to this audience?
 - Characters—Is each character believable, distinct, and recognizable? Are their voice and physicality appropriate? Does each character react to what the other is saying and doing?
 - Blocking/Tech—Does the blocking create a clear setting? Can you tell where everything is supposed to be in the space? In what ways do tech and blocking reinforce interactions between characters? Are the speakers careful not to touch or make eye contact?

Sample Comments

- The two of you have nice chemistry; I can tell you enjoy doing this together.
- You're not reacting to each other—you're just performing at the same time. Remember: all acting is reacting. If you don't react to what your partner does, your piece isn't believable.
- Your tech gets sloppy during the flying sequence. Your arms should be fully in sync.
- When you're speaking in unison, make sure your articulation and volume are the same.
- You two very effectively created a cramped setting for the submarine. We could tell exactly where everything was in the space. It stayed consistent throughout the scene. Good job.

Extemporaneous Reading

Extemporaneous Readers read for appreciation and enjoyment, both for themselves and for their audience. But they don't just read aloud; they interpret. Using vocal, facial, and bodily expression, they decide how to portray characters and circumstances in each story and how to convey the appropriate emotions or ideas in a poem. This year's selections: prose and poetry.

This is a draw category, so reading order is determined by lot. Thirty minutes before the round begins, the first reader draws three cuttings and selects one to prepare. Eight minutes later, the second reader does the same thing, and so on. You will see them one at a time.

Speakers will read as much of the complete cutting as time permits. Speakers can end the piece anytime after six minutes. When time expires, the reader may complete the sentence they are on. What counts isn't the length of the reading, but the effectiveness of the speaker reading it. The reader may use a teaser from the reading as a part of the introduction.

Time Limit: 7 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Readers are judged by their ability to interpret and convey what is happening in a text as they read it aloud.
2. Begin timing as soon as the student hands you their title and is ready. At the end of the performance, complete the critique quickly so the next reader can enter on time.
3. Things to look for:
 - Characterization—How appropriately does the student use vocal, facial, and bodily expression to convey what a character is going through? If the character is happy, angry, sad, or forlorn, how well does this come through in the performance?
 - Vocal quality—Consider diction, tone, inflection, pacing, volume, and projection.

Sample Comments

- You conveyed the wife's ambivalent feelings well. That catch in your voice was a nice touch.
- Avoid vocal fry and up-talking with the grandmother. She shouldn't sound like a teenager.
- Remember: you're not just reading the poem, but interpreting it. The middle stanza was actually about cancer, not just a smudge on the glass. Get that, and the final verse will linger.

Humorous Interpretation

Humorous Interpretation is meant to be funny. It tests a speaker's comedic skills through delivery, timing, and character development. It also tests the speaker's ability to find the humor in a piece of literature and cut it appropriately. Well-crafted Humors have a storyline that's easy to follow and a purpose the audience can understand. The best ones convey a clear message.

Most Humor pieces employ a variety of conventions: pops between characters, transitions between scenes, funny voices, facial expressions, and appropriate blocking and tech. Speakers generally perform a teaser before giving the introduction.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider the speaker's ability to tell a funny story or communicate a meaningful message in a humorous way.
2. Things to look for:
 - Humor—Was the piece funny? Did it make you laugh?
 - Characters—Is each character believable, distinct, and recognizable? Are their voice and physicality appropriate? In what ways do the characters react to each other? Is it clear what each character is trying to achieve? How well did the characters connect with you?
 - Blocking/Tech—Does the blocking create a clear setting? Can you tell where everything is supposed to be in the space? Is tech clean? Can you tell what characters are doing?
 - Cutting—Was the cutting easy to follow? Did it make sense? Was there a character arc that kept you engaged?

Sample Comments

- There are some really funny lines in this! Just be sure not to rush through them. We won't laugh if we can't hear them.
- Your "little kid" character behaves like a caricature. Cut the backpack tech—it's overplayed. His voice, however, fits the character well.
- Your characters were really fun to watch and so distinct! I always knew who was talking.
- You're too much in your own head at the beginning. Focus on delivering that joke *out* to the audience. It's clear you find it funny. Make us laugh, too.

Poetry Interpretation

Poetry challenges the speaker to interpret a single poem or, more commonly, a program of selections from several poems that convey a significant theme or message. A well-performed piece conveys not only technical skill but emotional depth and power. It presents ideas or images that can prod, challenge, provoke, evoke, or move the listener.

Titles and authors of each poem used should be stated in the introduction.

Not all poems used in this category follow traditional conventions of rhyme and meter. Additionally, some programs are linked more thematically than stylistically. These poems and programs can be disorienting for new judges. If you're not sure how to interpret these pieces, try approaching them as you would a Drama or Prose. Consider the overall flow and emotional arc.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider how well the speaker interprets and presents the meaning of the poem or program of poems.
2. What to look for:
 - Performance—Is the speaker comfortable and commanding in the space? Do the student's physicality, facial expression, and gestures enhance or detract from the piece?
 - Vocalization—How do the speaker's delivery, pacing, diction, volume, and rhythm bring the piece to life? How else do their vocal patterns enhance or detract from the narrative?
 - Understanding—How well does the speaker convey what is going on in each poem? How appropriate is the form of delivery to the content? Who is speaking, and to whom?
 - Cutting—How well do the selections fit together to create an overall progression of ideas, feelings, moods, or impressions? Is the theme or idea easy to follow? Does it flow and make sense?

Sample Comments

- Very strong cutting—this worked really well to promote your overall message.
- Try speeding up the rhythm as the excitement builds from a resting heartbeat to racing.
- Pause for a beat longer after the intro. You lost me by transitioning too fast.

Program Oral Interpretation

Program Oral Interpretation (POI) is all about creating an intellectually unified program by curating and performing thematically-linked literary material. Speakers draw from a wide variety of sources, including prose, poetry, and drama.

In POI, speakers structure material to convey a particular message or explore a specific theme. Speakers take great liberty in the way they choose to accomplish this: Some programs are designed to persuade, while others are designed to illustrate. Some do both.

Selections must be verbally identified by title and author; however, when and how this is accomplished is the speaker's decision.

A manuscript is required. It must be looked at occasionally. It may be used as a prop.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider how effectively the speaker constructs and presents an intellectually coherent theme or idea.
2. Things to look for:
 - Programming—Are at least two genres of literature used? Does all the literature contribute to the theme or argument? Does the flow make sense? Does the order contribute to creating a cohesive, compelling performance? Is there balance among genres?
 - Blocking—How are space, emotion, and action effectively conveyed through motion? Do all movements seem natural and motivated? Can you always tell what the speaker is doing?
 - Characterization—Does each selection have distinct and engaging characters? Does the performance match the genre? How are multiple characters used to animate the cutting?

Sample Comments

- I appreciated the diverse array of literature. That being said, your program is slightly prose-heavy. Try to find more places to bring out poetic and dramatic elements.
- There's a disconnect between the explosive language in your poetic section and the subdued blocking you use. Don't be afraid to be bigger. Put it all out there.
- Engaging performance! You made me laugh, you made me think, and you made me feel.

Storytelling

Storytellers recreate a familiar story in their own words. The stories they recreate are taken from a list announced at the beginning of the season. While providing a unique interpretation, the speaker maintains the author's original mood and format. They present the story in a direct, conversational style and they support their performance with appropriate characterization, blocking, and tech.

Stories usually begin with a teaser and end with a concluding statement. Speakers can cut the story to meet time constraints, but they shouldn't add subplots or change the story's original plot, style, intent, or mood.

This is a draw category, so speaking order is determined by lot. Thirty minutes before the round begins, the first speaker draws three stories and selects one to prepare. Eight minutes later, the second speaker does the same thing, and so on. You will see them one at a time.

Time Limit: 7 minutes

Judging Guidelines

1. Judges should consider the student's ability to recreate the story in their own words, specifically noting conversational style and physical characterization.
2. Things to look for:
 - Expressiveness—Does the student's voice align with the story? Does the student convey appropriate emotion? Do their facial expressions aid the overall delivery?
 - Characterization—Is each character believable, distinct, and recognizable? How does the student's voice and physicality distinguish between characters? Can you tell who's talking?
 - Relatability—Does the student effectively establish a connection with the audience? Is eye contact engaging? Would the story engage young children? Is it fun, scary, intriguing?

Sample Comments

- Your characters were very fun, distinct, and energetic.
- I thought you could've focused more on the theme of the selection in your intro.
- Your narrator's voice drew me right in to the Old West. I felt like I was sitting around the campfire with you. But when you choose an accent for the mom, commit to it.