INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE
Bringing Words to Life

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

Travis Kiger & Ganer Newman

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Contents

Introduction

T he place: Any given high school in the United States. The time: entirely too early in the morning. Tens of thousands of students wake up, suit up, and warm up to perform in interpretation events. With categories that range from humorous to dramatic, solo to duo, interpretation is a genre of forensic performance that allows students to express themselves creatively and exposes them to literature including classic children's stories, contemporary narratives, and Pulitzer Prize winning plays. Students learn to critically analyze text, gain a strong sense of physical communication, develop dynamic vocal variation, and earn increased confidence and poise. Indeed, the benefits gleaned from interpretation events extend far beyond the competition room.

Interpretation is a multi-faceted, dynamic, perpetually evolving genre of forensic performance. Therefore, for new coaches and students, approaching interpretation for the first time can be a daunting task. When we first began competing in the activity, it was overwhelming keeping track of all the vocabulary, rules, conventions, and best practices. On top of that, there are *acronyms* for all of the vocabulary, rules, conventions, and best

practices! Over time and through experience, the confusion dissipates and the challenge of crafting competitive performances becomes an endeavor you enjoy. Now, the year does not feel the same without scrambling to find scripts, the awesome feeling when a coaching session yields a creative idea, the fulfillment when a student "breaks" for the first time. But you don't know what "breaking" is yet. Trust us, we know the feeling. So we promise to take this one step at a time.

So what is interpretation? There are multiple interpretation events recognized by various forensic organizations across the country. The National Speech & Debate Association has three main interpretation events; Dramatic Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, and Duo Interpretation. Each event has its own rules and varying perspectives on how to best approach it. While some literature has been written on the subject, many new students and coaches find interpretation the event that is most difficult to conceptualize. Considering this, interpretation can be difficult to operationalize and therefore seems to be shrouded in mystery.

This book is most useful for individuals new to interpretation. It is designed to introduce new coaches and students to the three major interpretation events and operationalize the start-to-finish process of designing a competitive performance. In addition to explaining the rules and guidelines accompanying each event, this book will share practical insight into the process of finding material and cutting it down to a script appropriate for competition. It will also offer tips on creating performances that are competitive. Finally, this book will provide tips on how to prepare for and compete at tournaments. As we begin, it is important to keep an open mind and trust that understanding interpretation is a process that requires knowledge and experience. Certain concepts will be more difficult to immediately grasp than others. Consider that if you do not immediately understand a given concept, that concept will likely be explained in greater detail later. Our goal is to help remove the shroud veiling the event, while discovering the many joys and benefits of interpretation.

UNIT 1

Overview of Interpretation Events

Sam begins his high school experience like every other student begins theirs, absolutely terrified. During the freshman orientation in the gymnasium, a well-spoken senior gave a talk about the "forensics" team. He had heard that word somewhere before, but from what Sam gathered, the "forensics" team had nothing to do with dead guy stuff. The senior said that there are a number of events that appeal to a variety of interests, like public speaking, debate, and interpretation. "Interpretation is kind of like acting," the senior said. Sam's always heard he was pretty good with characters. "Maybe I'll check this forensics team out," he thought.

For anyone new to the activity, conceptualizing interpretation can be a bit of a challenge. Many newcomers will ask, "is it acting?" Not exactly. While there are those who will say that interpretation and acting are indistinguishable, there are some notable differences, particularly in regard to the confines of forensics. Acting allows performers access to stage prop-

erties, costumes, sets, lighting. In competitive forensics, these faculties must be interpreted by the performer. **Cutting**, or the process of removing text from a full-length play, book, or short story and transforming it into a roughly eight minute piece, is also relatively unique to forensics.

If interpretation is not acting, then what is it? **Interpretation** is a genre of forensics that performatively renders an author's work so as to bring out the meaning of that work in an effort to uncover some truth about the human condi-

> **"Selections shall be cuttings from published-printed novels, short stories, plays, poetry, or any other printed-published materials. Presentations must be memorized, without props or costumes. The time limit is 10 minutes which includes an introduction."**

tion. All that essentially means is that we present literature to demonstrate an argument about who we are. Interpretation is further segmented into different categories or events. Various state leagues and national forensic association tournaments offer a litany of interpretation events. Some events are done exclusively in select regions. For example the Minnesota State High School League offers an interpretation event

called Creative Expression, whereby students perform original narratives. In California, an event called Program of Oral Interpretation is offered, where competitors combine literature from Drama, Prose and Poetry to communicate a unified theme. Creative Expression and Program of Oral Interpretation are not widely recognized evenst. There are four interpretation events that are widely recognized at any given tournament in the country; Dramatic Interpretation (DI), Humorous Interpretation (HI), Duo Interpretation (DUO), and Oral Interpretation (OI), which involves both Prose and Poetry. The National Speech & Debate Association (the Association) recognizes DI, HI, and DUO as the three "main" interpretation categories and includes Prose and Poetry as separate "supplemental" events.

The Association rules for each of the three main interpretation events provide further clarity. They state, "Selections shall be cuttings from published-printed novels, short stories, plays, poetry, or any other printed-published materials. Presentations must be memorized, without props or costumes. The time limit is 10 minutes which includes an introduction." Each of the main events has its own *conventions*, but the Association *rules* for DI, HI, and Duo allow for a host of interpretive possibilities. As long as the selection is printed, published, memorized, and within the time limit it is allowed for competition. Keep in mind; "allowed" and "appropriate" are not mutually exclusive. Events are judged by individuals

from the community. Parents, coaches, clergy members, bus drivers, college students, anyone may judge an interpretation event round, so it is beneficial for students and coaches to choose material that is audience appropriate. More on that later in this text.

Each of the three main events share the above rule, however each event has its own nuanced description. **Dramatic Interpretation** "is an individual category in which the selections are dramatic in nature," **Humorous Interpretation** "is an individual category in which the selections are humorous in nature,"

and **Duo Interpretation** "is a two-person category in which the selection may be either humorous or dramatic in nature." Now that we know the general rules and event descriptions for the three main interpretation events, we will examine the rules and descriptions for Oral Interpretation or Prose/ Poetry.

Oral Interpretation, one of the oldest events in forensics, is an individual category in which a student performs (usually alternating) selections of prose and poetry. The event requires students to present selections while holding the "**manuscript**," a copy of the

work that is almost always contained within a binder. At many competitions throughout the country, students will perform a selection of prose that is a maximum of 10 minute (including introduction) in one round, then perform a selection of poetry that is 10 minutes (including introduction) in the next. These events continue to alternate until the final round. Which selection will be performed in the first round is generally determined by a coin flip at the beginning of the tournament.

Current Association rules separate Oral Interpretation into two **supplemental events**, meaning the events are performed only by students who do not advance to a certain point in any main event category, of Prose and Poetry. Each category has a time limit of 5 minutes that includes an introduction. The Association guidelines for Poetry explain that "Poetry is writing which expresses ideas, experience, or emotion through the creative arrangement of words according to their sound, their rhythm, their meaning. Poetry may rely on verse and stanza form. Only published, printed works may be used. No plays or other dramatic materials may be used." Likewise, the guidelines for Prose states that the event "expresses thought through language recorded in sentences and paragraphs: fiction (short stories, novels) and non-fiction (articles, essays, journals, biographies)." In both supplemental events students are prohibited from using the same source used in Duo, Dramatic or Humorous at any National Speech & Debate Association tournament. Meaning a student may not use their DI as a prose when they do not advance to elimination rounds, or out-rounds.

Each of these events will be explained in greater detail in later units in this volume. Units 2, 3, and 4 will provide valuable vocabulary that will serve as a foundation for all interpretation events. Some of this language will seem foreign, even to coaches with some experience in forensics. If you have trouble with any particular concept, stay calm – the concept will be reiterated later.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What materials must we create before we build a competitive interpretation performance?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Piece, Interper, Cutting, Interp, Teaser, Intro, Build, Dramatic Arc*

UNIT 2

Intro to Material Composition

S am entered the forensics room and was bombarded with a flurry of activity. Students were at the computers reading about politics, standing in the corners talking to themselves, and sitting in a circle filing enormous piles of paper. Sam approached a girl who was trying different voices while making faces in the mirror. He told her that he was interested in the event that was kind of like acting.

"You mean interp."

Sam then asked how to get started. The girl said to him, "First, you're going to have to find a piece."

Piece is how **interpers**, or competitors who compete in the interpretation events, refer to the literature that they are interpreting. Piece is short for "piece of literature." In the inter-pretation events, competitors use the words from works of literature to form a **cutting**, or script, that they use for performance. Interpers use cuttings because there is a ten-minute time

limit for the event. Also, cuttings allow students to highlight a part of a story to accent a certain theme of relationship in the story.

Upon diving into the world of interpretation, or **interp**, competitors must understand the basic steps that lead to the building of a performance. Whether a student is competing in DI, HI, or DUO, the steps are always the same.

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STEPS TO SUCCESS IN INTERPRETATION

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1. FINDING THE EVENT THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU.

Before a competitor can begin building a performance, they must determine which interp event is best for their performance style. Many competitors compete in multiple events; but, as the old adage dictates, "You've got to start somewhere." The easiest way to determine which event is best for you is to simply watch multiple rounds of each of the events and then choose the one that feels the most comfortable. However, as that method is rather unspecific, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you like making people laugh? (HI)
- Do you like making different voices? (HI)
- Do you like making faces? (HI)
- Do you like telling people stories? (DI)
- Are you fascinated with dramatic situations? (DI)

- Do you like playing "realistic" characters? (DI)
- Do you like teamwork and working with a partner? (DUO)
- Do you like reading scripts of dialogue out loud? (DUO)
- Do you like coordinating movement? (DUO)
- Do you feel comfortable with a faster paced performance? (HI, DUO)
- Are you comfortable with taking your time in storytelling? (DI)

These questions should not be a hard and fast guide, but they should get the conversation started in your head. The truth is, as different as each of the events can look, they all employ very similar characteristics in participation. Dramatic Interpretation requires an attention to humor. Humorous Interpretation requires attention to conflict. And both Dramatic and Humorous require attention to relationship. Duo Interpretation requires attention to both humor and drama, as well.

As a young competitor, these similarities

among events took me a while to understand. It took me a while to realize that the "performance modes" were not so important in making the big "event" decision. I found the question, "What kind of literature did I want to read during the research process?" guiding which event that I would compete in the most. Remember, though, that these questions are only a guide. As a coach, I learned to look for all kinds of literature for all kinds of performers. Some of my biggest coaching successes came of prompting a "Dramatic Interper" to do Humorous Interp. Or, even, prompting an Extemporaneous Speaker to try Duo Interpretation. In the end, this event decision has become about the literature. I read for all kinds. And when I find something good, I try it, regardless of which event it serves.

2. FINDING LITERATURE FOR COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE

After you have decided which event is the best fit for you as a performer, then you want to start researching for material to perform. This step is intimidating. You are not alone in scratching your head about where to start. The most common question that we receive from new coaches and performers from across the country is, "Where do you find literature?" Or, "How do you choose a piece that will serve you well in performance from ALL of the literature from ALL of time from ALL of the world?" The Answer: One book at a time. Many com-

petitors, experienced and inexperienced alike, place a ton of pressure on themselves to find the *perfect* piece for performance. The dirty truth is: yes, some pieces of literature are better for competitive performance than others. And some are better suited for *you* as a performer than others. And sometimes, interpers seemingly win because of a great piece of literature – but understand this: this is by *far* a rarity. It is just as common for an interper to not win with great literature than with. The filthiest truth is: the piece does not win for you. Hard work and dedication are much bigger factors in determining your competitive forensics destinies. This means: there will not be a *perfect*

piece. Some championships have been won with very simple little known pieces of literature that you will *not* see on any Pulitzer price list. But through performance and the interp process, the performer was able to communicate a truthful observation in the human condition. Sometimes – and I would argue that most times- when a performance is not working, something may be wrong with the performance – and the piece is not to blame. As a competitor, I had to learn this the hard way.

> Do not depend on veteran coaches to inform you of the rules. The rules change from time to time, and many veteran coaches do not read the rules every year.

Once upon a long ago, my coach suggested a piece of literature for me to check out for Dramatic Interpretation. I read it, recognized dramatic potential in the story, and began piecing together a performance for Dramatic Interp. I began competing with this performance, and I soon discovered what failure felt like. After two tournaments of abysmal rankings, I suggested to my coach that I switch my piece. I even had, "Try another piece of literature," written on some of my ballots. My coach shook his head and prompted me to fix some of the performance issues before I went back to the beginning in working on a brand new piece. Well, this suggestion made me unhappy. And after some very frustrating rehearsal sessions, some re-cutting, and some tempo and character changes, I was little more convinced that this piece would work. And then my coach said this wonderful thing. He said, "If you work on this performance looking for a negative experience, then you are going to find it. Try looking for a positive experience, and you'll be amazed at what might be found there." And I'd like to say that those words changed me forever right away, but I had to have another miserable tournament experience and more frustrating rehearsals before my coach told me his wonderful words again. And I heard him the second time. And we worked together to fix my performance. And I soon experienced success in DI. And I would not jump ship so quickly on a piece of literature again. The piece was *not* holding me back. *I* was holding me back. And once I figured that out, the search for literature became a lot easier for me. I stopped trying to find the *perfect* piece, and forensics made a lot more sense. This is how at Forensics Camp, we, as an Interp staff, are able to help successfully place literature with 60 competitors within 48 hours. It is *not* because we have better books than anyone else. We have just learned, through our experience, that the *perfect* thing isn't out there. And we enter the process looking for a positive experience. And when we make a mistake and make a choice that doesn't work, we don't lose hope.

Because there is a *lot* of literature out there, in *all* of the world, so it'll only be a matter of time before we find something that works.

Now that you understand that the *perfect* piece doesn't exist, how DO we decide on a piece to perform? We DO we look? Here are the steps:

KNOW THE RULES.

The first and most important step to finding literature for performance is to read the rules at the National Speech & Debate Association, Catholic Forensic League, and state league websites. Do not depend on veteran coaches to inform you of the rules. The rules change from time to time, and many veteran coaches do not read the rules every year. This brings me to the next step: Re-read the rules every year. If you are a competitor, it is also important for you to read the rules. Coaches, talk about the rules with your students. Students, talk about the rules with your coaches. As a coach, I always demanded much discussion about the rules for literature before competing in tournaments. I believe these discussions to be essential in developing self-advocacy in our young speakers. When petitioned for an explanation of validity in piece selection, I prefer my students have the tools to engage in an articulate well-informed discussion about the matter.

Read critically and carefully. Perform close readings of the manual. And I when in doubt, email the appropriate league. I contact the National Speech & Debate Association office *all*

the time with questions about the rules, and they are always very helpful. ALWAYS ask. Getting disqualified in a tournament for a rule violation stinks, and is very much an avoidable occurrence.

UNDERSTAND LITERATURE IN THIS WORLD OF COMPETITION.

The sheer volume of literature available in the world is not the only reason finding literature is an intimidating process. Once you have realized that there is no *perfect* piece and you are familiar with the rules governing this world, then you must encounter the culture of competitive interpretation. Admittedly, this is the hardest beast in your forensics endeavor. The sub-cultural phenomenon accompanying any competitive activity – whether it be folkstyle wrestling, competitive jazz dance, spoken-word poetry, junior spelunkers – can be an intimidating thing. The good news is: the forensics community is a friendly one, and there is never a shortage of veteran coaches offering to lend a hand. The bad news is: the process is still intimidating, as it is a competitive one, and the only way to get over it is through experience. My advice is to appreciate the adrenaline rush of leaping into the unknown. Sometimes I miss being new to this activity. When I entered the world of forensics armed only with my knowledge of the rules and competitive spirit, I was not so inhibited by cultural norms and practices. In a way, I felt it easier to innovate and create with original purpose. Still, I do wish that I had a handle on some of the cul-

ture stuff to make the transition easier. As the poet Donald Rumsfeld said, "There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know." These unknown unknowns are the things we're going to try to help you figure out.

UNDERSTAND TRADITIONAL VS. PROGESSIVE LITERATURE.

With new writers writing new literature every moment, where do we begin in our search? Consider that the National Speech & Debate Association welcomed its first member school in 1925. The Association has been around a while, and so have readers and interpreters of literature. As forensics is research oriented, we can assume that the best choices of literature for interpretation are have been used, and are being used, as time marches on. Because of this phenomenon, there is a premium for innovation in forensics. The innovative nature of forensics pushes us to pursue the newest ideas in order to "wow" the judges with spectacle that they have never seen before. Certainly, the newest material can give you an edge. However, sometimes older material is ready to resurface. This cultural occurrence if not unique to forensics though. Consider the industry of film- making. Every year, some film wows us with its innovative spirit and technical mastery. In 1997, James Cameron used technological advances and innovative story-telling techniques to earn a Best Picture award at the Academy Awards. In 2009, Cameron's direction of *Avatar* changed how we record and experience cinema forever, yet he was *not* awarded Best Picture by the same Academy. In 2011, Best Picture was awarded to *The Artist*, a silent film. Sometimes the audience wants innovation, sometimes the audience wants something familiar. So how do we decide whether to go all James Cameron or to take a more traditional approach? Consider this:

OLDER LIT DONE RESPONSIBLY

Ironically, the answer is NOT in watching trends. Just because *Someone to Watch Over Me* by Frank McGuinness has gone to Duo finals every few years since 1993 does not mean that a school's top duo team should do *Someone to Watch Over Me*. Frequently, we meet coaches that record the pieces that do well in finals, immediately buy them, and then have students perform them over the next season. This practice dilutes the research value of the activity. The fact that a piece of literature has done well is not reason enough to choose that piece of literature. Choose "golden oldies" with caution, and only when fueled by an innovative interpretive idea that will bring to light some new truth in the piece. Remember, the goal is to create a strong interp culture and reinforce interp skills. Selecting a piece of literature that has enjoyed a glorious run already is limiting the choices and potential for growth in the interper.

So when can we bring back those oldies? The answer is not unlike the one you'll receive when petitioning a lawyer for legal advice at a party. It depends. Like lawyers, a series of tests to inform our decision. Like law, the forensics culture is forever changing and welcomes well thought-out challenges–but these questions are a good place to start.

Has it been to finals?

General rule: If it has not been to finals, then the selection is fair game.

If yes, how long has it been since the selection was in finals?

General rule: We try to avoid pieces that have been to finals at all costs; however, if the interper is the mirror image of Judy Garland, and Judy Garland was already in Dramatic Interp Finals–then ask if it has been long *enough* since it's been there. We consider 5 years to be an appropriate waiting period. Remember that there is no *perfect* piece, and if a performer were to earn a spot in Dramatic Interp finals, then there is a strong possibility that they would have earned that spot with another piece of literature, as well, for it was informed dedication and work that got them there.

Has the selection been in frequent circulation?

General rule: If no, roll with it. But remember that practice of coaches scooping up literature does gets to finals one year and then running it the next year? That actually happens quite a bit, and you will typically see final round pieces in frequent circulation over the next few years. We have notice the frequency dies down over about 5 years, which informs our waiting period.

How successful have subsequent performances been?

General rule: Performances that are frequently in quarter-final rounds, semi-final rounds, or local final rounds are much more *on the radar* than those performances that are not. The more a piece is *out there* the more popular it is going to be. Keep in mind that when an audience views a piece that has been done before (particularly if done well), then that experience will inform their next experience in viewing the same literature. In performing frequently done literature, you are competing against every version of that piece that the audience has ever seen. This practice invites an additional challenge to overcome in your journey toward success.

Possible solution: So maybe an interper is the spitting image of Judy Garland. Maybe Judy Garland is their hero and they possess a life-long ambition to interpret her like-ness. Are if there is a similar alternative? Sometimes, if an autobiography of Judy Garland was done, there might be another literary selection with a similar character. Or there may be a work of fiction that re-imagines Judy Garland. Another portrayal of Judy might be available, or another actress from that era.

But what of the "real" oldies?

General rule: Go ahead and bring them back. Contemporize them. One of my favorite places to look for material as a competitor was "back in the day." If I hadn't done that, I would never have found Clifford Odets' 1937 drama *Golden Boy*, which has since become one of my favorite plays. *Golden Boy* was also the subject of a 2013 Broadway revival. Older literature can certainly still be relevant to a truth worth discovering through modern performance. If you the story is compelling, easy to follow, and culturally relevant– then go ahead and bring back *Our Town*. Sometimes the stuff you find hidden in the attic can seem as new as the stuff ordered from the "Manuscript Only" section of Dramatists.com. Older literature can be valuable in juxtaposition against new performance techniques, or it can be used to enlighten criticism of some new cultural practice.

ENCOURAGE NEWER SELECTIONS AND IDEAS

Again, forensics is about uncovering new ideas to expose new truths in the human condition. New literature and new approaches to older literature help further the activity. The most successful team cultures seem to strive for newer material. One of the hardest and most important concepts

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to learn when it comes to finding literature is to develop an "eye for forensics." Every time I read an article, watch a play, see a movie, watch a YouTube video – I am trying to reconcile what I just learned with how I can apply it to forensics. It's the forensics curse – to think about it so much- but, this "eye for forensics" can make your job SO much easier. The ideas are everywhere. Keep your eyes open. Still, there are some conventional places where I will typically begin my search:

- The bookstore. Check out all of the books with new glossy covers. Keep a list.
- Subscribe to new literature email lists through booksellers and publishers.
- Visit indie and college bookstores and try to find lesser known materials.
- Visit indie publishing websites like www.writebloody.com
- Subscribe to lit journals like McSweeney's, The New Yorker, or N+1.
- If you think of a character (in history of entertainment) that could be performatively interesting, perform a web search of the person or story. Many times, Wikipedia will provide a list of stories/ plays that have been written about that person or scenario.
- Dramatists.com, brookpub.com, playscripts.com, samuelfrench.com

The most successful team cultures seem to strive for newer material.

all contain lists of plays, the number of characters and a play synopsis. Also doollee.com is a database of almost every play that exists. If you can remember the name, but not the author, this is a fantastic website to gather more information.

- Short story anthologies. Especially ones edited by hip writers (like Nick Hornby, Dave Eggers, etc.)
- When watching/ judging rounds, write down the author names. Then check out other works by that author. This can be very helpful and a great jumping off point.
- Practice makes perfect. There is no one right answer. There is no magic database. We know that finding good literature can be a daunting task. The truth is, you can't get better by resorting to easy fix websites. There ARE hidden gems in quick lit for forensics websites, but they are few and far between and you are ALWAYS rewarded by taking the longer route. It will be frustrating at first, but you get better. And you will get better quickly … but ya gotta practice.

TIPS FOR READING FOR PERFORMANCE

Employing a few techniques can save you lots of time and cash in your literature search.

- Read the back cover. If the narrative is already too complicated, then go no further.
- Seek out pretty/ glossy covers. :)
- Read the first page and see if you get a sense of the voice. Then read the first page of the third chapter (sometimes books start slow).
- Next read the first few pages of the last chapter.
- Finally read the last page. After that, you should have a sense if the book will work of not.
- As you read, start cutting in your head. Think about possible conflicts, relationships, climaxes. If you are reading an autobiography about a movie star, look for the chapter where they had trouble making it, or the one about how they hit rock-bottom due to alcoholism. Think if you will focus on the relationship of the author with himself/ herself or the author with their father, or lover, or sibling.

LOOKING PAST THE WORDS

Don't immediately dismiss a selection when the words do not immediately make you laugh or cry. Try to imagine characters, environment, and interesting perspectives as you read. Sometimes, an idea or performance device can get you further than the actual words. Also, try reading with structure in mind: Knowing what you're looking for helps you find what you are looking for. Learn about cutting structure before you go hunting for literature. This will save you LOTS of time in the end. Remember – Exposition, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Conclusion.

RISQUÉ MATERIAL: IS IT WORTH IT?

It *is* ok to push the envelope sometimes; but, admittedly, pushing the envelope requires some experience to achieve consistent success. You should be aware that some judges will not like *edgy* material. But, sometimes the provocative nature of a piece pays off. Always remember, the competitors are high school students; and, no matter how seemingly mature, the competitors are still *seen* as high school students by the judges. And, most importantly, the competitors will be judged as high school students.

PANDAS, JAGUARS, AND UNICORNS, OH MY!

Forensics exists in college as well. And, as one might expect, many collegiate competitors are former high school competitors. Collegiate competitors often give back to their competitive communities by offering a hand

to the high school competitors still competing in their wake – thirsty to learn how the best practices of the college competitive world can give a competitive advantage in the high school forensics world. Many years of participating in both communities have taught us a very important lesson. College and High School forensics are different animals.

College Interp requires that competitors perform literature that is brand new. If a script has ever been performed before, it is generally frowned upon for another competitor to compete with the same work. The stories can have adult themes. Shocking the audience is a welcomed choice. The performances of literature in college are used to make specific arguments about very specific observations in our culture. Because of the advanced collegiate nature of college forensics tournaments, competitive interp rounds are laboratories in which performances are often theoretical in approach and execution. **Finding the right script for college performances is like hunting for Jaguars**.

High School is different. High school performances are more grounded, so the literature should be more universal. With high school competition, trends tend to shift more gradually, and extremely adult themes in literature are rarely rewarded in high school forensics. **Finding the right script for high school performances is like hunting for Pandas.**

Consider the high school science lab and the university science lab. The high school

science lab may dissect a common species of starfish – locating parts of its anatomy and function; and the lesson learned teaches the students about life in the sea. The collegiate science lab may dedicate its purpose to discovering a new *species* of starfish, and the lab may use the lesson to further theorize potential truths of our evolutionary universe.

When considering risk in story-telling, remember some core values. The selection should have *relatable* characters.

Every so often, you run across a story such as this: "There is a man who thinks he is the spirit of a young girl, whose mother is a magician. The man who thinks he is a little girl recalls his mother entering a box during a performance and disappearing forever. Then the man wakes up and he isn't a man at all… he is in fact… a dolphin." This kind of story is an example of a **Unicorn**, or a performance that is so abstract, it is almost impossible to follow or relate to an audience. Unicorn scripts NEVER WORK for high school and rarely work at any level.

When considering risk in story-telling, remember some core values. The selection should have *relatable* characters. The National Speech & Debate Association final stage has

shown us a number of characters, from transgendered people to the homeless, from Satan to Santa Clause. However, all of the characters that have ever made the final round have had relatable with easy to comprehend desires and motivations. In Dramatic Interpretation, *real* stories typically do better than fantasy. In HI and DUO, where many conflicts may be happening, the protagonist(s) should be engaged in *core* conflicts that anyone can relate to.

Remember this golden rule of thumb: Simple Story told Simply. Can the piece be interpreted within the time limit? Will the audience be able to digest the story in ten minutes? Many

> The cutting is an opportunity for you to express yourself as a performer. You get to manipulate other people's words to reflect what you want it to say. Your work is a composition.

plays are over an hour long and contain multiple plot-lines, but a single story can be cut from the material. However some plays and books contain a singular story-line that would not make any sense without all narrative elements present in the performance – and that would be hard to convey effectively in ten minutes.

A real life example: We found a graphic novel called "The Weirdly World of Strange Eggs" that looked like a fun, potentially competitive HI. The general premise of the book was about a mysterious Egg Man who emerges from a tree in the yard of two siblings, Kip and Kelly. The Egg Man speaks in verse and gives the kids eggs which have the ability to hatch anything that the kids imagine. Reading the description on the back of the book, it sounded like everything was there: Two relatable kids and loads of blocking potential ... then the story gets even weirder. The kids imagine a blood-sucking party hat that grows into an *enormous* blood-sucking party hat. The party hat only has one weakness, grape jelly ... obviously! So the kids take all of Egg Man's eggs and imagine different kinds of weapons to kill the gigantic, blood-sucking party hat. We cut it. We coached it to the best of our abilities. It was an abomination. We were romanced by the Unicorn, and we forgot that we were hunting Pandas.

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Request input about the culture in your community. To further complicate the process, different districts reward different conventions in performance. For example: Gaudy Climax vs. Quiet Climax. There are two types of performance climaxes ... the loud and the soft. Truthfully, it helps to have a little of both to compete on the national level. However, the preference for either of these two approaches to dramatic climax varies from district to district. Talk to other coaches about this. Also,

take your own notes when watching rounds at tournaments.

Obvious time and space. If a piece does not define this overtly, try to imagine how to create this in building the performance. In DI, the audience needs to know where the main character is at all times. There must be a "present reality" meaning the character needs to be in one place for the present monologue. Example: In both *Soul of a Butterfly* performances in the 2011 final round of Dramatic Interpretation, Muhammad Ali was speaking to the audience as an old man in a present reality. Both performances included flashback cues when the "present reality" was altered. This is a successful tactic in DI because it allows for a number of performatively interesting scene shifts. Keeping tactics like this in mind can help with the finding literature process.

Point of View and Voice. DI and HI selections should generally be told in the first person point of view. Some successful HIs have used omniscient narrators who speak in third person (eg: 2008 HI Champion performing *Charlie the Caterpillar*). However, this technique has never made the final stage in DI. It is safer to look for selections written from the First Person point of view.

Tense. The "present reality" should be written in past tense. (ex: "Did you know that the first time I met my husband, we were working as volunteers for a political campaign"- Sarah Brazier, Dramatic Runner Up, National Speech & Debate Association 2010). However, the tense may shift during flashback sequences to allow the performer to live in the past moment. An excellent example of this is the 2010 National Speech & Debate Association Final Round winner Mike Dahlgren performing *My Autobiography* by Charlie Chaplin. Mike began, "It was 1914, I was 25 years old and we were all on set." Then the performer suggests a flashback to the first film the character was in. He pantomimes Champlain performing a number of his famous physical bits. At this point, the tense shifts to the present, "...and here I am cramming every conceivable gag I could think of." This same narrative logic is executed in Humorous Interpretation as well as Duo.

3. CUTTING LITERATURE FOR COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE

The performance begins with the cutting. The cutting is an opportunity for you to express yourself as a performer. You get to manipulate other people's words to reflect what you want it to say. Your work is a composition. The cutting is the first glimpse of what that composition is going to be. It IS a CREATIVE PROCESS. Unless you are using a play that is written for forensics, you are going to have a play that doesn't follow the structure of performance perfectly. Yes, the playwright had a vision, but you don't have to follow THEIR vision. You only get a good ten minutes. Feel free to get rid of junk and think creatively.

After finding literature for performance,

you encounter the next question, "What is the best shape to tell your story?" Performances have shapes. And performances get their shapes from the shape of their informing texts. Think about any story that you have heard. This story was composed of connected events that were organized into a Beginning, Middle, and End. That is the shape of narrative: Beginning, Middle, and End. Time may shift, performance packaging may vary, but every performance must start at the beginning, and every performance must end at the end. That is "cutting" in all of its wondrous simplicity. But – this clear simplicity gets clouded rather quickly when you decide to cut a 300 page memoir to a ten minute performance. When you get bombarded with all of those words on all of those pages, return to the core story-telling structure: Beginning, Middle, and End.

Lucky for us, German playwright Gustav Freytag complicates this simple structure with the analysis of ancient Greek and Shakespearean drama that we have become familiar with in school: the **Dramatic Arc**. The arc, so we have been told by middle- school English teachers across the globe, is divided into five parts: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Dénouement. The **exposition** sets the scene, gives background information. In the exposition, we communicate who a character is and where they are. You always introduce the protagonist, or main character, in the exposition; and you often introduce the antagonist, or character working against the

main character in the exposition, as well. The **inciting incident** sets a conflict into motion and represents the beginning of the **rising action.** Sometimes, the introduction of the antagonist serves as the inciting incident. The **rising action** complicates the plot, and the **climax** is when the protagonist changes in the piece. The falling action resolves the conflict, and the **dénouement** is a little glimpse of life after the resolution.

The arc is important in guiding the cutting process, and is given minorly different treatments in the event specific cutting sections of the event chapters of this book. The dénouement, or the "something after the conflict has been resolved," is not always present in cuttings, though having that last moment can give the audience a moment to digest what they have just experienced. Familiarity with the arc can save time and headache in problem solving with ineffective cuttings. Before you begin, review the arc treatment in each event's chapter.

Even beyond Freytag's dramatic arc, stories vary in shape. Some stories are sad and some stories are happy. The late iconic American novelist Kurt Vonnegut analyzed the shapes of these stories and graphed them to illustrate our digestion of them. These graphs are a great illustration of how stories can be "performed." Here is an excerpt from one of Vonnegut's lectures. You can also view Vonnegut performing this same lecture on many video internet databases.

THE SHAPES OF STORIES
excerpt from *Palm Sunday* by Kurt Vonnegut

Anyone can graph a simple story if he or she will crucify it, so to speak, on the intersecting axes I here depict:
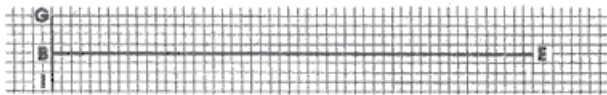

"G" stands for good fortune. "I" stands for ill fortune. "B" stands for the beginning of a story. "E" stands for its end.

A much beloved story in our society is about a person who is leading a bearable life, who experiences misfortune, who overcomes misfortune, and who is happier afterward for having demonstrated resourcefulness and strength. As a graph, that story looks like this:
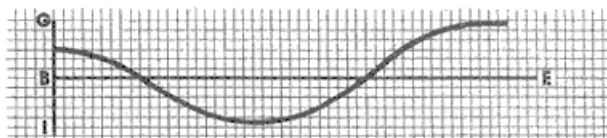

Another story of which Americans never seem to tire is about a person who becomes happier upon finding something he or she likes a lot. The person loses whatever it is, and then gets it back forever. As a graph, it looks like this:
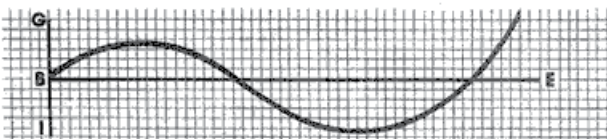
An American Indian creation myth, in which a god of some sort gives the people the sun and then the moon and then the bow and arrow and then the corn and so on, is essentially a staircase, a tale of accumulation:
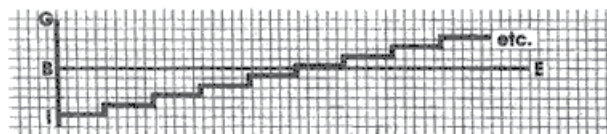
Almost all creation myths are staircases like that. Our own creation myth, taken from the Old Testament, is unique, so far as I could discover, in looking like this:
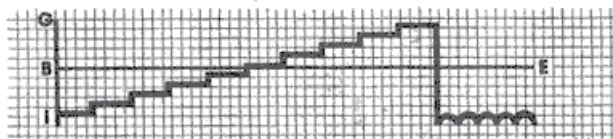
The sudden drop in fortune, of course, is the ejection of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," in which an already hopelessly unhappy man turns into a cockroach, looks like this:
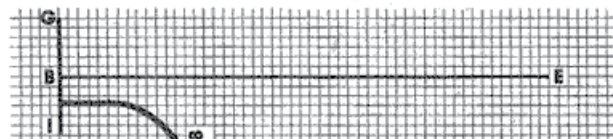
Have a look [at "Cinderella"]:
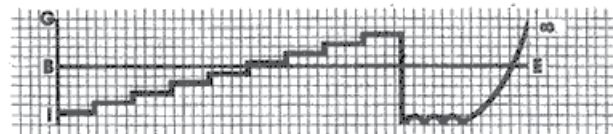
The steps you see, are all the presents the fairy godmother gave to Cinderella....The sudden drop is the stroke of midnight at the ball....But then the prince finds her and marries her, and she is infinitely happy ever after. She gets all the stuff back, and then some. A lot of people think the story is trash, and, on graph paper, it certainly looks like trash.

But then I said to myself, Wait a minute–those steps at the beginning look like the creation myth of virtually every society on earth. And then I saw that the stroke of midnight looked exactly like the unique creation myth in the Old Testament. And then I saw that the rise to bliss at the end was identical with the expectation of redemption as expressed in primitive Christianity. The tales were identical.

Reviewing Vonnegut's shapes before you cut can help you determine what kind of cutting you are going to pursue. Which shapes lend themselves best to a DI cutting? Which shapes will work best for HI? If you consider these shapes, a cutting can form in your head before you even begin to type it out. After reading a piece of literature, basic memory of the plot should help guide you. I like to plot out a story before I even re-read it. I write out major plot elements, and I try to affix them within Freytag's dramatic structure. I then look for the Vonnegut story pattern that I want to use within the collected plot elements. Once I have decided on a story, I go to the book to find the corresponding passages for each plot point. This "predicting" element of cutting can save lots of money, time, and frustration.

PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE

There is a definite structure to a cutting. Typically, you have 10 minutes to tell a story. Within this ten minutes, there are conventions typically observed in competitive culture. One of these conventions is the employment of a **TEASER**. A teaser is one to two minute snippet of your cutting located at the beginning of the performance. A good teaser prepares the audience for themes, conventions, settings, and characters to come. In a lot of ways, the teaser "sets the rules" for the upcoming performance. You may also view the teaser as an "attention getting device" with an especially provocative portion of your text used to make the audience sit up in their seat to take notice. After the teaser, the performer moves "out of the scene" created in the interpretation, and returns to a neutral position where the performer does not represent character, but speaks as themselves on what is to come in the performance. Further articulation on the teaser and introduction concepts can be found later in this book, specifically in the event chapters.

When preparing for competition, we suggest that you work within a 9:30 minute time frame, so to avoid over-time penalties. The time line observes the anatomy of a typical interp performance:

Teaser . . . . 0:00 – 1:30
Previews the topic and mood of the selection

Intro . . . . 1:30 – 3:00
Explains the purpose of the performance

Exposition . . . . 3:00 – 3:30
Introduces characters and setting

Inciting Incident . . . . 3:30 – 4:00
Sends the conflict into motion

Rising Action . . . . 4:00 – 7:30
Complicates the conflict

Climax . . . . 7:30 – 8:30
Emotional peak of the performance

Falling action . . . . 8:30 – 9:30
Resolves the conflict

THE STEPS TO CUTTING:

1. **READ.** In order to cut effectively, you must read the whole play, story, or book. To make your time more productive, read the work with a pencil and mark interesting passages as you read. If you are reading for HI, then mark especially funny passages. If you are reading for DI, then mark both moments of levity and moments of intensity.

2. **CAMEO or SPARK NOTES.** Next, choose what kind of cutting you would like. The Vonnegut story shapes can help you decide.

   CAMEO CUTTING – a cutting that tells just a piece of the story. For example, if you wish to cut one of the Harry Potter novels for Duo, but you would like to focus on Hermione and Ron's relationship (leaving Harry and Voldemort completely out of it), than that would be a Cameo cutting.

   SPARK NOTES CUTTING – a cutting that summarizes the entire tale. Often, you will choose this if the climax in the piece will coincide with that of the larger work.

3. **CHOOSE CLIMAX**. Next, you choose the climax. By choosing the climax first, you know where you are going ... so it is easier to get there. Use the Freytag arc. Try to assemble different plot elements until you find the most compelling story. This does not always have to be the most dramatic or humorous moment. For example, one of my favorite performances of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky left out the most dramatic moment in the book. When I asked the competitor why they chose to leave out this seemingly essential plot element, he said, "I had to choose whether I was gonna tell a story with some sad stuff or some happy stuff. I chose happy stuff." He picked a happy moment in the book as his climax and built the performance around that climax.

4. **CHUNKING.** This is where you will type out the marked passages (or CHUNKS) that relate to the story that you are trying to tell. Chunkings will often be around 3000 words, but they should not exceed 6000 words. These passages should coincide with your premeditated plot conceived in earlier steps.

5. **WHITTLE DOWN.** Next, whittle down the chunks into your **CUTTING**. The goal is to end up with about 1200 words of performance material. If you are having a difficult time getting down to 1200, then begin cutting entire extraneous conflicts or characters/relationships. Remember, you want to tell a simple story that can be simply told.

6. **MAKE IT COOL.** This is the last step. I think of this step as a glaze on top of a piece of pottery or a glossy finish added to a carefully crafted piece of woodwork. This is where you can toy with words to create interesting transitions, or maybe find moments of text that can be performed in a particularly interesting way (like delivering lines while jump roping, working on an engine, or painting a picture.) More tips for making a script cool are discussed in the cutting sections of the event chapters in this book.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CUTTING

Performance. Read aloud. Think about performance the entire time. Sometimes a story makes sense on paper and makes no sense out lout.

Transitions. How do you get from one scene or concept to the next? Sometimes, the transition is explicit in the text: "That's when I got to college. Let me talk about college." Sometimes, the transition can be motivated by emotions. You can, in performance, show thought process as a transition. This can be done by taking a beat (or a pause). If you plan on doing this, write it into your cutting.

Design your cutting like a script. Write in notes about actions and sub textual elements. Structure the cutting as if you are composing a play by using a play's format.

Utilize an anchoring environment (present reality). This is the environment to which that the character always returns: from where they are telling the story.

Show, rather than tell. For example: introducing a character in a scene by showing, physically what they are doing, versus just spelling it out. Write out blocking choices in your script. Like [looks at wedding ring] etc. Or *show* having a bad temper, rather than having your character say they have one. Have the character get mad at someone who walks into a room, and then go back to being the way they were.

Choose moments that you can have physical bits. Sometimes choices look better for performance. Picking a woman being interviewed at a dentist's office is more interesting than someone sitting behind a desk.

Save a bin of good stuff. Sometimes we don't see how a passage can fit into a cutting right away, but it is so cool that we don't want to cut it out. I put these passages in a section at the bottom of my cutting in case I can find room for them. This especially works with funny lines.

Are the stakes going to be high enough? Don't just select a story within a text because it tells a complete story. The story also needs to be compelling. Try to tell the *best* story.

Leave room for physicality. Remember that physical bits take time when you are timing your cutting.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What are the physical tools at our disposal to create a competitive interpretation performance?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, mirroring, spatial relationship, topography, shape, gesture, architecture, pops, morphs, focal points, blocking*

UNIT 3

Intro to Performance Composition

"Interp," "cutting," "piece," "teaser." Sam was surrounded by words. Some words were familiar just with a completely new context. Some were abbreviations that Sam figured someone must have made up to make it sound cool. Now that I have sense of how to turn words from a play into a piece, Sam thought, what do I do with the words now.

Now that we have a general sense of how to create material for an interpretation performance we need to discuss how to create a performance. There are a number of ways to approach the delivery of an interpretation performance. Since the three main events are delivered from memory, many students will instinctually begin memorizing the cutting. Some coaches espouse the idea of applying acting method to creating a performance so they encourage students to begin getting into the "mind" of their character. While there is certainly no wrong way to begin working with the delivery of interpretation selection, some

approaches to performance construction are more efficient.

To method, or not to method, that is the question we have pondered since we began coaching competitive forensics. Students gravitate toward acting method because it is so widely discussed by film and television actors. We admire actors who spend years mentally and physically preparing for a role.

However such approaches are not particularly appropriate for competitive forensics for a number of reasons. Initially, method acting is extremely inefficient and often inconsistent. Christian Bale spends months of physical and mental conditioning. He has told stories in interviews of isolating himself to mentally prepare for his roles. Bale is a professional actor, not a high school student. Between our various obligations, we have a lot less time to devote to getting into character.

Moreover, applying acting method to interpretation leads to inconsistent performance. At any point during a filmed scene, the actor or director may yell CUT! We do not have the luxury of a retake in a competition round. Attempting to "feel" it round to round is difficult. There are hundreds of stress-inducing factors that could disrupt our focus at tour-

naments. Digging deep into our memory to induce emotionality in a moment is extremely difficult at 8:30 in the morning.

For these reasons, and many more which will be covered over the course of this text, we espouse a presentational, physical approach to performance construction. All that really means is that we think of our performances as a composition, something we build ahead of time, rather than something we intuitively "feel" in the round. To do this, we will first explore some vocabulary that will inform our building decisions.

Much of the vocabulary in this unit is adapted from the book The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. Instead of establishing an acting method, Bogart and Landau propose a vocabulary, a way of thinking about performance. The authors propose nine viewpoints, four relating to time; tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition, and five relating to space; spatial relationship, topography, shape, gesture, and architecture. Bogart and Landau assert that these are not the *only* viewpoints, only the ones she finds most useful in her work. Therefore, for the purposes of competitive forensics, we had adapted Bogart and Landau's Viewpoint and added a few that we find useful for interpretation.

The first of Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints, **Tempo**, is a critical component of how movement in a performance is perceived by the audience. Tempo simply indicates how fast or slow an movement is performed. Recall the last time you raised your hand to answer a question in class. How fast or slowly you lifted your arm was dependent upon how confident you were in your answer. If you were very sure you were correct, you'd likely raised your hand with a fast tempo. If you were not total-

> ## We think of our performances as a composition, something we build ahead of time, rather than something we intuitively "feel" in the round.

ly sure yours was the right answer, you likely raised your hand with trepidation, and thus at a slower tempo. Similarly, the tempo of an action gives the audience clues as to how a character feels. If a character is nervous or frantic, a performer might gesture at at an extremely high tempo. Conversely, if the piece calls for you to play a teacher, you may chose to deliver gestures with a slow and smooth tempo to indicate confidence in front of the room. In general, each moment in a performance calls for a different emotional state which the performer must communicate. Therefore, an awareness of the tempo within each of these moments will increase how the emotion is perceived by the audience.

Duration is how long a performer stays in

an action or tempo. One of the biggest challenges we face as performers is an overwhelming discomfort with stillness. An awareness of duration helps the performer get a stronger sense of the timing of each movement in a performance. This viewpoint is extremely helpful in all interpretation events, for as Bogart and Landau note, "duration increases the performers ability to sense how long is long enough to make something happen onstage and, conversely how long is too long so that something

> When constructing your performance it is useful to imagine what your character's immediate uncensored reaction to an external event would be and then replicate that reaction.

starts to die" (p. 40). Knowing how long to hold a *take* in H.I. to get the biggest laugh possible, or how long to hold the silence in a D.I. to elicit the greatest emotional response for the audience is what makes the difference between good performances and great ones.

Kinesthetic Response is the immediate uncensored response to an external event around you. Recall you grade school years, when recess was a chaotic mishmash of activities. Suddenly someone shouts, "Heads up!" In all likelihood your immediate reaction was

to duck and place your hands over your head. That immediate reaction is the kinesthetic response. Laughing at a friend's joke is also a kinesthetic response. So is a sneeze. When constructing your performance it is useful to imagine what your character's immediate uncensored reaction to an external event would be and then replicate that reaction.

Repetition refers to the repeating of something in a performance. There are two kinds of repetition, internal and external. **Internal** repetition is the the repeating of movement within your own body. In example of internal repetition may be a character quirk that reminds the audience of who is speaking. For example, a student may have an HI with three characters. One way to differentiate the characters is by having one character who always gestures in large circles. This internal repetition gives the audience an easy and immediate clue to who is speaking. **External** repetition is repeating the shape, tempo, or gesture of something outside of your own body. The concept of external repetition is particularly helpful when constructing a Duo as coordinated movements are a major component of blocking in the event. One useful tool for performers to consider when building their performances is the concept of **mirroring**. Mirroring is a gesture you wish the audience to repeat. For example if a performer has a line in their cutting that reads, "Do you know what I mean?" That performer may say the line while nodding their head up and down

in an effort to get the audience to mirror that movement.

Spatial Relationship is the distance between things on stage. Consider this, when you are angry with a friend you are less inclined to sit next to them in the cafeteria at lunch. When you and your friend make amends, you either hug it out or shake hands. Your relationship can be expressed by your physical proximity. The same goes for the characters in our performances. We can say a lot about the relationship between two characters in a duo by the distance we place between them. For example two students performing in the 2009 National final round Duo performed a piece called *The Rabbit Hole* which is the story of a husband and wife who have grown distant after the tragic loss of their son. The team began the performance standing incredibly far apart to represent the emotional distance between the characters. Spatial relationship may also refer to one body's relationship to a **group** of bodies, such as the distance between the performer and the audience. The act of leaning in gives the impression of closeness or intimacy in the performance. While turning your shoulder out may create the indication of a character who is uneasy speaking with the audience.

Topography is the design or floor pattern we create in our movement through space. As we mentioned previously, in a stage play or a movie, the setting of the story is provided for the audience through the set. We have give the audience clues to our settings through our

physical presentation. Therefore, when constructing an interpretation performance it is important to consider the setting. Topography is important to maintaining a consistent setting throughout the performance. For example if your script is set in a living room, you may wish to include a chair for your character to sit on. Considering topography, you would remember to walk around the chair, rather than through the chair to maintain the illusion that the chair is really there.

Shape is the contour or outline the body, or bodies in a Duo, makes in space. All shape can be broken down into either, line, curves, or combinations of lines and curves. It really is as simple as that. Consider waving "goodbye" to a friend. What parts of the arms are straight lines? What curves does your arm make as the movement is performed? How do these lines and curves work together to create the full motion of the gesture? In Duo, the team may create a shape together. For example, in the 2009 Duo National final round, the championship team performing the piece "Charlotte's Web" created the shape of a spider spinning her web. Since each actor had four appendages, they worked together to create the shape of the eight legged creature. When we work on *blocking* our performances it is easy to get overwhelmed. However, when you consider each movement or gesture as a simple manipulation of shape our task is simplified.

One of the most used words in human communication is the gesture. For our pur-

poses, a **gesture** is a shape with a beginning, middle, and end. Consider for a moment the last time you introduced one of your friends to another. The gesture that accompanied, "Have you met, Ted?" had a beginning, middle, and an end. All meaningful gestures we make do. There are two broad types of gestures that we have access too when constructing our performances; **behavioral gestures** and **expressive gestures**.

Behavioral gestures are the types of gestures we see in our everyday interactions with others. Behavioral gestures are further broken down into **public behavioral gestures** and **private behavioral gestures**. Public behavioral gestures are intentional movements we create to indicate or direct those around us. The gestures we typically associate with presentations, shrugging, waving "hello" and "goodbye" are all examples of public behavioral gestures. Private behavioral gestures are unintentional. When a character scratches his head with curiosity, he publicly communicates but does so unintentionally. Private behavioral gestures are also described as psychological gestures as these gestures can indicate elements of the character's psyche. Take for instance a character who is struggling in her marriage. She may nervously twist her wedding ring. This simple private behavioral gesture gives audience an indication of the character's conflict.

Expressive gestures are those that we do not typically see or demonstrate in our everyday interactions with others. These gestures express the inner emotional state state of the character and are often poetic. Put differently, expressive gestures are "figurative" gestures. For example, if a piece includes the line "I was finally free," one choice might be to present an expressive gesture of a character breaking a chain. This gesture may not necessarily be "natural," but it could be a powerful expression of the character's emotional state.

Architecture refers to the physical environment in which you are performing and how awareness of it affects movement. The actual physical environment of most performances in competitive forensics is a classroom. At larger tournaments, finals rounds typically take place in larger auditoriums. However, as performers it is our duty to interpret or suggest a new the physical environment or architecture of the scene. Once you have established the architecture of the scene you inhabit as a character, it will indeed affect that character's movement. For example, if your character will look and move about one way if the piece is set in his or her apartment and a completely different way if the piece is set in a dark, scary cave. Understanding the architecture of our scene's informs the physical decisions we make in our performance.

In addition to Bogart and Landau's terminology, we will describe some language commonly used to describe performance techniques that are relatively unique to interpretation. These important terms are; pops, molds or morphs, focal points, and blocking

or tech. Each of these items will be explicated in greater detail in subsequent chapters, but it is a good idea to get some exposure to them now. One of the most commonly used in the interp world is "pops." In many instances in interpretation events, particularly Humorous Interpretation, a singular performer must play more than one character engaging in a dialogue. **Pops** refer to the quick physical and vocal transition from one character to another. The high tempo of the pop creates urgency in the scene and makes dialogue between two characters seem more fluid to the audience.

Similarly, **molds** or **morphs** refer to a slower physical transition from either one character to another or from one *time* or *place* to another. Molds and morphs are commonly used in Dramatic Interpretation to indicate a flashback. For example in the 2012 National Speech & Debate Tournamentl final round in D.I. a student performed a piece entitled The Face of Emmett Till. In the performance the students played Till's mother in her old age, reflecting on the events leading up to her son's tragic murder. To indicate a flashback in time, the student *molded* or slowly transitioned into a younger version of the mother in dialogue with her son. This mold signified a transition in time and gave the audience an opportunity to understand the present character in greater detail.

In solo interpretation events, like D.I.,

H.I., and O.I. the performer will often have more than one character engaging in dialogue. In sequences where dialogue is used, **focal points** give the audience the impression that two characters are indeed speaking to one another. As opposed to the performer looking at the audience, the performer will use an off stage focal position. For example in the <u>2012 National Speech & Debate Tournament Humorous Interpretation final round</u> one student performed a piece that was set around a dinner table. The protagonists' focal point in dialogue with his father was slightly up and to the right. When the performer *popped* to the father, the father looked at the son slightly down and to the left. This dynamic indicated that the father was physically taller than the son. The main character's focal point when speaking to his mother was the other direction. The performer's decisions regarding the placement of focal points give the audience the impression that the characters were sitting at the table across from one another.

A pair of words commonly used interchangeably are blocking and tech. **Blocking** and **tech** refer to all of the physical choices associated with performance construction. A student or judge will often say a performance had "great tech" if said performance had intricately choreographed, dynamic moments of physicality. Blocking involves all of the elements previously mentioned in this unit. Tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, spatial relationship, topography, shape, behavioral and expressive gestures, architecture, pops, molds, and focal points all inform our decisions when staging movement in a forensic performance. Now that we have a foundational understanding of the equipment we have in our physical toolkit, lets explore the most powerful tool of all, the voice.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What are the vocal tools at our disposal when constructing a competitive interpretation performance?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Pitch, Timbre, Volume, Vocal Tempo, Silence*

UNIT 4

Intro to Vocal Composition

Sam began thinking of the all the performance possibilities. He began imagining how the body communicates so much. He thought of how he was sitting in his desk and wondered what that communicated to his teacher. Does he raise his hand with a quick tempo or slow? But wait a second, Sam thought, weren't you supposed to speak in "speech?"

When we speak, we unconsciously activate an organic factory; a cooperative, intricate process that yields the production of human sound. However, it becomes our job to consciously consider this process when constructing our competitive interpretation performances. This unit will enhance our understanding of interpretation by introducing concepts useful in shaping our vocal performances.

One of the greatest weapons in a performer's vocal arsenal is pitch. **Pitch** is perceptual ordering of the sounds created by our voices on a frequency related scale. In other words,

the high and low of our vocal. Our voices are capable of producing a tremendous range of pitch. Consider your voice as a scale or spectrum with the lowest pitch your voice can safely produce on the bottom and the highest pitch your voice can safely produce on top. Now say a phrase at the lowest rung of the scale and over the course of ten steps, reach the top of the scale or the highest pitch your voice can produce safely. Now add an additional ten steps so it takes twenty steps to reach the top. Exploring the voice's capabilities regarding pitch allows you as a performer to see a fuller range of vocal characterizations at your disposal.

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When we speak, sound is created by folds in the voice, however where the sound resonates can be manipulated by the speaker. The location of sound resonation is called **timbre**. If a piano and a guitar play the exact same note, at the exact same loudness, the musical sound re-

mains distinguishable. That is because sound resonates differently from the body of a piano, than it does the body of a guitar.

Just like the sound produced by a violin is different from the sound produced by a cello, when we the sound we produce resonates from our noses, it sounds differently than when our sound resonates from our throat. There are a host of possible vocal resonators; *the chest, larynx, the pharynx, the oral cavity, the nasal cavity, the sinuses.*

Consider the Wicked Witch of the West from 1939 film, The Wizard of Oz. Now think of the way Margaret Hamilton delivered her most famous line, "I'll get you my pretty and your little dog too!" Where did the sound primarily resonate? The sound resonated largely from the nasal cavity and the larynx, which is our high frequency resonator in the throat. Now perform your best impression of Santa Claus saying "HO! HO! HO!" Sound resonates primarily from the lower portion of your chest and the pharynx. When we are constructing our competitive interpretation performances, it is important to consider how sound can be shaped based upon the origin of resonation.

The goal of interpretation, or for that matter, any public speaking event is to communicate with an audience. A critical component of communication a message is whether or not that message is spoken loud enough to be heard. Therefore, when constructing our vocal performances it is important to con-

sider volume. **Volume**, sometimes referred to as projection, is described as the loudness or quietness of sound. It is important that the language of a performance be heard by the totality of the audience. However, how loudly or quietly a character speaks suggests personality traits for the audience. For example in the 2011 National Speech & Debate Tournament Humorous Interpretation Final, a student performing The Putnam County Spelling Bee had a character who was extremely shy, so he performed the character at a quiet, though still registerable, volume.

Projection is one of the keys to successful communication. If you are not understood by the totality of your audience, you are missing out on an opportunity to leave a lasting impact in the round. Understanding how to project can be a challenge, however there are a few useful tips anyone can employ to become more proficient projectors.

Tip #1- *If you think you're being too loud, be louder.* When I tell my students to "be louder" many of them look at me like I'm crazy and say "THAT wasn't loud enough?!" A major hurdle for performers is understanding that while your own ear is just inches away from your mouth, the audiences' ears are ten, twenty, even hundreds of feet away. Performers must learn to to let go of the self-consciousness associated with being heard.

Tip #2- *Project beyond the last row of seats.* Many coaches ascribe to the idea of communicating to the audience member at the back

of the room to ensure that the performance is understood by all. However, projection is about more than simply being heard, it's about filling the room with your presence. A better way to approach projection is to focus on being heard just past the last audience member. If you think about projection this way, you will fill the room with your voice without looking like your screaming.

Tip #3- Think like a Soprano. No, not a fictitious gangster, a singer. Your voice is a tool so you have to be understand the mechanics in order to most effectively utilize it. When going over your piece alone or with your coach

make sure to practice deep breathing to exercise your diaphragm. Allow air to fill up not only your chest but your all of your rib cage, even your stomach should be filled with air. You will soon realize that your lungs can hold a lot more air than you ever thought. When breathing correctly, your shoulders should not even rise when you take a deep breath. This will improve the sound quality of your voice and your ability to full the room.

Vocal Tempo, much like physical tempo, is how fast or slow a sound is performed. Vocal tempo is sometimes described as vocal acceleration and deceleration, or in the musical world, duration. The vocal tempo of a performance can go a long way in characterization. One iconic example is Ben Stein's performance as the economics teacher in Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Stein's deliver of the line "Bueller... Bueller...Bueller" became the classical example of the boring teacher archetype, simply by his adept manipulation of vocal tempo.

One of the most powerful attributes of a strong vocal performance is the use of **silence**. The choice to use silence can elicit a maelstrom of laughter or bring an audience to tears. Consider the last time you told a crazy story to a friend. Silence was a critical component in that exchange. If your friend did not observe silence, you would likely think they were not paying attention. You used silence either before or after you gave the shocking conclusion to create suspense. The same tactics are used in competitive interpretation performances. Silence can be used to indicate confusion, compassion, fear, bewilderment, shock to either humorous or dramatic effect. As we will explore in the proceeding units in this volume, the ability to convey emotion through the manipulation of silence is critical to all interpretation events.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create a performance that is competitive in the event of Dramatic Interpretation?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Presentational vs. Representational, Teaser, Introduction, Exposition, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, Monologue, Dialogue, Here & Now Drama, Flashback to Drama, Anchor Reality, Environment, Circles of Comfort, Self-Disclosure, Flip-Book*

Dramatic Interpretation

What do Katherine Hepburn, Paul Robeson, Vivian Leigh, Muhammad Ali, rock star Nikki Sixx, Judy Garland, the 100 year old Delany sisters, and a homeless person with schizophrenia have in common? They are all characters who have graced the National Speech & Debate Tournament final round stage in Dramatic Interpretation. **Dramatic Interpretation** is the communication of ideas drawn from a text to create a dramatic effect. The purpose of DI is to explore an author's work through a dramatic lens in order to uncover some truth in the human condition. The ideas that best present this truth will be what you interpret by creating a physical performance.

At times, DI appears similar to acting; however, there are distinct differences. The biggest difference is the mode of performance. In DI, we use a **presentational** mode of performance. Acting most often uses a *representational* mode of performance. Distinguishing the difference between the two modes is hardest with DI, because mono-

logues often developed into a performance that closely resembles reality. This unit is going to make it easier to distinguish between the two modes.

The key to the event is to choose fragments of the text that best support the truth that you are trying to uncover for the audience. Performers use these fragments to compose complete ideas. Typically, these ideas will elicit emotional responses from the audience. *The performance that covers the most emotional ground will usually win the round.* If we think of our judge as having an emotional neutral point of 0, the student who takes the judge the greatest emotional distance from 0

thusly covers the most "emotional ground" in the round. So how do we do all of that? We will learn the steps for composing a competitive DI performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include: Script selection, Script cutting, Performance composition, and Presentation.

ANATOMY OF A DI

In order to go fourth and find the next gripping drama, it is important that we first explore the anatomy of a DI. While no interpretation performance is exactly alike, most DI performances include the same general components; a teaser, introduction, exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action. Most performances begin with a **teaser**, a section of the performance, usually 45 seconds to a minute and 30 seconds long, that gives the audience a preview (hence "teases") of the topic or mood of the selection. Following the teaser is an **introduction**, or "intro." The intro is a roughly 30 – 45 second long explanation of the performance written by the student. After the intro, the student returns to the performance of the script with an **exposition** that introduces the characters and setting of the piece. In general, an **inciting incident** sends the conflict into motion. The tension created by the conflict mounts and grows increasingly complicated in the **rising action** before reaching the **climax**, or the emotional peak of the performance. The per-

formance ends with a **falling action**, which generally, though not always, resolves the conflict. The structure is very similar to that of a short story. A major difference is that the climax is not necessarily a "turning point," but is the moment when the stakes are highest for the protagonist.

SCRIPT SELECTION FOR DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

Dramatic Interpretation performances can be drawn from a published play, novel, memoir, short story, or other published work. Using a published work that is dramatic in nature as source material is helpful and expected but not always necessary. Cuttings may consist of **monologues** or scenes that require **dialogue** or the portrayal of several roles. When looking for Dramatic Interpretation selections keep in mind that drama must include: 1) a state, situation, or series of events; 2) interestingness or intensity; 3) conflict of forces.

Recall the Unit 2 when we discussed finding literature. Now that you know what kind of literature can be used for DI, you must consider the competition. Remember when we said that the performance that covers the most emotional ground usually wins the round? Well known literature, or literature that has been used often for DI, will have a lessened emotional impact on the audience because the audience can predict what happens next for the character.

Additionally, a performance "covering the most emotional distance" does not necessarily mean the performance that is the *saddest* wins. When looking for literature to perform in DI consider the Vonnegut's explanation of shape of the story. Humor or levity can be used to achieve a greater "high" for the audience. In this way, the "low" does not have to be as low.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

The performance begins with the cutting. Once you begin manipulating the text, you begin shaping the story that you will be telling. Cutting is just as important to the performance as the actual physical representation is. Our cuttings guide and are guided by our creative, interpretive process. The fact that two students can successfully perform the same play with vastly different cuttings and interpretations is a testament to this concept. As you cut it is important to keep in mind what the performance will look like on its feet. One great practice is reading lines out loud as you cut the script. This allows the performer to get a sense of how the story sounds and can aid in the development of vocal characterization.

In DI, just as you are in all interpretation events, you are (above all) looking for a story. When reading for DI, you need to think about things that make DI work: *Interestingness*, *Intensity*, and *Diversity of Emotion*. *Inter-*

estingness suggests moments of the work that provide a source of intrigue for the audience. A good story keeps us guessing and wondering what will happen next. *Intensity* can be understood as the depth of a characters conflict. I story about a man losing his cell phone may not grip the audience, unless of course the man is trying to retrieve the cell phone because saved in the voicemail box was the last recorded sounds of his late wife's voice. When the conflict of a story is unimportant or mundane and the stakes seem low, then the audience will be less compelled by the drama. Finally, *Diversity of Emotion* refers to the emotional levels of a selection. Think about the last time you were at a social function with new people. When we first interact with strangers or acquaintances in everyday life we often avoid sharing deeply personal information about ourselves. We tell jokes to lighten the mood, we smile and sip our punch. As our friendships develop we share more deeply our "selves" in a process of **self- disclosure**. In a similar way, compelling characters don't spill the emotional beans upon first meeting. It takes a bit more time to disclose their deepest secrets (usually about seven minutes and forty-five seconds). We want scripts that offer at least a splash of humor or moments of levity.

Remember that our first step is locating the climax. However, in larger plays and especially books there may be multiple gripping moments that may serve as the climax for the DI that are not necessarily the climax of the

work. While bracketing chunks of material while you read, make special marks around potential climaxes. These should be parts of the story that will be the most interesting or where the conflict is the most intense. Look fort moments in the text where the protagonist is at a breaking point, or where your protagonist comes to some beautiful realization.

After you have marked several potential moments for a climax, ask yourself what the best way to tell the story will be? Which story is the most interesting? The most intense? When determining the overall structure of your cutting it is important to consider what style of Dramatic Interpretation you are attempting to create. If you are cutting a longer work, decide whether you will purse a Cameo cutting or a Spark Note cutting. While no DI is exactly alike and while there are certainly exceptions, there are two long-lasting stylistic archetypes; the **Here & Now Drama** and the **Flashback to Drama.** Consider the differences between the 2010 and 2011 National Champions in Dramatic Interpretation. The 2010 National Champion performing "Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop" by Danny Hoch is an example of a Here & Now Drama. The character was speaking to the audience entirely from his present reality; a prisoner struggling with AIDs. The drama unfolds in that character's present, hence "here & now." If we look to the 2011 Champion performing "Soul of a Butterfly" by Muhammad Ali, the main character, Muhammad Ali, is seen in the present

reality as an older man suffering with Parkinson's disease reflecting on his younger self. The drama of the present character is informed by his past, as seen through flashbacks. Whichever style of cutting you choose, it is important that your cutting has an **anchor reality**, or a clearly defined present time and space for your protagonist to inhabit. After you have chosen what kind of cutting you will pursue, choose the best climax to serve that kind of cutting. Choose one of the potential climaxes that you have already marked. Now you are ready to chunk.

Chunking for DI is tricky because you don't want the piece to be boring. The thing to remember is: Think about performing the *entire* time that you are cutting. Chunk the parts of the literature that are necessary to serve your story. In addition, chunk out pieces that can be interpreted to add levity to the piece. Remember, we want DIVERSITY OF EMOTION. If you find a piece of the literature that is especially funny include it in your cutting. If you read a line that is particularly stirring, include in the chunking. Such gripping lines, or **hit lines**, may be useable later. Type out the CHUNKED portions of your text into one document. For a full length DI, the chunking should be around 3,000 words. The chunking should NOT exceed 5000 words. The smaller the CHUNK, the easier the cut.

Now WHITTLE your chunking down to somewhere below 1200 words. We have observed that the average person can *under-standably* speak approximately 1200 – 1450 words in ten minutes. However, when one includes elements critical to success in DI such as emotional beats, physicality, environment, and silence, you are no longer dealing with an "average" speaking rate. We have also noticed that a major pitfall of many Dramatic Interpretation cuttings is that they simply contain too much text. Eliminate places where the

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protagonist repeats an idea or emotion. Keep in mind that certain text may better serve your performance as *subtext*. Eliminate characters that do not serve the story. Memoirs, a commonly used resource for Drama, often contain prosaic language that distracts from the dramatic situation. Eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST diverse, and the MOST intense language. As you cut, you should also be thinking about performance transitions and how you will get from one scene to another, or from one character to another.

Finally, you need to make it cool. This step is what separates good cuttings from great cut-

tings. One way of making your cutting cool is by finding HIT LINES. These are lines that shake the audience in their boots. These lines make the audience think, "UHHN, holy smokes!" You should already have a bank of these lines from when you created you initial chunking. The addition of a motif, such as reoccurring symbolism, through the cutting provides adds to the cool factor. Explore ways to surprise the audience with humor or by setting up a twist in the story.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

There are many ways to begin constructing a Dramatic performance. Instinctually, many students will begin memorizing the lines of the script out loud. We have noticed that when students do this, they often memorize intonations and inflection patterns. Once this happens it is incredibly difficult to break. It is important to keep in mind that our *instinctual* choice is not always the most *effective* choice. Therefore, we encourage students to initially read the cutting out loud only once to double-check the flow of the performance. If moments sound awkward or wordy, make final language eliminations. Now that we have an effective cutting we can build our performance.

Environment Construction

The first step in building a performance for DI is creating a set. Our behavior is heav-ily influenced by our environment. The way we interact with our parents homes is very different from the way we interact a school. The way we behave in a quiet church is very different than the way we behave at a baseball game. Therefore it is important that we craft an environment to demonstrate our character or characters' circumstances. In the absence of a physical set, we must create an environment for our characters to inhabit.

There are three aspects of environment that we must establish to make more informed physical decisions; the THINGS AFFIXED, the THINGS NEAR, the THINGS BE-YOND. The first aspect of environment are the **Things Affixed**. This refers to the character's costume, or the items on the character's immediate person that indicate something about who that character is. For example if a character is wearing a pearl necklace, white gloves, and a diamond encrusted evening gown then that suggests that the character is wealthy, or perhaps she is living well beyond her means. Determine what your character is wearing head to toe. How long or short is your character's hair? Do they have hair? Making physical choices can suggest your character's costume and relay important physical traits of your given character.

The second aspect of environment are known as the **Things Near**. This refers to the manipulatable objects in the immediate vicinity of the character that they can interact with and manipulate. If your character is a teacher,

the things in their immediate vicinity could reasonably be a blackboard, an eraser and a piece of chalk, a desk, pens, the student's desk before them, even the students who inhabit the desks. One way to establish the objects that the character can manipulate is for students to design a *floor-plan* of the the scene. If the setting of a given scene is a living room, then determine where the couch would be positioned. Decide where the bookshelf is positioned in the room and what items are placed on the shelf. Make your floor-plan as detailed as possible to ensure greater access to creative possibilities.

The final aspect of environment are the **Things Beyond**. This aspect of environment are the forces outside the character's immediate reach that the character can interact with but cannot manipulate. The things beyond may include environmental elements such as the weather that can help shape the scene. Consider how the mood of a scene can be created by the external environment. Envision an character hearing thunder, looking to the window and drawing the curtains. This interaction between the main character and the thing beyond creates an ominous mood without the help of textual cues. The scene will play out a

bit differently if it were a sunny day. The things beyond may also be secondary characters who influence the story but are not physically present in the scene. For example, a child may hear his mother calling "Dinner time!" from downstairs. The child may interact with his mother by shouting back "I'll be down in a minute!" but he may not physically engage his mother since she is not in the scene. The things beyond can be critical to the physical and vocal perfor-

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mance of a dramatic scene depending on the circumstances set fourth by the work. In the play The Diary of Anne Frank, Anne and her family hide from Nazi soldiers in the sealed-off upper rooms of her father's office building. The presence of the Nazi's are critical to this scene as Anne must tread carefully and speak quietly in order to avoid detection.

Circles of Comfort

Our "self" is comprised of our goals, fears, failures, and dreams. In this way, our self is the deepest part of who we are. The process of sharing this information with close friends and loved ones is an act of self-disclosure. It is extremely uncomfortable sharing our deepest secrets with strangers. No one likes to feel uncomfortable so we protect ourselves with emotional defense mechanism. We have jokes that we tell when meeting people for a first time or we talk about the weather. We wrap ourselves in a *Circle of Comfort* until we feel like we can trust a person enough to to self-disclose. This trust takes time and we do not normally disclose all of our "self" at once. In DI, the process of self- disclosure takes eight minutes, with the climax of the piece representing the most intense disclosure of the character's "self".

We want to give our audience the impression of a self-disclosing act. One way to do this is to envision the Circle of Comfort as a actual circle with the character in the center. The outside of the circle is Self-Disclosure. As the story unfolds and the character reveals more intimate details, they move closer to the edge of the circle. Upon realizing they are sharing too much, they attempt to return to the center of the circle, to regain a sense of comfort. Here, the character attempts to change the subject, they may tell a joke to lighten the mood, the tempo and volume of their . The important thing to keep in mind is that a level change <u>must</u> happen when a character attempts to regain comfort. Since we cannot un-say what we have already said, <u>we can never return fully to the center of the circle</u>. This process repeats

itself until the character reaches a point of no return, where self disclosure is imminent. This occurs in the rising action and concludes with the climax. After the climax, in the falling action, the character makes one last effort to return to comfortable. However, at this point they are forever changed.

Performance Construction

Now that we have created a scene for our DI character(s) and understand the concept of Circles of Comfort it is time to design a **Flipbook** of our performance. Have you ever created a short cartoon on the corners of your notebook? Cartoons are created by drawing a series of pictures that vary gradually from on page to the next. Once the pages are turned rapidly the movement appears fluid. We can construct our performances in a similar way by designing a series of striking images and moving fluidly from one image to the next.

We espouse a *psycho-physical* approach to interpretative performance construction. As mentioned previously in Unit 3 there are many challenges to applying acting method, particularly emotional recall, to forensics. Rather than recollecting emotional trauma in order to feel an emotion prompted by the text, a psycho-physical approach encourages students to craft interesting images that suggest the emotion they wish to communicate. Picture a man sitting on a bench. His shoulders are slumped over and his head is buried in his hands. How does he feel? Such a position uni-versally signals grief. We need not know what is actually going on inside the man's head to know he is upset. Humans have a strong tendency to physically indicate our emotional state. We smile when we are happy. When we lie we look down and to the right. When we are angry we open up our shoulders and clinch our fists. Therefore it stands to reason that creating a physical posture can suggest a character's emotion for the audience. We can do this very simply through the creation of dynamic physical images or "*flips*."

How do we create a Flipbook? The first step is to break the script down into Beats. Beats are emotional transitions, moments of self disclosure, or moments when a character attempts to regain comfort. Indicate beats by placing a small vertical line. Once a student has broken the script down into beats, they can choose a moment (beat) to "animate." This moment should be a completely still image (like a photograph or a sculpture). Does the moment call for a character to manipulate an item from the *Things Near*? Ask yourself what is the best image that will communicate the emotion of that moment. Perhaps the character makes a *Private Behavioral Gesture*. The moment may call for an *Expressive Gesture*. The student performs this task throughout the performance, initially creating 20 or so striking pictures throughout the piece. If the student were to mold into each of these images silently in succession, the audience should have a pretty solid understanding of a story.

After the student has created broad stroke images of major emotional shifts in the performance, the student begins adding in more "pictures" to fill in the gaps between moments. For example, let's say a major emotional moment in a piece occurs when the main character opens the door to his home. The first image the performer would create is the picture of the character looking around the door. The performer has now crafted an emotionally resonant physical image. Now the performer has to fill in the gaps to get there. The performer creates an image of reaching for the door. Then the performer creates an image of squeezing the door handle, followed by an image of turning the door handle clockwise, followed by an image of pulling the door toward him. Finally, the performer has now arrived at the image of looking around the door!

Next, consider tempo and duration. Increase or decrease the tempo based on the emotional choice. If the main character is afraid to open the door, perhaps the tempo will be incredibly slow. If the main character is angry that he has been disturbed, then maybe he'll open the door with increased tempo.

Once the performer increases or decreases the tempo, he now has a blocked, clean, emotionally resonant moment! The process may seem time consuming. However, it is much easier to block performances this way. The vague concepts of "blocking" and "being clean" is operationalized and simplified.

WINNING THE ROUND

The performance that covers the most emotional ground will usually win the round. To do this, it is important to compose a performance that emotionally resonates. We want to immerse the audience in the world of our characters. The more attention to detail in the environment construction, the more vivid the scene will be for the audience. When constructing images and rehearsing the performance ask yourself, "how will this image stand out?" and "Is this the most effective way to communicate the emotion of this moment?" Whenever we do this, we challenge ourselves to become BETTER than our performance instincts and craft the most emotionally powerful performances possible.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create a performance that is competitive in the event of Humorous Interpretation?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Humorous Interpretation, Presentational, Humor, Device, Protagonist, Antagonist, Conflict, Crisis, Bit, The Knee*

UNIT 6

Humorous Interpretation

H umorous Interpretation is cool. National Speech & Debate Tournament Final Round: 3,000 people laughing at one time. Because of one performer. Who made one smirk. That's cool.

And perhaps, because it is so cool, or because the mode of performance seems less *natural* than Dramatic Interpretation, or because a fear of not being funny when you are trying to be can be scarier than *not being dramatic if you are trying to be* that Humorous Interpretation can seem like such an arduous endeavor. Some people feel that they are just not funny. The good news is – you don't need to be the funniest person at the dinner table to excel at this event. You don't even have to think yourself funny at all. You only need to understand how to build a humorous performance by interpreting a written text. And this building process can be taught. And we are going to teach you.

Recall a performance that you have seen on stage or on screen that made you laugh. What do you remember most about the performance? What did the performance look

and sound like? What was funny about it? **Humorous Interpretation** is the communication of ideas drawn from a text to create a humorous effect. The purpose of HI is to explore an author's work through a humorous lens in order to uncover some truth in the human condition. The ideas that best present this truth will be what you interpret by creating a physical performance. Often, HI is represented as a silly event, full of students

> ## The purpose of Humorous Interpretation is to explore an author's work through a humorous lens in order to uncover some truth in the human condition.

making silly noises as silly characters to make the audience feel silly. Well, some of that is true. Students *do* often make silly noises; but, if the event is done well, then those noises are performed with purpose in consideration of a potentially purposeful impact. Legendary teacher Stephen Leacock believed, "humor is a part of the interpretation of life." If we are interpreting works to find truth in the human condition, then humor is a large part of that. Not to mention, it is also a lot of fun to make people laugh.

Like DI, in HI, we use a **presentational** mode of performance. This mode of perfor-

mance helps us create multiple characters that can move through space and time and from scene to scene and still have the audience follow along. Other hallmarks of this presentational mode in HI include sound effects, exaggerated gestures, and absurdly unrealistic portrayals of characters. The key to the event is to choose humorous fragments of the text that best support the truth that you are trying to uncover for the audience. Performers use these fragments to compose complete ideas. Typically, these ideas will elicit emotional responses from the audience. In HI, these emotions should have a humorous subtext in order to elicit laughter, or at minimum – a pleasant feeling, from the audience. An HI that communicates the sharpest attention to its ideas (or story) AND elicits the most laughter from the audience will win the round. Note that here are two components composing the deciding factors figuring the results of an HI round: Laughter and Story. LAUGHTER + STORY = WINNING HI. You must have both.

ANATOMY OF A HI

Humorous Interpretation performances can be drawn from a published play, novel, memoir, short story, or other published work. Using a published work that is humorous in nature as source material is helpful and expected but not always necessary. Cuttings may consist of monologues or scenes that require dialogue

or the portrayal of several roles. Thus, the elements of HI include research, composition, performance, and the audience.

As we did with Dramatic Interpretation, we will guide you through the steps for composing a competitive HI performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include: Script selection, Script cutting, Performance composition, and Presentation. Also, as with DI and DUO, the structure of HI is very similar to that of Freytag's model of dramatic structure. In DI, we described the climax to be the moment when the stakes are highest for the protagonist. In

HI, this may also be true; but, more specifically, an HI climax will be when the piece is the MOST humorous. This moment should elicit the biggest laugh, with laughs before it building to that moment. An HI performance should try to elicit volcanic laughter from the audience, erupting at the premise moment of your intention. After the climax, the falling action should be brief. You want the audience and the judge to hold on to that wonderful feeling that the climax gave them, that feeling of sublime laughter. If your falling action is too long, then this feeling may get diluted.

SCRIPT SELECTION FOR HI

First, you start with the story. For consistent success, an HI must have a story. A student once pitched to me that he wanted to create an HI of Webster's Dictionary. While I'll admit that his interpretation of the word and definition of "absenteeism" still makes me giggle, the student ran into trouble by the fourth or fifth word. Because there was no story. Because there was no conflict.

A big difference between searching for literature for DI and searching for literature in HI lies within a matter of parts of speech. Often, you can read a work and determine that it is suitable for DI based on its nouns. Cancer is dramatic. Death is dramatic. Addiction is dramatic. But what nouns make us laugh? Birthday parties? Sweaters? Penguins? For HI, in addition to nouns, we have to look to verbs. A birthday party *failing* can make us laugh. A penguin *knitting* a sweater can make us laugh. So when looking for HI literature, look to the things *happening*. Look to the verbs.

So how does laughter make us feel? What does it look like? Can it be built? Well that's the tricky thing isn't it? There is definitely an art to eliciting humor; but, lucky for us, it is an art that can be taught. Before diving into the oceans of books at your local library for HI piece ideas, think about what kind of literature that you are searching for. You are not just looking for something that makes you laugh. More specifically, you are looking for

humor; and, no, they are not the same. Laughter is what happens when a humorous text is interpreted well: INTERPRETATION + HUMOR = LAUGHTER. But the text need not make you laugh right away. Read with imagination in search of humor. So, before you even begin your search, understand the tools described in the Performance Composition sections of this book and keep them in mind when reading potential material. Try to imagine voices and scenes that you can create with the words. Sometimes, humor is sneaky. And, to be better humor detectives, we need to understand what humor is.

Humor is a state, situation, or series of events of comedy, absurdity, or surprise that amuse us. Humor amuses. Comedy makes us laugh. So how do we get laughter out of the things that amuse us? Think about this the next time you are watching a funny movie or a stand-up comic. Were the words themselves funny? Or was the voice or face the performer made funny? Typically, even if the words are funny right off of the page, the performance enhances them to make them even funnier. *That* is interpretation, and that is largely what HI performances do.

If you start watching comedic performances closely, you will see that laughter is most often elicited from conflict and irony. The absurdity of Jim Carey's rubber face is funny because of how surprising, or ironic, his reactions to conflict are. The same applies to HI. So when reading for HI, imagine potentially

absurd, surprising, and exaggerated reactions to the conflicts in the story, and that is where you will find your comedy. See how it starts with the story? *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* was funny because it was about a pet detective making funny faces. As talented as Jim Carey may be with that rubber face of his, he would also have trouble competing with an HI of the dictionary (I *would* love to see his interpretation of "absenteeism," though).

So now that we understand humor a bit better, let's recall the unit on finding literature. Now that you know what kind of literature can be used for HI, you must consider the competition. Well known literature, or literature that has been used often for HI, will have a lessened humorous impact on the audience … because it is difficult to surprise an audience with the irony or conflict of a piece they have been exposed to multiple times. That's the thing about irony, it works best the first time around. And remember, "the funny" is in the conflict. "The funny" is in the irony. If we are searching for "the funny" … then that is where we look. Often, accentuating the conflict can make a situation funnier. The same goes for accentuating existing irony, or making ironic choices to surprise the audience. For example, give a tiny voice to a very large character, or have a tough character react to a scary situation like a small child. The opposite of what is expected is a great place to start brainstorming for how to add humor to pieces. Think about these possibilities as you read. You will

find that reading with possibility fueling your imagination is one of the most important practices of interpretation.

Next, think about the structure of your performance while you read. Remember Vonnegut's story curves that were introduced in the Cutting unit? Think about which of the curves are best for HI? How do we want the audience to feel at the end of the performance? Hint: In HI … the answer is HAPPY. VERY HAPPY!

If you start watching comedic performances closely, you will see that laughter is most often elicited from conflict and irony.

So where do we find this great literature for HI? Unfortunately, the realistic answer is *everywhere*. However daunting this answer is, always keep it in the back of your head. Keeping an *eye for forensics* is the best way to find cool literature. Practically, though, start small. Start with a search of comedies at drama publishing houses like Dramatists and Playscripts, Inc., then subscribe to their email services so you receive updates of new plays. One of my favorite places to go for HI material is, perhaps, the most obvious one: the Humor section of bookstores. I've also found great HI ideas in memoirs of comedians, children's lit-

erature, and graphic novels. If there is an old campy movie that you think would be fun to re-imagine as a solo performance, check online for a novelization of the movie. The novelizations are often very similar to the script and can lend great freedom and fun for interpretation. Recently, the national competition circuit has been graced with HI performances of *The Karate Kid*, *Indiana Jones*, and *The Exorcist*. Each of these performances were vastly unique from their popular film counterpart, and each of these performances were great fun. Just remember the story. Your HI's got to have one.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

We've said this before and we'll say it again. The performance begins with the cutting. Once you begin manipulating the text, you begin shaping the story that you will be telling. Just like you had to use your imagination when searching for your literature, you must also use your imagination in cutting your piece. As you cut it is important to think about what the performance will actually look like. I like to cut HI around other people so I can try some of the lines out loud to see if we can make them funny. It also helps to read

out loud as you cut to ensure that the audience can follow the story. Sometimes with HI, we see a story on paper with multiple characters and places and conversations; and then, when we try to build the performance, we learn that it makes no sense. So reading out loud can save you time and energy so you won't have to needlessly re-cut.

As with the other interp events, the first step in cutting is looking for a story. Decide whether you are going to use a Cameo or Spark Notes Cutting. Remember, you do not have to tell the story of the entire work. Sometimes, the plight of one character or scenario is more than enough material for an interp performance. Some competitors like to have some kind of feel-good morality lesson in their HI stories. This *can* help create a competitive advantage, as a judge may choose a performance with "moral substance" over an equally funny but less compelling story, but this is not a requirement of the activity. Recall the National Speech & Debate Tournament Final Round of HI of 2008. It appears that Alex Wozencraft was no funnier than Gabe Gonzalez, yet Alex won the round. Now consider the stories each of the performers told. Gabe told a provocative tale of youth encountering their sexuality and Alex told a tale about a caterpillar learning lessons of self-worth and friendship. Which theme has a stronger sense of feel-good morality? That difference may have determined the outcome of the round.

Once you've decided on a story to tell, then it is time to cut. Similarly to DI, our next step is deciding on a climax. It is easier to make decisions on how to best take your audience on a journey if you know where you're going. While bracketing chunks of material while you read, make special marks around the parts that could be REALLY funny. I make two different kinds of brackets – straight lines for the parts essential to telling the story and squiggly lines for potentially funny moments.

Once you have decided on a climax, then begin mapping out the steps on how to get there. As with DI, you need to make decisions on what setting the reality of the performance will take place as you go. If you want to tell a story with multiple settings and time frames – or if you want to show flashbacks to memories – then realize that you will have to build a transitional device into your performance (sound effect, physical transition, etc). Also, when cutting HI, think about things that make HI work: Interestingness, Irony (and Absurdity), Ironic reactions, Abrupt Tempo Changes, Opportunities for interesting images/blocking, and memorable characters. Also, it is often helpful to have at least one character that is somewhat grounded in reality to juxtapose the more wacky/ ironic characters.

Now, you must move on to Chunking: HI style. Chunking for HI is tricky because the piece often requires many characters. The thing to remember is: Think about performing the entire time that you are cutting. Every character needs to be memorable in some

way. Most of the time, a character will need to appear more than once (this is not a rule, as there are exceptions). Chunk the parts of the literature that are necessary to serve your story. In addition, chunk out pieces that can used to add bits. **Bits** are humorous motifs. They can exist as a tick that a character is given that surfaces every time that he is stressed, or bits can exist as long drawn exaggerations of events or occurrences. Think, a string of

> Eliminate places where the protagonist repeats an idea or emotion. Eliminate characters that do not serve the story. Eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST punctuated, and the funniest language.

jokes that are often physical and requirement sound effects. For example, once upon cutting a piece for HI, we ran across a scene where the protagonist baked a cake. We saw this as an opportunity to create a bit that showed the character struggling with the elements of the kitchen and ingredients of a cake. We figured that this bit would last about thirty seconds, so we kept that in mind as we finished the cutting. Remember: bits can help characters be more memorable. Make notes of the bits in the chunking to help "see" the piece on the pa-

per. After you've chunked, type out the chunked portions of your text into one document. For a full length HI, the chunking should be around 3,000 words. The chunking should NOT exceed 5000 words. The smaller the chunk … the easier the cut.

Now whittle your chunking down to around 1200 words. Eliminate places where the protagonist repeats an idea or emotion. Eliminate characters that do not serve the story. Eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST punctuated, and the funniest language. Often a joke appears in a text in several ways. Keep the BEST way only. Unless you think the performance can build to make the joke funnier each time it appears. As you cut, you should also be thinking about performance transitions and how you will get from one scene to another, or from one character to another. Transitions and Character differentiation are two of the biggest challenges in HI, but also offer tons of opportunities for creativity!

Finally, you need to make it cool. Remember, this step is what separates good cuttings from great cuttings. One way of making your cutting cool is by determining the bits and/or devices. Another example of a bit: If one of your characters is a baseball coach and another character is a player with a conflict of the player getting signs from the coach mixed up, and you create a bit where the coach is constantly swatting flies away

from his face with his hat to it looks like he is giving crazy signs when he isn't. That bit can play out throughout the entire performance and elicit building laughter as the swatting becomes more extreme. The laughter does not just come from the fly swatting, but also from showing the player misinterpreting them. Write these bits into your script. Other ways to make cuttings cool are by: adding a motif (repeated symbol) through the cutting, adding setting up the audience for a twist, or surprising the audience in some other way.

PRACTICE AND EXTRA TIPS FOR CUTTING HI

Now try your hand at cutting HI. Manipulate the following sentences to make them more suitable for performance. You may cut as much as you like. Try to achieve the most humorous effect.

I saw Sam at the supermarket. He was struggling to push a cart that held more than ten bags of ice. I approached him and asked, "What are you doing with all of that ice?" He looked at me with desperation. "I think the AC went out in my grandma's apartment," he said. "That stinks," I replied, "but how is the ice going to help cool off the apartment?" "It's for my grandpa. My grandma said that he was 'hot-to-trot' with all of his new clothes," Sam said with haste, "so I'm going to try to cool him off."

What did you come up with? This is how we saw it:

I saw Sam ~~at the supermarket. He was~~ struggling to push a cart that held ~~more than~~ ten bags of ice. ~~I approached him~~ and asked, "What are you doing with all of that ice?" ~~He looked at me with desperation.~~ "I think the AC went out in my grandma's apartment," ~~he said.~~ "That stinks," ~~I replied,~~ "but how is the ice going to help cool off the apartment?" "It's for my grandpa. My grandma said that he was 'hot-to-trot' with all of his new clothes," ~~Sam said with haste,~~ "so I'm going to try to cool him off."

Becomes:

I saw Sam struggling to push a cart that held ten bags of ice and asked,

Me: What are you doing with all of that ice?

Sam: I think the AC went out in my grandma's apartment

Me: That stinks, but how is the ice going to help cool off the apartment?

Sam: It's for my grandpa. My grandma said that he was 'hot-to-trot' with all of his new clothes, so I'm going to try to cool him off.

Notice how the end result creates more abrupt tempo changes and conflict. Also notice the deletion of words that don't translate well into oral performance ("he said," "I said.") Those phrases can often be "filled in"

to "handle" in HI cuttings (and are often expected to be present). As conflict and ironic response makes comedy, sustained scenes between multiple characters are often ideal (this is a guideline and by no means a "rule") for HI.

Many competitors are scared of cutting, or think themselves not good at it. Do not succumb to this frame of thought. Cutting is a PART of the performance. It is a PART of the competition. Cutting is not excluded from the performance process. If you realize and understand this, then the process will be enjoyable. Take pride in cutting. As with anything, the more you do it, the better at it you will become.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

In order to create a performance that is competitive, we need to determine what a competitive performance looks life. Advice to this end is sprinkled throughout this book; but, for HI, I like to return to one question: What kind of characters make-up a memorable HI? Because when I remember HI, I remember characters.

Humorous Interpretations lends us this awesome opportunity to stretch and exaggerate characters. Keep this in mind as you begin the performance building process. Think about what an evil character might look like. Then streeeeeeetch it. Think about what a virtuous character might look like. Then streeeeeeetch it. Then apply clues from the text to your archetypical body molds. As dis-

with reactions to what was said (or done) by another character. Other deletions (e.g. "I approached, etc.) can be shown with physical action. When cutting, taking language from prose and putting it into "script" form can be helpful. Humor books, Comics, graphic novels, and autobiographies of comedians make great sources for HI pieces; however, they are often littered with prosaic language that gets in the way of your cutting being as compelling as it could be. This prosaic language also gets in the way of your protagonist, or main speaker, sounding like they are really speaking to the audience. And another difference between HI and DI is that multiple characters are easier

cussed in Intro to Performance Composition, these shapes burn pictures into the minds of audience members. Once you know the shapes of your characters, then you can begin making decisions on how they sound. Use levels in height, span, and focal points. Focal points are especially important for showing transitions between multiple characters. After you have defined body molds for each of your characters, think about potentially ironic performance choices like abrupt changes in tempo and shape. Also, look for places in your cutting for surprising reactions.

Have you noticed that I have not instructed you to memorize yet? So many competitors stress over memorization and so often get stuck at that point in the activity. Do not be one of those competitors. By determining physical choices throughout the performance building process, memorization often happens quite effortlessly, so trust the process.

One important factor in performance composition that is somewhat unique in HI is a tie to reality. I say that this factor is unique in HI because the event encourages so much departure from reality. I have seen a character reach into their own chest cavity and perform their own heart surgery, a character representing the anthropomorphic shape of all human joy, and a character that spoke backwards and in rhyme ... and all of them had to have some tie to reality. We *want* you to be creative. HI *needs* you to be creative. But in doing so, make sure your choices work according to the phys-

ics and reality that you've determined in the world of your performance. And make sure that the physics and realities that you create are consistent, and that the audience will be willing to take that trip with you.

Tell a story, be imaginative, manipulate the tempo, respond with irony, create bits, assign body molds, "pop" through transitions, and

> Think about what an evil character might look like. Then streeeeeeetch it. Think about what a virtuous character might look like. Then streeeeeeetch it.

determine focal points. And after ALL of that – be specific and consistent in your execution. If you create a wondrous environment that exists under the sea – be specific. If you create a cake-baking scene that last a 1:30 minutes – be specific. And MOST importantly – if you have multiple characters that require multiple body molds and multiple focal points – be consistent. I have seen so much awesomely creative work get muddled through a performance that lacked execution and specificity. Amend our original equation to: (STORY + LAUGHTER)(EXECUTION) = WINNING HI. It's that important. And the execution doesn't "happen" with practice, it begins

in the building phase. Lay a strong foundation, and practicing will be much more enjoyable.

As you build your performance, be careful to have your characters responding to one another. Often, when I see a well-executed HI that tells an interesting story that doesn't work, I scratch my head and try to figure it out. Many times, the problem is a hidden one – hidden under all of those body molds, sound effects, and character voices. Somewhere along the way in the process, the competitor lost sight of conflict, and, thus, forgot to have the characters responding and reacting to each other. I think that this is the most overlooked detail, and I think it essential to a winning HI.

WINNING THE ROUND

We determined at the beginning of the chapter: the HI that communicates the sharpest attention to its ideas (or story) AND elicits the most laughter from the audience will win the round. Consistent execution of your performance is the only way to achieve consistent results throughout a tournament or season. And consistent execution requires consistent energy. HI is a labor intensive performance mode. In order to bring winning energy every round, you need to be in performance shape. Once your performance in competition ready, practice it multiple times a day for multiple days to replicate the tournament experience. Drink lots of water. Forensic tournaments are marathons, as often the resulting ranking of a final round is determined by energy.

Lastly, one of the most intriguing *secrets* of HI has only recently come to my attention. A few years ago, I was working at a camp with 2-time consecutive National Speech & Debate Association Humorous Interpretation Champion Lindsay White (name drop), and she explained to me a concept she learned from accomplished coach Jim Fedje. She called this concept the Knee. The **Knee** describes the words or physical bits that link the jokes in your script. Lindsay pointed out to me that EVERY moment can be funny in the HI, not just the voices and dialogue, but every word and in-between. Performers should strive to make ALL moments humorous in their pieces, not just the joke moments. Brainstorm how to use irony, surprise, conflict, physical comedy, and absurdity to accomplish this tough feat. Think about Matt LeBlanc's character in the sitcom Friends. He turned the simple phrase, "How you doin?", into a laugh line, and, later, into a trademark. In a similar fashion, Lindsey employed the concept of the Knee in her senior year HI, *Fat Kids on Fire*. There was a scene in which the main character, Bess, was having a conversation with her new friend, Cindy. Lindsey enhanced this simple moment of exposition by having the conversation take place in the locker room. This gives Lindsey access to a very funny bit; Cindy toweling herself off in an unusual (and very comical) order. Think critically about creating humorous possibilities and you'll find the funny in the least likely places.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do two performers co-create a performance that is competitive in the event of Duo Interpretation?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Suggested Interaction, Strong Conflict, Balance, Precise Interaction, Creative Interplay, Trialogue, Forward Facing, "I" Formation, Turned In, Turned Out, Auditory Choreography*

UNIT 7

Duo Interpretation

Each year, six individuals in Dramatic Interpretation and six individuals in Humorous Interpretation present wonderfully imaginative expressions of art on the National Tournament final round stage. However, the event of final round of Duo Interpretation often boasts some of the most innovative demonstrations of human artistry. Duo Interpretation is the communication of ideas drawn from a text to create the effect of cooperative interplay and dramatic interaction. **The purpose of Duo is to explore an author's work in order to uncover some truth in the human condition through the interaction of characters and/ or ideas.** The ideas that best present this truth will be what you interpret by creating a physical and interactive performance.

Duo , like DI and HI, is a presentational mode of performance. However, what distinguishes duo from other interpretation events is that in duo, there are two performers who must suggest interaction between at least two characters. Note the key phasing of **suggest-**

ed interaction as both performers must use an offstage focus, meaning they may not look at one another. Also, only the suggestion of touching is permitted. This unit will build off of skills described in previous units on dramatic interpretation and humorous interpretation as well as explain the traits and skills unique to the event of duo interpretation.

> The key to the event is to select fragments of text that allows for the greatest expression of truth through the tension or interplay of two or more characters.

The key to the event is to select fragments of text that allows for the greatest expression of truth through the tension or interplay of two or more characters. Two performers use these fragments to compose complete ideas. Typically, these ideas will elicit emotional responses from the audience. The performance that covers the most emotional ground will usually win the round. So how do we do all of that? We will learn the steps for composing a competitive Duo performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include: Script selection, Script cutting, Cooperative Performance Composition, and Presentation.

ANATOMY OF A DUO

Since Duos can be either humorous or dramatic in nature and pairings can be male/ male, male/ female, or female/ female it is extremely rare that any two will look exactly alike. In general the basic comprising characteristic of most duos are; teaser, intro exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, and falling action. The structure is very similar to that of any other performance in interpretation. A major difference is that the conflict may be between the two main characters or the two main characters may share a common conflict with secondary characters. The **teaser** previews the topic, mood, or style of the selection and generally introduces the audience to at least the main characters that each performer will play. The **introduction** occurs at around the 1:30 – 3:00 mark and explains the purpose of the performance. The introduction is followed by the **exposition** of the Duo, which introduces secondary characters (if there are any) and setting. The characters encounter conflict, either between each other, or between secondary characters. This is known as the **inciting incident**. The **rising action** refers to the mounting tension between characters mounts or some other complication of the conflict for the two protagonists. These complications lead to the **climax**, or the emotional peak of the performance Finally, the falling action resolves the conflict either between the two characters

or, if there are two protagonists, between the protagonists and their obstacle.

SCRIPT SELECTION FOR DUO INTERPRETATION

Duo Interpretation performances can be drawn from a published play, novel, memoir, short story, or other printed-published work. The work may be humorous in nature, dramatic in nature, or a combination of the two. Most cuttings consist of a scene or multiple scenes of dialogue between two or more characters. However, some successful duos, such as the 2002 National Championship duo team performing "A Light in the Attic" by Shel Silverstein, have utilized plays with split monologues in which characters do not verbally interact (as in directly speak to one another) but emotionally interact (with emotionally corresponding monologues) to establish the narrative or conflict of the work.

All of the same principles we have covered so far in the DI and HI units apply to Duo. However, we are not limited to one body in order to express the scene. The interaction between two performers is the distinguishing essence of Duo Interpretation. The interaction

reveals the conflicting objectives of characters in a selection.

Recall the unit on finding literature as well as the previous units on DI and HI. Now that you know that interaction between two performers is the key distinguishing factor of Duo, we should consider the importance of balance. Each performer should be given a relatively equal or balanced amount of "work" to do in the duo. The script that has the greatest potential for success in Duo is the one that gives both performers opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

> Given that the event uses two performers, there are endless possibilities for the creation of interesting imagery and vocal dynamism. Students have sung, salsa danced, rapped, fist-fought, fenced, beat-boxed, and tapped.

Since Duo scripts may be humorous in nature, dramatic in nature, or a combination of the two, it can be a challenge determining what genre the script you are holding best fits into. Many scripts that are appropriate for HI may also be appropriate for Duo. In general comedies with two protagonists may work well in Duo. However, when you are looking at a comedy with only one protagonist and determining if it is right for Duo or not, consider the balance of interaction. If the protagonist is always interacting with more than one other character in the scene it may be more suitable for HI. For example, if the script you are reading is a trialogue, or a constant interaction of three characters, it is more difficult to have a balanced performance.

Moreover, many dialogue-driven DI scripts could possibly function as potential scripts for Duo. In general, dramatic Duo scripts involve characters who have equally powerful objectives. Therefore, both main characters drive the conflict forward. If one character simply stands and listens while the other waxes poetic about their problems, it may not be the best choice for Duo. While reading scripts if you are sure to keep in mind the importance of balance, it becomes easier to determine whether or not a selection is more appropriate for DI, HI, or Duo.

Since Duos may be humorous in nature, dramatic in nature, or a combination of the two, there have been a wide variety of genres performed on the national stage. Teams have performed classic literature, children's' literature, two character plays, multi-character musicals, the list goes on and on. What matters most is what the two performers bring to the material. How they breathe creative life into the work.

A relatively equivalent amount of Humorous and Dramatic Duo performances have graced the final round stage. Most successful

duos include the following characteristics; **Strong Conflict, Balance, Precise Interaction, Creative Interplay.** Given that the event uses two performers, there are endless possibilities for the creation of interesting imagery and vocal dynamism. Students have sung, salsa danced, rapped, fist-fought, fenced, beat-boxed, and tapped. Every duo has its strengths. Some exhibit masterfully creative imagery and highly synchronized blocking. Others succeed on the strengths of the performers' ability to craft realistic characters engaging in powerful conflict. It is impossible to label any particular winning characteristic in this event because every great duo is unique. What makes Duo such a special event is that, in general, the team with the greatest demonstration of teamwork wins.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR DUO INTERPRETATION

In many ways, the foundation for cutting a Duo is the same as every other interpretation event. Cutting a Duo involves reading the material, determining whether or not it is a Sparknote or Cameo cutting, choosing a climax, chunking, whittling down, and "making it cool." However, in Duo we have to consider that the cutting will be performed by two people. Remember that, like all interpretation events, the performance begins with the cutting. Well, in Duo we are shaping a two person performance.

Similar to cutting for other events, you are (above all) looking for a story. When reading for Duo, you need to think about things that make Duo work: Strong Conflict, Balance, Precise Interaction, Creative Interplay. While bracketing chunks of material while you read, make special marks around potential climaxes. Locate the point(s) in the play where the two main characters' competing objectives threaten to destroy the relationship. In some plays, the two struggling protagonists achieve a singular goal together. You will want to remove text that disrupts the balance between the characters. For example if one character has a three minute monologue, it may be a good idea to cut nonessential language so that the other character is not simply out of sight or standing silently for a while. Perhaps the other character also has a monologue that you could juxtapose to give the performance more balance.

After you have chosen what kind of cutting you will pursue, choose the best climax to serve that kind of cutting. Choose one of the potential climaxes that you have already marked. Now you are ready to chunk. Remember to think about the performance the entire time you are cutting. When cutting a larger work with multiple characters, determine which characters are necessary and which characters are expendable. Keep in mind the challenge of having three characters engaging in a simultaneous **trialogue**. This means that one of the performers will have to play two people in the

same room so you need to consider the logistics of the performance while you are chunking.

Now WHITTLE your chunking down to around 1200 words. You will want to remove text that disrupts the balance between the characters. For example if one character has a three minute monologue, it may be a good idea to cut nonessential language so that the other character is not simply out of sight or standing silently for a while. Perhaps the other character also has a monologue that you could juxtapose to give the performance more balance. As you cut, you should also be thinking about performance transitions and how you will get from one scene to another, or from one character to another.

Finally, you need to make it cool. It is critical to consider creative interplay. What opportunities does the script offer for interesting physical and vocal compositions? If the script has a hilarious moment of physical comedy, find a way to include it in the comedy. Sometimes a line can be said by both performers to give the line greater resonance. What will be the grand finale of the Duo? You have to imaging the performance from the audience's eyes and include moments that will make them want to cheer with amazement.

When two students cut a Duo together, they are beginning a creative partnership. Successful duo pairing have fun making decisions about what the composition will eventually look like. Great duos begin with BIG ideas. "Maybe we can do a funny Mambo dance here!" "It would look awesome if we blocked out a fight scene!" Partners should be encouraged to add stage direction while they cut. Decide where the characters are and what they are doing. More often than not, creative interplay can give the audience clues about the relationship or conflict more effectively than having it expressly stated in the text. Considering the performance while you cut and incorporating stage directions can encourage the scene or moment to be more humorous in nature or more dramatic in nature. Ultimately, open yourself up to creative possibilities and you will find joy in the cooperative process.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR DUO INTERPRETATION

Our interactions with one another are governed by goals. Whether we are speaking with a store clerk or a friend in the hallway, there is usually some end goal, or **objective**, to each interaction. An objective is the goal of a character and it is the tension of competing objectives that creates conflict between two or more characters. In a scene characters engage in actions as tactics to achieve their objective. Recall that conflicts are actions that elicit an emotional response from an audience. Well, two characters with competing objectives results in conflict. The drama and the comedy of a scene emerges from competing objectives.

Sometimes small conflicts of competing objectives can become a life changing dispute. Consider the short story "The Necklace" by Guy De Maupassant. In it, Mathilde and Charles are poor couple who want to attend an extravagant party. When Mathilde borrows what she believes to be an expensive necklace from a friend and loses it, they spend ten years struggling to replace it. Their lives are forever changed by a serious of incrementally worsening actions. Conflicts often grow this way and the tension that conflicts induce **raise the stakes** for characters. Now that the team has a cutting and has brainstormed creative possibilities, we can begin building our performance.

COMPOSING PRECISE INTERACTION

Remember that in Duo we can only suggest interaction. Therefore the performers must use an offstage focus and give the impression that the characters are interacting with one another. The essential question we must ask here is, how do we give the appearance of interaction without actually interacting? Recall our discussion on focal points. Focal points give the impression that two characters are are speaking to one another. Imagine a face-to-face conversation between two individuals. Now imagine a line forming between the two

that cuts the conversation in half and turns the individuals 90 degrees facing the audience as the two characters repeat the exact conversation exactly the same way. That is precisely how we give the impression of interaction.

The key to truthful interaction in Duo is that the characters give the appearance that they are listening and responding to one another.

As performers it can at times be difficult to determine how to best demonstrate interaction that appears truthful when it may only be suggested. Given this, one way of determining the appearance of interaction is to rehearse the performance and create performance images face to face. The teachings of Sanford Meisner, also called the Meisner technique, are particularly useful in designing responses and reactions that give the appearance of interaction. For Meisner, listening and responding was critical to genuine interaction of actors on stage. He encouraged actors to train using repetition exercises.

Meisner would begin with actors standing about ten feet apart facing one another. The actors look at each other, take the other in. When one actors is spontaneously compelled to do so, they may comment on the behavior of their partner. The observation is repeated back and forth until a new observation strikes one of the partners and is repeated back and forth. The goal of Meisner's exercise is for two actors to live as truthfully as possible. Therefore, we have adapted Meisner's repetition exercise to optimize its effectiveness in creating competitive interpretation performances.

When creating performance decisions in duo, students begin by facing one another. Consider *spatial relationship* when determining how far apart your characters should stand. If you characters in the scene are great friends, let that inform your decision regarding spatial relationship. Take a moment to observe each other's behavior. Partner A and Partner B rehearse the first few lines of their cutting face to face. If Partner B is not satisfied with the physical and vocal delivery of Partner A's line, Partner B repeat the line. Partner A then performs the line with a different physical and vocal delivery. If Partner B is satisfied, the partner B says his/ her next line. During this process, also consider *kinesthetic response*. What is the immediate uncensored reaction to your partner's physical decision? After a few successful line deliveries, both performers should stop and write down notes on their delivery. During this time the partners should also write in beats and score their script.

To be clear, Meisner would likely be extremely critical of this adaptation of his approach. Meisner, like many observers of Stanislavsky's method, did not believe in re-

hearsed vocal and physical choices as it increases the likelihood that a performer will miss a "real" moment. However, for the purposes of Duo Interpretation, where actual face to face interaction is prohibited, complete acquiescence to Meisner's technique is not possible. Meisner's approach is most helpful in informing decisions that performers can replicate and perfect.

After they have galvanized their decisions, the performers should perform the moment over again using an off-stage focal point, repeating the successful physical and vocal deliveries of each line. Remember to consider spatial relationship when determining how far apart characters should stand. If characters in the scene are great friends, let that inform the decisions regarding spatial relationship. The key to truthful interaction in Duo is that the characters give the appearance that they are listening and responding to one another.

CREATIVE INTERPLAY

Once the team has composed a vocal and physical performance that suggests truthful interaction, they must complete the physical composition of the Duo. The event has grown a great deal in the last two decades. While it is certainly not impossible for a duo to achieve competitive success when the two performers simply stand in one place and speak to one another, the event generally calls for teams to put the "do" in duo. We do not mean that you should move without reason. Of course, phys-

icality should add to the story, not distract from it. However, teams should explore the possibilities in their script for **creative interplay,** or opportunities for the team to create stylistic, dynamic, striking, physical imagery and auditory choreography.

PHYSICAL IMAGERY

In Duo, all relevant skills and approaches for DI and HI are used in the construction of each performer's character/ characters. If the Duo is humorous, the performers should construct physical characters using the strategies described in the HI unit. If it is a dramatic selection, performers should construct characters using those concepts detailed in the DI section. However, in Duo there are added possibilities for compelling imagery through the coordinated movement of the two performers.

Let us first discuss some basic physical positioning that are frequently used in Duo. The most commonly used physical position in Duo is the **Forward Facing** position. In this position, both performers stand side-by-side, facing straight out. This position is most commonly utilized because it allows the audience to see both of the performers facial expressions most clearly. Another position is the **"I" Formation**. In this position one of the Partners stands in front of the other. This essentially hides one of the performers so it is great choice when one character is addressing the audience in a monologue or to suggest that one of the characters has left the scene.

The third common positioning is **Turned In** position where both partners turn 90 Degrees toward each other. This positioning can serve to suggest intimacy, like two lovers speaking romantically or urgency, such as two friends having an argument they do not want others to hear. The final basic position is **Turned Out**. This positioning is the exact opposite of Turned In. Here, both performers stand turned out 90 Degrees.

An individuals voice in DI or HI can elicit tears or laughter, but in Duo, teams have four hands and feet and two voices to create dynamic sounds.

These four basic positioning can be altered using the principles we have discussed previously in this text. For example, in the Forward Facing position, students may consider spatial relationship and have one performer stand in the foreground and the other slightly in the background to signify retreat or aggression. Teams may also mix and match these basic positions, having one performer stand in the Forward Facing position while their partner stand in the Turned Out position to indicate a flashback. Students may also consider how to give the indication of touch without actually making physical contact with one another. Two partners in the Turned In position need

only lean into one another to suggest a kiss.

Once the duo has created the basic positions of the scene they can add in more physical nuance to the creative interplay in the duo. Take, for example, the 2007 Duo National Championship team performing "Mr. Marmalade." The team created a highly stylized operation sequence. In the sequence, one of the performers executes a back-bend to indicate laying on a operation table. As his partner pantomimes pulling leavers and pushing buttons in the imaginary operating, the male performer synchronically bends his back to give the appearance of being lifted on the table. This is a highly sophisticated example of creative interplay, where the performers create an striking moment in the Duo through choreographed *flips*.

In fact, the performance of this elaborate looking sequence can be easily broken down into concepts we have been exposed to previously in this text. The male performer's decision to do a back bend was a consideration of shape. The way his partner moved about the space, creating the imagery of the operating room considered the second aspect of environment (*things near*), the floor pattern she created in her movement on the stage (*topography*), and the distance between the two performers (*spatial relationship*). Moreover, when the female performer pulls the lever, the male performer's physical reaction gave the appearance of an uncensored reaction or *kinesthetic response*. Once the creative vision is in place,

all the performers have to do next is break down each move step-by-step, beat-by-beat.

AUDITORY CHOREOGRAPHY

Creative Interplay also suggest that teams consider how striking sounds can be composed with the voices of the two performers. An individuals voice in DI or HI can elicit tears or laughter, but in Duo, teams have four hands and feet and two voices to create dynamic sounds. This means Duos performing at the highest level are generally expected to be particularly creative and precise with the sounds their voices and bodies produce. The 2010 National Championship Duo team performing the "Wizard of Oz" provides an excellent example of auditory choreography. In addition to excellently demonstrating physical creative interplay through choreographed dance and characterization the team also created a captivating auditory performance. In the scene transitions the team harmonized a vaudevillian-style melody, slapping their thighs, clapping their hands, and stomping their feet. These choreographed sounds made the performance feel larger than life.

However, the creative possibilities for dynamic auditory choreography are not limited

to comedic Duo performances. The 2009 National Duo Finalist team performing "Because I Wanted to Say" used auditory choreography to both create levity in the dramatic piece and establish a stylistic motif. The performance begins with the the two dancing while the male performer hums a melody. In between the beats of the song he is humming the two engage in a quippy dialogue.

> (*Male hums the melody while the two dance*)
>
> **Male**: You have to move your hips or do something
>
> (*Humming Vocal Overlay*)
>
> **Female**: (*Cutting him off*) I'm trying!

The vocal overlay gave the teaser greater levity, it forced the audience to pay attention, and it established a dramatic motif; that the two would be dancing from "one part of life to another." You do not need to dance or sing to compel an audience with auditory choreography. If two characters are fighting, consider how the argument sounds. Is the sound too shrill? Is it layered effectively? Decide where silence is placed in the performance. The team should determine how to build sound around silence to increase it's impact.

WINNING THE ROUND

Since the performance that demonstrates the greatest teamwork generally wins a given Duo round, it is imperative for teams to have a positive working relationship. One thing we have learned is that it is incredibly difficult to compete successfully in Duo without a trusting interpersonal relationship. For this reason, there are many pairings that final more than once. Strong, trusting working relationships mean that the team enjoys working with one another as such relationships foster creativity. The more time you spend in the laboratory inventing and practicing the more likely you will be to wow the audience and win the round.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: *How do we construct introductions for interpretation performances? How do Dramatic, Humorous, and Duo Interpretation introductions differ?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Introduction*

UNIT 8

Writing an Introduction

Sam wiped his brow. He was whipped. He learned about each event, chose which event was best for him, selected literature, cut his piece, composed his performance, and practiced with winning round strategies. He walked into interp practice ready to show off his performance composition. Just as Sam was about to sign up for a performance time to showcase his work, his interp team captain stopped him. "You mean I'm not ready?" Sam asked, "What else is there to do?"

The team captain smirked knowingly and gently prompted, "Just one more step, Sam. You're almost there."

Forensics is an argument based activity. In debate, competitors create cases and argue their positions. In extemporaneous speaking, competitors are asked questions about current event and in thirty minutes construct arguments to defend their answer. In original oratory, competitors write and perform speeches to persuade their audience to engage in some action.

In interpretation competitors shape an authors work in order to argue some truth about the human condition. In each interpretation event, a student writes and performs an introduction to the performance. During the introduction, which generally follows the teaser, the performer drops character and speaks to the audience for about 30-45 seconds introducing the story and communicating the title and author of the selection before moving into the exposition of the performance. The **introduction** *in interpretation events is the central argument of the performance or the lens through which you want the audience to view a performance.*

Introductions are written in the student's own words. Since the purpose of an introduction is to provide a lens through which the audience should view the performance, the lens should be clear. In this way introductions should be insightful yet digestible. In each of the interpretation events, introductions begin with a broad concept, theme, or historical explanation and then provide details more specific to the particular selection. This unit will discuss how to write and perform an introduction for each of the interpretation events based upon current national trends.

DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

Current national trends in dramatic interpretation suggest that introductions typically are three to four sentences long. The first sentence or two generally provides either a universal

theme or, if the DI is biographical piece, some general explanation of the character's historical importance. The universal theme may be expressed through quotation, theory, or a study. The next sentence provides an explication of the universal theme and it's association with the character's conflict or further explains the historical figure's importance in the student's own words. The final sentence is the most specific to the student's current selection; it provides the particular lesson or moral that the audience will take away from the student's performance of the selection. The the performer states the title and author of the selection.

The following is an example of an introduction written and performed by Mike Dahlgren the <u>2009 National Final Round in Dramatic Interpretation</u>:

> *T.S. Elliot once noted, "the end of our exploring is to arrive where we first started and to know that place for the very first time" As an actor, devout mormon, husband and father, Stephen Fales has played many roles for many people. But he reminds us all in his autobiographical one man show that to be oneself and to love oneself is the greatest role of all.*
> *Confessions of a Mormon Boy by Stephen Fales*

Note how each of the three sentences fulfills the basic formula we have explained above. The Elliot quotation highlights the universal theme of self exploration. The second sentence gives the audience some clues to the character's conflict. The final sentence provides the audience with the lesson of the performance; the importance of self-acceptance.

HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

Similar to DI, Humorous Interpretation introductions demonstrate the lesson that the audience should take away from a student's performance. In general Humorous Interpretation intros are humorous in nature. Often times students will begin with a joke or a funny scenario from the student's own life that captures the broad sentiments explored in the piece. Next, the particular lessons of the given selection are highlighted. Finally the performer states the title and author of the selection.

Introductions are written in the student's own words. Since the purpose of an introduction is to provide a lens through which the audience should view the performance, the lens should be clear.

The following is an example of an introduction written and performed by Lindsey White in the <u>2010 National Final Round in Humorous Interpretation:</u>

Tonight, I would like you all to go home, look at yourself in the mirror, alone, naked. Do you like what you see? If not that's okay, because someone, somewhere...HAS to be uglier than you. Unfortunately looking in the mirror and picking out things about yourself you wish you could change happens to most of us. Including me. But all it takes is one person to show you that you are who you are...and that's a SEXY thing.
Fat Kids on Fire by Bekah Brunstetter

What is most important to keep in mind when writing an introduction for humorous interpretation is that it should cater to the student's performance strengths and style of humor. For example, Lindsey's introduction indicates that she is comfortable discussing issues of weight. Lindsey's willingness to share information about overcoming her own insecurities revealed the personal significance of the the selection and invited the audience to laugh at the touchy subject of self-image.

DUO INTERPRETATION

Many of the same theoretical concepts used in writing Dramatic and Humorous Inter-

pretation introductions may be employed when writing introductions for Duo Interpretation. The first line in general establishes the broader social issue addressed in the performance with each line becoming increasingly specific to the given selection. The important thing to keep in mind when writing a Duo is balance. Both performers should be given a relatively equal role in conveying the lesson of the performance, unless the team makes a choice to do otherwise. Finally the performers state the title and author of the selection.

The following is an example of an introduction written and performed by Ryan and Chris Wilkins in the 2011 National Final Round in Duo Interpretation:

> Performer 1: August 1, 1966
> Performer 2: University of Texas
> Both: 16 Killed
> Performer 1: April 20, 1999
> Performer 2: Columbine High School
> Both: 15 Killed
> Performer 1: April 16, 2007
> Performer 2: Virginia Tech
> Both: 33 Killed
> Performer 1: March 31, 2011
> Performer 2: Worthing High School
> Both: 1 Dead
> Performer 1: And that's one too many.
> Performer 2: The brutal murder of today's youth has become an epidemic
> Performer 1: But instead of societies searching for a way to fix this problem, everyone is looking for someone to blame
> Performer 2: Herman Howard's a victim of bullying and a broken home becomes one of those teens lost in the shuffle.
> Performer 1: Making him another statistic
> Both: Hello Herman
> Performer 1: by John Buffalo Mailer

What is most important to keep in mind when writing an introduction for humorous interpretation is that it should cater to the student's performance strengths and style of humor.

While this intro is unique as most introductions do not involve so much back-and-fourth vocal interaction, this intro demonstrated balance extremely well. Observe how each of the performers is given a relatively equivalent number of lines. In this way the intro not only communicates the lens through which the performers wish the audience to view the performance but also conveys teamwork balanced textual craftsmanship and through auditory choreography of the vocal performance.

PERFORMING AN INTRODUCTION

In all interpretation events, the performer communicates the introduction as him or herself. Given that the introduction is written in the student's own it is typically performed in the student's own voice. At the end of the teaser, the performer will generally mold out of the character and into his or her neutral/ natural position. The performer stands upright in a relaxed, though confident and poised position with arms resting at his or her sides. It is not enough for students to simply recite the introduction. This is a critical time for the performer to gain the audiences support and demonstrate their credibility as a performer. Therefore, it is important for students to give as much thought and specificity to the vocal and physical performance of the introduction as they would with other aspects of the performance. Once the performer has stated the title and author of the selection, they mold or pop into the character and resume the performance.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What do we do to prepare for and compete at tournaments in interpretation?*

MATERIAL COVERED: *Professionalism, Attire, Equipment, Grooming, Tournament Structure, Speaker Code, Tab Room, Sign In, Cross-Entered, Rank, Speaker Points, Break, Out-Rounds, Postings*

UNIT 9

Competing at Tournaments

S am has been practicing with his coaches and teammates for months. He knows his performance like the back of his hand, in fact by now he probably knows his performance better than the back of his hand. But, he can't seem to shake this feeling of uncertainty. The first tournament is in two weeks and he has no idea what it's going to be like.

No matter how prepared you are for the performance, it is difficult to imagine what the tournament competition will be like until you experience it. We may hear we need to wear a suit, but why? Where can I get a suit if I do not already own one? What should it look like? Then other questions arise. How early should I arrive at the tournament? What do I do when I get there? How do I know where to go once I arrive? This unit will break down the process of competition, from what to wear before you leave for the tournament to what to do when you get there.

PROFESSIONALISM

A critical aspect of forensics competition is that students are expected to look and conduct themselves with professionalism. One does not need to purchase an expensive suit to look and carry oneself professionally, but it does require some effort and thoughtful preparation to be ready for a tournament. There are four aspects of tournament professionalism that this section will address; attire, equipment, grooming, and conduct.

First, competitors are expected to wear professional attire. Just as a warrior cannot consider him/herself ready for battle without armor, a forensics competitor is not ready for competition without professional attire. At the minimum men are expected to wear a shirt and tie, slacks, a belt, and dress shoes. However, at the highest level of competition, most young men where full suits. Some will say that male competitors must wear solid color ties, or they must wear white shirts, but the fact of the matter is young men have competed at the highest level wearing a number of different shirt and tie or suit combinations. The most important thing to keep in mind is that the clothing should not distract from the performance. The audience should be paying atten-

tion to you performance, not trying to read the funny print on your tie. Men are to wear brown, black, or navy dress shoes depending upon the color of their suit and brown, black, or grey socks depending upon the color of their shoes. Be sure to shine you shoes and have your clothing cleaned and pressed.

Women are expected to wear professional attire as well. If you are buying professional attire for the first time, we encourage young women to wear suits. Young women have competed successfully wearing dresses but it is more common practice to wear either a skirt or pants suit. Traditionally, young women wear black or blue suits, but in recent years, competitors have worn more colorful suits. If girls are wearing skirts, they should wear panty hose that coordinates with their suit's color. The most commonly worn panty hose are nude, misty tope and off black. Women are to wear either professional-looking flats or close-toed, short heels to complete the look. If you are wearing heels, be sure to pack a pair of professional-looking flats in your tournament bag, as walking around in heels on high school campuses can put unnecessary and damaging strain on young girls' developing feet.

If you are operating on a tight budget, many thrift stores offer excellent deals on suits. Hand-me-down suits that are a size too big can often be tailored to fit for as little as $15. Simply tell the retailer or the tailor your reason for needing the suit. Many times they will be happy to give you a discounted rate.

A student of ours once wrote to a retail store, explained his financial situation and his desire to compete in forensics and the store gave him a suit free of charge. You would be amazed to know how many retailers want to help facilitate such an important activity!

Just as a warrior cannot consider him/herself ready for battle without armor, a forensics competitor is not ready for competition without professional attire.

Now that you have the attire you need to make sure you have all of the equipment ready. We encourage students to have a tournament bag. This can be a briefcase or some other bag with a shoulder strap that the student can store important tournament information and other necessary accessories. Students should be discouraged from wearing their school book-bags as they look less professional and often wrinkle the student's suit jacket. In the student's tournament bag they should keep and pen and a small notepad, so the student can write down important round information. It might also be a good idea to keep shoe polish, a lint roller, a timer, and some throat lozenges just in case.

Now that you have the right attire and the right equipment, you need to complete the

professional look with grooming. The most important thing to keep in mind is that nothing in your look should distract from your performance. We recommend that men be clean shaven. While some may be able to grow professional-looking facial hair, it usually takes away from the performers ability to suggest a character. In this sense, facial hair distracts from the performance. Hair should be groomed and out of the performers face. Humans perceive much of our emotions based upon facial expressions. When hair is covering the brow, then less emotion is perceived by the audience. The same goes for women. Hair should be pulled back, out of the eyes and makeup should not distract from the performance.

> Hair should be groomed and out of the performers face. Humans perceive much of our emotions based upon facial expressions. When hair is covering the brow, then less emotion is perceived by the audience.

Professional conduct suggests that students carry themselves with a respectful demeanor at all times during a tournament. Students should be mindful of their language when interacting with peers. Competitors should be warm and friendly with fellow competitors, tournament staff, parents, and volunteers. In addition to the karmic benefits that accompany such mindfulness, being recognized as a friendly competitor is also competitively advantageous. You never know who will be your judge in the next round. Who knows, the person you held the door for may be holding your next ballot.

TOURNAMENT STRUCTURE

Tournaments, large and small, are all generally structured the same way. Upon registration, each team or student is given a **Speaker Code**. The speaker code is intended to prevent judges' affiliation bias and helps keep track of rankings in the **Tab Room**, or the area where tournament tabulation occurs. The Tab Room is important because if a student experiences any problems at the tournament, they and their coach should report to the Tab Room.

The first rounds are preliminary rounds. There will be six or so competitors and, with the exception of larger national tournaments, one judge in each preliminary round. When a student first walks into the round, he or she will **"sign in,"** which in general involves writing their speaker code and the title and author of their selection. If a student is entered in more than one event at the tournament, they should indicate that with an "XE," which stands for **cross-entered**. This lets the judge know that you will either show up later to the round after performing your other event or that you need to perform early in the round and excuse yourself to the

next. A student should always politely ask "May I please be excused to my next round?" after they have performed and before the next speaker is called if they are cross-entered. If a student is not cross-entered they should attentively watch the all of their fellow competitors perform.

In the preliminary rounds, each student performs one after the other. Present cross-entered competitors perform first, regardless of their allotted speaking order. The judge then takes notes and writes down criticisms on the ballot. Once all of the performers have performed, the judge then ranks each competitor in descending order. For example, the judge will assign the rank of "1st" to the performer they deemed "best" in the round. The second "best" performer will be given a rank of 2 and so on. The judge will also assign a corresponding number of speaker points out of either 25 or 100 depending upon the tournament. The speaker points helps meat out the quality of the round. For example, if a judge adjudicates a round in which each competitor forgets their piece, that judge may assign the students low speaker points. Speaker points also help in tournament tabulation to break ties.

The number of entries in an given event at a given tournament determines the number of preliminary rounds that will take place. After the preliminary rounds, scores are tabulated and the higher ranking individuals "**break**" or advance to "**out-rounds.**" The size of the tournament also dictates whether the first out-round will be an octo-final (meaning eight sec-

tions of rounds), quarterfinal (four sections), semifinal (two sections), or if the tournament will break directly to a final round. Out-rounds generally have more than one judge adjudicating and the top ranking performers are advanced to the next set of out-rounds.

The tournament staff will typically post "breaks," also called **postings** at a common area on the tournament site. If the student was awarded high enough ranks to break, their code will be on the posting. The posting will also indicate where the student will perform and their speaker order. It is important for a students to keep a professional demeanor during postings. Posting are an exciting time, so it can be tempting to celebrate or sulk too much depending on your fortune. A coach of mine once told me a great piece of advice, "always remember to keep your highs low and your lows high."

MAINTAINING STAMINA AT A TOURNAMENT

The tournament experience can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Students will often go hours without anything to do and then experience great surges of adrenaline during rounds and when postings drop. Your judge is tired too. A performance that lacks energy only worsens their fatigue. Winning rounds takes energy. So how do we maintain stamina and win more rounds? This section will discuss some tricks to maintaining healthy energy while competing at tournaments.

The easiest way to have energy during the tournament is to get a good night's rest the night before the tournament begins. Anticipation, anxiety, and ill preparedness can sometimes lead students to stay awake the night before a tournament. Such behaviors only hurt your chances. Your brain needs rest in order to recall all of the information necessary to successfully perform at a speech competition. Make sure you are fully prepared, get in several in-person rehearsal sessions in the weeks leading up to the tournament to curb the anxiety of your first competition. Also get all of your weekend's homework out of the way so you can focus all of your concentration on the tournament.

The next way to maintain stamina is to wake up your body before the competition begins. Every competitor should begin the tournament with physical and vocal **warm-ups**. The entirety of a team's warm up should last no longer than 20 minutes. In this way, the warm-up should be long enough to wake up the body, voice, and articulatory tools, but not too long where students over-exert themselves and tire out. A proper warm up exercises should stretch the muscles of the mouth, body, and tongue and serve to loosen the vocal chords. Warm ups also reinforce physical discipline through mimicry, encourage proper breathing, and improves sensory awareness and listening skills.

Creating a unique warm up routine also helps build and strengthen the culture of a team. Each team performs warm-ups in a different way. These unique differences enhance team camaraderie. A great way to end a team warm up is with a song that is unique to that particular team. Rallying around the school's fight song is a great way to finish a team warm up! After the team has warmed up, we suggest finding a completely secluded space to go over your performance one final time before the first preliminary round. We often remind our students that the first round is not a practice round, it is the first round.

Finally, a healthy diet is a critical component of a performer's ability to maintain stamina at the tournament. Most importantly, DRINK WATER! Speaking involves atypical breathing patterns and your body perspires more than it usually does. This compounded by the added stress of wearing a suit and dashing from round to round across a high school or college campus takes a toll on your body. You lose tons of water during the competition day, so it is absolutely critical to rehydrate. On average competitors should drink 3 liters of water or roughly five 20 ounce water bottles during the tournament day. It is also critical for students to eat balanced meals during the tournament. The nervousness that accompanies performance anxiety can curb a student's appetite. However, food is necessary for the body to produce energy. Students will often supplement this energy with caffeine. We do not recommend this as coffee and other caffeine inducing beverages can make a performer jittery, which obviously diminishes physical control.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we grow competitively from tournament to tournament, season to season?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Peer Coaching, A Relationship of Co-Creation, Start/Stop Session, Ballot Analysis, Code of Conduct, Communication Model*

UNIT 10

Fostering a Team Culture of Success

After competing at his first tournament, Sam finally felt like a real interper. He did not break to elimination rounds at his first competition, but he had a lot of fun, learned a lot, and met some really cool people along the way. Even though Sam enjoyed competing, he still wanted to try to do better at his next tournament. The competitors in the final round looked like they were having so much fun and he wanted to know what that was like. Thankfully, Sam's team had a culture that fostered success. His team had tools that helped him figure out what to improve upon. Sam realized that he was not alone in his journey, and he even had enough confidence to help some people new people on the team. After-all, he was a veteran now.

Winning matters. Forensics is a competitive activity. The judge determines the winner of any given round based on a vast array of potential criteria. The student that best demonstrates the truth is given the highest rank in the round. The competitor with the

highest ranks wins the tournament. The winner is given a trophy. Winning matters, but it certainly isn't everything and it cannot be the only barometer for how we measure success in forensics. We often tell our students,

> The most successful teams in the country have some requirement that students practice in front of a coach before they are allowed to compete at tournaments.

there's no professional forensic league. Success in forensics is not measured by hardware, but by the personal growth that accompanies serious investment in the activity. Success is measured by the skill set that students develop and the relationships they form. The person you become when you leave forensics is the true measure of success, not the heaps of metal and plastic you won. We have had the opportunity to work with some of the most successful forensics programs in the nation. These programs have raised great competitors, excellent students, and responsible citizens. This chapter seeks to explicate some of the defining characteristics of these teams in order to understand how to foster of culture of success on your own.

COACHING STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Practice is important to any competitive endeavor. Therefore, strong practices yield strong results. The most successful teams in the country have some requirement that students practice in front of a coach before they are allowed to compete at tournaments. At one particular school, students are required to have one hour of practice every week, regardless of wether or not a student is competing in a tournament that week. Having regularly scheduled time to work with an event encourages students to constantly think of ways to improve their performance. Other schools have requirements about the amount of **peer coaching**, or a coaching session with a fellow teammate, where students regularly perform for each other and offer constructive criticism. In addition to doing wonders for a team camaraderie, peer coaching sessions help students become more aware of audience perspective. Pointing our performance issues in others, helps us better recognize our own.

Coaches should encourage a **relationship of co-creation** on their team. All too often, coaches will unknowingly foster a parent-child relationship with students, where all information is transmitted hierarchically from the coach to the student. We have know coaches who simply give students a cutting of a script, who do not allow the students to make any preliminary performance decision,

who dictate all creative choice. In addition to being highly inefficient, such practices limit student growth. Instead we recommend that coaches co-create performances with their students. If you teach a student how to cut a script, they will be able to team novices and newcomers. Allow the student to make their own creative decisions first, *then* provide additional direction and guidance.

Before every coaching session begins, make sure the coach has a timer and a pen and pad. The student should also have a pen, a notebook that is used exclusively for forensics, and a copy of their cutting with them. The coach should start the timer when the performer begins. In an hour long session, we typically have the student perform their piece in its entirety. Write down critiques on the notepad, what are some lines that could have been delivered more effectively? What are some moments that lack physical specificity? At the conclusion of the performance, we will commence a **"Start/Stop"** session work where problematic moments of the performance are addressed.

When you are coaching an event for the first time, it is important to begin your critique by highlighting broad themes then becoming more specific. For example, you may notice the broad theme that the character does not seem believable. Determine what specific changes the student could make to resolve this concern. As a former competitor, I found it bewildering to be given vague criticism like "be more natural" or "be more per-

sonable." Break down the criticism for the students. Give them a list of specific performance alterations and have them write them down in their notebooks. Consider using the specific language detailed in this text, or create your own. What matters is that every member on the team is equipped with a vocabulary that is clear and consistent.

BALLOT ANALYSIS

At the conclusion of every tournament, the coach for each participating school is given a packet filled with each students' ballots. The ballots are data, the results of the forensics experiment. If a student does not "break" at a tournament, the answer to why the stu-

> If you teach a student how to cut a script, they will be able to team novices and newcomers. Allow the student to make their own creative decisions first, *then* provide additional direction and guidance.

dent did not break can often be deduced by performing ballot analysis. **Ballot analysis** is the in depth examination of the ballots a student receives for a given performance at a given tournament to determine strategies for improving subsequent competitive outcomes. Most successful programs dedicate some time

the week after a tournament to conduct ballot analysis with their students.

Ballot analysis seeks to understand why a given judge gave the student a given rank in a given round. The student and the coach should read ballots carefully and identify any recurring themes. For example, if multiple judges say they had trouble hearing the performer, then low volume is a theme that must be addressed before the next tournament. To identify themes, discuss all information available to determine clues. What was the student's rank in the round? What kinds of selections were fellow competitors performing

in the round? What area of the state was the judge from? Use every possible clue at your disposal to improve the performance for the next time around.

Some ballots are seemingly more helpful than others. Students will often get frustrated if the judge simply writes "Good job!" on the ballot and gives the student a rank of 6th place. However, allowing frustration to get the better of you and getting angry at the judge does so much more harm than good. Most judges are volunteers who know very little about the intricacies of competitive forensics. While we certainly appreciate robust critiques, we

should not expect them. When we get defensive of the comments on the ballot, we are less motivated to make proactive changes to our performances. Also, such behavior often leads to an antagonizing perspective of judges. This attitude can makes students more cold toward judges, which disrupts competitive outcomes.

TEAM POLICIES

Teams function best when there is a clear structure and set of standards. Therefore, it is critical that the coach, with the assistance of student, design rules and policies that govern all members. Many successful programs have a team handbook that details a full list of team-member responsibilities as well as punishments that will occur should a student fail to meet their responsibilities. To create your team policies, create a list of behaviors that you would like to students to perform at tournaments and a list of behaviors that you would like the students to perform at school. Then create a list of those behaviors that you want students to avoid at tournaments and at school. Next write down the potential rewards and consequences of each. Consider including an online code of conduct as well. Many students can damage their reputation and the reputation of the team by writing negative or unsportsmanlike comments on online forums.

Print out enough copies of the team policies for the students and their parents to have

a copy. Read the team policies at the first team meeting of the year. Students should be fully aware of what the expectation are for being on the team as well as the consequences of engaging in behaviors that damage the team. Have the students sign a sheet of paper that acknowledges that they have read and agree to the teams' code of conduct.

Lastly, an important hallmark of successful teams is a communication model. Have a plan on how information gets delivered to your

 Many successful programs have a team handbook that details a full list of team-member responsibilities as well as punishments that will occur should a student fail to meet their responsibilities.

team members. Often, team officers are left with this duty, but also consider event captains in addition to team officers. Knowing how to communicate on a team is important to managing team stress, conflict, and preparedness. Some teams meet with all of its members once a week. For larger teams, meeting once a week may not be possible, so each event meets on a specific day. An online team message board and an active team website are also important tools to consider with your team communica-

tion model. The biggest thing to keep in mind is to be specific. Define what kind of information will travel through which channel. It is impractical to send an email for every issue that arises on the team. Reserve email notifications for important messages; so, in your communication model, define which kinds of messages are important enough to warrant an email notification or query. A good communication model is often a huge difference maker in teams looking to climb to the next competitive level. If you construct one in the beginning, then you can focus on other challenges of more glaring immediacy – like winning interp rounds.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create prose and poetry performances that are competitive in the event of Oral Interpretation?*

VOCABULARY COVERED: *Coin Flip, Binder, Page Turn, Poetry Program, Talk Poems, Splicing, Threaded, Bit Poems, Stationary Position, Hand Journey*

Appendix A

Oral Interpretation

Oral Interpretation as an event is distinct though interrelated to Oral Interpretation as a performance concept. As a performance concept, Oral Interpretation, as defined by Paul Campbell in his book *The Speaking and Speakers of Literature* is defined as "the oralization of literature." As such defined, all performance in which literature is orally communicated, including but not limited to each of the forensic events, can be classified oral interpretation. Whether or not you are watching an author read their work at a coffee shop, a spoken-word poet on stage, or a debater speaking five hundred words per minute in a classroom, you are witnessing an act of oral interpretation. However, the Oral Interpretation (OI) we are discussing in this unit is a very particular event with very nuanced rules that shift from tournament to tournament, from league to league. The Association does not recognize Oral Interpretation as one event but as two of its supplemental and complimentary events of

Prose and Poetry. However, many state leagues recognize Oral Interpretation as a ten minute event. Given the wide variety of rules and conventions, in this unit we will explicate the most common iteration of the event.

In general, OI is not one event, but two. In OI, students perform two selections, one ten-minute selection of prose and one ten-minute selection of poetry. At most tournaments, students alternate performing a selection of prose in one round and a selection of poetry in the next. A **coin flip** determines which selection the students must perform first. For example, if a student is competing at a tournament that has four rounds (two preliminary rounds, one semi-final round, and a final round) and the coin flip determines that prose will be performed in the first round, then poetry will be performed in the next, prose in the semifinal, and poetry in the final round. This organizational practice makes OI very challenging because the selection of poetry and the selection of prose must be of equal competitive strength in order for the student to consistently perform well.

Another unique aspect of Oral Interpretation is that the event requires students to present selections while holding the manuscript, or a copy of the performance cutting usually contained within a **binder**. Many leagues have some sort of rule about the amount of time a student should "acknowledge" or look down at the manuscript. Some states discourage movement, others embrace it. The convention of the binder has also encouraged other conventions.

For example, you would never have guessed that there are conventions for how to open the book – but there are. Other conventions include the use of page turns as transitions, the use of the manuscript as an interpretory tool, and the sometimes awkward thing of closing the binder. We will cover all of the essential territory.

ANATOMY OF A PROSE

Performances of prose can be drawn from any work of fiction (short stories, novels) or nonfiction (articles, journals, essays, autobiographies) that is not a dramatic work. There is usually a bit of confusion about the last part of that description. The distinction between a "dramatic work" and prose is that prose works are written to be read, not performed. For example, in competition, you may perform Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* in Prose, but not the stage or screen adaptations of the book. The Association stipulates that you may not use the same source used in Duo, DI, or HI. Meaning if you performed Martin Lawrence's autobiography in Dramatic Interpretation, you may not use it again in Prose competition, even though it is a prosaic work. Prose selections typically involve 1st persona narration, but may also be 2nd or 3rd person narration. Cuttings of prose may in-

volve one voice or multiple voices. Thus, the elements of Prose include research, composition, and performance.

As we did with previous events, we will guide you through the steps of composing a competitive Prose performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include: Script selection, Script cutting, Performance composition, and Presentation. Prose is similar to DI in that it follows Freytag's model of dramatic structure. However, what distinguishes Prose from DI is that Prose emphasizes story more than character. The purpose of Prose is to uncover some truth about the human condition through the interpretation and presentation of a story.

SELECTING A STORY FOR PROSE

Prose may come from fiction or nonfiction, First, Second, or Third- person view, and any style in-between. Memoirs, young adult fiction, short stories, even science fiction have been performed at the highest levels in Prose competitions. It really does not matter what style of story you choose, so long as there *is* a story. Remember, in Prose, you are looking for a great story.

What makes a great story? Great stories usually involve a protagonist with a clear, relatable, and interesting goal. In great stories, we know personal information about the protagonist. We feel for them, or at the very least can see why they think the way they think. A great story involves an antagonist or some other ob-

stacle that stands in the way of the protagonists achieving their goals. Great stories have a great confrontation or climax. Whether the protagonist achieves their goal or not, they are changed forever after the climax.

I once had a student who brought in a short story that she loved very, very much and asked if she could please, please perform it as her Prose. I ready the short story. The language was simultaneously dense and abstract, very dreamlike, very confusing. It was a second-person work about a girl whose mother was a magician. The girl would often go to see her mother perform in magic shows. The girls' mother did not know she was her mother. *Wait. I'm now hopelessly confused.* The narrator never explains this. The girl then volunteers in her "mother's" magic show, is placed in a box and disappears forever. Let's go over the elements of a great story once more. A protagonist with a clear, relatable, and interesting goal. The protagonist in the story is interesting, however her goal is not even a little bit clear or relatable. There was no real antagonist or definite obstacles. The climax was strange to say the least. While I assume being caught in a netherworld or some deserted magical dimension would be quite a change for the main character, the ending left me more bewildered than compelled. This was not a good story for Prose competition.

The elements that make up a strong story are likely why first-person style pieces are so successful. We get to hear the protagonist's inner feelings so their goals are generally very clear.

We feel for the protagonist as he/ she grapples with their obstacles or the antagonist. Another bonus of using first person style works is that the audience can also watch a character. However, students have performed second person and third person style works quite successfully. What matters most is the story.

Selections of Prose can be found just about anywhere. Look through the short fiction anthologies at your local bookstore or library. If you come across an anthology that reads "Best Young Adult Nonfiction," you can safely guess that there is a good story or two contained within it. Read the first few pages of each short

What matters most is the story.

story. Does the style, character, or situation intrigue you? Read on. If not, then put it down. Then take a look at the literary magazines, like *The Atlantic Review* or *The New Yorker*. Once you have a found a few stories you're interested in, check out the memoir section. Do any of the titles grab your attention? Read the synopsis on the back of the book, and then read the first few pages to get a sense of the voice of the work and the conflict of the story. Is the language too difficult to immediately process? If you find yourself constantly rereading lines to discern their meaning, then it may not work

for competition. Consider this: the audience will only hear you tell the story once.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR PROSE

The process of cutting a Prose is very similar to the process of cutting other events. Despite the fact that OI involves the use of a binder, one must still cut a Prose with the performance in mind. The first step is to locate the story. In larger works like memoirs and novels you will need to decide whether you are going to use a Spark Notes or Cameo Cutting. Remember, you do not have to tell the story of the entire work. You may only want to tell one of the stories. With short stories, you will usually be working with a Spark Notes cutting, trimming down unnecessary story details.

Unlike DI and HI, however, transitions through time and space can be easily indicated in Prose through the use of **page turns**. In general page turns occur when there is a major shift in the work. This shift may be a shift in time. For example the story may read: "I thought to myself, 'I just need to get some sleep, everything will be better in the morning.' The next morning things were much, much worse." There is a shift in time that occurs. Time passes from evening to morning. Shifts in time may also involve space are also common in stories. For example, "My head fell like a brick *on my pillow*. I thought to myself, 'I just need to get some sleep, everything will be better in the morning.' The next morning *in the lab* things were much, much

worse." Here there is a change in time and space. Since you are cutting with the performance in mind, determine where the page turns occur in your cutting. You may also incorporate a page turn on certain emotional shifts. For example, "She gave me a soft kiss on the cheek, squeezed my hand, and walked up her steps. [page turn] BEST DATE EVER!"

ANATOMY OF A POETRY PERFORMANCE

T.S. Elliot wrote, "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." The goal of poetry as an event in forensics is to explore some truth about the human condition through poetry. Essentially, we communicate through poetry to understand the world. But what is poetry? The National Speech & Debate Association has a compelling definition of what constitutes poetry. "Poetry is writing which expresses ideas, experience, or emotion through the creative arrangement of words according to their sound, their rhythm, their meaning." Poetry performance can be drawn from any work other than plays or dramatic material that meets this definition, so long as it meets the Association's publication requirements.

SCRIPT SELECTION/ PROGRAM CONSTRUCTION

Unlike other events, Poetry can be a long, single work by a single author (like Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven") or a collection of works by a single author (*A Light in the Attic* by Shel Silverstein). Poetry can also be a collection of poems by different authors that demonstrate an argument or theme. This final type, known as a **poetry program**, has become increasingly popular in the last decade or so.

The process of finding an interesting single work or collections of work by the same author is the same as finding literature for any other interpretation event. Comb through the poetry anthologies section at your local library or bookstore. Look through their literary journals. See if any poem or author speaks to you and seems performatively interesting. When looking for a long single poem, you are looking for work that is dynamic. Does the work have some semblance of a story arch? Most of the time, longer poems have some sort of narrative. These are often called **talk poems** because they have prosaic story elements. Look for emotional levels and opportunities for striking creative choices. You need to read with the performance in mind, or else you'll wind up with a script that is static and dull. If you are planning on performing a single work by a single author, you need to make sure that the work is long enough. Remember, a final cutting of an interp performance is around 1200 words. If the work you've selected is nowhere near that, then the work is likely too short for this approach. If this is the case, consider finding other works by that author or using the work in a program.

If you are looking to perform a collection of poems by a single author and no particular author "speaks to you," then go online. There are excellent websites and podcasts that feature new artists weekly. Once you find an artist you like, look up their name. More often than not, poets publish collections of their works in small poetry collections or chapbooks. If you cannot find a poet's chapbook in the library or online, write an email to the author explain who you are and what you do. Poets LOVE forensicators! You will be surprised how many poets were former competitors themselves and the recognize that forensics is free promotion. Just ask if there is any way that you can read a published version of their work.

> Another performer could look at the same literature and see a different pattern while another might not see any pattern at all. That is the beauty of poetry. The interpretive possibilities are endless.

If, as you are reading poetry by various authors, you begin noticing recurring themes that speak to you, you may be inclined to construct a **Poetry Program**. Programs are collections of work by various authors (anywhere between three and seven) that address a central argument or theme. For example, when I was a senior in high school I read four works

about individuals whose experienced adversity, either by other individuals or by the nature of their circumstances. Mattie J.T. Stepanek was a young boy who suffered from a rare form of muscular dystrophy. John Townsend Trowbridge's work "The Vagabonds" is about a destitute man drowning his sorrows in a bar. Taylor Mali's, now heavily overdone, *What Learning Leaves* is about a teacher who is embarrassed by a lawyer's cocky confrontation at a dinner table when his is asked "What teachers make?" The final poem, also now heavily overdone, "The Wussy Boy Manifesto" by Big Poppa E, was about a young man bullied for being a geek. I noticed each of the characters had, or discovered, a great deal of pride in spite of their difficult circumstances. Stepanek spoke with a great deal of pride about "letting your heart sing." The Vagabond, was extremely proud of his dog's ability to perform tricks. The teacher discovers a great deal of pride in his oft under-appreciated profession and simultaneously sticks it to the lawyer by saying, "You want to know what I make? I make a difference." The Wussy Boy discovers that, though he may be physically weaker than his attackers, he takes pride in his wit and intelligence.

That's what the literature said to me. Another performer could look at the same literature and see a different pattern while another might not see any pattern at all. That is the beauty of poetry. The interpretive possibilities are endless. When I read those poems, I got the sense that pride was all these characters had left. Growing

up, I'd learned that Pride was a bad thing, but through these works, I determined that Pride could be a source of redemption. The theme of my program became "Redefining Pride."

Constructing a program can be a daunting challenge. Poetry is everywhere, so finding the right poems to suit your argument or theme can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. There are a number of ways to begin your search. I started by reading poems and then discovered my argument. Others begin with an argument and find works that address that argument. This can sometimes be extremely difficult. For example, if you see something on the news that bothers you and you want to construct a program about that issue, there may not be literature on that subject. The easiest way is to start by reading poetry. If a poem reminds you of something you think about, something that makes you passionate, then use that poem as the foundation and build the program around it.

When you are compiling poems for a program, you are looking to balance specificity and diversity. Each poem needs to address your particular topic in some way. If it does not, then the audience will be confused as to why it's there. However, there must also be levels to your program so you are also looking for a diversity of viewpoints on the theme or subject. You may, for example, want to include a character or poem that reflects the antithesis of your programs' argument. Collect anywhere from three to seven poems that represent your argument. Now you're ready to cut.

SCRIPT COMPOSITION IN POETRY INTERPRETATION

Cutting a long poem by a single author is generally a simple process. Chunk the parts of the poem that are necessary to the arch of the work. This usually will not be difficult as most long poems (aside from epics) rarely exceed 3,000 words. Next, you whittle down the work. Remove the language that may be too difficult to understand. Remember the audience is only hearing the performance once. It will also be a good idea to remove vulgarity or

hyper-sexual language from the work. Finally, make it cool. Keep the interesting moments that allow for creative performance decisions. Write where the page turns will take place. Is there an cool moments where you can incorporate a more dynamic page turn or where the sound of the page turn can enhance the emotion of the text? Indicate that in your cutting.

> There is no one particular formula or structure to construct a program of poetry. What matters most is that there *is* structure.

Collections of work by a single author and programs are tricky. Think of a poetry program like a documentary film. Consider how documentaries are put together. A documentarian collects interviews from different individuals speaking on the same subject. The documentarian then edits the interviews together, letting them build into the climax of the film. This editing process in program construction is known as **splicing** the work. In a documentary, each interviewee generally speaks on camera more than once. Their viewpoints build in relationship to the viewpoints of other interviewees. Your poetry program can do the same thing by breaking up each work into two or three parts and splicing them together or having one work introduce a concept that is exem-

plified by the next. Take a look at the following example of a potential program format:

TEASER
Poem #1 (15 seconds)
Poem #2 (45 seconds)
Poem #3 (20 seconds)
Poem #1 (15 seconds)
INTRODUCTION (30-45 seconds)
Poem #4 (1 minute)
Poem #3 (1 minute)
Poem #1 (1 minute)
Poem #2 (1 minute)
Poem #4 (30 seconds)
RISING ACTION
Poem #3[rising action] (30 seconds)
CLIMAX
Poem #1 [climax] (1 minute)
FALLING ACTION
Poem # 2 [falling action] (1 minute)

Notice how each of the poems comes back more than once. That way the different perspectives can *speak* or respond to one another. The program builds and builds until it reaches a climax. There is no one particular formula or structure to construct a program of poetry. What matters most is that there *is* structure.

In general, the teaser will introduce the basic concept of the program and should introduce most of your central characters. These central characters will be **threaded** throughout the program, building the argument. Thread poems have a beginning, middle, and end. You may find a few short poems that per-

fectly exemplify the argument. We sometimes call these poems **bit poems** because they only show up once or twice. Bit poems are great for adding humor or an interesting technical moment to your program. Arrange the works so that they "speak" to each other. If the poems you have selected really exemplify your central theme, then chances are they will share certain linguistic choices. Arrange the works so that each poem communicates with the previous. This can be a response, a reaction, or an addendum to their predecessors' argument.

Finally, consider the performance arc of your piece. Just because you are performing poetry doesn't mean that you get to ignore all of the things discussed in this book that make great performances. Humor is necessary, especially in the beginning. Sometimes, programs become too technical or too heavy and this can be exhausting to listen to for ten minutes. Additionally, there should still be a type of performance arc similar to the energy of a dramatic arc. Many programs introduce some mechanism of frustration early in the performance, and have the theme "solve" the frustration by the end of the performance. The program should end with a sense of closure. A sense of resolution.

COMPOSING A PERFORMANCE FOR OI

One rule that frequently dictates the competition in a prose round is that the performer must maintain a **stationary position**. This means that the performer may not move about the room. The limits of this rule vary. Some rules limit movement to a small radius, and some rules dictate that one foot must remain in place. We advise that you read the tournament rules carefully before competing. Typically, the tool with which you will compose your performance is your upper body. Once, again, the rules determining the lower body as a tool for interpretation vary; but, in the event that bending your knees is fair game, cross apply the strategies used for the upper body.

Your tools of interpretation for OI are very much the same as the other interp events. The unit on performance composition intimately discusses these tools in entirety. The important thing to remember is: you are using your body to create images. And audience members and judges remember images. Considering this, do not be do quick to "put away" a gesture, psychological or expressive, literal or figurative, once you have made it. Hold the gesture. Hold the image. Then, rather than returning to a neutral position before the next gesture, move straight to it from the previous gesture position. I like to link these gestures together and, in succession, I call this a **hand journey**. Hand journeys can help the audience hang on your word, only move on with their attention when you command that of them. There is this instinct for young performers to put a gesture *away* after making it; however, every time you put your gesture away, you are releasing the audience's attention. Be cognizant of the ener-

gy that a gesture can hold, and manipulate this energy with focus and purpose.

Hand journeys are a great addition to the Flip-Book system. Hand journeys are also especially effect when trying to communicate poetry. Poetry is often written in a language that is not meant for conversation or oration. In deciphering the images of poems and applying expressive figurative gestures to them, we can communicate the emotion of a poem. Resist the urge to *naturalize* poetic language. Hand journeys can also be helpful in creating gesture motifs to represent rhythm, rhyme, and tempo.

Another distinction of OI performances is the use of voices and/ or sound effects. In Prose, performances with these tools mirror DI and HI quite obediently, but in Poetry, voices can be manipulated in different ways. In delivering a long poem, a character must be created to deliver the poem and the character should remain consistent. When performing multiple works, however, a performer will typically assign a character (voice and body mold) to each poem. You may also manipulate your voice within single poems in order to communicate different ideas. Ultimately, if you take the process one step at a time, and you never forget about your audience, and if you approach building your OI performance with the same tools discussed earlier in this text, you will find success as an Oral Interp competitor.