Program Oral Interpretation (POI)

Event Description

Using a combination of Prose, Poetry and Drama, students construct a program up to ten minutes in length using at least two out of the three genres. With a spotlight on argumentation and performative range, Program Oral Interpretation focuses on a student’s ability to combine multiple genres of literature centered around a single theme. Competitors are expected to portray multiple characters. No props or costumes may be used except for the manuscript. Performances also include an introduction written by the student to contextualize the performance and state the titles and authors used in the program.

Considerations for Selecting POI Literature

Students who do POI are expected to bring together a wide variety of literature for their program. Students should select pieces that are appropriate for them and that create a well-balanced program which may incorporate humor and drama. Considerations for selecting a POI topic should include the student’s age, maturity, and school/team/coach standards.

Traits of Successful POI Performers

When considering what event you should choose, or in which direction to point a student when selecting an event, below are some general traits of successful POI performers to keep in mind:

- Ability to characterize multiple perspectives
- Strong argumentation skills
- Controlled performance
- Depth/breadth of emotion
- Knowledge of poetic, prosaic and dramatic convention

Sample Literature for a POI:

Topic: Magical Realism

Drama:

- *Lily Plants a Garden* by Jose Cruz Gonzalez
- *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* by August Wilson

Poetry:

- *The Rusted Door* by Stephan Delbos
- *Write about an Empty Birdcage* by Elaina M. Ellis
- *The Giant Golden Boy of Biology* by Anis Mojgani

Prose:

- *The People of Paper* by Salvador Plascencia
Basic Understandings

Program Oral Interpretation relies on the performer’s ability to portray a wide range of characters and literature all held together under a common theme. Each program must contain at least two of the three genres and students are encouraged to include all three. There is a set time limit of ten minutes, with a thirty second grace period. Students who choose to compete in POI should focus on making an interesting argument that is supported in different ways by each piece of literature they select.

Research

When looking for a Program Oral Interpretation topic, it's important to know your limitations, and your strengths. Students with a background in Humorous Interpretation may find they have a greater ability to portray multiple characters within the program and choose to include more literature than a student who has a background in Dramatic Interpretation. Conversely, a student with a background in DI may choose to devote more time in the program to a select few pieces of literature, developing each character with greater depth.

What makes POI unique is the performer’s ability to choose what kinds of stories they want to tell and the way those stories are told. When deciding on a topic, think about what motivates you. What do you want to change about the world? Whom do you want to lend your voice to? By answering questions like this performers are given a strong sense of potential topics.

Searching for literature in POI can seem intimidating, since you have more scripts to find than the other interpretation events. However, keep in mind that POI allows for the most freedom when searching for literature. As long as it follows the publishing guidelines of the National Speech and Debate Association, and it meets team and coach standards for appropriateness, you can use it!

To start, think about why you wanted to speak about your topic. Then, think about any books, plays or poetry you have encountered that relate to the topic. Find that literature and include it in your POI.

Then, broaden your search. Start researching online, at local libraries and bookstores, and begin piecing together enough literature for a program.

Not only will you be finding different genres of literature, you will also encounter different tones, perspectives and length. Good POI’s will include longer narratives for the audience to relate to, short snippets packed with information and literature that lets the audience laugh. Finding a diverse set of literature enables a more dynamic performance.

Structural Components

Structure of an Interp (taken from Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life).

- **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

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**Program Oral Interpretation**

There are a few key structural components of every POI:

*Programming* is the process of cutting your literature and threading it together throughout the performance. That does not mean that your POI will consist of performing a poem in full, then reading a short story and closing with a monologue from a play. Instead, break your literature down into pages and build a program that follows the structure of interp. For example, introduce the compelling character from your Prose in the intro, and then dedicate time later on in the performance to that same character.

Each selection of literature should be distinct in your performance. Perhaps the non-fiction book you use is performed by characterizing the literature as a lecturer, whereas a poem is performed with a great attention to vocal meter, rhythm and pace. In short, each piece of literature in your POI should have a distinct feel to it.

*Blocking* or tech, is how the character(s) moves in the space you’ve created for him/her/them. In POI, the manuscript may be used as a prop as long as you stay in control of it throughout the entirety of the performance. For example, if you are using a black binder for a manuscript it would be appropriate to mimic using a laptop with your binder.

*Introduction*. An introduction explains the purpose of the performance. Typically, after the teaser, a performer will give a brief explanation of the program’s relevance, then give the title and author of each piece used during the performance.

**Organizing**

Each POI will be organized in a unique way. However, there are some guidelines that create a memorable performance.

Pay attention to balance among genres in the program. Eight minutes from the same play with a little time devoted to a poem at the end is not the recipe for a strong program. Instead, try to devote time to each genre. It is not necessary to carve out exactly three minutes for each, but make sure that each genre is present throughout the program.
Look for thread pieces to help you along. A thread is a piece of literature that tells a complete story throughout the program. This is generally a character that the audience can relate to which helps contextualize your argument in the program. Include a page that introduces the character, another that outlines the conflict, a climax page and resolution. There can be more than one thread piece in a program, (there is no one right answer for how to organize POI), but, make sure the audience has a character they can connect to.

Not all pieces of literature have to be prominently featured in the program. There will likely be pieces that only have one page dedicated to them. Whether it be a funny punchline, an emotionally powerful stanza from a poem, or a short excerpt from a non-fiction book, don't be afraid to include a piece that is short if it adds to your program's theme or argument.

**Standing it Up/Practicing**

After you have finished cutting and organizing your program, it's time to start constructing your performance. The first thing you need to do is put together the manuscript you will be using. The most common manuscript is a small black binder with page protectors (often referred to as slicks), which can be found in most office supply stores. Type up your cutting, format it into two columns and print the document. Then, simply cut out each specific page and place it in your page slicks. Some people like to put black cardstock in each page slick and glue or tape the cutting to the cardstock. Your cutting should read like a book, meaning, a peer or coach could pick up your manuscript and read your program from beginning to end.

Once you have put the manuscript together, it's time to start creating distinct characters for each piece of literature. Think about different mannerisms, voices and postures each character might have. What kind of environment are they in? Do you have some characters that need to have a lot of blocking? Find a way to make each piece distinct.

Don't be afraid to use your manuscript as a tool in the performance. As a general rule, make sure that all of the words from each section (or scene) of your cutting fit onto one page. In this way, each time you turn the page, the audience knows that you are transitioning between pieces of literature. Think of each page turn as a pop in and out of the different parts of your program.

www.speechanddebate.org/poi.