

# **THE NCFCA COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO SPEECH**

Competitor's Handbook

**National Christian Forensics and Communications Association**

Edited by Natalia Rosa

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First Edition, October 2016

Institute for Excellence in Writing, L.L.C.

**The purchase of this receives access to supplementary educational resources, including PowerPoint presentations and video streaming.**

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Competitor's Handbook*

First Edition, October 2016

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**CONTENTS**

*Introduction* .....7

*Interpretation*

**Module A – Selecting Quality Literature**

A.1 What is Interpretation? ..... 18  
 A.2 NCFCA Interpretation Events ..... 18  
 A.3 The Value of Interpretation ..... 18  
 A.4 The NCFCA Mission Statement through Interpretation ..... 20  
 A.5 Selecting a Piece ..... 20  
 A.6 Analyzing a Piece ..... 28  
 A.7 Original Interpretation ..... 32  
 A.8 Biblical Presentation ..... 32  
 A.9 Making a Choice ..... 34  
 A.10 Assignments ..... 34  
 Worksheets ..... 36

**Module B – Cutting Interpretation Scenes**

B.1 How to Cut an Interpretation ..... 43  
 B.2 Cutting Your Scenes ..... 44  
 B.3 Original Interpretation ..... 47  
 B.4 Assignments ..... 48  
 Handout ..... 51  
 Worksheets ..... 53

**Module C – From Scene to Script**

C.1 Cutting Powerful Lines ..... 57  
 C.2 Duo and Open Interpretation Toolbox ..... 58  
 C.3 Biblical Interpretation Toolbox ..... 65  
 C.4 Original Interpretation Toolbox ..... 66  
 C.5 Assignments ..... 67  
 Handouts ..... 68

**Module D – Theater of the Mind**

D.1 Understanding Theater of the Mind ..... 72  
 D.2 Character Development ..... 75  
 D.3 Scene Development ..... 77  
 D.4 Assignments ..... 80  
 Worksheets ..... 82

*Platform Speaking*

**Module A – Selecting Your Topic**

A.1 What is Platform Speaking? ..... 86  
A.2 NCFCA Platform Events ..... 86  
A.3 The Value of Platform Speaking ..... 86  
A.4 The NCFCA Mission Statement through Platform Speaking ..... 88  
A.5 Selecting a Topic ..... 88  
A.6 Assignments ..... 94  
Worksheets ..... 96

**Module B – Structuring Your Speech**

B.1 Structuring Your Speech ..... 103  
B.2 Clear Communication ..... 105  
B.3 Conversational Communication ..... 110  
B.4 Value of a Rigorous Process ..... 110  
B.5 Assignments ..... 111  
Worksheets ..... 113

**Module C – A Well-Rounded Speech**

C.1 Structuring Your Speech ..... 119  
C.2 Understanding Diversity ..... 120  
C.3 Diverse Judging Styles ..... 121  
C.4 Compelling Communication ..... 122  
C.5 Assignments ..... 124  
Worksheets ..... 126

**Module D – Physical and Vocal Delivery**

D.1 Ballot Review ..... 129  
D.2 Vocal Delivery ..... 130  
D.3 Physical Delivery ..... 135  
D.4 Assignments ..... 138  
Worksheets ..... 139

*Impromptu*

**Module A – Preparing for Impromptu**

A.1 What is Impromptu? ..... 144  
 A.2 The Value of Impromptu Speaking ..... 145  
 A.3 Elements of an Impromptu Speech ..... 146  
 A.4 Managing Prep Time ..... 150  
 A.5 Crafting Your Thesis Statement ..... 151  
 A.6 Assignments ..... 154  
 Worksheets ..... 156

**Module B – The Art of Storytelling**

B.1 Begin with the Ballot ..... 161  
 B.2 Storytelling in Impromptu ..... 162  
 B.3 The Art of Storytelling ..... 163  
 B.4 Impromptu Notebook ..... 165  
 B.5 Assignment ..... 168  
 Handouts ..... 169

**Module C – Making an Impact**

C.1 Begin with the Ballot ..... 171  
 C.2 Making an Impact in Impromptu ..... 172  
 C.3 Assignments ..... 175  
 Handout ..... 176

**Module D – Vocal and Physical Delivery**

D.1 Begin with the Ballot ..... 177  
 D.2 Vocal Delivery ..... 178  
 D.3 Physical Delivery ..... 182  
 D.4 Assignments ..... 184  
 Impromptu Topics ..... 185

**Module A – Understanding How We Are Shaped by Our Worldviews**

A.1 What is Apologetics? .....188  
A.2 The Value of Apologetics .....190  
A.3 Begin with the Ballot ..... 191  
A.4 How We Are Shaped by Our Worldviews .....192  
A.5 Application to Apologetics ..... 196  
A.6 Assignments ..... 199  
Worksheets ..... 201

**Module B – Understanding and Organizing the Topics**

B.1 Identifying Key Convergence Points between Topics ..... 205  
B.2 Developing Your Understanding of the Topics ..... 210  
B.3 Assignments ..... 212  
Recommended Resources ..... 213

**Module C – Preparing Your Cards**

C.1 Event Framework ..... 216  
C.2 Elements of an Apologetics Speech .....217  
C.3 Assignments ..... 224  
Sample Apologetics Card .....226

**Module D – Organizing Your Box and Delivery**

D.1 Supplies ..... 230  
D.2 Organizing Your Apologetics Box ..... 230  
D.3 Delivering Your Apologetics Speech ..... 231  
D.4 Physical Delivery ..... 234  
D.5 Assignments ..... 236

*Extemporaneous***Module A – Understanding the Framework and Answering the Topic Questions**

A.1 What is Extemp?	240
A.2 The Value of Extemporaneous Speaking	242
A.3 Elements of an Extemporaneous Speech	242
A.4 Managing Prep Time	249
A.5 Assignments	252
Worksheet	254

**Module B – Understanding and Researching Topics**

B.1 Your Mind – Your Greatest Asset	255
B.2 Electronic vs. Physical Files	259
B.3 Team Organization	261
B.4 Begin with the Ballot	264
B.5 Breadth and Depth	264
B.6 Research	265
B.7 Practice	269
B.8 Assignments	269
B.9 Recommended Source List	270

**Module C – Delivering Your Speech**

C.1 Ballot Review	273
C.2 Vocal Delivery	274
C.3 Physical Delivery	278
C.4 Practice	279
C.5 Assignments	280
<i>Tournament Preparation</i>	283
<i>Conclusion</i>	293
<i>Appendix</i>	295

### **Video Instructions:**

We have prepared the following video clips to further enhance the instruction provided in this curriculum. The first four video clips are designed to demonstrate a dynamic coaching session. Review them prior to reading the Interpretation Module. The final eight video clips are designed to supplement Interpretation, Platform, Impromptu, and Apologetics Module D, as well as Extemporaneous Module C. To access the video clips, please see the blue page for step-by-step download instructions.

*Q&A with Coach Kristi Eskelund*

*Q&A Coach and Students*

*Raw Duo Interpretation Performance*

*Live Duo Interpretation Coaching Session*

*Welcome – Vocal and Physical Delivery*

*Delivery P1 – Proper Projection*

*Delivery P2 – Proper Tone and Pitch*

*Delivery P3 – Proper Articulation*

*Delivery P4 – Proper Pacing*

*Delivery P5 – Proper Energy Level and Passion*

*Delivery P6 – Proper Movement and Gestures*

*Delivery P7 – Proper Facial Expressions*



## WELCOME!

You are about to embark on a grand adventure! Pursuing education is important, but a head full of knowledge is only beneficial if the knowledge can be communicated effectively. We want to encourage you in your desire to grow the skills of critical thinking and gracious, articulate communication in your life. We want to empower you with practical instruction built on a strong biblical foundation as you are actively preparing to be culture shapers and sharpened tools in the hands of a mighty God.

As you may know, NCFCA has been providing fabulous tournament opportunities through its well-developed system of competition for the past twenty years. Over the past few seasons, it has become clear that one of the most effective ways we can assist families is by providing not only top-notch competitive opportunities, but also by providing excellent training materials to support them in their preparation. We know successful communication skills are developed by more than going to tournaments. Speech and debate education begins long before the first tournament check-in!

Successful training is the result of a combination of hours invested by competitors, clubs, parents, and coaches in classrooms and living rooms across the country along with judge feedback and tournament competition. While tournaments are a great way for students to practice their skills, if a student does not have the right foundation and mindset as they are preparing, then the tournament only provides opportunity to further develop an improper mindset. We've seen first-hand the old adage—"what goes in determines what comes out"—and that is why this curriculum was born.

This NCFCA *Comprehensive Guide to Speech* uses the general framework and constraints of NCFCA competition as its scope and sequence because the event choices and ballot criteria are carefully constructed to propel students toward godly communication. We'd love to have you join us in competition because we know that putting into practice what you will learn through the pages of this curriculum is a necessary step towards achieving proficiency. However, competing in NCFCA tournaments, although highly encouraged, is not required to use this material.

Tournaments are important; there is great value in the "iron sharpening iron" experiences inherent in competition. However, our goal is not to produce tournament winners. Our goal is to train young people to be thoughtful, articulate, and gracious in their quest to share the love of God. Anyone can use this curriculum and the speech categories outlined in these pages to learn to glorify God through their communication, and we encourage you to do just that!

Let's begin! We have an exciting adventure to look forward to, and the adventure begins as students explore what it means to communicate from a biblical worldview in order to address life issues in a manner that glorifies God.

# THE FOUNDATION OF THE NCFCA GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE SPEECH

## The NCFCA Mission Statement

*“The mission of the National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA) is to promote excellence in communications through competitive opportunities, where homeschool students develop the skills necessary to think critically and communicate effectively in order to address life issues from a biblical worldview in a manner that glorifies God.”*

The NCFCA *Guide to Competitive Speech* has been developed using the three foundational pillars of the NCFCA Mission Statement. They are as follows:

### 1. Excellence

Throughout this curriculum, you will notice that excellence (the quality of being outstanding) is emphasized in every module. We stress excellence primarily because it is commanded throughout Scripture. Unlike the modern definition of “success” as a static destination to be achieved, excellence is viewed as an ideal that grows when one pursues it. It is much more than public recognition and awards, although it may result in those things. Excellence is the cultivation of character for its own sake: a lifelong journey of growing in wisdom.

*My compelling desire is to do all that we do with excellence in order to magnify God in our work. We are called to be ambassadors for Him, and He deserves nothing less than for us to reflect His excellence to the degree we are able.*

~ Teresa Hudson, NCFCA President

### 2. Critical Thinking

In order to effectively communicate a concept, you must first clearly understand that concept yourself. Critical thinking is being able to identify and explain the foundational *why* of what you believe. Critical thinking plays a special part in our vision for students to address life issues from a biblical worldview. Exercises and assignments throughout this curriculum will drive students to dig deeper for the answers themselves rather than looking to others to hand them pre-packaged solutions.

### **3. *Effective Communication***

The purpose of NCFCA competition is to test a student's communication skills. The competitive environment is controlled (set judge panel, clear criteria, etc.) in order to give students the best opportunity to polish their communication skills before they fully engage today's world in both the battles and opportunities that lie ahead. At the same time, competition attempts to mirror real life as much as possible by varying the types of judges (age, gender, profession) that rate and give feedback to our students. The goal of this testing process is to increase the student's understanding and use of communication. This curriculum will serve to equip students in their preparation for tournaments, as well as equip non-competing students in their efforts to learn the building blocks of effective communication.

These three pillars of excellence, critical thinking, and effective communication work together to support our overarching goal, which is to help others learn to “address life issues from a biblical worldview in a manner that glorifies God.”

This goal of godly communication is threefold in its composition. It is designed to

#### **1. *address practical life issues***

We seek to encourage students to use their oratorical skills in the real world whenever they have opportunity, both in the present and in the future. Rather than focus on forensics as merely an academic activity or a game of sorts, we seek to train students in skills that they can and will easily and directly apply to “real life.” The goal is teaching life skills, not trophy collecting!

#### **2. *from a biblical worldview***

Many people one meets in the “real world” do not necessarily share a Christian or biblical worldview. Thus, one of the primary skills Christian communicators must possess in order to reach a lost world is a thorough understanding of their own worldview and the worldviews of those with whom they will be communicating. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of communicating with relevance without the loss of integrity.

Through NCFCA participation, students learn to think hard about life's issues and determine their views based on what the Bible says. Focusing on the dictates of the culture will cause them to communicate differently.

#### **3. *in a manner that glorifies God.***

While this curriculum provides loads of practical instruction for speech preparation in competition, the ultimate goal of every lesson is to glorify God. What does it mean to glorify God? To glorify God is to reveal or make clear the glory of God by one's actions. This goal ties in directly with our first pillar of excellence. As you complete each lesson, we encourage you to contemplate your reflection of God's character through speeches prepared for competition.

## **Introduction to NCFCA Speech**

### ***What is NCFCA?***

In 1997, the HSLDA (Homeschool Legal Defense Association) Debate League began through the vision and efforts of Michael Farris and his daughter, Christy Farris. As they planned the first ever homeschool debate tournament, their goal was to equip Christian homeschool students with the skills needed to reach their world with God's truth. The homeschooling community was experiencing exponential growth, and in the year 2000, HSLDA decided it was time for the Debate League to become a league of its own. With the help and blessing of HSLDA, the National Christian Forensics and Communication Association (NCFCA) began the process of becoming a non-profit corporation.

NCFCA has grown over the years and currently has Affiliates and active clubs from coast to coast. The governing board of directors maintains the mission of NCFCA while local volunteer leadership consisting of regional coordinators and state representatives coordinate tournaments and support Affiliates. The vision remains centered on helping homeschool students "address life issues from a biblical worldview in a manner that glorifies God."

### ***NCFCA Speech Categories***

NCFCA has three basic categories of speeches. Included within these categories are eleven different events and each offers a unique focus or skill. Students are encouraged to tackle different types of speeches to learn various elements necessary to become a compelling communicator.

#### ***Platform Category***

##### ***Informative***

The Informative speech is designed to give a student the opportunity to share on a topic of importance to the student. The goal is for the student to inform, instruct, or inspire the listener.

##### ***Biographical Narrative***

The Biographical Narrative event is designed so that a student may explore the relevance and/or unique contributions of a person's life.

##### ***Persuasive***

The Persuasive speech gives the student an opportunity to encourage others to make a difference and involves either a call to action or a call to rethink a position.

##### ***Illustrated Oratory***

Illustrated Oratory offers the student a chance to develop the skill of creating and manipulating visual aids which will enhance his message.

***Interpretation Category******Biblical Presentation***

A Biblical Presentation challenges the student to develop and present one or two selections of Scripture in an effort to foster understanding of God's word, deepen the speaker's Christian faith, and encourage the listener.

***Open Interpretation***

An Open Interpretation provides an opportunity for a student to creatively explore and develop the intellectual, emotional, and artistic embodiment of a single selection of literature for performance.

***Duo Interpretation***

A Duo Interpretation allows two students to work together to creatively explore and develop the intellectual, emotional, and artistic embodiment of a single selection of literature for dual performance.

***Original Interpretation***

An Original Interpretation is a chance for a student to author a literary work for performance, giving him an opportunity to creatively develop the intellectual, emotional, and artistic embodiment of his own unique story.

***Limited Preparation Category******Apologetics***

Apologetics is a limited preparation event in which the speaker is given four minutes to prepare a six-minute speech on a topic related to articulating his or her Christian faith. Apologetics pushes the student to learn and understand what they believe and why they believe it, and then challenges them to be able to effectively articulate those truths.

***A Note about Apologetics:*** *Apologetics is more than just a speech event; it is the study of the tenets of one's faith. While we can teach you how to foundationally approach the art of giving an Apologetics speech, it is beyond the scope of this curriculum to delve deeply into the subject matter of Apologetics. You may want to consider using supplemental material, such as Fearless Apologetics by Chap Bettis, as you prepare relevant subject matter for the NCFCA Apologetics event.*

***Extemporaneous***

Extemporaneous is a limited preparation event in which the speaker is given twenty minutes to prepare a seven-minute speech on a current event topic. Participation encourages the student to recognize God's hand on the world stage as well as here at home and develop thoughtful responses to questions about current events.

## *Impromptu*

Impromptu is a limited preparation speech in which the speaker is given two minutes to prepare a five-minute speech on a randomly drawn topic. It challenges the speaker to be able to think critically and share a meaningful message on a variety of topics as the opportunity presents itself.

*But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.*  
~ I Peter 3:15

### ***An Important Note about Competitive Material***

*Material chosen and presented for NCFCA competition should be appropriate for general audiences. Content should enhance the judge's understanding of the topic. Explicit material should not be included for shock value. Vulgarity is never acceptable. Discretion should be exercised by students, parents, and coaches when determining material for competition, keeping in mind that NCFCA is a high school league.*

*The preservation of good faith and trust among competitors and their judges and our mandate to glorify God in all things should guide competitors in their pursuit to protect their integrity and witness. There is a great responsibility on the part of the competitor to choose material carefully and from sources that will not compromise their witness for Christ. While it is important that each family do due diligence in assessing the appropriateness of material for competition, it should also be assumed that the source from which a competitor chooses a piece would follow the same guidelines as the actual material being presented. Others that view your student's work may trust that if a piece your student chose was suitable for competition, the original source material would also be suitable for competition.*

## **A Parent's Role in Preparing Material for Competition**

Parents have a very special role when it comes to helping their students prepare for competition. Your guidance and expertise is critical to helping young people develop their communication skills, but it is imperative that we not lose sight of the fact that the competitors are our children, ages 13–18. Please give encouragement, guidance, and feedback to your students as they write their speeches, do their research, design their boards, and cut their chosen selections of literature. Remember, it is the students' original work that should be entered into competition.



## OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

### Terminology

There are many terms in speech and debate that may not be familiar to you as you start your adventure. Don't worry! As with any discipline, you will pick up much of the vernacular as you go. We've tried to cull out any of those words or phrases that may be hard to understand, but if you find a word that is foreign to you, check in with a friend who is familiar with competitive speech, or with the NCFCA Representative in your area. He or she would love to meet you and give you any help you may need in this area.

***Please Note:** We use the terms “class” and “club” interchangeably. You may be using this curriculum as part of a class, co-op, or speech club, or you may simply be using this material with your own children. There is no difference in how the curriculum will work.*

*We also use the terms “coach” and “leader” interchangeably. We mainly choose to use “coach” because that is the common term used for one who is preparing others for competition, and this curriculum is written from that perspective. Along those lines, “competitor” and “student” are also interchangeable.*

### Event Rules and Documents

You will find the complete set of NCFCA rules, ballots, and script submission information in the Appendix of this book. Please take advantage of this convenient resource, and make very sure you have thoroughly read the rules for all the events in which you or your student is participating. It is imperative that the rules are followed in order to have fair competition across the country. It is not fun to work diligently on a piece and then find out that it is ineligible for competition!

### Organizational Flexibility

This curriculum provides instruction for all eleven NCFCA speech events within the Platform, Interpretation, and Limited Preparation categories. In order to grant individual clubs and coaches the freedom to arrange this instructional material according to their unique needs, we have not locked the instruction into any particular teaching schedule. The three-ring binder allows you the flexibility to cover the categories in the order you choose. Simply make sure that you work through the modules inside each category in order, as they build upon one another. As long as you keep these modules in order, it is easy to design the flow of the coursework however best fits your needs!

## Sample Schedule

Although each club is unique and should organize club instruction in the way that best fits the club's needs, we provide the following sample schedules for your convenience. Remember, there are two main components to learning speech instruction and practice. These sample schedules accommodate both class lessons and practice/coaching sessions!

***A Note about Extemporaneous Scheduling:** Please note that the sample instruction schedule below is created with the assumption that students participating in Extemporaneous will meet separately. Due to the unique instruction and study necessary to expand the relevant general knowledge base, Extemp competitors often meet for discussion and coaching at separate times. This delineation gives the Extemp competitors time to share research, discuss current events, and practice speeches for competition.*



**SAMPLE 1***INTRODUCTION*

<b>Week</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Module</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Interpretation Impromptu	A A	Selecting Quality Literature Preparing for Impromptu
2	Platform Apologetics	A A	Selecting Your Topic Understanding How We Are Shaped by Our Worldviews
3	Interpretation Impromptu	B B	Cutting Interpretation Scenes The Art of Storytelling
4	Platform Apologetics	B B	Structuring Your Speech Understanding and Organizing the Topics
5	Interpretation Impromptu	C C	From Scene to Script Making an Impact
6	Platform Apologetics	C C	A Well-Rounded Speech Preparing Your Cards
7	Interpretation Coaching Session	D	Theater of the Mind
8	Platform Coaching Session	D	Physical and Vocal Delivery
9	Apologetics Coaching Session	D	Organizing Your Box and Delivery
10	Impromptu Coaching Session	D	Vocal and Physical Delivery
11	Tournament Prep Coaching Session		Tournament Preparation
12	One Day NCFCA Practice Day		

## ***SAMPLE 2***

<b>Week</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Module</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Interpretation Impromptu	A A	Selecting Quality Literature Preparing for Impromptu
2	Interpretation Impromptu	B B	Cutting Interpretation Scenes The Art of Storytelling
3	Interpretation Impromptu	C C	From Scene to Script Making an Impact
4	Interpretation Impromptu	D D	Theater of the Mind Vocal and Physical Delivery
5	Platform Apologetics	A A	Selecting Your Topic Understanding How We Are Shaped by Our Worldview
6	Platform Apologetics	B B	Structuring Your Speech Understanding and Organizing the Topics
7	Platform Apologetics	C C	A Well-Rounded Speech Preparing Your Cards
8	Platform Apologetics	D D	Physical and Vocal Delivery Organizing Your Box and Delivery
9	Coaching Session		
10	Coaching Session		
11	Tournament Prep Coaching Session		Tournament Preparation
12	One Day NCFCA Practice Day		

## MODULE A

# INTERPRETATION

### *Selecting Quality Literature*

*We learn best and change from hearing stories that strike a chord within us.*

~ John P. Kotter

## SUMMARY

In this module we will review the NCFCA Interpretation events and the personal value of preparing an Interpretation. After considering why you should choose to participate in an Interpretation event, we will learn how to critically analyze potential Interpretation materials in order to ensure the selection of quality literature. The content you select in this module will drive your Interpretation. Since it is worth investing extra time to ensure the selection of quality material, we will guide you through a detailed process of how to make a proper selection. Prepare yourself for an exciting adventure! If you open your heart, the story you choose for Interpretation will change you and your audience in more ways than you can imagine.

## OBJECTIVES

- Understand the NCFCA Interpretation events and their value.
- Learn how to critically analyze Interpretation materials.
- Implement practical steps for selecting (or writing) quality literature.

## ACCESS EVENT RESOURCES

*ALL INTERPRETATION RESOURCES  
INCLUDING RULES AND BALLOTS  
CAN BE FOUND IN THE APPENDIX OF THIS CURRICULUM*

## A.1 WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Interpretation is literature brought to life. It is the dramatization of a written work according to the NCFCA rules and guidelines. Interpretation offers an exciting opportunity for you to speak through a story. To watch a sample Interpretation, scan the QR code, or click on the link provided.

## A.2 NCFCA INTERPRETATION EVENTS

There are four types of Interpretations you may consider for NCFCA competition:

### *Biblical Presentation*

A Biblical Presentation creatively develops and presents one or two selections of Scripture in an effort to foster understanding of God's word, deepen the speaker's Christian faith, and encourage the listener.

### *Duo Interpretation*

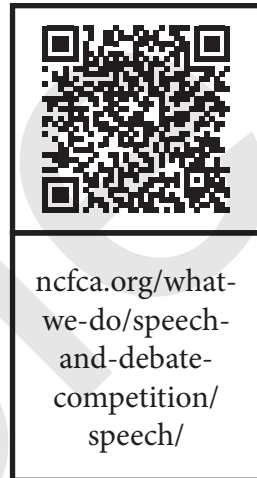
A Duo Interpretation creatively explores and develops the intellectual, emotional, and artistic embodiment of a single selection of literature for dual performance.

### *Open Interpretation*

An Open Interpretation creatively explores and develops the intellectual, emotional, and artistic embodiment of a single selection of literature for performance.

### *Original Interpretation*

An Original Interpretation creatively explores and develops the intellectual, emotional, and artistic embodiment of literature written by the student for performance.



*Note: Take time to read the rules for each event! Remember, all event resources can be found in the Appendix of this curriculum as well as on the secure Affiliates' Individual Event Resources Page via the NCFCA website login.*

## A.3 THE VALUE OF INTERPRETATION

### A3.1 Why Choose Interpretation?

Whether you enjoy acting and naturally have some talent in this area or struggle with expressing yourself through vocal and physical delivery, Interpretation will push you to the next level as a communicator. Interpretation provides a unique opportunity to communicate a message through story in a manner that may resonate with the audience more effectively than traditional methods of public speaking. For example, an audience may not naturally connect with the struggles of a child with a disability as explained in a three-point speech, but they may be moved to tears by the same struggles depicted through Interpretation.

### A3.2 What is the Cultural Value of Interpretation?

It is often inaccurately assumed that Interpretations lack educational potential. In order to fully understand the educational value of Interpretation, it is important to consider the part stories play in shaping the cultural landscape. Debates that transform society happen after countless stories have reshaped cultural thinking. Stories lead people to transformation *through the back door*.

For example, consider the impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on American society. Reportedly, Abraham Lincoln greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1862 by saying, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war."

Whether or not this exact dialogue between Lincoln and Stowe actually ensued, it accurately encapsulates the impact of Stowe's story on early American culture. By illustrating slavery's effect on families, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* personalized the political and economic arguments about slavery in a way that speeches, tracts, and newspapers could not. Interpretation provides students with the opportunity to shape culture through stories.

*Interpretations don't get the respect they're due. They profoundly move and deeply affect people. This kind of impact deserves respect. When you do an Interp, you are doing something that is respectable and valuable. Never forget this.*

~ 2012 Sweepstakes National Champion, Cody Dedon

### A3.3 What is the Personal Value of Interpretation?

The personal value of Interpretation is threefold:

*1. Heightened analytical skill*

The ability to analyze and interpret literature effectively produces invaluable rewards for academic and professional endeavors. Interpretation provides a training ground for evaluating an author's intent, identifying underlying messages, recognizing plot elements, and crafting a compelling story.

*2. Heart lessons learned from your story and its characters*

Just as your story and characters may dramatically change your audience, they may also profoundly change you. Interpretations invite you to step into someone else's world and walk in their shoes. By selecting quality material, you will learn indispensable heart lessons from your story and its characters.

*3. Increased comfort level and performance skill*

Excellent interpretation requires a level of precision in delivery that demands rigorous fine-tuning.

## MODULE A

Whether you struggle with pauses, vocal inflection, enunciation, pacing, or hand gestures, interpretation will drive you towards improvement!

*Interpretation produced tremendous growth in my student. She enjoyed reaching inside of herself, imagining what the characters would be like, and bringing them to life. She was a relatively shy student, but Interpretations drew her out of herself, and now she enjoys coaching and encouraging others.*

~ Rachele Light, NCFCA Parent

### A.4 THE NCFCA MISSION STATEMENT THROUGH INTERPRETATION

As evidenced in the explanation above, Interpretation advances the three prongs of the NCFCA Mission Statement by providing students with an opportunity to exercise analytical and oratorical skills, address cultural issues from a biblical worldview, and glorify God through performance and personal growth.

### A.5 SELECTING A PIECE

#### A5.1 Begin with the Ballot

Before you begin to choose a piece, take time to review the *Content* section of each Interpretation ballot. Each ballot serves as a clear checklist that you can use to determine the merits of your possibilities.

**Open Interpretation Ballot**

Judges: Your confidential endorsement ballot is very important. Please do not discuss this ballot with anyone except a tournament official.

**Area of Critique**

**Content**

- Presents a selection of literary merit and universal appeal
- Moves, entertains, instructs and/or provokes the audience to thought
- Presents a selection that has a clear beginning, middle, end, climax and resolution
- Meets time requirement

**FINAL RANK WITHIN RO**

First (1<sup>st</sup>)  Second (2<sup>nd</sup>)  Third (3<sup>rd</sup>)  Fourth (4<sup>th</sup>)  Fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) or Below

Reason for Ranking and Other Comments: (Comments are not available for the development of our ability. Use back of ballot for additional comments.)

→ *Note: The Content sections of each Interpretation ballot have been clipped out and included below. You can also find the complete ballots in the Appendix of this curriculum.*

*Duo and Open Interpretation Ballots***Content**

- Presents a selection of literary merit and universal appeal
- Moves, entertains, instructs, and/or provokes the audience to thought
- Presents a selection that has a clear beginning, middle, climax, and resolution
- Meets time requirement

*Original Interpretation Ballot***Content**

- Writes and presents a work or works of literary merit and universal appeal
- Moves, entertains, instructs, and/or provokes the audience to thought
- Demonstrates style, originality, and creativity
- Meets time requirement

*Biblical Presentation Ballot***Content**

- Presents selection(s) which enhances one's overall understanding of Scripture
- Moves, entertains, instructs, and/or provokes the audience to thought
- Develops a unified total presentation
- Meets time requirement

**A5.2 Research**

At this point, you may be wondering, "How in the WORLD am I supposed to find the perfect piece?"

You may be encouraged to know that the many competitors and coaches we interviewed during the writing of this module all emphasized there is no such thing as a perfect piece. Regardless of your research, every piece will present unique challenges, strengths, struggles, and joys. There is no perfect, "soul-mate" piece out there awaiting wedded bliss by Interpretation! Follow the tips below and search diligently, but give yourself a deadline to make a decision. The main point is to begin your search with a clear understanding of quality material. Once you have carefully evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of each possibility, make a commitment.

## MODULE A

### Step 1: Passive Research

Before you actively research new titles, take time to consider literature you already know and love. The best option might end up being the book you keep on your bedside table!

- Favorite childhood books
- Family read-aloud chapter books
- Classics

Also ask family members to brainstorm their favorite titles.

### Step 2: Active Research

If you have not selected a piece from the list of literature you already know and love, it may be time to seek out new possibilities. Below is a list of places to look and ways to seek out quality literature. Enjoy the adventure!

- Consult lists (For example: Newberry Award, book clubs, bestseller, etc.).
- Browse "classics" sections.
- Ask friends for favorites and get their reasons for liking.
- Talk to teachers, librarians, and other professionals.

## A5.3 What to Look For

There are three questions you should consider in the process of selecting a piece for Interpretation.

### 1. Do you LOVE this piece?

The reason why we encourage you to begin your search with stories you already know and love is because love for your literary selection is imperative to excellence in Interpretation. When you know a piece, you have already entered into it emotionally and thus begun the journey of Interpretation. As you search for quality material, keep in mind that you will be working on this piece for the entire season. Many competitors focus on “finding a piece that can win Nationals” but never bother to think about whether they will be tired of the piece by June.

A better approach is to first consider if the selection is worth presenting a hundred times, and then evaluate its competitive potential. The power of a piece always comes from the inside out, not from what you layer on top of it through acting. When evaluating literary options, engage with the main point of each piece and choose a message that really resonates with you!

### 2. Does this piece provide opportunity for originality?

Throughout our interviews the number one Interpretation pitfall coaches identified was the tendency to copy instead of create. Although it may be tempting to copy speeches performed by previous National competitors, doing so will greatly diminish what you can learn from Interpretation. Furthermore, *originality* is a point of evaluation found on every ballot. Don't be afraid to start from



the ground up and build a story you love. You were created with originality and you do yourself a disservice when you try to copy another competitor. We are by no means implying that you must find a piece of literature that has never been performed in the past! It is very possible to take a known piece and infuse it with originality. Our encouragement is that you focus on making your story your own, and avoid a copy-and-paste technique based on the performances of others. The piece plus your personality equals an original performance.

### Piece + Personality = Original Performance

Strive for Inspiration	Avoid Imitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Humbly learning from the skills and talents of others</i></li> <li>• <i>Diligently observing and implementing a proven process demonstrated by others</i></li> <li>• <i>Carefully investing unique perspective and personality into selected piece</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Critically comparing oneself with the talents of others</i></li> <li>• <i>Avoiding diligence by copying the hard work of others</i></li> <li>• <i>Depending solely on the unique perspective and personality of others</i></li> </ul>

*Interpretation and life have a lot in common. I learned a lot about life from competing in Interpretation while in the NCFCA. I learned that besides the official rules (for life, consult the Bible; for NCFCA, consult the official guidelines), you should always dare to interpret differently! There are a million ways to skin cats, and the people who profoundly impact the world (or their Interp audiences) always skin them differently!*

~ Cody Dedon, 2012 and 2013 Humorous Interpretation National Champion

### 3. Will this piece require and generate growth?

The value of Interpretation is linked with the degree to which it requires and generates growth in an individual. Remember the first foundational pillar of this curriculum—excellence? Keep in mind that the cultivation of character and the journey towards wisdom do not always coincide with short-term success. Short-term success provides crucial motivation to work hard, but it should not be viewed as an end unto itself. Select a piece that propels you towards the lifelong journey of excellence—and then pursue success along the way!

## Q&A with Kristi Eskelund, NCFCA Parent

### What is humor?

There are some great definitions out there! For me, however, humor is something bigger that can't really be pinned down. Humor is part of our "pathos" or emotional side. Delight, amusement, laughter, serendipitous discovery of something a little absurd—we have an innate need for these. They grow us intellectually, and they can often become an outlet for the less lovely and darker emotions that find their way into our hearts. Nothing shows that to me more clearly than the death of Robin Williams, one of the greatest comedians and masters of humor we will ever see.

As a public speaker, humor is an important aspect of your own personal ethos. You essentially become part of your definition of humor when you decide to use it in a speech. Will your humor have charm to amuse and delight? Will it be ironic and satirical to expose human folly? Will it mock and demean what you don't like? Will it be thoughtful or careless? The answers will suggest as much about YOU as about your subject matter.

So this means that humor is both an art and a tool in the hands of each speaker. In the realm of art, there are subtleties and tones to understand. It should reveal more skill than a splatter painting or one of those "masterpieces" done by an elephant holding a brush in its trunk! Even if a speaker has some natural ability with humor, training and technique are needed to become a true master. As a tool, humor has a proper use and safety features that a good speaker must acknowledge. The difference between demolition and craft is precision and careful handling, and that applies to our humor and the way we apply it.

You can effectively use humor everywhere. It is certainly applicable in every single NCFCA event! It is a positive and productive way to counter the growing cynicism of our culture. Communication is ultimately about impacting thinking, and laughing at something changes how we think about it. In your Interp speeches, humor connects the audience with a sense of joy, or it allows us to laugh at the human condition by arousing new perspectives on things. It breaks the tension we feel as our emotions build around a conflict we are witnessing. The way the humor is applied to the characters you are portraying tells the audience how you feel about those characters and their actions (and ultimately how the audience is supposed to feel, too!). Can we embrace them? Or do we see them with derision? Does the laughter make us joyful? Or does it feel creepy and sinister? Is it charming? Or is it just mean? Those are such important distinctions in your characterizations!

Too much of our entertainment today is just too intense. There is reason for mirth in the world, and we should express that. Laughing together builds a bridge the same way that enduring hardships together does.

### **When and how does one use humor well?**

Oh, that is the million dollar question, isn't it? Essentially, using humor well means using it with skill or delivering it in the most effective way. So—you have to know a few things—let me make it four things—in order to accomplish that.

#### *1) First of all, KNOW YOURSELF.*

I said humor was an art, so the speaker has to be an artist. That means understanding your own humor palette. Imagine that instead of little paint pots on your palette you have things like timing, pauses, facial expressions, body language or blocking, posture, and tone or attitude. Being a good "artist" here means knowing how much to use of each of those. What will enhance your message? What will become a distraction? Some speakers are better with "brights" while others prefer pastels or naturals. Every painter is noted for his or her style that is characteristic—realistic or stylized, bold or impressionistic, abstract or subtle. With practice, a speaker also develops a style that is unique and personal. Finding that should be one of your goals for your time in the NCFCA!

I also said that humor was a tool, so if you have a palette to use, you also have a humor toolbox. In it you might find things like anecdote, conundrums, irony, understatement, puns, sarcasm, wordplay, caricature, exaggeration, hyperbole, parody, satire, wisecracks, or jokes. You have to choose the right tool for your task, which means you should understand if you are delicately uncovering something or blasting it to smithereens! Some of these tools will feel comfortable in your hands; others will be clumsy when you pick them up. That is also part of finding your own personal style and understanding which types of humor work best for YOU and your message. Try them all and see which ones get your job done! That is the training that leads to mastery, and it gives you your own distinct trademark.

Ultimately, your humor and what you do with it will be a reflection of YOU. You have choices. Choose what is appropriate and effective for your situation and your interaction with that situation.

#### *2) Next, KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.*

All communication is about connecting with your audience. When using humor, it is critical to understand the values of your audience because you need to know that they will be unwilling to laugh at these. Instead, you want to use topical humor related to the times, the culture, the purpose, or the group. Or you can use situational humor related to

the immediate situation, like the strange arrangement of the room or the sudden ringing of someone's cell phone in the middle of your speech. Use yourself as a subject when you can, because that is ground no one else can claim.

Observe the audience as you are speaking. Don't leave them splatter painted or jackhammered by your humor! Watch how they are taking it and adjust. This is the beauty of speaking live.

A few cautions here:

- Your mother's friends are part of this audience, so she will know what you say. (That's scary!)
- God is part of your audience. That doesn't mean you have to talk about Jesus, but it does mean you have to use good taste. (Yep, that's even scarier than mom!)
- The open internet can become your audience if you are filmed or posted, so future employers or potential significant people in your life can be part of your audience now. (That might be the scariest of all...)

### 3) *KNOW YOUR MATERIAL.*

You really should understand and honor the intent of your material. Once I was judging a round of Humorous Interpretation, when one of the more talented speakers performed Hamlet—humorously! It was not a spoof or a ten-minute Hamlet. It was Shakespeare's own Hamlet! And it was funny. But it just didn't sit so well with me because I sensed it wasn't supposed to be funny. (Okay, I admit that I am a former English teacher and literary snob and I *know* it isn't supposed to be funny.) Truly, Hamlet's struggle isn't funny, and making it laughable made it something less worthy. There are just some things we don't laugh at. Period.

You must also be aware of how fresh your material is. If it is so overused it isn't funny anymore, then you will not create a favorable impression. You will no longer be a clever speaker, only a cliché.

### 4) *And if that isn't enough (and it isn't!), KNOW THE DANGERS.*

You can really damage your own ethos if you use your humor to create an air of superiority, present a callous attitude, or suggest a lack of credibility by your lack of seriousness. If you are acting the idiot in one speech, what do you think the same judge will think of you when he meets you in a debate round? Think about some of the people who have served as MC on the Academy Awards. Sometimes, they just look foolish or arrogant with the way they try to be funny. Don't let that be you! Use this safety net: Get *lots* of feedback from coaches, friends, and neighbors before you compete—pay attention to it.

You can also damage a person, a group, or an idea if you seem to be mocking, belittling, or ridiculing in the way you treat it as a subject. Consider the damage that has been done to men by American sitcoms and commercials over the last couple of decades. If you are careless (or worse, deliberate) about this, you run the risk of looking mean or ignorant.

Try to remember: Laugh at yourself; build others up.

Please understand that one of the groups you can damage with a poor application of humor is NCFCA and the effort the league is making to advance our Mission Statement. You have the privilege of the platform provided by NCFCA, so use this safety net: Be very aware of who you are representing and what that means.

You can also tire your audience or offend them if you use humor poorly or inappropriately. This makes you memorable in entirely the wrong way. In my own life, there are a number of careless remarks I've made in the effort to be funny in the moment that I certainly wish I could take back. Somehow, they are very hard to erase, so keep in mind this principle and you won't need to erase: Let no unwholesome thing proceed from your mouth! Use humor to picture, not to puncture.

Humor is actually hard. It requires the subtleties of an artist and the caution of a craftsman in building the delivery.

#### *Review*

1. Know Yourself
2. Know Your Audience
3. Know Your Material
4. Know the Dangers

As you review potential pieces for Interpretation, keep in mind that you will likely be preparing your selected piece for an entire year. Not only will you analyze your story's plotline and characters, you will also immerse yourself into them. You will live and reflect their emotions and struggles. You will invite your audience to enter into them, as well. Consider the admonition offered by the apostle Paul in the book of Philippians as you consider the value of your potential selection:

*"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."*

~ Philippians 4:8