4-H SPEECH CONTEST

EVENT: POETRY READING

TIME: Maximum - Senior: 10 minutes
- Junior/Intermediate: 5 minutes

DESCRIPTION:

In the interpretation of poetry, the student has a chance for a finer and more delicate presentation. Not only must the reader have the desire to share his aesthetic pleasure with the audience, but also he must be ever mindful that his duty is to suggest, not to subject his audience to a recital of rhythmic acting.

The rhythm of poetry is part of its beauty, but it should usually be supplementary. Rhythm is more often underlying. The pulse of the metric beat should be very infrequently present. The communication of emotions and ideas are of importance in the presentation of poetry as they are in the interpretation of prose. To present the ideas of poetry, very careful attention should be given to word grouping, word emphasis, the stress of thought carrying phrases and sentences and meaningful voice intonation. To present the emotion, the reader must have a careful understanding of the mood, and of the author’s point of view in relation to who is speaking, to whom he is speaking and where he is when speaking. The reader must project the emotion sincerely. He must have a sympathetic feel for climax and for timing, which is suggestive natural for the expression of the emotion.

The selection should first of all be one of literary merit. It might be a ballad, a narrative, epic or dramatic poem. It might well be one long poem, several selections or a group of poems concerning a central theme.

The reader is a go between for the author. He has so carefully studied the poem that he has almost made it his own. The reader’s satisfaction comes from a sincere desire to share with his audience that which someone else has written which has become very important to him, the reader.

The reader must always remember that he is interpreting the poem or poems from the printed page; he is not exhibiting his skill in memorization, neither is he doing sight-reading. But his interpretative reading of poetry should be the result of much study that gives him great familiarity with the selection, freeing his eyes and voice directed toward the printed page. Where the reader directs his eyes will be governed by the author’s purpose in any particular poem.

Whatever form of manuscript the reader takes to the platform with him, it should be one that is easily, and not awkwardly, handled. The book or manuscript is the reason the reader and listeners are gathered together. The reader should not be ashamed of it. He is going to read from the book or manuscript with his audience. But effective
reading from the printed page demands a high degree of familiarity with the passage, but not memorization, a freedom from the page and the achievement of a well-balanced distribution of eye contact with the audience. Interpretative reading is communication – reading with a listening and seeing audience.

The interpreter may use facial and body expressions as long as they do not call attention to the interpreter as a performer, detract from the meaning of the material or constitute acting or impersonation.

Adapted from the Handbook of the Kentucky High School Speech League, Centennial Edition. Reprinted and revised from Hawaii Speech League, pages 35 – 36