



## Oral Interpretation of Literature

The oral interpretation of literature shares more characteristics with public speaking than with acting or theater. When reciting a poem, the speaker does not use props or costumes. Instead, the speaker relies on her or his voice, posture, facial expressions and gestures to convey the meaning of the poem to the audience.

Poetry uses emotional language and powerful imagery. The interpreter must carefully paint the images in the minds of the listeners; s/he must give the audience time to picture and think about the poem's content.

Contemporary poetry employs a variety of rhythms. Be aware how the rhythms change with the ideas and emotions that are being expressed.

Much modern, contemporary poetry is written in a conversational, narrative, free verse form. The speaker should take care in analyzing these kinds of poems, looking specifically for poetic techniques that might escape the listener. Be careful not to dismiss them as simply another type of prose.

Most traditional poetry employs rhyme and predictable rhythm patterns. In performing this poetry, the interpreter should accentuate the rhyme when appropriate (usually in humorous verse) and avoid it when not (serious verse). Rhyme and predictable rhythms can be difficult to perform without sounding monotone. Understand what the poem means, notice where there are changes in tone, and keep the performance fresh and engaging.

Many performers think that moving, walking or making large, dramatic gestures can help animate the recitation of poetry. In many cases, however, movement (such as walking, pacing back and forth, moving towards the audience) can be distracting for the audience and can make the recitation seem more like acting and less like poetry interpretation. Performers should keep movement to a minimum, and gestures should be natural, purposeful and not distracting.

### EFFECTIVE SPEAKERS PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Volume
- Rate
- Pitch
- Articulation/Pronunciation
- Pauses

## Memorization Techniques

One of the most difficult challenges for students participating in the Poetry Out Loud recitation competition is the memorization of their selected poems. The following suggestions may help.

- **Color coding:** Using a different color, highlight every three or four lines, or underline lines with a brightly colored pen. Read the poem out loud five or six times, trying to remember which lines are highlighted or underlined in which color. Different colors can act as a visual cue to help you remember individual lines of the poem.
- **Read out loud:** Read your poem out loud, clearly, several times each day. Hearing your own voice speak the words can help you remember them more quickly.
- **Line by line:** Memorize one or two lines of the poem each day. The next day, add one or two more.
- **Memorize with a partner:** Work with another student, friend or family member who can check for accuracy and correct you if you make mistakes.
- **Record yourself:** Read the poem word for word, slowly and clearly, into a tape recorder. Listen to the recording five or six times a day, repeating the words to yourself as you listen.
- **Speed run:** Read the poem out loud as fast as you can as many times as you can. Constant repetition is very useful when trying to memorize. Once you know the lines well, do a speed run as often as possible.
- **Index cards:** Using index cards, write one line of the poem on each card and try to memorize the lines as you would flash cards in math class. When you have a moment, pull out the cards and work on the lines.
- **Visualization:** Partner each line of the poem with a clear and powerful visual image. For example, imagine each line of the poem associated with a specific object or place. These associations will act as a trigger to help you remember the poem.
- **Practice, practice, practice:** The more you practice, the easier your memorization process will be!