Tips for Oral Interpretation of Literature

Oral interpretation is the process by which a speaker performs literature out loud for an audience. Your concern is to communicate the TOTAL EFFECT of the literary work of art to an audience.

**INTERPRETING THE MONOLOGUE**

Begin by UNDERSTANDING it. Understand every single word it contains. If you don’t know a word, LOOK IT UP! (Use No Fear Shakespeare to help you understand the meaning of your monologue.) Be sure you check pronunciation on words that are unfamiliar.

Learn about your AUTHOR and the time period in which it was written. Understanding WHY a piece of literature was written will make your interpretation more meaningful to your audience. (You’ll also need that info for your introduction… see below for instructions about the introduction to your piece.)

Be aware of the SPEAKER of any piece of literature that you perform. Find out as much as you can about the speaker so that you can BECOME that speaker when you interpret. Of course you will have to fill in missing details about your speaker; that is your INTERPRETATION of the piece. What does your speaker LOOK LIKE? What are his/her MOTIVES? His/Her STATE OF MIND?

Be aware of the SPEAKER’S AUDIENCE. This is different from YOUR audience. The SPEAKER’S AUDIENCE may be one person, a particular group of people, or the general masses. But be aware of the relationship between the fictional speaker and the imaginary audience.

Know the SETTING. Where does your selection take place? And when? BE THERE when you perform it, and take your audience there too.

Indeed, you must fully understand all of the literary elements of your selection (plot, characters, setting, conflict, theme) in order to effectively interpret the piece.

**MARKING YOUR MANUSCRIPT**

To prepare for your recitation of the monologue, read through it slowly and deliberately, looking for pauses and emphasized words. Using a RED pen, indicate short pauses with one slash ( / ) and longer pauses with two ( // ). Circle or underline words that command emphasis. In the margins, write yourself vocal cues, such as SLOW DOWN, EXCITED, SCARED, SHAKY, LAUGHING to remind yourself how you should sound. Look especially for mood or tone changes. MARK THEM so that you remember to change YOUR mood and tone.

Please remember that marking a manuscript is a complete waste of time unless you PRACTICE reading as you have marked. You can’t practice unless you are reading aloud.

The secret to a good grade is PREPARATION. The temptation is to slap some marks on a manuscript and wing the performance. That you can read aloud is a give; your GRADE will be based on your ability to INTERPRET! Again, PRACTICING aloud from your MARKED manuscript is critical.

Finally, strive to sound natural and conversational. Think about what this means. Eliminate all traces of “First-grade-reading-group syndrome.”

THE INTRODUCTION

Before you begin your selection, you should include an introduction to the piece. You may use the introduction I have included on the quote handout, or you may write your own introduction. The purpose of the introduction is to PREPARE the audience for your recitation. Include the title, author and any background information necessary to help the audience’s understanding. The introduction is part of the assignment and part of your grade. Please do not make yourself look FOOLISH by trying to improvise an introduction. You will RUIN the performance, and I will deduct at least a letter grade.

IF YOU NEED HELP, PLEASE ASK.