

# POETRY INTERPRETATION

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CONTESTANT

• **ENTRIES.** As many as THREE students from grade levels 4, 5, 6, or combined grades 7 and 8\* OR ages 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 respectively by Sept. 1 of the current school year, if in an ungraded school, may be entered in the **POETRY** Interpretation District Contest from each school. Designated adults representing each school will select contestants to represent the campus at the District Meet based on their abilities and interest in public speaking and prose or poetry reading, as well as other factors, which are decided upon by each school.

*\*Districts may elect to allow up to 3 students per grade level in Poetry 7/8, but speech sections must contain a mix of 7th and 8th graders, and ONLY the top 2 from the final round advance to State.*

• **ADVANCING TO STATE.** 4 students must compete in each contest to allow the top two students from each group to advance to State (See page 8 for complete rules. *See page 108 for an abbreviated chart for contest administration.*)

• **NATURE OF THE CONTEST.** Coaches may use these guidelines in preparing for either the Poetry or Prose Interpretation Contest. Students in the Prose or Poetry Interpretation Contest select a published poem OR prose piece, or group of poems/prose works, prepare an introduction to this literary work(s), and present the work(s) with an introduction in a six-minute time limit at the contest. There is no minimum time limit. Better presentations are at least three minutes in length, however. Contestants who exceed the allotted six minutes shall be disqualified.

**Works published on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other websites, are not acceptable for use without the written permission of the author.** Each year the selection category alternates: **2022-2023-POETRY**; **2023-2024-PROSE**; **2024-2025-POETRY**.

• **CHOOSING A SELECTION.** Students may select a work, several excerpts from a work, or a group of works, for their presentations. Students should ask these questions:

1) **DO I LIKE THE SELECTION?** A student must enjoy a selection if he or she will spend time thinking about it, analyzing it, and rehearsing it.

2) **IS THE SELECTION APPROPRIATE FOR ME?** Literary selections written by and for adults offer problems for elementary and middle school students because the levels of experience, understanding, and vocabulary are so very different from their own. Select literary works that present a young person's point of view, situations that you can identify with, and themes that you understand.

3) **DOES THE SELECTION WORK FOR THIS TYPE OF LITERARY INTERPRETATION?** This judgment must not be made too hastily. Almost all selections become richer and fuller as students work with them; a few selections, despite rehearsal and exploration, simply do not benefit from an oral presentation.

• **DOCUMENTATION.** A requirement of the contest, documentation means **the contestant researches and**

**brings** to contest printed information that proves that the work is the literary type specified for this school year.

**Documentation EXAMPLES:**

- A photocopied passage from an encyclopedia or anthology of poems/prose works;
- The book cover, or a photocopy of it, **along with the table of contents** that lists the title of the work in reference to its type;
- A printed internet page that specifies the work to be either prose or poetry (excludes Wikipedia);
- The actual literary source in which piece is found. (Contestant must point to the specific information in this source that clarifies that the work is either prose or poetry, **noting word descriptors found on page 75 of this handbook, and a photocopy of this information must be provided.**)

Some works may not have printed sources that indicate specifically that they are poems or prose, and sometimes rhyming works in children's literature are actually classified as prose. Library of Congress references may provide both prose and poetry references, as well, but these will direct the contestant to a source that will document the genre needed. *Please be aware that failure to present the documentation will result in disqualification, even if it seems obvious that the work is a poem or a prose work.* Consider documentation an opportunity to find out more about the work you are presenting.

• **THE INTRODUCTION.** The **required original** introduction should prepare the audience to hear the literary work. It may be dramatic; it may or may not say something about the writer; it may describe the setting of the work; and/or it may introduce other aspects of the literature. **It is important to remember that the introduction MUST be given from memory with the text closed, that it MUST NOT include the student's name or school,** and that it should be fairly short because the presentation, including the introduction, must not exceed six minutes.

• **APPROPRIATE GESTURES.** Responsive use of the body (i.e., spontaneous changes in posture, gesture, and "limited" place-to-place movement) are permissible. However, this active use of the body should . . .

- (A) be appropriate to the demands of the selection;
- (B) be a natural outgrowth from the literature to be performed;
- (C) not call attention to itself; and
- (D) be limited in scope.

**The judge's opinion in this matter is final.**

**Although the literary work may be presented from memory,** contestants are required to hold a transcript **open during the reading.** **"Artful" glances at the transcript are recommended.** The transcript may be placed in a small, dark colored folder or notebook that does not detract from the presentation. Holding a transcript can prevent the overuse of gestures and prevent the contestant from performing a dramatic monologue. Remember that voice inflection and interpretation of the different characters and the scene are the most important



components of a great poetry or prose interpretation. The voice, not the body, should convey the meaning and feeling in the literary work. **Walking around the room, instead of confining oneself to a smaller area of appropriate outgrowth movement, should be cause for a JUDGE to make note of such over-gesturing and thus rank the contestant lower than he/ she might have been ranked otherwise.**

• **APPROPRIATE ATTIRE.** Although contestants are not required to wear a suit and tie or dresses, appearance can be a factor in the judges' overall impression of the presentation. Contestants should not wear logo clothing (other than the PSIA State Meet T-shirt), especially if the logo is of the school or symbols of the school attended. Clothing that appears to be a costume representing your literary piece is not appropriate. If a contestant wears one of these unacceptable pieces of clothing, the contest director may have the student turn his/her shirt wrong-side out, or otherwise change clothes. Although dress is not a disqualifier, it is a rationale for deductions in ranking by the judge.

• **WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CONTEST.**

1) The contest director will announce the time and place that contestants and one adult should report for evaluation pick-up and/or awards presentation. 2) As roll is called and substitutes OR alternates are checked in, each contestant will be given a card on which the letter of his/her speaking order is written, in accordance to the Contestant Roster (**Do NOT change speaking order.**); 3) The Contest Director will **CHECK DOCUMENTATION** at roll call, and keep any questionable documentation to secure approval. (No opportunity will be provided to run and get documentation papers after roll call, **but all contestants will be allowed to present their interpretative readings. Disqualifications will be noted to judges only after presentations.**)

4) The contest director/timekeeper will **announce speaker A; and 5) the contestant will hold that number up, then give the card back to the director.** Timing begins with the contestant's first words of the presentation. Because the PSIA events are intended to be educational, the contestants **are to** remain in the contest room after their presentations, and **audiences are expected to the capacity of the room. No one may enter or leave the room once the contest has started, unless a note of approved late arrival or early departure has been provided by the meet director.** The contestant will speak before a single **impartial** judge or **preferably** a panel of three judges. All speech events are judged by an odd number of judges **who independently decide on the ranking of contestants. No collaboration is permitted.**

6) When only 30 seconds are left in the allotted time for a speaker, the contest director, who also serves as the timekeeper, should hold up a "30 seconds left" card in order to assist the contestant in stopping the speech prior to the end of the time limit. **Judges should take no more than 1 1/2 minutes following the contestant presentation to complete his/her evaluation.**

• **ENTERING PROSE or POETRY AND A CONTEST IN CONFLICT ON THE REQUIRED SCHEDULE.**

Students in Prose/Poetry Interp grades 6-8 may also be entered into these events in the preliminary round: On-Site Drawing, Ready Writing, Number Sense, Calculator, and/or Science. Grades 4/5 may also compete in Spelling (Late speaking order) Maps, Music, or Vocabulary. For the final round, grades 6-8 may be entered in Spelling (Late speaking order AFTER Spelling). Arrangements for the contestant to speak early or late in both prelim and final rounds must be submitted to the District meet director in writing at least **30** days prior to the meet, and to the State director at least **14** days prior to the State Meet. Contestants will **NOT** be given additional time in dual entry contests.

• **DISQUALIFICATIONS.** A contestant **WILL** be disqualified for these infractions of the rules:

- 1) **failing to provide an introduction from memory;**
- 2) **speaking over the six-minute time allotted;**
- 3) **failure to remove profanity from presentation;**
- 4) **stating name or name of school;**
- 5) **prompting by audience member from school;**
- 6) **any body movements that provide information to contestant during performance;**
- 7) **failure to provide documentation of the type of literary work being presented. Documentation is checked at both the prelim and final round.** Other presentation improvements needed should be noted by the judge (not the contest director) on the evaluation sheet. Clearance at District level on these requirements does not ensure clearance at the State level of competition.

• **ADVANCING TO THE FINAL ROUND.** If there are more than 9 students in the competition, two sections of the contest (preliminary round) will be held. The top 3 ranked students will advance to the final round from each of two "prelim" sections, and the top 2 will advance if there are three prelim sections. Contestants may read the same literary piece for the final round, as well as at State.

• **POSTING THE PRELIMINARY ROUND.**

Rankings are posted in AMC, and contestants pick up their evaluations at the time and place designated on the schedule. At this time the names of the contestants advancing to the final round will be announced in random order and posted on a designated bulletin board in a random speaking order for the final round.

• **NEW RULE:**

Contestants must perform the same piece in all rounds (Prelims and Finals) during a meet. Contestants may change pieces between meets.





## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR COACHES / CONTEST DIRECTORS

• **PREPARATION FOR CONTEST.** Read and follow all instructions provided in the “Information Pertaining to All Contests” section of the *PSIA Academic Handbook*. Observe and practice with students all rules and procedures delineated in the “Instructions to the Contestant” and in the “**POETRY Contest Director Checklist**” and the “Checklist for Judges.” Preparation for the Prose or Poetry Interpretation Contest should include instruction in the curriculum objectives of public speaking. Practice performing before an audience is essential. Invitational meets with other schools provide the most effective practice, as well as boosting enthusiasm for the contestant. You may wish to prepare your students for the excitement of winning as well as the disappointment of losing. All speech activities rely on the subjective opinions of judges. The philosophies and techniques of oral reading differ widely, and your students need to be aware that their work may be evaluated by people with a variety of approaches to the field. If you emphasize the joy of sharing literature rather than the necessity of a first place ranking, all your students will be winners, especially if they carry their love of literature into adulthood.

• **PERSONNEL NEEDED FOR CONTEST.**

1. **Contest Director/Timekeeper.** Must be a language arts or speech teacher OR have two years of experience at directing the Prose or Poetry Contest
2. **Assistant Directors.** Two knowledgeable coaches from different schools other than director’s. One serves additionally as Hall Monitor.
3. **Judge(s).** Three qualified, impartial judges should judge preliminary and final rounds. An odd number of judges is required. One qualified judge is acceptable only if 3 cannot be found. (Same criteria as the contest director/timekeeper)

• **SECTIONING.** Following random placement in the AMC program, make sure that students from the same school are in different sections, if possible, and **make sure that the first persons listed on the entry forms are not all in the same section.**

• **JUDGING REQUIREMENTS (ADDITIONAL INFORMATION applicable to all speech contests).** (See Contestant information) Judges for all PSIA speech contest should:

1) Hold a Language Arts, English, or Speech Communication education certification, OR be working on a degree in a speech /language arts field.

2) Have prior judging experience of at least three speech contests. Contests may be invitational or intramural, but preferably, judging experience should be at the district or state level of PSIA competition.

Persons meeting these qualifications let your campus coordinator and your district director know of your expertise in order that you may fill a much-needed position at your District Meet.

Please let the state office know that you meet these criteria and volunteer to fill one of the many much-needed speech positions at the two state meets. It is our goal to fill these positions (3 judges per section) prior to the end of the district meet each year.

**ON-LINE POSSIBILITIES FOR FINDING POETRY OR PROSE SELECTIONS:**

*(Search with these titles may be helpful)*

Many sites are available. Here are just a few that may be helpful:

**The On-Line Books Page**

Directory of 3 million+ books that can be freely read on the Internet. <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>

**The Bookwire Index: [bookwire.com](http://bookwire.com)**

Provides descriptions of major book awards. Includes original fiction, reviews, author interviews, thousands of annotated links to book-related sites, etc.

**Library of Congress Home Page**

**A Celebration of Women Writers**

This site provides a more in-depth biographical information about women writers and their books.

**Children’s Book Awards**

Includes books for children and young adults

<https://www.amazon.com>

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com>

<https://americanliterature.com>

**The Association of American University Presses**

**Online Catalog**

This is a searchable site of University Press Catalogs (for example, the University of Texas Press).



# Prose OR Poetry?: Documenting Your Selection

• **WORD IDENTIFIERS FOR PROSE:** If documenting Prose, the information should contain one or more of these prose identifiers referencing the work's title, or **other possible words** that signify that the work is written in paragraph form:

story      novel      short story      passage      fiction      fable      fairy tale      tale      folklore  
allegory      anecdote      essay      editorial      autobiography      biography      parable (if not written in verse form).      places  
where paragraph literature may be found, verifying that the selection is prose.

• **WORD IDENTIFIERS FOR POETRY:** If documenting Poetry, look for these identifiers:

verse      poem      poetic      hymn      blank verse      couplets      pentameter      meter      epic lyric  
haiku      ballad      sonnet      free verse      stanza      limerick      ode      rhyming      etc.

Bibliographic information on specific works, including classification according to the Dewey Decimal System, is available at the Library of Congress Online Catalogue at <https://catalog.loc.gov/>

Follow the simple directions found on this website to locate information about a work, to find works on subject areas, or to do a general search for a title or an author.

Be sure to get a printout of your findings. Hand written or typed information can not serve as proof of the work's genre. Also, the numbers in this system do not tell a novice director that a work is prose or poetry. Provide statements or listings that are photocopied.

You may occasionally find a book or anthology that the online card catalog labels as "miscellaneous writings." These books are often collected works of individual authors that are not limited to or chiefly identified with one specific form. You may also encounter a book, published by a small press, which has not been assigned a specific genre category. In such cases, it is necessary to ask the following questions to identify the material's classification.

• **Does the piece contain stage directions?** The presence of stage directions can help you establish a piece as a work of drama. **DRAMA EXCERPTS MAY NOT BE USED IN PSIA PROSE OR POETRY INTERPRETATION CONTEST. Dramatic monologues, or any work that is classified as a Dialogue or Monologue, are not acceptable in this contest.**

• **Are there any published articles, reviews, or interviews which clarify the genre of this particular work?** Newspapers and magazines often review or analyze works of literature. Articles found in these periodicals can give you insight into a particular literary work's content and form.

• **Do I have the correct original source?** Many works of literature are published in more than one form. For example, John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* is available as a novel, a play, and a screenplay. A cutting from the novel would be an acceptable prose selection. The other two literary versions of the story could not be used in PSIA competition.

• **Copyright Infringement:** Prose and poetry excerpts and full works are acceptable from the internet, as long as the website and/or author do not indicate a copyright and prohibition to print or use. The pages printed from such websites must provide clarity that permission is granted to print out and use the work.

*Make additional copies of your findings and your documentation to bring to competition. (There should be no copyright concern for making additional copies, if the documentation has been appropriately secured.) You will be required to present your findings to the Contest Director at each level of competition, or be disqualified from the contest. Handwritten proofs will not suffice for documentation. Although disqualified students will be allowed to present their prose or poetry presentations, without acceptable documentation, the student must be disqualified when the ranking procedure is done.*



# PRIVATE SCHOOLS INTERSCHOLASTIC ASSOCIATION



## Poetry Interpretation Individual Evaluation Sheet

SPEAKER ID: \_\_\_\_\_

(Contestant ID Label to be placed here AFTER judging)

SELECTION TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_ SECTION # or FINAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Judge's comments should be constructive and supportive, but constructive criticism will be most helpful for the contestants.

Check (✓) appropriate box indicating your judgment of this speaker's expertise.

### COMMENTS

#### I. The Text and Introduction

Needs Work Satisfactory Good Excellent Superior

**Introduction:** Is the required introduction given from memory with text closed? Does it effectively introduce the work, drawing interest and setting the mood? Is the information relevant for the piece?  
Comment:

**Insight and Understanding:** Is the selection appropriate for age level and student ability? Does the speaker display understanding of the selection, evidenced in the recreation of the mood, setting, point of view, and intent of the piece?  
Comment:

#### II. The Performer

Needs Work Satisfactory Good Excellent Superior

**Voice and Diction:** Is pronunciation acceptable and enunciation clear and distinct? Are pitch, rate and volume appropriate? Is vocal variety sufficient? Does the voice control the performance?  
Comment:

**Gestures and Bodily Actions:** Is the speaker poised? Are gestures a natural outgrowth of the work and not overacted or distracting? Does the speaker reference the script with ease? Is the speaker dressed appropriately, without costume or school uniform?  
Comment:

#### III. The Performance

Needs Work Satisfactory Good Excellent Superior

**Pacing:** Did the performance move through phases of logical and emotional progression? Did pacing, silence and build seem appropriate? Was the presentation long enough for effectiveness?  
Comment:

**Character Portrayal:** Were characters distinctly portrayed vocally, physically, emotionally, and intellectually?  
Comment:

**Overall effectiveness:** Did the speaker clearly communicate the selection, maintaining the listener's interest? Was the performance consistent? Was the performance interesting and effective?  
Comment:

Make copies for each judge for the number of contestants in each section.

Judge's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Judge's Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_