

# Thematic Interpretation

## Overview

If you like to act and also like to express your own ideas, Thematic Interpretation, or TI, might be a great event for you. Some competitive Speech events have narrow requirements, but TI gives you lots of options. In 'Original' events speakers write the whole speech themselves; in 'Interpretive' events they perform a script published by someone else – in TI you can do both. Most interpretive events focus on one selection with one tone throughout, but in TI you can mix together comedy and tragedy, fiction and nonfiction into a program of your own.

## Rules and Requirements

- You create a piece examining a theme. A theme is not just a topic – a theme should contain a claim or idea.
- You choose at least 3 different selections on your theme, which are linked and explained by your own words. For example, in one TI you could use a dramatic scene from a play, a complete newspaper article, a humorous poem, and an autobiographical selection.
- The material you choose must be published—not available solely on-line.
- The selections can be cut to fit the time and program needs.
- You compose your own material developing your theme and the relationships between your selections, providing transitions, introductions, conclusions as needed; this original material is often brief, but can be up to 1/3 of the program.
- Thematic Interpretation programs must be performed with a script binder in hand, though competitive speakers memorize all the material. Many creative and effective uses of the binder to enhance the TI program are allowed under current competitive rules.
- Your presentation cannot go over 10 minutes long (though some tournaments allow a 30 second grace period). There is no minimum time, but speeches that do well are usually not shorter than 5 or 6 minutes
- No props (other than your binder) and/or costumes are allowed.

## Final Thoughts

Thematic Interpretation gives you opportunities for creative choices within the competitive rules. 'Traditional' TI's often follow a common structure—an introduction, first piece, transition, second piece, etc. There are also 'blended' TI's where some pieces may be cut into smaller sections that mix and alternate throughout the program.

Creating a good TI needs a scholar, an actor, an author, a director, a stage manager, and sometimes a singer or choreographer, but all these people need to be you!

For specific competition rules, samples, and further suggestions, see the California High School Speech Association Handbook and web site.