

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION (T.I.)

Thematic Interpretation is an oral interpretation event. The contestant must choose a subject, create a theme statement about that subject, and select three or more pieces of literature that support and/or illustrate that theme to create a meaningful presentation. The theme is then developed through the combination of the original introduction and transitions, the literary materials, and interpretation.

Tournament Requirements

1. The theme and/or literary works, partially or wholly, may not have been used in competition by the contestant in previous years in the same or in a different event.
2. All selections used must be from printed, published, readily available, and nationally distributed sources. If using a part of a literary work, a minimum of 150 quoted words must be used; otherwise, the entire work must be used. Anthologies may be considered multiple sources.
3. Photocopies of the excerpts with the part used highlighted, the title page, publisher page, index with story or poem listed, and the introduction and transitions typed, double-spaced, must be turned in as the manuscript.
4. Thematic selections must be interpreted from a manuscript in the hands of the contestant.
5. Introductory, explanatory, and transitional material must be in the contestant's own words and must include the name of the author, title, and source of each selection. The original material must not exceed one-third of the total presentation.
6. The presentation must not exceed ten (10) minutes. There is no minimum time, but preferably not shorter than five (5) minutes.
7. No costumes and/or props are allowed.

Creating a Theme

Themes may be serious, humorous, or a combination. Look in quotation books and poetry books for ideas. Choose something that is abstract or something that is a frequent thesis in literature. Topics are not themes. "True Love" is a topic. "True love cannot exist in the modern world" is a theme.

Selecting Material

Literary materials may be poems, plays, speeches, monologues, novels, articles, and/or song lyrics.

1. Some good selections can be taken from literature that is part of the school's regular curriculum.
2. Ask teachers, parents and other knowledgeable adults for suggestions.
3. Look in poetry books where poems are listed by theme.
4. Check the library catalogues.

Preparing the Final Presentation

1. Use the folder that holds the manuscript for every practice. Remember that the manuscript must remain in the hands of the speaker at all times.
2. Practice a direct communication with the audience during introduction and transitions.
3. Practice, recreating the meaning and emotion of the selections through the use of voice, gesture, body movement, and facial expression.

Ballots are in a separate location. Click the link below

California High School Speech Association Ballot:
Thematic Interpretation

SAMPLE THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION AND THEME STATEMENT: (For the sake of ease, the theme is underlined) Mrs. Cleaver, wearing a spotless, wrinkle-free dress, and pearls, vacuums the living room. Dad opens the door, tosses his hat onto the hat rack, and proclaims, “Honey, I’m home.” Two clean, freckle-faced children bound down the stairs, followed by their faithful dog. We are shown this image in books, magazines, movies and on television programs depicting the all-American family. However, the All-American family is only an image. Let’s take a look at reality.

TRANSITION #1: The modern American family is a far cry from this pretty picture. Parents are still the nucleus of the family, still the protectors and first educators of their children, except that all too often, they abdicate this responsibility to someone or something else. America’s number one babysitter, the TV, preaches a distorted set of values and behaviors to children. Russell Baker describes his education in crime, courtesy of his parents reliance on the “boob tube,” in “School vs. Education.”

SELECTION #1: A cutting from “School vs. Education” by Russell Baker. [This is a satirical narrative essay which describes a pre-school child’s education in crime from watching TV.]

TRANSITION #2: Although Baker describes a dysfunctional family that is the result of the lack of parental input, too much parental influence can have the same result. A child responds to her mother’s continual “interference” with self-destructive behavior in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan.

SELECTION #2: A cutting from *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. [This is a novel which explores the conflict between the first generation Chinese women and their daughters.]

TRANSITION #3: Even when parents attempt to raise their children “right,” rapid changes in society and the state of the world can leave their children unprepared to face reality. America’s experience in Vietnam gives testimony to this paradox. A “good” eighteen-year-old boy leaves for Vietnam and returns a tortured twenty-year-old to confront his parents in *Sticks and Bones* by David Rabe.

SELECTION #3: A cutting from *Sticks and Bones* by David Rabe. [This is a social drama of the 70’s which illustrates a family coping with their son’s Vietnam experience.]

ORAL READING ASSIGNMENT OF THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

(Sample lesson for the teacher/coach)

1. Requirements

- A. Introduction
- B. Transition
- C. Literature
- D. Conclusion
- E. Two copies of your manuscript: one to turn in before speaking, the second to be used in presentation.
- F. Labeling in margin of the Introduction, Transitions, (underline link to theme), and Conclusion.

II. Check Points required

- A. Time 5 to 10 minutes
- B. Two copies of the manuscript
- C. Eye contact 100 percent of time during introduction and transitions
- D. Typed, double-spaced
- E. Rehearsed five or more times
- F. Checking diacritical (pronunciation) marks
- G. Slowing down your delivery

III. Typical subjects for which themes can be created

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Anger | 11. Emotion | 21. Loneliness | 31. Responsibility |
| 2. Beauty | 12. Envy | 22. Love | 32. Revenge |
| 3. Bitterness | 13. Excuses | 23. Money | 33. Sadness |
| 4. Children | 14. Fantasy | 24. Negativism | 34. Sincerity |
| 5. Complications | 15. Friendship | 25. Nonsense | 35. Suicide |
| 6. Crisis | 16. Frustration | 26. Passion | 36. Traditions |
| 7. Death | 17. Happiness | 27. Peace | 37. Ugliness |
| 8. Depression | 18. Hatred | 28. Pollution | 38. Unrequited Love |
| 9. Displeasure | 19. Humor | 29. Positivism | 39. War |
| 10. Embarrassment | 20. Jealousy | 30. Religion | |

IV. Organization

Once selections have been made, determine an appropriate order. Edit selections, if necessary, unifying them with original transitions. Use the following pattern or something similar:

Introduction: Use standard attention devices to establish the theme. Lead into the first selection by explaining how it relates to the theme. Give the author, title, and source of selection. Keep it short.

Selections: Summarize the idea of the first selection and blend in a transition to the second selection. Tell the author and title. Continue this pattern for each selection.

Conclusion: End with the last selection if it provides a lasting impression. If an original conclusion seems more appropriate, summarize the last selection and generalize the theme. A final quotation or a profound statement relating to the theme is another variation.

A. Introduction

1. Should not be literal interpretation of the author's point of view.
2. Should be an interpretation of your own philosophical point of view on a particular problem or unique segment of society.
3. Theme should be clearly presented,.

4. Could include examples from personal life experience such as: being forced to make an unpopular decision, acting jealous, wanting revenge, hating someone, or feeling hurt. The introduction may include the humorous side of life.

B. Transitions

1. Must include the author's name, title, and source.
2. Must promote continuity of theme.
3. Must clearly tie to the piece of literature.

C. Selections

1. Some effective thematic interpretations have both serious and funny selections. The actual choices of literature may be influenced by several factors:
 - Variety of genres and styles -- prose, poetry, drama, song lyrics, essays
 - Variety of moods -- satire, comedy, drama
 - Length of cuttings
 - Pacing of literary selections
 - Depth of literary selections
 - Performance requirements such as vocal variety
2. There must be a minimum of three selections, each tied to the preceding selection by transition. (A selection can be any published writings, poetry, prose, plays, short stories, and songs.)
3. Each selection must clearly reflect the theme.
4. The three or more selections must be used in their entirety (i.e., a short poem) or must use a minimum of 150 words of a longer work.
5. Selections should come from diverse authors and sources. Selections may also come from different works by the author.

D. Presentation

1. Characterize the presentation so that individuals, images, messages, and situations are life-like and believable. Be as animated as possible. Rather than standing on the outside, merely reciting, step into the literature and become a part of it.
2. Vary the delivery to avoid a monotone or flat emotional level.
3. Memorize your introduction and transitions.
4. Practice the presentation for someone who will make worthwhile suggestions for improvement.