

Emerging Voices: Declamation

Overview:

Throughout its history, The Webb School has placed great importance on teaching students to speak confidently before a large audience. While this requirement has taken many forms over the years, the most traditional assignment is the declamation, a memorized piece of literature with an original introduction written by the performer. Each 9th grade student presents a declamation to the student body during chapel, and often new students in the junior year choose to do the same. In their subsequent years of high school, students build on the foundation of their declamation performance with an oration, a creative public performance, and finally the presentation of their own original research. This process enables students to leave the Webb School ready to share their ideas and findings with the world with poise and conviction.

Process:

1. SELECT A PASSAGE

The first step is to select a passage from either a work of literature, a historical or religious text, a speech or a poem. The passage should be of personal significance to you, such that it is worth your time to memorize it, and of literary merit to warrant the entire school community hearing it. It should show a sufficient complexity of writing to be appropriate for you to declaim. On the next page, you will find help with selecting your declamation as well as information about difficulty level and grading.

2. WRITE AN INTRODUCTION

Once your selection is approved, you will need to write a (roughly) 30 second introduction. No part of the introduction may be copied from any other source; it must be completely original. The goal of the introduction is to provide appropriate context to the listener; please see the next page for information about what to write.

3. COMMIT IT TO MEMORY

After you have selected a passage and written your introduction, you should start memorizing it **right away!** You will receive your official declamation date in an email very soon.

4. PRACTICE ON STAGE

You will need to practice your declamation with your advisor on stage several times to ensure that you are ready to go on your declamation day. Your advisor is ultimately responsible for determining whether you may take the stage on your scheduled date. Ms. Northrup is available for extra practice if necessary, but if you have not successfully practiced your declamation at least once, you may not take the stage on your declamation day and you will receive a late grade.

5. PERFORM YOUR DECLAMATION

On the day of your declamation, you will need to wear formal winter dress code. For ladies, this means tucked-in Oxford shirts, navy or khaki skirts no more than 3" above the knee with knee socks/tights or pants, and dress shoes. For gentlemen, this means Oxford shirts with ties, navy or khaki pants, a belt, and dress shoes. Blazers are encouraged but not required. **You may not wear tennis shoes or sandals.** If you are not in full dress code, you will not deliver your declamation on that day and you will receive a late grade.

You are expected to behave like a Webb lady or gentleman from the moment you set foot on stage until Chapel is dismissed. Sit up straight while others are speaking and maintain respectful behavior; no talking or fidgeting.

While presenting, students are not allowed to use a podium or hand gestures. You should stand still on stage with your hands at your sides or behind your back.

If you are absent the day of your declamation, we will reschedule your performance for another day, and you will not be penalized. If you are unprepared to declaim on your scheduled day, your declamation will be penalized one letter grade and you will be rescheduled for the next available space.

Grading:

Your grade in seminar will affect your honor roll standing; you can only make A-Honor Roll for the quarter by earning an A on your declamation; likewise, you can only make B-Honor Roll for the quarter by earning a B on your declamation. If you hope to earn an A each quarter in seminar, you should work closely with your advisor (and/or Ms. Northrup) to ensure that your performance meets this standard. You must earn at least an 80% on your performance before late penalties or you will be asked to re-perform your declamation.

What should I pick?

Good question! It's up to you. Good declamations are passages that speak truth. Have you read a book for school or for fun that you felt said something important? Do you have a favorite passage of scripture from your religious tradition? Have you listened to a speech given at a critical moment in history that changed our world? Have you read a poem that made you feel inspired? Any of these would make good declamations. Choose a text that speaks to you; you will find it easier to memorize and easier to perform.

Selections are scored based on their difficulty level. Think of it like diving or gymnastics at the Olympics – the harder your passage, the higher your grade will be. Feel free to contact Ms. Northrup if you're still not sure!

Grading:

Lexile levels will be used to determine the difficulty level of the text you select. This isn't a perfect system. Lexile levels are used to test the difficulty of a text by measuring sentence and word length, but sometimes a difficult or complex text won't have the longest words or sentences. The following are the general guidelines for how your declamation will be approved. When you think you've picked your declamation, please email it to Ms. Northrup and your advisor. We'll test the Lexile Level of your piece and help you determine how much of it you'll need to do to earn the score you want to earn. It's recommended that you start from a 100-point max score length and then shorten your piece later only if you must. The library has lots of resources for helping you choose your declamation.

Lexile level	Examples	90-point max score	100-point max score
Anything below 700	<i>Cat in the Hat</i> : 200-300 <i>The Spiderwick Chronicles</i> : 500-700	Lexile levels below 700 will not be approved without special permission.	
Levels 700-900	Luke 21, NIV translation: 700-800 Steve Job's graduation speech: 700-800	2:30 or more required	3:00 or more required
Levels 900+	Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail": 1100-1200 Polonius' monologue from <i>Hamlet</i> (Shakespeare): 900-1000	2:00 or more required	2:30 or more required

What should I write in my introduction?

Good question! The point of your introduction is to let your audience know what you're about to declaim and why it's important to the book it's part of and/or to the world at large.

Here are some questions to consider:

Does this selection have its own title?

Who is the author or speaker? Is it important for us to know anything about him/her to understand your piece?

What work does this come from? Which part?

What message does this convey?

How does it affect the rest of the story, or the world?

Answer whichever of these questions are appropriate to your passage in a concise, well-organized paragraph. (Though you can, you do not need to say why you chose it; the more important goal of this is to share the author's purpose.)

Here are some examples of well-written introductions:

“Throughout history, thousands of women have been locked away because they didn't fit the feminine stereotype. The list includes notables such as writer Zelda Fitzgerald, Saint Joan, actress Francis Farmer, and poet Sylvia Plath. Scholar, Dr. Phyllis Chesler suggests in her book *Women and Madness*, “To call a woman ‘crazy’ is to say that it's okay to dominate her. After that, her attempts to resist being dominated are ignored.” We can no longer ignore this treatment of women. In the following, Susan recounts her false incarceration into an insane asylum, in 1992, by her husband merely to get her out of his way. *Crazy* by Susan Hamilton”

(“Writing Introductions.” *Northern California Forensics Association*)

“Ob-la-di ob-la-da life goes on brother. La-la how the life goes on.” These words made famous by the Beatles are presented in one way or another throughout the ages in literature and song. When we struggle our parents tell us, “It's ok, you'll get through this. You won't even remember it a year from now.” We may even find ourselves comforting a friend by telling them to shake it off because life goes on. Although this phrase may seem trite, I find comfort in knowing that I am a part of a bigger picture. It is a good reminder that time is fleeting. In the poem “Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town” by EE Cummings, we are reminded that we are but a blip on the timeline of history and we should live each day with passion and know that the mistakes we make will not be remembered forever.

Grading:

This Rubric will be used to grade your introduction. The quality of your introduction will be considered as you deliver your declamation and could impact your final grade, especially if the graders are unsure whether you deserve an A or a B. Think of it as a tie breaker.

Rubric Categories	4	3	2	1	Score
Attention Grabber	The introduction begins with a strong hook or attention grabber related to declamation topic that is appropriate for the audience.	The introduction begins with a hook or attention grabber related to the declamation topic, but it is weak or rambling.	The introduction begins with a hook or attention grabber, but it is not clearly related to declamation topic.	The introduction is missing a hook or attention grabber or it is unrelated to declamation topic.	
Background information and message	Background information is adequate and does not overwhelm the listener.	Background information is present, but there is either unrelated information or chosen information overwhelms the listener.	Background information is inadequate and does not give the listener context for declamation text.	Background information is absent.	
Message/ Connection to Larger Text	Message and/or personal connection to larger work is clear, and vivid words give listener a strong expectation of the meaning and tone of the declamation to follow.	Message and/or connection to larger work is clear. Listener is left with an expectation of what they will hear in the declamation to follow.	Message and/or connection to larger work is not clear. Listener is left with questions of declamation to follow.	Message or connection to work is absent.	
Transition	A strong and smooth transition, including title/author is used at end of introduction to present declamation text.	A transition is used at end of introduction to present declamation text.	A transition is used at end of introduction, but author/title is missing, and/or transition lacks flow.	The transitions between ideas are unclear OR nonexistent.	
Grammar & Spelling	Author makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Author makes 1 error in grammar or spelling.	Author makes 2 errors in grammar or spelling.	Author makes 3 or more errors in grammar or spelling.	

Grade	_____/20 = ____ %
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