



# Overcoming Glossophobia (The fear of public speaking)




**MANY PEOPLE ARE TERRIFIED** by the thought of speaking in front of a large group of people. And, yet, public speaking can be a very useful life skill. Since our earliest days, Collingwood has always recognized the importance of public speaking. This led to the creation of Public Speaking Day many years ago. In its original format, each English class would complete a public speaking unit and select three students to go forward to the official Collingwood Public Speaking Day. The 60 students (12 per grade) would then compete for medals in two categories, persuasive and humorous.

This all changed in 2014 when Morven English teacher and public speaking coach Barbara Thureau was at a Pro D event and learned about a school that was hosting an annual school-wide public speaking tournament. “Over time we found that there were generally two or three students in most classes that were naturally good at public speaking,” said Barbara, “By limiting participation in the school-wide competition, we were sort of providing a disincentive for the other students to work and grow at public speaking.”

Inspired by what she had learned at the Pro D event, Barbara put together a plan for school leadership that would transform public speaking at Collingwood into a much more broadly inclusive program. Instead of just two categories, there would be five categories that spanned a diverse array of public speaking styles. These categories would include interpretive reading, dramatic monologue, TED talks, spoken word and a persuasive speech.

The rest is history. Six years later, we now have a third of Collingwood students at Morven speaking on Public Speaking Day. This year 210 students participated! Each speaker is judged by a three-person panel, randomly selected from all disciplines of Collingwood faculty. Judges are briefed on the different possibilities, what to look for in the speech and, finally, how to arrive at a score. One of the exciting byproducts of this event is that teachers from other departments have begun to see students in a light beyond their discipline. The day concludes with a showcase at the end of the afternoon before announcing the winners.

In 2016, Collingwood hosted the IISSC international independent public speaking competition with 175 talented speakers from around the world. In the last five years, four Collingwood students have qualified to become part of the Canadian team at the world championships, the pinnacle of competition in the high school world. The next one is in April 2020 in Shanghai, where Jena Yue will be one of 12 students that represent Canada.

“We have a lot of graduates that come back and tell us that public speaking served them well.” says Barbara, “Compared to their peers from other schools, our grads are much more comfortable speaking in front of people.” 



“Participating in regional, national and international events, I am honoured to be a part of an intellectual community embracing friendly competition, authentic ideas, and diverse discourse. By exploring current topics such as the China-Hong Kong Crisis or Greta Thunberg’s “Fridays For Future”, public speaking has motivated me to become a more politically and socially informed citizen.

- Eve Parry, Gr. 12

“Public speaking at Collingwood has allowed me to share my passions, new perspectives and thoughts, empowering me to feel heard and validated. These speeches are an emotional, creative outlet. It has also taught me an important life skill. Practising public speaking has allowed me to improve my ability to communicate and express myself, which has enabled me to feel confident in sharing my opinions and ideas.”

- Cassidy Foley, Gr. 10

“Collingwood has given me the chance to speak within the province, nation and even internationally. Going to Boston for the IISPSC competition, I was able to experience public speaking on a whole other level. I saw students from Bermuda, South Africa, Peru, and Canada come together to share their passion and love for public speaking. Public speaking has brought me all across the world already and soon to Shanghai where I will have the chance to represent Canada at the world championships.”

- Jena Yue, Gr. 10