Teacher in a Box: Creating Speech and Debate Curriculum for New Teachers

Education author Rick Smith best describes the traits of a new teacher: “Being a new teacher is like trying to fly an airplane while building it.”

How many of us can relate to this concept? We know this feeling of being “not prepared” for the unit plan, let alone individual lesson plans—and sometimes, we are afraid or too busy to seek out veteran teachers to assist in the planning process for our own lessons. When talking about speech and debate, we often have the added complication of a new teacher who lacks formal experience in the discipline.

To develop the blueprint for building our own airplane, the National Speech & Debate Association has embarked on the journey of creating Teacher in a Box for the new speech and debate educator. The NSDA also has partnered with other organizations to develop curriculum that can be implemented directly in the classroom. These lessons are developed and written by top speech and debate educators utilizing best practices and resources cultivated by the NSDA in the quest for excellence in our classrooms.

Curriculum Committee
The first step in creating our airplane was to develop a curriculum committee—part of the initiation phase. Formed four years ago, this ad hoc committee consists of Dr. Josh Anderson, Olathe Northwest High School, KS; Pam McComas, NSDA Board Member, KS; Steve Meadows, Danville High School, KY; Renee Motter, Air Academy High School, CO; Gail Naylor, retired coach from Silver Lake High School, KS; James Weaver, National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), IN; and Derek Yuill, Gabriellino High School, CA.
Steve Schappaugh, Director of Community Engagement, and Nicole Wanzer-Serrano, Director of Development, are the national office liaisons who helped develop the concept of Teacher in a Box.

### Educational Partnerships

In addition to establishing the curriculum committee, the NSDA recently expanded its engineering crew and partnered with NAMLE (National Association of Media Literacy Education) and P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Learning).

NAMLE is at the forefront of efforts to encourage media literacy in youth and adults, and we know that speech and debate gives students the skills to effectively understand, analyze, and question the messages they are bombarded with from numerous sources on a daily basis. Speech and debate can be a vehicle through which media literacy is achieved. In conjunction with NAMLE, the NSDA co-developed lesson plans for the 2016 presidential election cycle, which are available to our members online (https://namle.net/2016-presidential-election/) and can be used in different disciplines to look at and analyze various aspects of this presidential election.

Working with P21 provides additional advocacy opportunities for the NSDA. By becoming a member, the NSDA has joined P21’s diverse coalition of business community, education leaders, and policy-makers working together to prepare learners along the entire continuum of learning. P21 provides a framework, through their 4Cs of Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Collaboration, via which we can develop curriculum that is attractive to administrators and teachers who prize 21st century skills.

While these partnerships have moved the NSDA forward in developing curriculum to give more students access to speech and debate, the committee decided there was an immediate need to build debate and speech lessons for “new teachers” to utilize in their classrooms as they get their programs off the ground.

### Teacher in a Box Takes Flight

Phase 2 of our project involved creating a blueprint for our curriculum—the integration phase. This past June, veteran Pennsylvania coach Sharon Volpe joined co-chairs of curriculum writing Renee Motter and Pam McComas to create, develop, and write a set of Public Forum lesson plans for new teachers.

Assessing the current PF resources, the writers concluded the priority was to integrate webinars, the PF textbook, final round videos, and existing lesson plans, as well as write new lessons, develop supplemental materials, brand all materials, and develop a lesson plan template based on Understanding by Design by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. After this direction was established, the process of creating a logical progression of lessons into a unified unit became the goal.

### Curriculum Writers

- **Pam McComas** – Kansas
  
Pam is a seven-diamond coach and member of the NSDA Board of Directors. She is the 2016 recipient of the NFHS Outstanding Speech/Debate/Theatre award. She has an M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction and served 40 years as a secondary teacher.

- **Renee Motter** – Colorado
  
Renee is the Speech and Debate Head Coach and Teacher at Air Academy High School. She earned her M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction and has 20 years of experience in high school classrooms. She is a two-diamond coach.

- **Sharon Volpe** – Pennsylvania
  
Sharon teaches calculus and coaches speech and debate at North Allegheny High School. She has a bachelor’s of science degree in applied mathematics and a master’s degree in mathematics education. She is a four-diamond coach.
For Public Forum Debate, the final blueprint is in the implementation phase. As the 2016-2017 school year gets underway, the complete PF curriculum is available on the NSDA’s website. Anyone can visit www.speechanddebate.org, click the “Resources” menu, drop down to “Search/View All Resources,” and then click on “Teacher in a Box” to access the lesson plans complete with unit summary.

On the Horizon
Without question, there is a need for more curriculum. Ongoing development of debate lesson plans will consist of Policy Debate, Lincoln-Douglas Debate, and Congressional Debate. After tackling the debate events, the committee plans to create lessons that utilize existing resources and some newly designed ones to teach all NSDA main events. Finally, the committee will look toward creating Teacher in a Box 2.0, which will focus on more advanced strategies and skills in each event.

In developing these lessons and integrating resources already cultivated by the NSDA, our hope is new speech and debate teachers and coaches will feel a little less like they are building a plane in the sky and a little more like they are effectively giving students a voice. Our hope is that new speech and debate educators will hear about Teacher in a Box, use the lessons and resources, and give us feedback to make these materials even better.

Get Involved!
The committee is seeking experienced teachers in various speech and debate content areas to assist in our curriculum writing endeavors. If you’d like to be part of future curriculum writing groups, please contact Pam McComas at pmccomas1434@gmail.com or complete our form at http://tinyurl.com/nsdateacherinabox.

Teacher in a Box:
Public Forum Debate
This set of Public Forum Debate lessons for Teacher in a Box is designed for the novice coach and students. The lessons are sequential and should be presented in this order.

Each PF lesson begins with an essential question and a set of objectives. The lessons connect existing material, as well as introduce new material for Public Forum Debate. There are links to webinars, handouts, and extended materials.

Lesson 1 What is Debate?
Lesson 2 What is Public Forum Debate?
Lesson 3 Resolution Analysis
Lesson 4 Research
Lesson 5 Evidence and Tagging
Lesson 6 What is an Argument?
Lesson 7 Writing the PF Case
Lesson 8 Flowing
Lesson 9 Crossfire Questioning
Lesson 10 Debate Demo
Lesson 11 Delivery
Lesson 12 Refutation
Lesson 13 Practice Debates
Lesson 14 Tournament Etiquette

Find these and other materials under the Resources menu: www.speechanddebate.org