

# COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM ORAL INTERP (POI) UNIT OUTLINE

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What makes a successful Program Oral Interp performance?

## ACTIVITIES:

- Students will review the NSDA rules for POI, including rules for approved source material.
- Students will work in groups to select an argument/thesis for a group POI.
- Students will work in groups to select literature to include in a program.
- Students will craft/write a POI as a group.
- Students will block and perform a POI as a collaborative performance.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Access to recorded performances of POI at the NSDA National Tournament.
- Post Its for idea sharing.
- Access to a variety of literary material (internet, library, etc.)

## OVERVIEW OF UNIT:

- Although Program Oral Interp is an individual event at NSDA-sanctioned tournaments, in the world of Slam Poetry, performances called co-labs provide the opportunity for groups (usually 3 or more) performers collaborating to write and perform a poem. The collaborative nature of this activity can be used as a scaffold for new interpers or as a team building exercise for more advanced/experienced students.
- Using this as a model, this unit guides students to collaboratively create a Program Oral Interp performance by developing an argument, finding multi-genre pieces that support that argument, and blocking the performance.

### Note:

*Rather than being a step by step set of directions of what to do in your classroom, this unit outline is intended to serve as a guide for your own lesson planning and assessment practices. Grading instructions are not included in this unit because schools use different approaches and methodologies when it comes to group work and grading in general. This unit could be a “practice” unit where students are graded on participation or reflection. Or a teacher could create a rubric for performance and group work. There are many ways to use this type of activity as part of a larger unit on interpretive performance or literary analysis. If you develop a method for assessment that works for you please feel free to share with us at the NSDA and we’d be glad to make it available to other educators.*

## Part One – Building Background Knowledge

- a) Introduce POI to Students / Review the basic tenets of POI.
  - i) Provide students the *Getting Started Guide – POI* <https://www.speechanddebate.org/poi-getting-started-guide/>
  - ii) Basic Rules
    - (1) Ten minutes maximum (30 second grace period)
    - (2) Multi-Genre (prose, poetry, & drama)
    - (3) Includes a performer-written introduction.
    - (4) Should be thematic and make an argument.
  
- b) Show students National Tournament final round videos. Be sure to select several different performances – ask
  - i) 2017 Champion – Quest Broussard - <https://youtu.be/ASMW87LBQJI>
  - ii) 2017 Final Round – <https://www.speechanddebate.org/nationals-2017-program-oral-interpretation-finals/> (must be signed in to access)
  - iii) 2016 Final Round - <https://www.speechanddebate.org/nationals-2016-program-oral-interpretation-finals/> (must be signed in to access)
  
- c) Class Discussion
  - i) While Watching – Have students use post its to record first impressions of POI and each of the performances they’ve seen. Group the post its by question and ask students to “gallery walk” and review the different responses of their classmates
    - (1) What is the most powerful moment of a program?
    - (2) How does the performer transition between pieces?
    - (3) In your own words, what is the argument or thesis of the program?
  - ii) Post Gallery Walk
    - (1) Small Group Sharing
      - (a) Which piece stands out in your mind? Why?
      - (b) What are some topics that might make a good POI theme?
      - (c) How is POI different from different Interp events?
      - (d) How do the performers use their binder as part of their piece?
    - (2) Share out group answers with class.
  
- d) Create Groups for Program Creation and Performance
  - i) Option 1 – Teacher Assigned Groups
  - ii) Option 2 – Student Selected Groups
    - (1) Have students brainstorm themes/arguments they would like to make in a POI
    - (2) Have students work together to form groups of similar theme/argument
    - (3) Ask students to develop their ideas into one overarching theme/argument.

## Part Two – Laying the Foundation

- a) Review basic tenets of POI
  - i) Review Rules
    - (1) Ten minutes maximum (30 second grace period)
    - (2) Multi-Genre (prose, poetry, & drama)
    - (3) Includes a performer-written introduction.
    - (4) Should be thematic and make an argument.
  - ii) Review/Teach Dramatic Structure – Most POIs follow this structure and doing so helps students organize their program.
    - (1) Exposition – Introduces the characters, background information, and context.
    - (2) Inciting Incident – The event or moment where the audience is introduced to the argument or thesis of the program.
    - (3) Rising Action – Series of moments/pieces that build toward the climax of the program.
    - (4) Climax – The turning point or the most intense moment in the program.
    - (5) Falling Action – The take away or potential solutions to the problem being addressed.
- b) Introduce Collaborative POI Activity
  - i) Make it clear to students that this project is collaborative even though POI traditionally is not. Potentially, tell them why working as a team will help them grow as performers (learn from each other, challenge each other, practice justifying performative choices, etc.)
  - ii) Create standards for group interaction. Consider having the groups write norms for group participation that include respect, listening, and how to resolve conflict. There will be moments when students don't agree – discuss how those disagreements will be handled in the context of this project.
  - iii) Tailor the “rules” of POI to fit the time you have in your classroom. Will the performances need to be memorized? If you have students with interp experience they may be able to craft a full 10-minute performance in the provided time whereas less experienced students may be more successful with a three or four-minute time maximum.
  - iv) Provide students a written set of expectations/directions. Provide students information about how this activity will be assessed/graded.
  - v) Optional – Show slam poetry co-lab performances. It may be difficult for students to visualize how a group of people can perform one POI. Consider using *Brave New Voices* Final Rounds – many can be found on the Youth Speaks YouTube channel. These feature high school aged students performing original poetry and generally they make very clear arguments.
    - (1) Discuss how the physicality of these slam poetry performances add to the message/argument being shared.
    - (2) Discuss how the poets work together to create visual imagery.
    - (3) Discuss how the poets convey emotion through vocal and physical choices.

## Part Three – Crafting an Argument and Finding Literature

- a) Challenge students to explain their group’s argument in a few sentences. Have them distill it down to a thesis that is specific enough to be clear but broad enough that they can find multiple texts and perspectives into their program. For some groups, this may take a while and they’ll need abundant coaching, other groups will be able to write their thesis quickly and can move on to the next step.
- b) Have students begin looking for pieces to include in their programs. This is likely the part of the process that will take the longest and be the most “frustrating” (for both you and your students)! Guide your students to look for NSDA approved selections in the follow places:
  - i) Published collections that center upon a theme - especially ones that include multiple genres. *Example: Of Poetry and Protest: From Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin by Cushway, Warr, & Smith*
  - ii) Published Librettos/Scripts of Musicals - many songs make great arguments or tell narrative stories (and generally approved for use by the NSDA) *Example: Dear Evan Hansen (TCG Edition) by Levenson*
  - iii) Published Spoken Word Poetry - many of the spoken word poets that students are drawn to on YouTube or other video platforms have published their work in text form and those published versions are perfect for using in a POI. *Example: Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution edited by Olson*
  - iv) Newspaper and Magazine Articles - great sources for statistics, quotations, and contextual information *Example: “What Science Says to Do If Your Loved One Has an Opioid Addiction” by Maia Szalavitz (From FiveThirtyEight)*
  - v) TED Talks - with official transcripts - can serve as a great anchor piece or a source that helps provide the “big idea.” *Example: “Violence Against Women - it’s a men’s issue” by Katz*
- c) As the students begin finding pieces that they want to use as part of their program, either digitally or on paper have students take each selection and give it its own font or color. This helps the students to visually associate the piece with a character.
- d) Once the students feel they have enough pieces to work with the shuffling begins. Revisit the dramatic structure that was taught earlier and have students work together to begin blending the pieces together. Challenge them to find a through line that will connect the pieces together. When organizing their program students should strive to be flexible and keep “trying things” until they find the “right” order to pieces. It often helps students to use a through line for their transitions. Perhaps they have a list or a poem that they perform a bit of between each piece... but somehow, they connect seemingly disconnected pieces together with transition material that adds to the performance, their argument, and their storytelling.

## Part Four – Blocking

- a) NSDA Rules about Blocking
  - i) The NSDA has limited rules about blocking for interp events. For POI the only specific blocking related rules are related to the use of a manuscript.
  - ii) Manuscripts: The use of a manuscript during the performance is required. Common practices include the use of a binder or folder. Have students work on blocking while holding their binder or manuscript.
  - iii) To save yourself much headache, once a student has finalized the order of their piece and is ready to put it in the binder (many students tape/glue their selections onto black cardstock that they then place into “slicks” or plastic page protectors) they should number each page and then make a copy of the program in order in its entirety. Inevitably, the pages will fall out of the book and get lost or shuffled. Having a second set is a great time saver.
  
- b) Group Blocking
  - i) Clearly state your expectations for the blocking of programs.  
Things to consider:
    - (1) Do all students have to be part of the performance?
    - (2) How active do the students need to be during the performance?
    - (3) Where will you be performing these programs/how much space do the performers have?
    - (4) Are students required to memorize their program?
    - (5) How much time do they have to block and practice their blocking?
    - (6) Will the blocking process be part of their assessment?
  - ii) Monitor, Monitor, Monitor! As students are blocking arguments are likely to spring up, students might get off track, and students may get frustrated. Be prepared to be side coaching throughout the process – but give your students the freedom to make their own blocking choices based on their comfort level and their inspiration.
  - iii) Blocking a POI piece uses many of the same best practices as other interp events. One of the things that makes POI unique is how different selections can/should have different characterization and “personalities.” It may work for some students to block the “pieces” individually and then splice the fragments of those pieces back together.
  - iv) Finally, encourage students to value silence and stillness in their POI. POIs need not be frenetic. It isn’t all about page turns and changing voices. Sometimes it is important to give the audience and judges a second or two to process what they’ve just heard and seen.

## Part Five – Performance & Reflection

- i) Prep your Audience
  - (1) Arrange the space so that transitions between programs can be quick and effortless.
  - (2) Consider- what is “appropriate” in a competitive setting (quiet, polite clapping, little audience response/participation) may not be what is appropriate for the class setting. Let your students know ahead of time about your expectations for audience behavior.
  - (3) If students will be assessing/judging/scoring their peers provide information about constructive criticism and effective feedback.
- ii) Prep your Performers
  - (1) Review previously discussed expectations for performance (if grading performances)
  - (2) Pump them up! Especially important if you have beginner students, make sure that the environment in the room is positive and supportive so that nervous students feel that they are free to relax and show off their work.
  - (3) Determine a performance order.
  - (4) Instruct students on how you will transition between programs.
- iii) Potential Reflection Prompts – a variety of prompts to use for written or verbal reflection.
  - (1) Which program do you “agree with” the most? What was the argument to program made? How did the pieces the performers choose demonstrate the group’s point of view? What would you add to this program?
  - (2) What do you feel is missing from your own program? If you feel your piece is “perfect” imagine that you must add a minute to your performance – what would you add? How would it improve your group’s program?
  - (3) Which group had the most thought-provoking blocking? What did they do that surprised you or gave you something to think about? How does our body language and the way we use our bodies influence the meaning of the words we are saying? In a POI? In life?
  - (4) What did you learn about your theme/argument as you searched for pieces to include in your program? How has your perspective on your chosen subject deepened since you began this activity?