

Humorous Interpretation (HI)

Using a play, short story, or other published work, students perform a selection of one or more portions of a piece up to ten minutes in length. Humorous Interpretation is designed to test a student's comedic skills through script analysis, delivery, timing, and character development. Competitors may portray one or multiple characters. No props or costumes may be used. Performances can also include an introduction written by the student to contextualize the performance and state the title and author.

Considerations for Selecting HI Literature:

When searching for literature, a student should look for more than one-liner jokes. Humor can be created through strategic choreography, creative characterization, and dynamic non-verbal reactions. Typical selection topics range from light-hearted material including interpretations of comics, children's literature, plays, short stories, and more. Considerations for selecting an HI topic should include the student's age, maturity, and school standards.

Traits of Successful HI Performers:

When considering what event you should choose, or which direction to point a student when selecting an event, here are some traits of successful HI-ers to keep in mind...

- Creative
- Physical control
- Bold/ high energy
- Ability to think outside the box
- Dynamic physical and vocal techniques
- Risk- taker

Basic Understanding:

Humorous Interpretation, as its name indicates, is humorous. Competitors use multi-character selections to tell relatable stories using humor as a device to connect with the audience. Think about your favorite comedian's latest stand up routine, or something funny that recently happened. Ask yourself why it's funny. Then ask yourself if that joke would be funny to, say, your mom, or great-great Uncle Joe. Humor is a complex human quirk. Each individual's sense of humor is unique. However, other aspects of humor are more universal in nature. So, when choosing an HI, it is imperative to consider not only the humorous elements of the selection, but also to keep in mind how the story itself will appeal to the audience. Not everyone will laugh at the same joke, but if a character's plight is relatable, the audience will identify with him or her. Humor in a Humorous Interpretation should be tasteful and motivated.

Research:

Finding an HI that's right for you may seem a little daunting. Go to your local library, visit the biographies section of a bookstore, or visit Play Scripts, Dramatists, or Samuel French online. These are just a few of the places you may find material. There are a few things to keep in mind when questing for a script. We have scripts specifically appropriate for Middle School Success on our website. When looking for scripts, do not have fewer than 4 characters!

Organizing:

You only have ten minutes in an HI to tell a story and make an audience laugh. Pick your moments accordingly. Decide what jokes you want to play up, and what parts of your story will contrast the humorous moments. As you finalize your cutting, read it aloud to help make informed decisions about characterization and blocking. Beat out your script. This means reading the script aloud and making notes as you go. As you read aloud, use symbols to indicate shorter pauses "/" or longer pauses "//." Consider the emotionality behind each line. Ask yourself what the motivation for the characters' actions are. Use this to influence choices. Make sure your choices are not just funny for the sake of funny, but make sense contextually in your script. Make sure you are listening for the reactions of the characters to the lines that came before. If you are doing a multi-character performance, remember that this is a dialogue, and should be treated as such.

Structural Components:

Structure of an Interp (taken from *Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life*).

TEASER • 0:00 – 1:30 *Previews the topic and mood of the selection*

INTRO • 1:30 – 3:00 *Explains the purpose of the performance*

EXPOSITION • 3:00 – 3:30 *Introduces characters and setting*

INCITING INCIDENT • 3:30 – 4:00 *Sends the conflict into motion*

RISING ACTION • 4:00 – 7:30 *Complicates the conflict*

CLIMAX • 7:30 – 8:30 *Emotional peak of the performance*

FALLING ACTION • 8:30 – 9:30 *Resolves the conflict*

Strengths and Limitations:

HI often requires a performer to manipulate their voice, move quickly in and out of different characters, and have a strong sense of comedic timing. Think about your vocal register when looking at a cutting. Would you be required to play characters with voices in your upper register? What characters would be played using your lower register? How many ways can you manipulate your voice? How well can you manipulate your body and facial expression to create distinct, unique characters? If you have limited physical or vocal control, it might be beneficial to choose a selection with fewer characters. Think about your abilities outside of acting: can you sing, dance, stand on your head? Could those skills be utilized in your performance? Be aware of how you can showcase your unique skill set.

What makes you laugh? This is your piece, your performance, and your interpretation. Find writing you think is hilarious. If it makes you laugh, and you enjoy performing it, then your audience will enjoy it, too.

Is it honest? Is it relatable? Pick a piece with meaning. As performers, we not only look to entertain our audience, but to engage them in meaningful communication through performance.