

## JUST FOR FUN

by Kesten Blake

What does a Competition Speech and Debate Class do for finals? Present their selections again? Debate against each other one more time? As finals approached, I asked my class what they wanted to do for their final. They quickly decided that they would like to host a meet that would be fun. At first I was resistant; it would be too much work for me; and no one would want to come to another meet, especially one that involved events no one had ever heard of before.

They argued with me that they would do the work and that the speakers in our area of Orange County, California wanted an opportunity to spend some stress free time together. (How can speech competition be stress free? Wait and see what they did.) Because this particular group of speakers is so bright and dedicated, I came to the following compromise. They could plan the meet, create the events, write the topics, and create an invitation. Once that was done, I would talk to coaches in the area to see if they would agree to bring their teams.

### Planning

In class the students worked as a whole group to define the events which, in their opinion, had to require no advance preparation on the part of the competitors. They wanted everyone to do something as a team; so the entry requirement was that every competitor had to participate in their team's Reader's Theater. The individual events were Impromptu, Impromptu Story-telling, Spontaneous Argumentation (impromptu debate), Team Spon-

taneous Argumentation, Impromptu Congress, Impromptu Interpretation (cold reading), Impromptu Expository Speaking, and Mime. Half of these events were created by my students.

Coaches said they probably could find one or two students willing to come to our campus after school on a Thursday to compete in our meet; so the invitations were finalized and mailed or faxed. Word of our meet was spread at a large invitational meet the weekend before our "Just for Fun" meet. Much to my pleasure, many there, including the coach of the sponsoring university, expressed their delight in the concept of a fun gathering. Suddenly the meet which I had feared would not have even a dozen entrants from two schools (not enough to grant NFL points) grew to a collection of more than 40 students from six schools. There were enough entrants for all eight of the individual events.

Class members put in all of class time for two weeks plus two extended class days (staying for three hours beyond our normal class time) meeting campus requirements for facilities use, creating awards, designing ballots, writing topics, and scheduling the events. We charged no entry fees; so the students made "Laurel" wreaths to give as awards. When the supplies were brought in, the laurel turned out to be eucalyptus, but the wreathes were made and decorated with colored ribbon nonetheless. Special awards were "paper plate awards" which were really paper plates with the award titles written on them. Special awards were given

for the most glib, the best use of a bad analogy, most abusive, biggest kiss up, and others of that ilk.

### Fun Meet

The meet itself was a total success. Students were busy, happy, and well mannered. The meet left very little down time, and the plans the students made covered most of the possible problems. They offered a "money back guarantee" if anyone was dissatisfied, but no one even asked for the refund. As I walked the halls during rounds, I was truly amazed at how well everything was going. My students acted as hosts, directors, and judges for all the events. There was not even one complaint from teachers whose rooms were used after hours.

The awards assembly, like all other public aspects of the event, was managed entirely by the students. The students "knighted" each award winner and placed a wreath on their heads. The competitors accepted the awards with just as much gravity and pride as they accept trophies at serious meets. We were finished by 7:30 pm.

I was right when I figured this would mean some extra work on my part, but it wasn't that much more work than other finals I have given. I oversaw the students work to develop this activity, assisting with problem solving and suggesting possible problems to be solved. I paneled all the events (the night before), copied all the paperwork, contacted teachers whose rooms were to be used, and tabulated all the events.