

ORAL INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE: A DISCIPLINE OR AN EVENT

by Collette Mikesell Winfield

Somewhere in every speech coach's file there's a copy of "Yellow Wallpaper". You remember the wrenching monologue! The young woman, for reasons now forgotten, is confined to this room, and this room is covered with yellow wallpaper, and the yellow wallpaper is driving her more crazy than she was already before someone confined her to this yellow wallpapered room.

For years, "Yellow Wallpaper" was the "standard" in the old event called memorized dramatic declamation. You remember "declamation"; "elocutionary recitation," . . . "harangue" at its best. In the old days, judges heard not only dramatic "dec", but oratorical dec (vehemently delivered) and humorous dec (exaggeration plus), as well. Those were the days, at least in Iowa High School speech, when coaches each fall restocked their files with 70-cents-each cuttings from Wetmore Declamation Bureau and Edna Means Dramatic Service. Those were the days when coaches studied the talent levels of their "pupils" and rubbed their hands in glee when one of them appeared to have the "talent" to handle "Yellow Wallpaper". Why? Because "Yellow Wallpaper" won. Those were the days of much "event" and not much "discipline".

I don't know how much talk went on in Judges' Hospitality rooms in those days about "terrible interp", about "How many more times am I going to have to listen to that 'Wallpaper' thing," about "Why can't these kids do something besides yell and screech at me?" about pieces that "are just not appropriate," and about "Whatever happened to good literature?" I was a student during those days, doing a little "Wallpapering", "Leacocking", and "Speech Judge's Nightmaring" myself. I only waited for the "1"'s to appear. For me as a student, winning was all. So I picked what would win, and I performed it in order to "win". For me, interp was an event. I have a feeling that I was not very different from the young people who enter the "event" called interp today.

I have no idea whether I did "good" interp as a high school student or not. I didn't know much about interp, so chances are that I probably yelled, and screamed, and patronized, and bulged my eyes with the best of them. I do remember believing that the more traumatic or dramatic something was, the better. The more "ha ha" funny something was, the better. It's probably just as well that I will never hear myself as judges heard me then.

But now, I judge the "event". I haven't had anyone dump "Yellow Wallpaper" on me during recent years, but what I have heard in some of these rounds has produced a nightmare or two. I've been yelled at, screamed at, and patronized. I've seen bulging eyes, bulging neck chords, and bulging mouths. The over-dramatic! The overdone! The overkill! Technique at the expense of feeling. The "eventers" on their way to "1"'s and all-tournament trophies. Volume in place of intensity, bent-over and distorted bodies in place of authentic age; cracking, whiny writhing voices and horror-house poses to present every over-55 character ever created by poet, novelist, or playwright. I've heard the rhythm of Shakespeare turned into lousy prose. I've heard all 1,564 lines of "The Congo" sung in a monotonous inflectional pattern that never lets the voice go higher than this nor lower than this. I have listened to every ". . . man in the moon marigold" in the country, sometimes two times in a round. I have sighed. My mind has wandered. My eyes have grown glassy. My head has nodded. Sometimes I am embarrassed for the young students who grit their teeth at me, wrench their hands, throw their heads, roll their eyes, screech with forced laughter, and bellow at the tops of their lungs. Where do they get this stuff, anyway? Real human beings don't behave like this! Do they? Well, their experience tells them that this "stuff" wins, and winning is what an "event" in Forensics competition is all about.

Oh, yes! Still I judge. And

though I complain about what I hear or don't hear, I keep thinking there's something important about this "event". And there is.

Good Reading Connects Us With Truths

Charles Laughton, one of the world's finest interpreters, commented once that one of the reasons people liked to hear him read in public was that "for the moment, they [were] all bound together, and momentarily [lost] their sense of being alone" (*The Atlantic*, June, 1950). Corny as it may sound, deep in each of us is a loneliness that, in part at least, can be satisfied by the truths about human experience told to us by the poets, the essayists, the novelists, and the playwrights who give us the literature to interpret. Altruistic? Yes. But a reason for preserving the event that ought to be seriously considered in this age of non-connection with anything.

Literature Connects Us With Themes and Life Experience

Several years ago, when the content of lit books was divided up into value units (Determination, The Lessons of Life, Courage, Love), there was a very good chance that a freshman or sophomore in high school might really understand that "The quality of mercy is not strained" and that there are "miles to go" before any of us can sleep and that a person who feels spiritually fulfilled just does not go home "one calm, summer night" and "put a bullet through his head." Chances are that human strengths and weaknesses were talked about more frequently in the literature and speech classroom and that students had better opportunity to describe how and why a parable works. Without the help of the lit book, themes, and discussion about human experience, I'm not sure there are many places in this busy world, this technologically bound society, for young students to think long or seriously about love and hate, death,

jealousy, mercy, ambition, and Nature.

I remember the first time that "time", and the passing of time, and age, and loss, and death really hit me emotionally. Funerals were not uncommon to me. I had experienced many deaths by the time I was 16. None of them impacted upon me as significantly as did Doug Spaulding's experience in *Dandelion Wine* when he emotionally recognizes age and time and loss and death for the first time as a 12-year-old. I read and read and reread the section that details his illness, an illness adults were afraid would kill him. No one knew why Doug was ill. The reader knows that it's his inability to accept time, and loss, and death. My experience with Doug Spaulding was crucial to my own growth. Later in life, my experiences with Brutus, Prufrock, Richard Cory, Miniver Cheevy, Philip Carey, "Patterns", and Stephen Daedalus were equally crucial to my growth. But these experiences, remember, came through a value-centered approach to literature which my instructors used.

Is It Any Wonder?

We've become a society that must find ways to escape from the stress that's killing us all. Our young students reflect our own problems focusing on depth. Court TV, the saga of O.J. Simpson, "Married With Children", Beevis and Butthead, Harlequin novels, the *National Enquirer*, the *Star* and sitcom after sitcom serve as models of the depth we are not able to tolerate. Is it any wonder that our students, generally, are light-years from the power and mastery of a language that can carry the breadth and depth of human experience? Is it any wonder that some of the "literature" chosen by students for the interp event is shallow, mundane, obscene, profane, and downright crude? Is it any wonder that some students never seem to move from the "technique" into the experience of the literature?

Students cannot interpret what they do not understand. Nor can they "be interested" in literature they cannot understand; in literature they cannot "identify" with; in literature they have not "lived" to some extent.

Can Students Really Understand?

But let's be realistic. We're working with 15, 16, 17, and 18-year-olds. Can they really understand the evil of Iago, the torture of Brutus, the emptiness of Richard Cory? Can they really enrich the universal experience of the literature they choose by drawing on their own experience? Probably not. Not unless we begin to teach them some ways to understand the depth of Iago's evil, the pain of Brutus, and the spiritual barrenness of Cory. Unless we are willing to teach, to strengthen the discipline of interpretation, we face nothing but the technique-ridden pile of "Wallpaper" this event has been prone to encourage.

Students who "go out for" interp likely do so because they believe they can "do" the event. They likely want to "win" the event. It's possible that they have heard someone older on their high school speech team "do" some "funny" or "traumatic" piece that won. Bingo!! They want to do "that story so-and-so did." They want to "try that cutting that won district last year." And so the cycle goes. Students without real education in interpretation picking up pieces of literature that are "popular" or that are beyond them or that they have not studied and analyzed. Techniqueville, here we come!

How Shall The Interpreter Work?

It wasn't until I went off to the University of Northern Iowa and met Elaine McDavitt, the Charlotte Lee of Iowa, that I learned that there was something better to do with literature, even "Yellow Wallpaper," than yell it, scream it, grind my teeth at it, and generally overdo it to the point of death.

The "Yellow Wallpaper" issue comes back to some fundamental questions much older than the "What will win" question. The fundamental questions lying at the root of oral interpretation in forensic competitions are "Shall the interpreter be trained or shall the interpreter be educated?" "Shall the interpreter learn to work through the literature or on top of the literature? "Shall extrinsic skills be applied by the student interpreter, or shall the interpreter learn to mask

those skills and embrace the art that comes from authentically understanding the human experience inside the literature?"

I hear the moans and groans of speech coaches all over the country. "Do you mean I have to guide each student in selecting a cutting for interp?" Yes. "Do you mean I'm supposed to expand a student's awareness of good literature?" Yes. "Do you mean that all these 'winning' cuttings have to go?" No. "Do you mean that I have to turn every artificial performance from a student into authentic interpretation?" Absolutely. It's not as difficult as it may appear. And unless someone makes the first move, the "event" called interpretation is doomed for the trash can.

How Much Technique Shall We Teach?

True! "Techniques" have to be learned. Techniques of voice and techniques of body must be practiced over and over again, just as one practices scales and arpeggios and pivot shots and three pointers and split-fingered fastballs. Practicing the techniques of voice means learning what the voice can do in terms of pitch, and range, and quality, and force, and intensity, and inflection. Practicing means learning how these elements of voice must be used in order to recreate beauty, and age, and anger, and hurt, and disappointment, and joy, and how many more pieces of experience for an audience.

Practicing the techniques of body means learning what the face can do, what the head and neck can do, what the entire body can do, overtly and covertly. Practicing means learning how those elements of body movement and intensity must be used in order to recreate fear, and peace, and jealousy, and question, and happiness, and pain, and enthusiasm, and hate, and love, and how many more pieces of experience for an audience.

Practicing the techniques of voice and the techniques of body requires the student to listen to himself again and again and again and watch himself again and again and again. The student interpreter must learn to hear herself as others hear her and see herself as others see her.

The practicing of techniques

requires the student to try different things with the voice and body and to recognize that words (verbs and adjectives particularly) carry feelings. The voice should not be sounding the same on the word "spinning" as it sounds on the word "whispering." The voice should not be sounding the same on the word "flung" as it sounds on the word "prissy." On and on the study of language, its meaning; the voice and body, their power and flexibility go. Anyone who intends to communicate well through life will be continually in the process of studying language and its meaning; the voice and body, their power and flexibility.

The oral interpretation of literature is not easy, and students should not be led to believe that it is.

Techniques Must Be Automatic

Learning to breathe from the diaphragm; learning to change pitch, rate, emphasis, quality, duration, and inflection in order to create certain effects is mandatory for the interpreter. Learning to use the facial muscles, the neck muscles, the shoulder muscles, posture and positioning in order to create certain effects is mandatory. The skills of voice and body must be developed. No one picks up a baseball in a championship game and throws the perfect slider for the first time in his life. The pitcher who can use the slider to strike out the .434 hitter in the bottom of the ninth inning with a one-run lead and the based loaded is the pitcher who remembers exactly what his body, his legs, his hips, his arm, his hand, his fingers, his shoulders, his head, his neck, and his mind have to do in order to re-create the perfect slider. The more the skills, the techniques, are practiced, the more automatic the recall of those techniques becomes.

Practice Is Imperative!!

Aha! The more the skills, the techniques are practiced, the more automatic the recall of those techniques becomes! Without enough practice, the techniques look and sound like techniques. With enough practice, the techniques become part of the student. They look and sound natural. They look and sound

easy. They are authentic, and thus, have become art.

"But there's no time to do all of this," I hear the clamoring masses of coaches exclaiming!

Maybe there is.

Some approaches to working with oral interpreters can potentially make better orators, better extempers, and better debaters. And the number one approach involves doing with groups of students what we sometimes try doing with individual students, one at a time. It's the working one on one that burns us out.

Let's Uncover Some Dusty, But Valuable, Practice Exercises!

The old school of elocution and declamation led to some now old and forgotten speech textbooks that contained some wonderful "technique practice" exercises (exercises used when the world of speech education focused on teaching voice and diction). The *New American Speech* by Hedde and Brigrance is one of those old textbooks. In it, were poems for practice; poems that rhymed; poems that the student had to read using different voice qualities (raspy, thin, sepulcher, full-rounded, breathy). Through the practice, the student was to come to some understanding of his own voice's ability and its limitations. In it were short descriptive cuttings, full of adjectives and adjective phrases. Full of color words which the student was to practice saying so the words actually sounded like their meanings (onomatopoeia at its best). In it were character monologues, some of them dialectical, through which the student was to bring a character to life, and to "hear" the missing side of the conversation, and to practice the duration of pause necessary for us, as audience, to imagine what was said by the missing character (*ala* Bob Newhart). In it were dialogues, through which the student practiced changes of voice, changes of stature to suggest the differences in the two people speaking. In it were example statements which the student was to practice by changing emphasis, placing the emphasis on a different word each time the statement was read. Through such an exercise the student came to understand how

meaning changed as emphasis changed. Tracking down an old Hedde and Brigrance book, or some other text from the 30's, 40's, and 50's and using some of the old "technique-building" exercises of voice and diction and body movement can help the student interpreter develop skills necessary for authentic and artful performance.

"So, the very stuff called technique you lamented at the beginning of this article is the very technique you now want me to use!" I hear the coach exclaiming. Yes! Yes! The technique must be learned and practiced carefully so that later, the student can vocally and bodily rely upon that practice to serve automatically once a real, live audience is present.

This Is The House That Jack Built?

"This Is The House That Jack Built" is one of the best practice pieces for students who are trying to learn how to use vocal and body techniques. The repetitive pattern and bounce of the poem forces the student to either bounce along in sing-song fashion OR to THINK THE THOUGHT, which is a skill the student must learn to perfect.

*This Is The House That Jack Built
This is the house that Jack built
This is the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack Built.*

*This is the cat that killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the cow with the crumpled horn
That tossed the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumpled
horn
That tossed the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the man all tattered and torn
That kissed the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumpled
horn
That tossed the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the priest all shaven and shorn
That married the man all tattered and
torn
That kissed the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumpled
horn
That tossed the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

*This is the cock that crowed in the morn
That waked the priest all shaven and
shorn
That married the man all tattered and
torn
That kissed the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumpled
horn
That tossed the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.*

In the poem, the verbs carry the picture. We have malt "that lay," a rat "that ate," a cat "that killed," a dog "that worried," a cow "that tossed," a maiden "that milked," a man "that kissed," a priest "that married," and a cock "that waked." Now while young, inexperienced students may come around slowly to this idea, eventually, through the good coach-reader's help, they can come to see that "killed" should sound different than "ate" or "worried" or "kissed;" and "married" should sound different than "waked" or "milked." The coach can challenge the student. "How many different kinds of sounds can you make your voice do?" "How does 'tossed' really sound?" "Who can give 'tossed' a different sound?" Potentially, the task of making the voice sound like the action or the image expressed by the word is tough, but through simple things like "This Is The House That Jack Built." technique practicing can be turned into fun time. Obviously, choral reading of pieces like Jack allows the student to experiment more with techniques because the single student's voice is not standing out, all by itself.

From Other Voices, Other Rooms.

by Truman Capote
(copyright, 1948 by Random House, Inc.)

Falling...Falling...Falling! a knifelike shaft, an underground corridor, and he was spinning like a fan blade through metal spirals; at the bottom a yawning-jawed crocodile followed his downward whirl with hooded eyes: as always, rescue came with wakefulness. The crocodile exploded in sunshine. Joel blinked and tasted his bitter tongue and did not move; the bed, an immense four-poster with different rosewood fruits carved crudely on its high headboard, was *Falling...Falling...Falling!* a knifelike shaft, an underground corridor suffocatingly soft and his body had sunk deep in its feathery center. Although he'd slept naked, the light sheet covering him left like a wool blanket.

The whisper of a dress warned him that someone was in the room. And another sound, dry and wind-rushed, very much like the beat of bird wings; it was this sound, he realized while rolling over, which had wakened him.

An expanse of pale yellow wall separated two harshly sunlit windows which faced the bed. Between these windows stood the woman. She did not notice Joel, for she was staring across the room at an ancient bureau; there, on top a lacquered box, was a bird, a bluejay perched so motionless it looked like a trophy. The woman turned and closed the only open window; then, with prissy little sidling steps, she started forward.

Joel was wide awake, but for an instant it seemed as if the bluejay and its pursuer were a curious fragment of his dream. His stomach muscles tightened as he watched her near the bureau and the bird's innocent agitaion: it hopped around bobbing its blue-brilliant head; suddenly, just as she came within striking distance, it fluttered its wings and flew across the bed and lighted on a chair where Joel had flung his clothes the night before. And remembrance of the night flooded over him: the wagon, the twins, and the little Negro in the derby hat. And the woman, his father's wife: miss Amy, as she was called. He remembered entering the house, and stumbling through an odd chamber of a hall where the walls were alive with the tossing shadows of candleflames; and Miss Amy, her finger pressed against her lips, leading him with robber stealth up a curving, carpeted stairway and along a second corridor to the door of this room; all a sleepwalker's pattern of jigsaw incidents; and so, as Miss Amy stood by the bureau regarding the bluejay on its new perch, it was more or less the same as seeing her for the first time. Her dress was of an almost transparent grey material; on her left hand, for no clear reason, she wore a matching grey silk glove, and she kept the hand cupped daintily, as if it

were crippled. A wispy streak of white zigzagged through the dowdy plaits of her brownish, rather colorless hair. She was slight, and fragileboned, and her eyes were like two raisins embedded in the softness of her narrow face.

Instead of following the bird directly, as before, she tiptoed over to a fireplace at the opposite end of the huge room, and, artfully twisting her head, seized hold of an iron poker. The bluejay hopped down the arm of the chair, pecking at Joel's discarded shirt. Miss Amy pursed her lips, and took five rapid, lilting, ladylike steps....

The poker caught the bird across the back, and pinioned it for the fraction of a moment; breaking loose, it flew wildly to the window and cawed and flapped against the pane, at last dropping to the floor where it scrambled along dazedly, scraping the rug with its outspread wings.

Miss Amy trapped it in a corner, and scooped it up against her breast.

It is such a simple piece, but it is such a moving piece. The student has to start by figuring out what to do with the word "falling." Three times the word is used at the beginning of the cutting. The student cannot just dump out "falling" three times with the same sound, the same inflection, the same intensity. Somehow, the three "falling"s have to sound different and be different in their implication. At the beginning, Joel is coming out of a dream. He is moving from the dream world into the reality of Miss Amy's presence in his room and the plight of the bluejay whom Miss May is determined to trap. The student must vocally and bodily work inside that dream world, visualizing it and leading the listener to visualize it. Then, the student must move the listener to the "whisper of the dress" that tells Joel that "someone [is] in the room." The contrast needed here is the stuff from which good interp is made. The interpreter must learn to move the listener from one world to the other. The student must learn how to use changes in rate, changes in vocal quality, changes in duration (length of time on a word or a phrase), and pause to build contrast. By practicing different kinds of sounds, the student can be taught the kinds of vocal sounds that are believable; the sounds that make a listener believe that the student is "inside the literature" and not on top of it.

Why not use practice pieces like the Capote cutting and the Jack rhyme that everybody practices,

everybody performs for awhile, everybody gets up in front of the room to read for everybody else? Why not use these practice pieces to build real student confidence and real student ability to hear what works and hear what does not work when it comes to uses of techniques? Why not coach by letting the student know "I don't believe you" when technique starts to take over and the emotional content of the literature is lost?

Use Some Children's Lit

The Cat Next Door by Betty Ren Wright is a simple, purely drawn children's story told from the viewpoint of a little girl, seven or eight, who remembers that "last summer" she, her mother and her father went to visit her grandmother and grandfather, who lived, presumably in a summer home near, we are led to believe, a beautiful lake. In the girl's memory are the happy times, the boat rides in the evenings, the search along the shores for "duck babies," the laughter, the flowers, Grandma's homemade cookies, and the warmth of Grandma herself. Mostly, there was the warm dock, the *swip, swip* of the water, and the waiting for "You-Know-Who," the Cat next Door, who Grandma said, never much came around people.

The girl remembers *last summer* and her relationship with The Cat next Door, who had come down to the dock, who had meowed, and talked, and shared with her the warm summer. "I wish this day could last forever," the little girl tells her grandma. "It will," her grandma responds, "because that's how long we're going to remember it." The experience of "last summer" was obviously significant for the little girl and for her growth as a person.

Now it is this summer and the little girl does not look forward to the trip back to the cabin. Grandma, we learn, has died. "I don't want to go to the cabin this year." The little girl says. "Nothing will be the same." And so, it seems, nothing is. The greeting from Grandpa is not the same. The old dog Gabe seems even older. The little girl so much misses her Grandma. She goes down to the familiar dock and lies on the warm wood, sad and lonely. She waits, and in a while, she hears the time meow of "you-know-who." The Cat next

Door has returned to her, this time with two new little kittens. What a splendiferous surprise" the little girl responds, commenting that "Grandma can't come,...Just remember that she'll love you forever and ever." With that, the little girl is able to "go on," able to greet the new little kittens, happily, for herself and for her grandma.

The Cat Next Door

by Betty Ren Wright

(Illustrated by Gail Owens and published by Holiday House, New York)

Last summer our vacation started when we drove through a dark tree-tunnel and out into the sunshine. "Look!" I shouted. "There's Grandpa's cabin. There's good old Gabe.

The big dog Gabe lay on the back porch. He stood up slowly, with his tail flip-flopping.

My mother said, "Gabe is smiling."

Grandpa and Grandma came out on the porch. We hugged and laughed. Everybody laughed--Grandma and Grandpa and my mother and my father and me. Grandma laughed most of all.

When the grown-ups went inside, I ran around the cabin, past the swing, past the orange flowers that curved like a waterfall over the path. I raced down to the lake and out onto the dock.

I lay on the sun-warm wood and listened to the gulls call Hello, hello again from way up in the sky. I peeked between the boards to see the water underneath me. Swip, swip, it whispered. Hello again.

Then Grandma came out on the dock. "I knew I'd find you here," She said.

"I'm waiting for you-know-who," I told her. "Maybe she won't come this year."

Grandma sat down beside me. "She might have lots of things to do on such a splendiferous day, but she'll come if she can. Anyway, you know she'll love you forever and ever."

I lay very still, hoping. Soon I heard a soft sound. It was a tiny, whiny voice. Closer and closer it came. I pretended not to hear.

"Meow," the voice whined, right in my ear. Something poked me with its nose. Whiskers tickled my chin.

"Meow," said The Cat Next Door. Where've you been all year, you silly girl?

The Cat Next Door never said hello to anyone but me. Each morning of my vacation she came out on the dock. She let me rub her stomach. She watched my toes wiggle in the water. When I jumped off the end of the dock with a loud splash, she scooted away, complaining to herself in her tiny, whiny way.

Last summer I learned to swim in the lake. I let Grandma ride on my crocodile raft, and once she fell off. Sometimes she made cookies and lemonade. We had a picnic at the end of the dock.

Every evening we went for a boat ride after supper. Grandpa ran the motor, and

I sat with Grandma up in front. We watched for duck babies along the shore. We watched the gulls glide up and down, riding a roller coaster made of air.

Every morning I said, "I wish this day could last forever."

"I do, too," Grandma said. "And it will last forever, because that's how long we're going to remember it."

This summer I didn't want to go to the cabin.

"Grandma won't be there," I said. "Nothing will be the same."

My mother looked sad. "You're right," she said. "It will be different this year. But we must go to keep Grandpa company for a while. He's very lonesome."

One morning we drove through the dark tree-tunnel and into the sunshine, just the way we did last summer. The cabin was there, and Gabe was lying on the back porch. He lifted his head, and he wagged his tail once or twice, but he didn't get up.

"The poor old fellow's losing his pep," my father said. I thought, Gabe is going to die pretty soon, like Grandma did.

Grandpa came out on the porch by himself. We hugged, but we didn't laugh the way we did last summer.

Afterward, I walked around the side of the cabin, past the swing and the orange flowers. I looked at the shining silver lake. Gulls rode the waves out in the middle, bobbing like my bathtub toys. I wished Grandma could see them.

I walked out to the end of the dock and lay down. That was the worst time of all. I could hear the water under the boards, but what I wanted to hear was Grandma's footsteps on the dock.

What I wanted was to hear her call, "How about a sugar cookie, sugar?" I listened hard, trying to make it happen, but the only sound was the swip, swip of the water.

I begin to cry.

Then I heard something else--a tiny, whiny voice, calling from a long way off. It came closer and closer. I lay very still with my eyes shut tight, pretending not to hear.

Something poked me with its nose. Whiskers tickled my chin.

"Meow," the whiny voice said. There've you been, you silly girl?

I opened my eyes and looked at The Cat Next Door. Then I sat up and stared. Sitting a little way behind her were two kittens. One looked just like The Cat Next Door. The other one didn't.

I put out my fingers, and the kittens came right up to me. One of them crawled into my lap. The other one tried to bite my big tow. I forgot to feel sad.

Surprise you, didn't I? meowed The Cat Next Door.

The kittens started talking in their tiny, whiny voices. They said, Where've you been, you silly girl?

I laughed out loud. It seemed as if I could hear Grandma laughing, too. It seemed as if we were all there, at the end of the dock, together.

"Grandma cant come," I said. "But it's okay. She would love your splendiferous surprise, and so do I. Just remember that she'll love you forever and ever."
"I'll remember," said The Cat Next Door. Then, for Grandma and for me, I said hello, hello to the kittens for the very first time.

This is a simple, pure story; one that can be used as a fine teaching tool for the young interpreter. The story hangs on the contrast between "last summer" and "this summer;" between the "joy" experience through a living grandma and the "joy" learned through a grandma now dead. The story has no huge, breathtaking climactic build. It depends upon an interpreter's ability to show a child's quiet acceptance of change and death to make its impact. "Nothing would be the same this year," the child laments; and yet, something is the same. The Cat next Door, constant in its loyalty, constant in its trust, comes to the dock to greet the little girl. This is the best kind of lesson for a little girl to learn. For while the grandmother is gone, she is not gone. So long as the memory of the relationship among the girl and the grandma and the Cat Next Door remains, Grandma is there, forever. The interpreter has to learn how to "drive" the intensity of that very beautiful lesson of life. The story "sits down" on the little girl's ability to rise from her grief and greet two new little kittens, symbols of newness, symbols of continuance, symbols of birth and life and death and birth again. Subtle though the story's emotional content is, it whacks a mighty wallop when read by an interpreter who can, through voice and muscle tone, recreated the inherency of it.

Students Must Know Logical and Emotional Content

The student must be able to describe the logical content and the emotional content of any piece of literature she intends to read aloud. What is the situation? What events have created or triggered the situation? What has happened to intensify the situation? What is the relationship among the characters in the situation? What does each character contribute to the situation or the problem? How does the situation develop? What is the logical

climax of the story, the poem, the essay, the cutting? What is the emotional climax of the story, the poem, the essay, the cutting? If the two are not one, why? What is the resolution? The description can be as single-dimensional as the one I have just presented of *The Cat Next Door*, or it could be as multi-dimensional as what the student would have to be able to say about James Joyce's *Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man* or Shakespeare's *Othello*. Oh, and by the way, the student has to be responsible for talking about the WHOLE piece of literature from which a cutting comes, not just the cutting itself. Some students might actually try to get by with studying a cutting only, heaven forbid, unless the coach requires the student to describe, talk about, the WHOLE.

Students Must Stay Inside The Literature

The poem, the story, the novel,, the essay, the play must speak for itself, from inside itself. The student must be able to read the piece of literature from inside itself. What does the poem, in and of itself, say? What does the story, in and of itself, do? What is the inherency of the novel? What does the inherent development of the essay lead the reader to conclude? These are the questions that must be used by the student who studies the literature and the coach who guides the student in that study.

Will a student be willing to meet one or two hours each week with other interpreters, in order to work on developing voice and muscle tone? Guess so, if that student intends to compete. Will a student be willing to study/analyze literature, describe logical and emotional content, and make decisions about how that logical and emotional content has to be delivered to an audience? Guess so, if that student intends to compete. I'm suggesting the need to put some "teeth" into the "event" so that students begin to understand that interp, done well, may take just as long as extemp, done well. "So, if you're looking for an easy out or an easy way to win, interp ain't it!!!" That's the kind of message that might begin to dent the problems of selection, the problems of "too much technique," and the problems of

shallowness faced by coaches everywhere.

Interpretation requires the reader to pull the emotional content from a piece of literature and bring it to life for the listener. Joy, sorrow, anger, hurt, jealousy, love, hate, and grief, are universal emotions which we can feel again and again, sometimes more intensely than at other times. These emotions are not found in the reading of words. Nor are they found by pointing vocal and body techniques at us. They are found in thoughts, in whole images, in whole scenes which the student interpreter must learn to talk about, feel, and visualize out of real and vicarious experience. Starting with simple, pure, but honest emotions found in simple, pur stories like the cutting from *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and the story *The Cat Next Door* invites the student to work with basics before trying to compete in the World Series. The student cannot work with "tough," multidimensional pieces until she can bring the simple, single-dimensional pieces to life.

I did not understand the logical or the emotional content of "Yellow Wallpaper" very well when I performed it all those many years ago. I knew enough "technique" to "win," but that may only have been true because others in my sections knew less technique. That, unfortunately, has been a common scenario for judges over the years. We are forced, by the thing called "competition" to select the least bad of the bad, the best of the worst." It's time for less technique and more Art, for less declaiming and more interpreting, for less "event" and more "discipline."

(Collette Mikesell Winfield competed and coached in Iowa. She is currently a college teacher, who often appears at NFISDA workshops. She is one of NFL's finest writers and teachers.)

