

*Once you've made the fabulous decision of doing Speech Arts in the Music Festival, the next question is .... What piece should I perform? Of course, there are thousands of answers to that question. This resource is just to narrow that down a little to get you started. Once you're started, you'll find that you have your own ideas.*

#### **SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES ON SPEECH ARTS:**

- Choose works that appeal to YOU. There are (as I mentioned) thousands of poems, stories and scenes available. Choose something you like.
- Read it OUT LOUD. When you're trying to choose a piece, read it out loud. You'll find that your feelings about the piece are more clear doing it this way rather than reading silently. Poems in particular have sound devices that you will enjoy more out loud.
- Choose something appropriate for a family audience. There are many solo scenes, for example, that are not. Read your piece out loud for your parent, your grandparent or a local festival committee member before the entry deadline to get a second opinion. There are many appropriate choices you can make!
- Why are you doing this the day before the entry deadline? Give yourself some time to try things out, don't put this off to the last minute.

#### **TYPES OF SPEECH:**

- See the current SMFA provincial syllabus to see what classes are available.
- In general – start with poetry, no matter what age you are. Next look to Prose. For older students – choose a scene from a modern play or from Shakespeare.

#### **PLACES TO LOOK FOR SPEECH SELECTIONS:**

- Try out the test pieces in the current SMFA syllabus.
- The Royal Conservatory of Music offers exams in Speech Arts and Drama. The syllabus is free to download from their website and offers the best advice we can give you.
- Whatever literature you are studying in school might be appropriate for performance.
- We have a really great library system in Saskatchewan – you can order a book on line and if it's anywhere in the province it will be delivered to your local branch for you to borrow.

#### **THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC SPEECH ARTS AND DRAMA SYLLABUS:**

- Go to [www.rcmusic.ca](http://www.rcmusic.ca), scroll to the bottom of the home page and under "examinations" you will find "publications". Click on publications. Scroll down to find the Speech Arts and Drama 2011 syllabus. Download it!
- This syllabus advises students to work on the grade which is one below their school grade – so if you are in grade 5 at school, look at the grade 4 list for suggestions of poems, prose, and scenes. This will give you a good idea of the types of things and the length of selection that might suit you at your age. Keep in mind, however, that in the festival, classes that are "Own Choice" are just that. So a selection from ANY grade list of the RCM syllabus may be done in ANY age category at the festival.
- The background information on page 14 - 17 of the RCM syllabus has great advice on each type of Speech Arts performance, but keep in mind that their rules are not SMFA rules. Use this as background information.
- For someone who wants to delve deeper into the world of Speech Arts, the resource lists at the end of the RCM syllabus offer some very good books to use for more information.

## AN APPROACH TO SPEECH ARTS BY FRED BARKER

In teaching music and drama in both the public school system and privately, I have always looked for ways to encourage and reach students who appear to be having difficulties in singing in tune, or in projecting their voices. This led me to the development of a process where students use their speaking voices in exercises involving pitch, dynamics, tempo and rhythm, as stepping stones to better singing or speaking with more authority. These stepping stones were in themselves, a whole world waiting to be explored. This world, which I want to share with you, is known as Speech Arts. Directly, or indirectly, everyone can benefit in spending some time in appreciating speech arts. Here are some of the benefits of Speech Arts:

- Knowing how to verbalize builds confidence.
- The confidence in knowing how to verbalize adds authority to what is being said.
- With the facility to communicate verbally, comes the ability to socialize with contemporaries.
- In the process of deciding how best to communicate, comes a deeper insight into what is being communicated.
- In knowing how to say something, there is less danger of being misunderstood.
- With verbal confidence comes the ability to communicate intelligibly your own and others' thoughts, concerns and suggestions.
- The ability to use emphasis and nuance can add humor, pathos and credibility to the spoken word.
- There is a development of vocabulary, as simpler, subtler, more aggressive or persuasive means are sought to communicate.
- By developing an ability in speech arts comes a better understanding of the human body: posture, vocal resonators, adequate breathing and breath support.
- Speech arts requires disciplined conformation, but it can also accommodate individual differences, or the adaptive dimension in teaching.

Some students are very reticent about using their voices while others are very boistrous. As a precursor, or introduction to speech arts the following routine could be used to encourage the reticent and curb the boistrous.

1. Sigh or yawn and sense that your mouth and throat are open. Keep the mouth and throat open while inhaling and exhaling. In exhaling introduce an AH sound, which usually is very breathy to begin with. Gradually try to focus this AH sound, being careful to avoid a glottal attack in its formation.
2. Put arms out horizontally sideways with palms facing down. Inhale while bringing the arms down to the sides. Exhale to an AH sound with an open throat and mouth while raising the arms sideways with palms upwards.
3. Repeat No. 2 but this time with eyebrows raised and nostrils distended. Try to focus the AH sound to reach someone at the back of the room.
4. Practice placement of sound into sinuses by saying NYUH. Keep moving the jaw around and raise the eyebrows and distend the nostrils as NYUH is repeated.
5. With fingertips lightly placed on cheekbones below the eyes, say the following words and feel the resonances in the cheekbones: Go-ing, com-ing, bang-ing, sooth-ing, weed-ing, etch-ing, etc ....

The following repertoire of methods, exercises and techniques explores the many aspects of speech arts. They are organized under a number of headings and some of the activities from each area could be used profitably in each session. By varying the choice of activities the students are challenged and motivated, and appreciate the many facets involved in speech arts.

Physical conditioning  
Pitch  
Dynamics  
Tempo

Rhythm  
Articulation  
Scansion

## **PHYSICAL CONDITIONING**

### **1. Increasing the lung capacity for greater dynamic range and extended phrasing**

- a) Sitting up straight, with your back pressed against the chair, breathe in deeply so that your torso is pushed forward by the expansion of your lower back against the chair.
- b) Sit on a chair and put your head down to your knees. Place your palms on your back between your rib-cage and pelvis, inhale and feel your hands being pushed outwards.
- c) Stand up straight, exhale and then put your arms above your head. Now inhale slowly, hold your breath and stretch your arms higher and stand on your tiptoes. Exhale slowly while lowering your arms to your sides and your heels to the floor.
- d) Exhale, then clasp your hands behind your head. With five inhalations fill your lungs as if they were balloons. Exhale slowly with a hissing sound. Repeat the exercise using four, three, two, and finally one inhalation to fill the lungs (balloons).
- e) Hold an imaginary lit candle at arm's length and repeatedly try to blow it out.
- f) Exhale with a hiss lasting fifteen seconds, then twenty, and so on.
- g) Inhale while raising your elbows and sense the rib-cage expanding. Exhale, lowering the elbows but consciously keeping rib-cage extended. Now continue breathing but keep the rib-cage extended.
- h) With controlled blowing, hold a piece of tissue paper against a wall.
- i) Lie flat on the floor and place some books on your stomach. Raise the pile of books by your inhalations.
- j) Lie on the floor with the calves of your legs on a chair. Put your hands behind your head, breathe in deeply with shoulders on the floor. Now exhale, lifting head and shoulders off the floor.

### **2. Strengthening the diaphragm and lower back muscles for greater air support.**

- a) With elbows raised, swing to the right and hold, then swing to the left and hold. Repeat this a number of times.
- b) With feet about 30 cm. apart, back straight and knees bent, repeat the above.
- c) With feet apart and back straight, and palms of your hands on the side of your thighs, alternately move palms up and down while keeping the back straight.
- d) Similar to c) but with one arm over the top of your head and a finger in ear.
- e) With feet together and back straight, try raising one foot off the ground, keeping the back straight, legs straight, and the sole of the foot kept horizontal with the floor.
- f) Exhale, raise your hands above your head and inhale, now bend forward from the waist as far as possible and exhale.

### **3. Strengthening the larynx and neck muscles.**

- a) Place your chin on one shoulder and slowly rotate downwards and across to the other shoulder. Do this several times, always slowly, and feel the pull on the muscles at the back of your neck.
- b) With arms by your side rotate the shoulders (together) backwards several times then forwards.
- c) Alternately rotate fully extended arms backwards and then forwards.
- d) Extend the arms sideways to a horizontal position and then slowly rotate in small circles backwards a number of times, then forwards.

### **4. Strengthening the tongue and larynx.**

- a) Stretch out your tongue trying to touch first your nose and then your chin.
- b) Rotate the tip of your tongue, between the teeth and lips, ten times in one direction then ten times in the other direction.
- c) Drop your jaw and hold it still with your hand while saying slowly, AH, AYE, EE, AW, and OH. See that the jaw remains still and be aware of the tongue changing shape to form the vowel sounds.

### **5. Strengthening the facial muscles.**

- a) Massage behind the ears in a circular motion.
- b) Massage in front of the ears, rotating the finger tips in a circular motion working from the hair line to below the lips.
- c) Rotate the jaw a number of times clockwise then anti-clockwise.
- d) Pull or stretch the lips horizontally as far as possible (don't use your hands).

- e) Open the jaw as wide as possible, so lips are far apart.
- f) Pretend you are sucking on a straw (as hard as possible).
- g) Show a surprised look, eyes wide open, eyebrows raised and mouth open.
- h) Show a happy, toothe-paste advertisement look.
- i) Show a sad, unhappy, corners-of-the-mouth-down look.
- j) Show a vicious, scowling, frowning, teeth-bared look.
- k) Yawn in an exaggerated manner.
- l) Move the jaw from side to side while saying AH.
- m) With clear articulation say "Bumble Bee" or "Bubble Gum" rapidly ten times.
- n) In an exaggerated manner say "Fish and Chips" or "Strawberry Jam" or "Rhubarb and Custard" very slowly.
- o) Imagine you are speaking to someone who is hard of hearing, and deliberately exaggerate your facial movements to reinforce what you are saying.
- p) Imagine you are giving directions to a rather slow person, and this is the fourth or fifth time you have had to repeat the directions. You are trying to stay calm and not lose your temper.

### **Pitch**

- a) Say the numbers one through ten slowly, beginning on as low a sound as you can and gradually ascending to as high a sound as you can.
- b) Do this in reverse and try to stretch your upwards or downwards range/limit each time you do it.
- c) Take a sentence from some prose, or a line of poetry and begin as low as possible and gradually ascend to as high as possible. Then do the same line but start as high as possible.
- d) Find the most important word in a line of poetry and make that the highest pitch, beginning as low as possible and finishing as low as possible.
- e) Pitch NYUH as high as possible and let the sound descend to as low as possible. Repeat this a number of times aiming for an ever higher attack.

### **Dynamics (volume)**

- a) Say the numbers one through ten slowly, beginning as quietly as possible and gradually becoming as loud as possible. Show that a contraction of the diaphragm results in a faster flow of air through the larynx creating a louder sound - use your body to help your vocal production.
- b) Take a sentence or a line of poetry and start as quietly as possible to as loud as possible. Then take the same line and go from loud to soft.
- c) Find the most important word in the line and build up to this in volume and then recede from it.
- d) Stop suddenly in the middle of saying something and see how the silence is deafening.
- e) Pick a phrase and using both Pitch and Dynamics work through a number of permutations until there is ample facility in using these two facets of Speech Arts.

### **Tempo (speed)**

- a) Say the numbers one through ten, beginning slowly and gradually accelerating.
- b) Say the numbers one through ten, beginning quickly and gradually retarding.
- c) Take a line of poetry or prose and practise a variety of tempos in a variety of ways so as to gain familiarity with the concept.
- d) Be aware that three or four syllable words present difficulties when articulated at a rapid pace.
- e) Try combining Pitch, Dynamics and Tempo using the same phrase with as many permutations as possible. Find the most effective combination to realize the most impact for your phrase.

### **Rhythm**

- a) Look for the specific rhythmic patterns which are used in poetic writing, and this will help you to better interpret the poem: Iambic (weak, strong), Anapest (weak, weak, strong), Trochee (strong, weak), Spondee (strong, strong), and Dactyl (strong, weak, weak).
- b) Look for obvious, or subtle, changes in the rhythmic structure, make sure that your listeners (auditors) are made aware of these changes.

- c) Be mentally aware of the rhythmic style of the poem you are interpreting, but do not bombard your listeners with the rhythm, interpret and draw meaning out of the text and punctuation while being helped by the rhythm.
- d) Look for specific rhythmic effects and enhance these with the use of Tempo, Dynamics and Pitch.

### **Articulation**

- a) This is the manner in which you say or pronounce the text.
- b) Be sure of the correct pronunciation of all words. Refer to a dictionary and use the diacritical marks if in any doubt.
- c) Look for onomatopoeiac words (clash, hush, zoom), alliteration (tip-toe, elderly elms), assonance (hist whist, with pleasure and leisure).
- d) Read and understand the text then use your personal articulation to draw out your deeper understanding of that text.

### **Scansion**

- a) Practice Scansion, that is, seeing where the "feet", or stressed syllables, are placed in a line of poetry or prose.
- b) Look at the punctuation, see where lines run-on and where you can take a breath.
- c) Look for onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and portmanteau words.
- d) In poetry, look at the line endings and see if there is a rhyme scheme.

As your appreciation, understanding and experience grow in Speech Arts, then in studying a poem, or a piece of prose, you will become aware of "sign-posts" or "flags" jumping from the written text. As you recognise these indicators and their implications, you reach a deeper understanding of the written text. Your understanding should be further reinforced by articulating the written word and convincing an audience.

Physical behavior should not be obtrusive and detract from the spoken word, but rather be an almost unconscious gesture enhancing the dialogue. Become aware of personal distracting habits or gestures and consciously seek to avoid doing them. An audience likes to see animated facial expressions, but these require very careful rehearsal, perhaps in front of a mirror, and should agree with the spoken word.

### **CHORAL SPEECH**

Choral speech necessitates the choosing of the right poem or prose for the group involved. You must know the voices and know what they are capable of doing. There are basically five types of Choral Speech:

<b>Refrain</b>	Soloist and choral response.
<b>Antiphonal</b>	Group divided into two distinct types of voices.
<b>Sequential</b>	A number of soloists, or cumulative additions with a unisonal response.
<b>Part Speaking</b>	Group divided according to voice quality with each group reading as one voice.
<b>Unisonal</b>	Everyone speaking at the same pitch, volume, tempo and every nuance and emphasis exactly the same.

The vowel sound carries the pitch of a word. Using an "Ah" vowel sound, pick one student to hold this vowel sound at a steady pitch and, one by one, add the group members to the initial student. Make sure, that as each new voice is added, the pitch remains constant. If there are changing voices, then see that the vowel sound is reproduced at the exact octave. If the teacher's hearing is not very acute, then ask some reliable student to judge the pitch. In unisonal passages, listen to every vowel sound and check that every student is producing the same vowel sound.

The group will become aware that they must make some compromises so that there is one unisonal sound, which is extremely effective. It will take time and effort, but the results, and the side-effects of the exercise, are very worthwhile.

## PREPARATION OF POETRY AND PROSE

1. Discover what you can about the history and background of your selection.
2. How does the selection fit into your program?
3. Listen to each member of your group and grade them High, Medium or Low voice. This will help you in deciding small groups.
4. Be very aware of voice blending/matching, and make your group aurally aware of what is going on, and what you're trying to do.
5. Are there opportunities for solo or small group voicings? If there are, then know whom you are going to select before your rehearsal.
6. As groupings become smaller so the blending becomes more critical.
7. If there is dialect in your selection then know how to deal with it.
8. Check for any difficult vocabulary, know what every word means, and how to pronounce every word correctly.
9. In a poem look for the overall basic rhythm. In prose, identify the strong opening statement, the development or unravelling, and then the concluding argument or resolution.
10. Look for sign-posts to use variations in pitch, dynamics, tempo or rhythm. Look for onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and portmanteau words.
11. Look for lines that run-on in poetry. Look at the punctuation, where are your group going to breathe? Where might a sudden pause help?
12. Are any properties required? Is there a need for specific gestures?
13. If there is any particular blocking which you feel could enhance the selection's presentation, then rehearse that way from the start.
14. If you are going to conduct the selection, then know what you're going to do in conducting, and be consistent in every rehearsal.
15. Know the selection yourself and have it memorized if possible.
16. If there is any incorrect word, stress or pronunciation, then rectify it as soon as possible, don't wait until the next rehearsal.
17. In your own mind know what you are aiming for with regard to pacing, climax, resolution and overall shape of the work.
18. Relate to the selection as much as possible. If the piece is about animals then have the group recall animal experiences. In "Someone" question the group on who or what the Someone is. In "The crocodile's toothache" ask about experiences at the dentist. In "Sick" ask the group about their excuses for not doing something. Above all, get inside the text and make it live, both for the performers and the audience.

As a further dimension of Speech Arts I would like you to consider how closely the spoken word is related to music. There are a number of interesting, exciting and challenging works available combining the spoken word with specific pitches, dynamics, rhythms and tempos.

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### SASKATCHEWAN POETRY IDEAS:

We would like to encourage students to work on poetry by Saskatchewan writers. What follows is not a complete list – there are many others to consider. You can search your library for these authors, or other Saskatchewan authors, or choose different selections from these books. The ages are only suggestions; any poem can be done in any “own choice” class. These are arranged like this:

- Book name, publisher
  - Age suggestion; *Name of poem*
- Circles by Jessica Layne Bird; Authorhouse
  - Sr: *Unbiased Potential*
  - 18: No Hope for Hope Happening
  - 18: A Young Man’s Pride
  - 16: Hated Like Spiders
  - 16: Wings
  - 14: Unfinished Angels
- Love of Mirrors by Gary Hyland, Coteau Books
  - Sr: That Small Rain Poem AND Small Rain Deceit
  - Sr: Vortal Tomb, Poul nabrone, Ireland
  - 18: Throats of Stone
  - 18: The Wild Yird-Swine
  - 18: A Brief History of Zero
  - 16: Heroes in Coffins
  - 16: Learning Time
  - 16: Reflections: The Love of Mirrors
  - 16: A Safe and Easy Thing
  - 16: Stakes in the River
  - 16: The Doctor
- Red Ceiling by Bridget Keating, Hagios Press
  - Sr: A Letter to My Daughter
- A Sudden Radiance; Saskatchewan Poetry, Coteau Books
  - Sr: Poem About Nothing by Lorna Crozier
  - 18: Marjorie by Jerry Rush
- Going Places, Coteau Books
  - Sr: *Journey Begins* by Don Kerr
- Dancing Visions by Glen Sorestad, Thistledown Press
  - Sr: *Yellow Warblers*
- Famous Roadkill by Allan Safarik, Hagios Press
  - 18: *The Incident*
  - 18: *The Natural History of the Striped Skunk*
- Before the First Word, The Poetry of Lorna Crozier, Wilfred Laurier University Press
  - 18: On the *Seventh Day*
- Hands Reaching in Water by Gary Hyland, Hagios Press
  - 18: *Dream Place*
- Penned: Zoo Poems, Signal 2009
  - 16: *Santiago Zoo* by Lorna Crozier
- What We Bring Home, Coteau Books
  - 16: *Dawn* by Judith Krause
- Who Greased the Shoelaces by Lois Simmie, Stoddart
  - 14: *Jimmy Lorris*
  - 12: *Jeremiah*
  - 12: *Lyle*
  - 10: Handy Insect Identification Guide
- 10: *Running in the Family*
- 8: *Face-off*
- 8: *Fussy*
- 8: *Pterodactyl*
- 8: *Triceratops*
- Listening with the Ear of the Heart: Writers at St. Peter’s, St. Peter’s Press, Muenster
  - 14: *At Night The Writers* by David Carpenter
- New Canadian Poets, 1975 – 1985, McClelland and Stewart
  - 14: *The Child Who Walks Backwards* by Lorna Crozier
- Silence Like the Sun, Thistledown Press
  - 14: *A Gift Withheld* by John V. Hicks
- Renovated Rhymes by John V. Hicks
  - Any two *may* be done as a sonnet sequence, or one as a poem.
- Prairie Jungle, Coteau Books
  - 14: *Nightmare* by Rick Hillis
  - 10: *Hydrophobia* by Barbara Sapergia
  - 10: *Trip to the Zoo* by Lois Simmie
  - 8: *The Song of Two Cats* by Sandra Church
  - 8: *The Horrible Morning* by Lois Simmie
- White Crane Spreads Wings, Coteau Books
  - 14: *Midnight Skater* by Gary Hyland
- Number One Northern, Coteau Books
  - 14: *St. George* by Nancy Senior
- Hold the Rain in Your Hands, Coteau Books
  - 14: *Morning of the Hoar Frost* by Glen Sorestad
- Inscriptions: A Prairie Anthology, Turnstone Press
  - 12: *Loon Song* by Lorna Crozier
- From The Top of a Grain Elevator by Barbara Nickel, Beach Holme Publishers
  - 12: *At Batoche*
  - 12: *Forty Below*
  - 12: *Gopher Tales*
  - 12: *Prairie Hallowe’en*
  - 12: *The Wind in May*
  - 10: *Saskatoons*
- 200% Cracked Wheat; Coteau Books
  - 12: *help* by Lois Simmie
  - 10: *God lives in Saskatchewan* by Cathy Jewison
  - 8: *How to Tell What You’re Eating* by Lois Simmie
- Animals on Parade; Bayard Canada Books
  - 8: *Bee Dance* by Helaine Becker

### **SOME HINTS FOR PROSE SELECTIONS:**

Prose is a really great type of speech arts to do! It gives students a chance to take on various voices within a selection, which builds acting skills, and it allows them to perform out of any book they enjoy! Here are some things to consider (these are not rules):

- Choose a passage from any book that you like, or a test piece from the current SMFA syllabus, or a selection from the RCM syllabus for a grade appropriate to you.
- It is okay to do a descriptive passage, but it's really most fun to do an excerpt that has a narrator as well as characters speaking. That way you get to be more than one person within the performance.
- The prose selection is not staged. Yes, you may use character voices and character placement focus, but there should be only minimal movement, and no costumes. It is not a scene.
- You can look at the RCM syllabus for some hints on making cuts to prose, but here are a few:
  - It's okay to make cuts in prose. (Unlike poetry, which should, generally, not have cuts made.)
  - As long as you maintain the author's intent, you can use a few paragraphs then skip something and continue with another few paragraphs.
  - If you are doing a good job of differentiating your characters, it's okay to leave out words like "he said".
  - In order to make your excerpt flow well, you can leave out a character who is not essential to this part of the story.
- Follow time guidelines – before the entry deadline make sure you have read the excerpt aloud to time it.
- Sometimes your piece might be a whole story – a children's book, or a short story. But most often it will be a part of a larger story. Try to choose an excerpt that stands alone well, that has a beginning, a middle and an end.
- The introduction you make up can fill in any necessary details your audience needs to understand the story. (Something like: This is an excerpt from "Anne of Green Gables" by Lucy Maude Montgomery. "So far in our story, the little orphan girl, Anne, has been mistakenly sent to a couple who wanted to adopt a little boy.")

### **SOME HINTS FOR SOLO SCENE AND SHAKESPEARE SCENE**

- Choose something appropriate for your audience.
- Choose something appropriate for you!
- Yes, you can and should stage it out. Not too many props or sets, keep it minimal. It's also okay to not have a costume, or just to have a shawl or something that suggests a costume.
- Sometimes you will do a scene where another character has a line or two. Yes, you should leave those lines out, but your character will probably be aware of them being said. "Place" the other character out above the heads of the audience and respond to that imagined character.
- Monologue books such as A Perfect Piece and Another Perfect Piece are good places to FIND a solo scene but – if you are performing a solo scene you should read the whole play. Use the library. In order to perform that character intelligently you need to know the whole story.
- For Shakespeare scenes, an easy place to get some background information is on [www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com).

### **FAVOURITES!**

Do you have any poems, books, stories, plays that you especially like to use for performance pieces? If so, let us know and we'll add your favourites to this page. If it's a specific piece, please suggest an age. If it's a book, try to give the complete title, author, and publisher so it's easy for people to find. Thanks!

- 'Til All The Stars Have Fallen – this is a great little book of Canadian poetry for children, and is readily available in the library.
- Robert Munsch – kids LOVE Robert Munsch books. Choral Speech doesn't always have to be poetry – you can use an excerpt from books like his for Choral Speech, or as a soloist it can go in the Prose class. One of the side effects of speech arts is a love of literature and of reading – so books with rhythm and flow and energy in them really work towards that goal.
- The Broadview Anthology has poetry from various centuries, appropriate to mid-teens and up. It's a very good collection.