

Poetry Interpretation- Weaving Multiple Poems

Compiling a Poetry selection for competition can be one of the more challenging aspects to the event. Given that there is little to restrain competitors, the possibilities are nearly without end. In essence, the event of Poetry is almost as free-form as some of the verse used for a piece. However, there are a few rules and techniques to creating a Poetry selection competitors should be made aware. Understanding and using these tips can help a competitor put together a fantastic book for Poetry competition.

The Regulations

There are four main rules of Poetry to be conscious of when crafting a piece. Poetry selections are to be ten minutes in length. This varies by league. Some areas use an eight minute time limit. However, most leagues are ten. A piece should either tell a story or have a clear expression of a thought/theme using a clear progression of events throughout the cutting. Selections can either be one large poem or a collection of several. If using multiple poems, the verse does not need to be from the same author but does need one common bit of unity so the poems relate and adhere to rule two.

All selections chosen for the cutting must be published, printed materials of VERSE only--no plays or other sources of dramatic work are permitted. Thus, with such openness it is clear why the options are numerous when making a cutting. Here are some suggestions of potential cuttings and the benefits/disadvantages to using them.

One, Long Poem

Cutting a selection from one, lengthy poem offers both pros and cons. The most obvious reason for choosing one poem is that this can diminish the time period devoted to finding a piece. Once a competitor finds the one poem that meets the above criteria the selection process is almost guaranteed to be complete. Another advantage to selecting one poem is the given consistency of the piece. The rhythm, rhyme, and style of the poem will be similar through the whole piece. Further, one poem also means one story arch and one tone employed by the author. This means that the plot of the poem should already create a build, create driven suspense, and have a theme for the competitor to interpret and deliver. All of these factors result in one story/theme for the competitor to interpret (easier than say three separate poems) and a more straight-forward poem for the audience to follow-along.

Negatives to choosing a long poem stem from the nature of the work. For instance, in some poems of length every stanza is important. Yet, competitors know oftentimes cuts must be made. Removing a stanza from a long poem could result in a muddled story, lost rhythm, and overall confusion. Further, as with anything long, holding complete attention throughout is challenging. A long poem increases the risk of boring an audience. Also, using a long poem can limit the creativity, range, and exhilaration of a piece if the poem sticks on one note with little deviation. And finding one, long poem of great quality could be hard in and of itself. Epic or lengthy verse is less common than shorter works.

Several Short, Related Poems

A competitor wishing to have full creative license might be drawn to this type of Poetry selection. Competing with this form of piece offers slightly different pros and cons than the long poem. One of the strongest reasons for using multiple pieces is that this provides the liberty of being massively creative. A patchwork of related poems means freedom to choose how the theme evolves, which tones/ranges to hit during the piece, a chance to use different verse types (blank, free, rhyming couplets, modern, older, etc.), and so forth. This also provides for a competitor to be exciting and groundbreaking. Two poems discussing similar themes but using differing atmospheres/settings rarely thought to be mashed up could be very innovative. Also, the use of multiple poems allows the audience a chance to connect to several poems instead of one; if a person is not so enthralled by one poem they can be won with the next poem of the selection.

However, using several poems is not easy. Finding pieces that go together can be exhausting. Even deciding to use a few poems by the same author does not promise for a cohesive cutting. Also, with the ability to use poems of varying tones/moods/styles comes the downfall of making it work. Not only must a relatable theme or thought be consistent throughout, but the various poems must work together and appear to belong alongside the other. Even if one poem is inconsistent, that is one verse that can draw an audience out and cause alienation. For that matter, one poem deemed rotten within a selection can ruin any chance of making rank despite the rest of the poems being enjoyable. Further, multiple poems means multiple interpretations. Every verse will have its own arch, its own language and diction, and

its own challenges; and they all must form one over-arching narrative then needs to have cohesion.

If a competitor does decide to present a collection, here are some ideas for possible combinations:

One Author--a collection of poems by one author. Note, find poems that either combine to tell a story or share similar themes otherwise the unity of the works will be thin. Poems from the same author typically share the same style which adds for more solidarity.

Same Themes--poems that contain similar messages. For example, three poems all about the loss of adolescence could make a collection. Be sure that each poem offers something unique so it is not the same note being hit during each poem. Also, make sure the poems tell a story or have some sort of arch.

Similar Subjects--verse that all possess the same topics. A cutting could deal with the ocean, feminism, men, the color red, or even something as ridiculous as squirrels. As long as the poems relate, form a story/theme, and have a build then anything can work.

Songs--popular songs, which are usually written in verse, turned into a Poetry cutting. Although doable, it will take effort. Songs are not necessarily written with poetic structure in mind, nor tend to contain strong lines (the case of some popular tunes).

Word Matches--a grouping of poems united due to the sharing of a distinctive word. These connections can be hard to find, but making a collection of poems containing, say, the word "starburst" or "rabbit" can create a distinctively original work. Again, try to meld together

pieces that can create an arch or emotion. Although, be aware with a word related collection it might be hard or impossible to create a story. Just attempt to combine works in such a way to captivate the audience and show the various uses and connotations surrounding the one word chosen.

Whichever technique is used to create a Poetry piece, the common objective of producing quality is ever present. Whether using one poem or a collection of smaller works, a competitor must objectively form a cutting that is interesting, workable, and easy to follow. The truth is some poems work for competition and some are either too long, too abstract, or not cohesive enough with others to work. Without a good bond and an idea to link everything, poetry can become unruly and cost a competitor points.