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Learning the ins and outs of English contests



Contest schedule

- o **skit contest** - mid June
- o **prefectural junior high school story telling contest** - July
- o **spelling battle** - September 13/14, 2014 (tentative)
- o **prefectural senior high school speech contest** - first or second Friday (before Sports Day) in October
- o **technical high school speech contest** - last Friday in October
- o **debate contest** - last Saturday in October
- o **Okinawa Christian University - Okinawa Christian Junior College English oratorical contest** - early December

The Essentials

- o **Volume** - Speak loudly and clearly. Everyone in the auditorium should be able to hear the speech.
- o **Memorization** - Make sure your contestant has fully memorized the speech and can recite it without the aid of the script.
- o **Expression** - Never send a robot out on the stage. Make sure your students can effectively express themselves.
- o **Eye contact** - Your student should have his/her head up and should vary his/her line of sight. Engage different judges and different members of the audience.
- o **Gestures** - The inclusion of gestures - within reason - can help effectively tell a story or speech.

The Essentials

- o **Body Language**- Try to do away with any unnecessary fidgeting and swaying. Good posture is a sign of confidence!.
- o **Pronunciation** - Stay far, far away from katakana English. Record a CD or MP3 of yourself so that your student(s) can reference exactly how their speech should sound.
- o **Comprehension**- Be sure your student fully comprehends the story or speech at hand. Your student should understand exactly what (s)he is saying, and is not just reciting a collection of words.
- o **No pausing**- The speech should flow and run smoothly. Do your absolute best to help avoid any unnecessary pausing.

Choosing the right contestant

- o **ALTs:** Be involved from step 1!
- o **JTEs:** Start early & confer with your ALT.
- o **When choosing your contestant, take into consideration:**
 - o English ability
 - o Flair (talkative, enthusiastic, outgoing, naturally gifted speaker, etc.)
- ✂ **Other factors to consider:** extracurricular activities, jyuku, reliability, personal drive, etc.

How to get students involved

- o make a sign-up sheet
- o have your English club members participate
- o in-class contests
- o make posters announcing the contests
- o make announcements in class
- o recruit students yourself - but don't be pushy.

General practice tips

- o **Manage your dates and deadlines.** Know when the contest is, when the paperwork/script has to be submitted, and when your student will be on campus and available to practice.
- o **Start early, practice often.** Practice as much as you can. If possible practice daily - especially a week or two before the contest.
- o **Put yourself in the student's shoes.**
Public speaking is difficult. Doing it in another language can be downright frightening.
- o **Find a practice spot where you student is comfortable.**

General practice tips

- o **Don't overwhelm your contestant.** Break the script up into manageable sections and work slowly toward total memorization.
- o **Make yourself available.** The student will lean on you for encouragement and support. Being there when your student wants to practice will help them tremendously.
 - o If you need to, adjust your schedule during contest season.
- o **Continually build and work to maintain your contestant's confidence.**
- o **Get different perspectives on your contestant's speech.** Ask not only the other English teachers to listen, but everyone on campus. From the P.E. teachers, to the other students, to the people in the office.

General practice tips

- o **Record your student(s).** Your student will absolutely hate you for it at first, but having them watch themselves on video is the best way to show them what they can improve.
- o **Prepare your students through uncomfortable situations.** Have them do their speech or skit in front of their class, on the stage in the gym while the basketball teams are practicing, during morning assembly...by the time the contest comes around, your student should feel that the worst is over.
- o **Ask before you tell.** It should always be about what is comfortable for the student.
- o **Time the student(s).** It will help the student(s) get used to a comfortable pace.

SKIT CONTEST

JUNE

About the contest

- o English acting contest amongst senior high school students
- o skits must be **original**
- o it's the contest that is most fun!

How to help students

- o translate jokes/funny lines.
- o actions, gestures
- o brainstorm with your students what they are going to wear and what props they are going to use

What not to do

- o write the script
- o change the content or story
 - o make suggestions instead
- o tell them what actions/gestures to do

What the judges look for

- o no over-exaggerated movements or voices/speaking
- o originality
- o humor
- o controversial topics (through humor)

How it's judged

- o content (grammar, relevance, interest) - 40 points
- o English (pronunciation, intonation, memorization) - 30 points
- o delivery (use of props, audience appeal, etc.) - 30 points

Pointers

- o highlight your students' talents.
 - o magic, juggling, playing guitar, dancing, singing, etc.
- o get the audience involved
 - o doing a cue for the audience to clap, etc.
- o Spend some time making props that go well with the story. However, keep in mind it'll be considered secondary to **good acting and clear English**.
- o The actors should **speak loudly and expressively** to make an impact on the judges and audience.

STORY CONTEST

JULY

How to help students

- o choose a story together
- o facial expression and tone. Laugh, cry, scream and shout... have fun with it!
- o gestures

What not to do

- o tell them which story they are going to choose
- o tell them what gestures they should do

What the judges look for

- o appropriate amount of gestures
- o proper flow and tone
- o originality

How it's judged

- o interest (use of gestures, audience appeal, etc.) - 20 points
- o English (pronunciation) - 40 points
- o delivery (intonation and memorization) - 40 points

How to bore your audience (and your judges)

- o The Lion and the Mouse
- o The Giving Tree
- o The True Story of the Three Little Pigs
- o The Gingerbread Man
- o The Three Billy Goats Gruff
- o The Real Photographer
- o Red Demon Blue Demon

Originality

- o **try something different** - choose a story that the audiences and judges will remember!
- o **translate a story** - put your skills in action and translate a Japanese story to English
- o **keep your eyes peeled** - when visiting home or another country, be on the lookout for children's books you could use for the contest instead of recycling the same old stories.

SPEECH CONTEST

OCTOBER - DECEMBER

About the contest

- o speeches must be **original**
- o JHS: smaller contests in each district. Finalists go on to the Prince Takamatsu Trophy All Japan Inter-Middle School English Oratorical Contest.
- o SHS: may have a school speech contest. Winner goes on to prefectural or other speech contests.
- o possibility of going on to All Kyushu or All Japan
- o OCU • OCJU oratorical contest has impromptu questions at the end of speech

How to help students

- o help them edit their script - with them there
- o brainstorm with the student an appropriate topic
- o remind them of eye contact, posture, and where to place their hands.
- o circle/underline sentences or words on their script they need to work on

What not to do

- o write or translate the speech for them
- o tell them what to write about

What the judges look for

o Content

- o focused with a clear point, a strong introduction ,body, and conclusion.
- o judges like personal stories but the speech should have a deeper underlying message (relevant to a broader audience)
- o on the other hand, the student shouldn't give a speech about serious issues **without** it being tied back to personal experiences.

o Delivery

- o the student shouldn't sound like they are telling a story
- o the style of speaking should match the speech
- o sudden shouting, sorrowful or exaggerated voices should be avoided.
- o forgetting parts of one's speech doesn't automatically ruin a speaker's chance of winning
- o think of a real speech- if a speech would sound goo out in the public, it'll probably sound good to the judges.

How it's judged

- o prefectural contest

- o content (grammar, relevance, interest) - 40 points

- o English (pronunciation) - 30 points

- o delivery (intonation, memorization, audibility) - 30 points

- o OCU· OCJU contest

- o organization - 20 points

- o audience adaption - 20 points

- o language use - 20 points

- o delivery - 20 points

- o impromptu response - 30 points

Pointers

- content is important, but so is your student being themselves.
 - If a student really, really wants to share a story about a special friendship, or winning that badminton tournament for the first time, let them.
- participating in a speech contest is as much about winning as it is about students expressing themselves and the personal growth that comes through doing so.
- show your students examples of good speakers.

DEBATE CONTEST

**LATE
OCTOBER**

About the contest

- o English debate competition for senior high schools
- o new debate topic is announced every year
- o consists of teams of 3 students, who must be able to debate **both** the affirmative and negative side of the topic.
- o possibility of going on to the All Kyushu Debate Contest

How to help students

- o explain what it is and how a debate works
 - o rules
 - o attitude
- o define common terms and phrases
- o research - especially English content
- o script - explanation, writing, memorization
- o staying organized
- o supplies – note cards, binders, folders
 - o ask about a budget from the English department or PTA
- o organize mock debates
- o **overall support**
 - o working hard + long hours + English = tired and frustrated students

How to prepare students

- o Have students analyze the pros and cons of both sides of the issue, find good supporting evidence, anticipate the other team's possible approach, and plan counterstrategies for each.
- o Have a mock debate against ALT and JTEs when it gets closer to the debate contest.
- o Get your teams used to doing both the affirmative side and the negative side of the topic.
- o Get them used to the time limits for each role.
- o Show them a previous year's debate so they get a feel for what is expected of them.

Planning your team's arguments

- o Make sure the plan and advantages or disadvantages are stated very clearly at the beginning of the constructive speech and developed in a very logical and conclusive manner from that point.
- o Planning effective questions that will lead to an attack is a difficult skill. Spend a lot of time on this.
- o The rules of the debate may change from year to year so make sure you read the rules thoroughly.

Communication

- o English ability is only judged as communication points (5 points only). So have your team focus mainly presenting an effective argument. The points may come in handy but only if two teams are really close.
- o Good communication includes manners and sportsmanship. Make sure your teams don't:
 - o speak too fast, yell or come off abrasive
 - o rudely interrupt the other team (they may politely ask to move on)
 - o ask rhetorical questions during the debate (e.g. "can you tell me when I said that?")

What the judges look for

- o Sound information
- o clear, understandable voices
- o good attitude
- o respect

How it's judged

- o soundness and impact
- o the scores calculated for each advantage/disadvantage are added to each other
- o communication points are added to the final sum - max. of 5 points

Pointers

- o start preparing early
 - o recruiting students
 - o gathering evidence
 - o practicing speaking and listening comprehension
- o ask for help when you need it

SPELLING BATTLE

SEPTEMBER

About the contest

- o oral dictation & spelling bee
- o teams of three (up to five teams per school)
- o 4 rounds - 2 days
 - o 1st round (oral dictation)
 - o 2nd round (winners from 1st round. oral dictation)
 - o semi-final round (spelling bee)
 - o final (spelling bee)
- o oral dictation section is like a quiz show - press the buzzer to answer!
- o word list will be sent to your school from Okieikai (Okinawa Association of English Education) or you can download it from their website at okieikai.jimdo.com
- o **Another fun contest to assist with and watch!**

How to help students

- o give pronunciation and spelling quizzes
- o teach common spelling/pronunciation patterns
- o organize a mock spelling battle
- o the word list is long so break it up into sections so students don't feel overwhelmed
- o buy quiz buzzers (I bought mine from ETWS) to get students used to the dictation portion of the contest

What the judges look for

- o correct spelling and pronunciation
- o clear, loud voice
- o sportsmanship

How it's judged

- 1st round

- 10 words - each word is equivalent to 1 point

- 2nd round

- 10 words - each word is equivalent to 1 point

- semifinal round

- 9 words - each word is equivalent to two points

- final round - 7 teams

- 9 words - each word is equivalent to two points

Pointers

- in the oral dictation round, the words are not limited to the spelling on the word list.
- study → studying

The Big Day

- **Get a good night's rest.** The student will be on stage but they'll be looking to you for support.
- **Ask in advance if it is okay with your school to go to the contest.**
- **Know the schedule on contest day and where your student should be at what time.**
- **Make the day special.** Bring snacks to share, go to lunch with your student(s) and JTE, talk about things other than school to help relax your student(s).
- **Smile!** If you look nervous, your student may start to get nervous.

Post-Contest

- Win or lose, tell your student(s) of how proud of them you are and point out how far they have come with their English, shyness, etc.
- Encourage the student(s) to continue to participate in contests.

See you at next year's
contests!