

The Anatomy of Interpretation:  
A Podcast Series for Effective Competitive Speech Performance using Aristotle's Poetics

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*The Anatomy of Interpretation* is an ambitious eight-episode podcast series tailored exclusively for the dynamic community of students, coaches, judges, and parents actively involved in competitive high school speech and debate. While numerous resources exist to support students in the theater arts, there remains a significant gap in connecting performance theory with the world of competitive speech and debate. This project explores the world of competitive speech interpretation events, something thousands of students participate in every year, and dissects every element of Aristotle's *Poetics* for the betterment of student performance. It aims to provide invaluable tools for script analysis and character development, fostering a more equitable and enriched competition space while bridging the gap between literature and theory within competitive performance. *The Anatomy of Interpretation* will eventually be published on the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast, a four-year-old podcast series with hundreds of regular listeners, predominantly in Wyoming, but slowly expanding to other regions of the country as resources become more and more difficult to find and access without payment.

#### **Rationale**

Interpretation comes in many forms in the world of speech and debate. There is humorous interpretation, dramatic interpretation, duo interpretation, poetry interpretation, program oral interpretation, and many more. They are a fundamental event in the larger world of speech and debate because artistic expression is inherently an argument, the sole purpose for the activity in the first place. This series will use an ancient text and put it in a modern context to help students around the country make dynamic creative choices, build empowering performances, and inspire connections across performance disciplines. Existing materials are currently aimed to help theatre students, but this project takes the best of humanities literature and uses it to help guide students who are more familiar with the social sciences.

## **Intellectual Merit**

This project is a true multidisciplinary endeavor that advances knowledge and understanding within multiple fields, including theater performance, communication, political science, and debate. It synthesizes concepts from literature, theater studies, and communication into a cohesive narrative that examines how interpretation events function as a foundation for human expression.

Over the course of creating this series, I aimed to illuminate the vital role interpretation events play in the performing arts landscape, reinforce the significance of building persuasive arguments within the artistic realm of interpretation, investigate how interpretation shapes narratives, both in literature and everyday communication, foster multidisciplinary dialogue and collaboration between diverse fields, render Aristotle's profound ideas accessible and easily comprehensible to a young and vibrant audience from a variety of backgrounds and skillsets and create engaging and equitable resources for the thousands of students who passionately participate in interpretation events each year.

## **Broader Impact**

*The Anatomy of Interpretation* has profound broader impacts on both academia and society at large, transcending the boundaries of traditional research and using an innovative podcast format. The podcast series will serve as a dynamic, accessible educational resource for a diverse audience, including students, educators, and lifelong learners. It demystifies complex concepts, making them approachable, engaging, and highly relevant to the modern discourse. By exploring interpretation in various cultural and historical contexts, the podcast fosters a deeper appreciation for diverse worldviews and narratives.. *The Anatomy of Interpretation* encourages critical thinking and analytical skills. It dissects the process of interpretation, empowering listeners to become more discerning consumers of information, media, and stories. This, in turn, contributes to a more informed and resilient society. The podcast series is a wellspring of inspiration. By showcasing the artistry inherent in interpretation, it encourages individuals to explore

their own interpretive skills in their respective creative pursuits, nurturing a generation of innovative thinkers and creators.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Anatomy of Interpretation Podcast Scripts*

Over the course of this chapter, the eight scripts for *The Anatomy of Interpretation* series will be reviewed. These scripts were the basis of the series, as they are where the content of the episodes themselves lived. The eight episodes went through various drafts and differentiations. They also include what was said as well as creative flair that will be included once the series has been recorded with the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast. Below is both a script, transcript, and living document of what will exist in perpetuity on the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast website and other organization platforms.

#### **Episode 1: “Welcome to the Anatomy of Interpretation with Bailey Patterson”**

Infamous Ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle once said nearly 2,500 years ago, (insert outside voice) “Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives - choice, not chance, determines destiny” (Find Center Beta).

We’ll return to this later, but for now, let’s fast forward. (rewind sound insert). The National Speech and Debate Association was founded in the United States in 1925, back then it was called the National Forensics League, but as you can imagine, the initials NFL became a bit confusing when the National Football League got bigger, and as forensics became increasingly associated with crime scene investigation, well, now you know how the NSDA got its new name.

In the world of competitive speech and debate, there are many events students can participate in, but the two general categories are, of course, speech and debate. Debate events require an individual or team to effectively persuade a judge that their side of a resolution or topic is more valid than the opposing side. For example, the National Speech and Debate Association Lincoln-Douglas topic this September was Resolved: The United States ought to guarantee the right to housing. As students began their competitive debate season this year, they created cases for both sides of the issue. Debate isn’t about



choosing the side you like best, it's about learning how to effectively argue on both sides. Students will compete, typically November-March, with the National Speech and Debate Tournament for the best of the best in mid-June.

The speech events in speech and debate are a little different than debate. First, there are two distinct sub-categories. Public Address, also known as platform speaking depending on the vocabulary your side of the country uses, requires a student to write and perform their own speech either to share a belief, teach the audience about a new idea or concept, persuade their audience to act, or answer a question. Students have roughly ten minutes to present their speech in front of other students and judges at tournaments around the country.

I find that debate events, such as Lincoln-Douglas, and Public Address events, such as original oratory, are what the average, non-speech and debate affiliated person pictures when they hear the words "Speech and Debate." However, there is a second sub-category of competitive speech events that might surprise anyone unfamiliar with the activity. A hidden category to the average outsider, but nonetheless competitive speaking events that thousands of students participate in every year across the United States and beyond. That sub-category is called interpretation.

Interpretation events ask students to select and perform previously published or documented material from books, plays, musicals, articles, and even poems, then create a stylistic representation of the creative work or dramatic role. Essentially, interpretation events are acting events. They require students to perform as a character or characters, inhabit new perspectives, express complex emotions, make motivated vocal and movement choices, shape a story, and create an engaging atmosphere for the audience. All within ten minutes, usually by yourself, and with no access to props, costumes, sets, special lighting or sound equipment and other technical designs. The essence of the event is really about, well, your interpretation of something, without the reliance of physical spectacle to catch and maintain audience attention. Students must speak for ten minutes almost entirely on their own. In many ways, the lack of technical theatre allows the performer and audience to focus on the story without additional fluff. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm currently completing my Master of Fine Arts Theatre program and I know the

importance of technical theatre, but interpretation events purposefully strip that away to make competitive speech more equitable and accessible. It isn't about who spent the most money on props or elaborate costume designs, as a judge, I am exclusively ranking you on your performance.

Additionally, interpretation events ask you to take currently existing art and make a new argument for what that art represents and why it's important for our communities to be talking about today. This comes in a variety of forms, humorous interpretation, which typically tells a story using humor, dramatic interpretation, which focuses on sadder or more serious material, duo interpretation, which can be comedic or serious, but now has two people telling a story together, and program oral interpretation, which asks students to combine prose, poetry, and drama to create their own unique story. There are other interpretation events too, depending on your corner of the country, but these are typically the most popular. Unlike theatre competitions, speech tournaments are wonderful for students to participate in because they help students find their own unique creative voices, as opposed to auditioning for a show and becoming a piece of the puzzle. In a former interview I did with the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast (Insert shameless plug to check out Season 1 Episode 17: Dramatic Interpretation with Bailey Patterson) I detail the many benefits young performers and artists get when they do speech and theatre as opposed to just theatre. First, interpretation asks you to find material for yourself, making you better at finding and learning auditioning material. Second, it gives you the experience of learning how to command a space by yourself for ten minutes, something most high school plays or musicals won't be able to do. Finally, it gives you a better sense of how to become a storyteller overall. There are four people I know in the state of Wyoming who have done especially well in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Irene Ryan competition, a huge competition for college theatre performers that takes place across the country every year. While there are many performers in Wyoming with talent and experience galore, I do not think it is a coincidence that all four were high school interpretation competitors for at least three years. Interpretation can give you skills and opportunities that you might not find in other places.

You might be surprised to find that these events, rooted in performing as another instead of speaking as yourself, would be part of the speech and debate world. But the heart of speech and debate as an activity is curating and communicating effective arguments. And arguments don't just come in the form of a formal debate or persuasive Ted-talk-esque style speech. Audiences can be informed and persuaded through stories. In fact, stories can often be more persuasive than facts, figures, or statistics. In the book (potential outside voice insert) *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath they note a study they conducted with a group of students who watched a series of short speeches (2009). After presentations, they found that 5% of audience members remembered individual statistics, but 63% remembered stories. Interpretation events are an integral part of speech and debate as an activity because they harness the power of storytelling, a persuasive tool often more compelling and memorable than facts and figures. People remember stories and interpretation allows us to harness the power of storytelling to make lasting changes in individuals and society.

Interpretation demands more than just choosing a script and acting it out, however. There are many steps in the interpretation process. From finding a story you're passionate about sharing, to cutting it down to the under 10-minute time limit (with that nice 30 second grace period, of course), memorizing, rehearsing, and finally getting in front of a judge or two at a tournament. But first, interpretation requires vision. As Jonathan Swift once stated (possible outside male voice insert), "Vision is the art of seeing things invisible" (Just as a sculptor envisions the shape within a block of marble, or a painter sees a masterpiece on an empty canvas, an interpreter (short for interpretation performer) envisions a full performance within the script's words. This imaginative step is where interpretation begins, where we perceive the invisible and cultivate our artistic vision, taking mere words off a page and creating a living, breathing performance.

But vision alone is insufficient if it isn't valid. In other words, there are thousands of interpretations for just one script, as we are all unique artists with different ideas, but the vision must be informed by the script itself. At Texas Tech University, my directing professor, Jesse Jou gave the class an example of a production of *Hamlet* that took place on the moon. He would ask the class questions about the validity of this vision and

inevitably the class would always circle back to the same question: what about that choice speaks to the themes and messages within the script? Much like a scientist dissecting an organism, we must dissect the script to inform our vision and inevitably our characterizations. As the theatrical director Jason Pasqua aptly put it to me just a few months ago (insert sound of Jason's voice), "putting on a play is breaking it apart and then putting it back together." The same is true in the world of interpretation performances. So, if we must start with taking the script apart to create a valid vision, what methodology are we going to use to successfully anatomize?

Enter: script analysis. According to Louis E. Catron and Scott Shattuck in their book *The Director's Vision: Play Direction from Analysis to Production* (voice insert) "script analysis is the bedrock upon which we build bold interpretative choices, ultimately shaping an inspiring and persuasive vision." ( That valid vision will not only give us confidence and clarity in the story we're telling, but also transport our audiences to worlds they've never seen, listen to stories they've never heard, and ultimately empathize and relate to people they've never met. And empathy, being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand a perspective different from your own, is where societal progress can take root. When Aristotle said "excellence isn't an accident," he didn't mean that great things don't come from accidents, but that to achieve a goal we need to have clear intentions, good faith effort, and informed choices. Script analysis as a performer or interpretation competitor helps you accomplish all three. So many students think that the best performances come from natural-born talent, an exceptional coach, money or chance. But while those things would help, there is methodology anyone can use to be the best storyteller they can be.

Welcome to the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast series *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. I'm your host, Bailey Patterson, but in this series, you can call me Professor Patterson. I'm a former National Speech and Debate Dramatic Interpretation Semi-Finalist, a Wyoming state champion in Dramatic Interpretation, Duo Interpretation, and Poetry Interpretation, Program Oral-Interpretation Runner-Up at the International Forensics Tournament in Vienna, Austria and overall lover of anything performance. So much so that after I graduated high school, I went on to earn my Master of

Communication and my Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance and Pedagogy. That's a fancy title for learning more about acting, directing, and how to teach acting and directing. Over the course of earning my Master of Fine Arts I also won the National Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship given by the Kennedy Center every year and was honored to receive the Jane Alexander Emerging Artist Award from the College of Fellows of the American Theatre in 2022.

Over the next few episodes, I will introduce you to the intricate world of interpreting by reviewing script analysis and using a text over 2,000 years old as our guide. That text is none other than Aristotle's *Poetics*. This ancient work stands as one of the earliest surviving pieces of dramatic theory and is still used today to shape the practices of writers, actors, directors, and now, interpreters like us. While Aristotle's idea of what constitutes "good" performance is not universal and certainly not the end all be all of effective performance, it does give us a good foundation for talking about a variety of performance techniques and terms that will help us create a shared vocabulary. As we embark on this journey together, we'll unravel the secrets of script analysis, forging a deep connection between timeless theory and contemporary practice. We'll understand how the nuances of plot, the depth of characters, the power of thought, the resonance of diction, the emotion of music, and the allure of spectacle work in harmony to not only enhance our art but also resonate with the essence of human communication, argumentation, and expression.

In our next episode I will do an overview of the very foundation of storytelling itself for you. Whether you are a student, coach, parent, judge, or someone just generally interested in new ways of creating and sharing impactful stories. I'm Professor Patterson. Join me next time for *The Anatomy of Interpretation* Episode 2: Breaking down the Backbone, or Aristotle's first component of tragedy, Plot.

## **Episode 2: "Breaking Down the Backbone: Plot According to Aristotle"**

Welcome back to *The Anatomy of Interpretation* where we dissect each essential element of effective interpretation performance. Not just to win the 1 in the round, but to be the most effective storytellers we can be. I'm your host, Bailey Patterson, and today

we are breaking down the backbone. Plot, according to Aristotle, is similar to a spine in that it provides structure and support for our story. But first, let's make a fundamental distinction between story and plot.

A story is the body of a narrative, everything that happened during an event. But the plot is the carefully constructed arrangement of those events, giving the story its shape and purpose. Louis E. Catron and Scott Shattuck make an important distinction between story and plot in their book *The Director's Vision*. In it they say, "The king died and then the queen died." is a story, but "The king died and then the queen died of grief over the death of her husband." is a plot. The first event shaped the second event, they're related, connected, intertwined, and inseparable. Plot is especially important for us to understand in the world of interpretation because in many ways we are performer, director, designer, AND playwright. We take a script, book, poem, movie or various other texts and we craft our own plot depending on the story we want to tell and messages we want to share with our audience. It's not impossible to cut a 150-page biography into a drama, or a two-hour movie into a humorous interpretation piece, but understanding the parts of plot and how they function will help you create the best cutting you can.

There are two keys to understanding plot. First, identifying the dramatic question and second, understanding the protagonist's goals.

The dramatic question is the base of any compelling plot. It's the question that keeps you awake at night, the question that propels you through each chapter or scene. It's the "what's going to happen next?" that keeps us on the edge of our seats. It's what turns a string of events into a gripping narrative.

Imagine watching a thrilling mystery. The dramatic question might be, "Will the detective catch the elusive killer?" And the detective's goal is clear - to solve the case, to bring the killer to justice. The plot revolves around this tension between the question and the pursuit of the protagonist's goal. Dorothy Gale from *The Wizard of Oz* has a clear

goal as a protagonist. More than anything else, she wants to get back to Kansas and with her little dog too. Her goal helps us understand the larger looming dramatic question, will Dorothy get home? The dramatic question and protagonist's goal are central to understanding the story we are creating and will help guide our decisions as performers to interpret the piece as best we can later in the rehearsal process.

Now, let's dissect the plot backbone into its individual parts. Just like our spine has segments, so does plot. Here are the key elements from beginning to end:

Number 1. Previous Action: This is the backstory or history that shapes your character or characters and their world. It's the foundation upon which the rest of the plot is built. You might not give too much consideration to what happens before the character even begins speaking in the script, but what if you considered your character a full, complete human being. Even if they are a pretend person, characters are more dynamic and interesting when you present someone as a whole person with a past, present, and future. What was your character like one day before the story began? What about a week? A month? Ten years? What were they like as a child? What happened that led them to where they are now, speaking in the script? The more detail you have about what happened before, the more your characters will feel like real, living, breathing people.

Number 2. Exposition: This is where we introduce the main characters, setting, and initial situation. It's like setting up the stage for our story to unfold. It's the moment when we meet our protagonist and understand their ordinary world before the storm of the climax takes place. Usually, exposition is synonymous with the word "teaser" in the world of interpretation, or the part of your speech before the introduction, but not always. There are plenty of pieces that perform scenes out of order, or scripts where events don't happen chronologically. The best example I can think of is the 2014 National Champion Duo piece, *Never Swim Alone*, which takes a lot of what I'm saying here and totally breaks it apart, but they effectively broke the rules because they knew the rules really well in the first place. Even still, exposition will be revealed at some point in the story where we learn about the characters, their past, and what got them to this moment.

Number 3. Let's talk just a little about foreshadowing. While not present in every script, book, movie or piece of performance art, foreshadowing can be an effective device in the world of interp. Foreshadowing hints at future events before they actually happen, like breadcrumbs left for the viewer. It's anticipation, the clues that keep us guessing and what will keep our audience interested. Some of the best interpretation pieces I have seen utilize foreshadowing at the end of their teaser, right before the introduction. In fact, the word "teaser" suggests that you are teasing the audience with something before giving a brief description of your story and argument in your introduction. The best use of foreshadowing will happen in the teaser, and the best teasers have an element of foreshadowing. Foreshadowing might only be one or two sentences, but it's a preview of what is to come and leaves an audience wanting more. Have you ever watched *CSI*? Most of us have seen an episode or two of it. They always begin the same way, there's been a murder. Every episode of the thousands of episodes of *CSI* begins in the same way because the tv writers know its effectiveness. If they can get your attention in the first thirty seconds, they can keep it for the next hour. Consider that when creating your own teaser for an interpretation piece.

Number 4. The Inciting Incident: This is the trigger, the event that sets the plot in motion. It's the spark that lights the fire of your story. It's the first domino that falls, setting off a chain reaction. It's the detective learning there has been a murder, Dorothy getting swept away in a tornado, a future duo interpretation state champion going to the speech and debate classroom for the first time. The inciting incident sets our protagonist on a journey and knowing the inciting incident helps us understand how a character gets from point A to point B to, finally, point C, what I like to call the climax, but more on that one later. After the inciting incident, we have

Number 5. The Rising Action: This is where the plot thickens. It's a series of events, complications, and conflicts that build tension and complexity. It's meeting the scarecrow, tinman, lion, and wicked witch on our journey across the wonderful world of



Oz. It's like climbing a steep, winding staircase, each step more challenging than the last which will eventually result in

Number 6. Climax: The climax is the high point of the story, the moment of greatest tension and conflict. It's where the protagonist faces their ultimate challenge. It's like the storm reaching its peak, lightning cracking across the sky. It's Dorothy defeating the Wicked Witch of the West by melting her with a bucket of water. The Wicked Witch of the West will never be the same, and neither will Dorothy. Because she is successful in defeating the witch, she gets to go home. This is an example of

Number 7. The Falling Action: After the climax, we see the consequences and resolutions of the main conflict. It's like the storm gradually receding, the world settling after the chaos. Dorothy clicking her heels three times and magically finding herself back in Kansas. Finally, we arrive at

Number 8. The Resolution: The resolution ties up loose ends and provides closure to the plot. It's like the calm after the storm, where we see the aftermath and possibly a glimpse at the character's future. It's Dorothy, surrounded by her friends and family stating simply, (insert audio clip) "there really is no place like home." End credits role.

Each of these elements from inciting incident to resolution is like a vertebra in our storytelling spine. They work together to create a strong, flexible, and engaging narrative structure. But remember, just like each vertebra supports the next, each plot element supports the story's overall structure. They're all essential for a healthy, robust narrative and an even better performance. If you are taking a book and condensing it to a ten-minute performance, you will need to find all of these elements to construct your script. My recommendation is to begin by finding your climax, what is the big event the story is leading up to? Next, identify the resolution. Some interpretation pieces don't have clear resolutions, or a resolution at all, but I find pieces are at their best when there is a clear glimpse of what the main character has learned and what their future might look like after the performance is finished. Always leave your audience wanting more. In fact, always

leave your audience wanting to know more about this character or characters. They should enjoy the experience so much or get wrapped up in the plot so much that they experience what renowned theater director, Seth Gordon, once described to me in one of his workshops as “the great shlump.” This occurs when an audience is so invested in the story, so interested to know what happens next, that by the time the performance is over, they realize all their cares, wants, and worries have completely disappeared. They were slumped over in their seat totally consumed by the story in front of them. Part of your job as an effective interpreter is to distance the audience from their own reality. When you’ve done that, you know you’re successful.

After determining your resolution, find the inciting incident, or what gets your character on the path to the climax. Once these big three are determined, you can easily go back and consider the previous action, rising action, and falling action. You’d be surprised at how the spine will start materializing before your own eyes in the cutting process when you have a general idea of beginning, middle, and end.

Just to be clear though, identifying all parts of the plot backbone will be beneficial, even if you have a pre-cut piece, as each of these elements will help determine how you should play certain moments. Is the climax of *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy melts the Wicked Witch of the West, like I stated before, or is it actually when she discovers that the great and powerful Oz is a total fraud, preventing her ability to get home. Both are highly emotional moments. The one you choose as the climax determines how you play the climax and what your audience walks away understanding about the heart of the story.

Aristotle's idea of plot is a little different than what we discussed today, but the fundamental principles still remain. Plot is the backbone that holds everything together, creating tension and release, excitement and resolution. So, next time you watch a movie, read a script, or begin cutting a new piece for this season, remember to pay close attention to the spine - the sequence of events that gives the story its shape and purpose.

In our next episode, we'll explore the lungs of interpretation - the characters. See you next time!

### **Episode 3: “A Closer Look at the Lungs: Aristotle’s Characters”**

Welcome back to *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. In this episode, we're diving into the lungs of a performance - the characters. Characters are simply the people we meet in a story. They breathe life into the narrative, taking a plot from words on a page to living, breathing, meaningful communication.

When you read a script for the first time, you develop emotional responses and connections to the people. You'll empathize with the main character in a drama, you'll delight in the eccentricities of the best friend in a humor piece, and you'll relate to the relationships you watch in a duo performance. This emotional connection is central to interpretation. Part of why interpretation is effective at argumentation is that it takes a broad issue and instead of talking about that issue with facts or statistics, we meet someone who has actually been impacted by the issue. And we don't talk about them in the third person, we embody who they are using our voice and our body.

Your vision of an interpretation performance will often include how you feel about the characters, or people in the script. You'll have ideas about how they move, how they talk, their goals, and the actions they're willing to take to achieve those goals. You'll also envision the relationships these characters have, with themselves, each other, their environment, and how their experiences relate to you, the audience, and humanity at large.

First, let's start by distinguishing the two central characters that drive drama - the protagonist and the antagonist.

The protagonist is the leading character, the one we often root for, though not always. We follow their journey through a plot. They have a primary goal or objective

that takes us from beginning to middle to end. The protagonist is usually the main character, or who we see the most often in an interpretation piece. Typically, it's best in any interpretation event to meet the protagonist in the teaser. Even in events like humor and program oral interpretation (POI), we should meet our main character before the introduction. While you don't need a main character in an event like POI, since you will play multiple characters, it's still best to have one central character with a story we regularly return to throughout the piece. The key to understanding the protagonist, is that they transform from the beginning to the end of the piece. Dorothy is not the same person she was before she got swept away to Oz. She evolves, changes, and learns.

On the flip side, we have the antagonist - the character who opposes the protagonist's goal. They're often seen as the source of conflict, the one we usually love to hate or sometimes just regularly hate. Identifying the antagonist is important because they will often stand as a primary obstacle in the story. Humor and duo pieces will usually have clear antagonists. When building a POI, you might have a voice of opposition added to your piece to showcase the opposite side of your argument. Including an antagonist can help build more dimension in your piece.

Not every character is a protagonist or an antagonist. There's typically one of each and they are surrounded by other side characters with their own unique personalities and feelings about the protagonist or antagonist.

Characters, whether the protagonist, antagonist, or any side characters are defined in two primary ways - through stage directions and dialogue. Stage directions give us insights into a character's physicality, movements, and interactions with the environment. They reveal presence, demeanor, and required choices by the author. For instance, if the stage directions describe a character as pacing nervously, we get a sense of their anxiety, their restlessness. Without that stage direction you could play the character in a variety of ways, but those stage directions give us a lot of insight.

Dialogue, on the other hand, is the character's voice, their thoughts, emotions, intentions, and interactions with others. It's where we hear the rhythm of their speech, their unique vocabulary, and the way they express themselves. We learn just as much about the character from what they say as we do what the author says about them.

Pay close attention to both the stage directions and dialogue to get a full picture of who your character is and, therefore, how they should act.

Here are some fundamental questions to ask to figure out who your character is and, therefore, how to play them most effectively:

1. What is the character's main goal? What do they want more than anything else? Do they want it? Or do they need it? There is a big difference between want and need. I want a candy bar, I need oxygen. What does your character want and what do they need? Do they confuse their wants and needs?

2. What are the character's demographics? Consider their age, gender, race, physical size, occupation, habits, mannerisms, usual attitude, and beliefs. These aspects are the character's DNA. They shape who they are, how they interact with the world, and how they're perceived by others. How can you change your body and voice to play an 80-year-old? How is that different than playing a 6-year-old? How might a doctor present themselves as opposed to a park ranger? What ticks do they have? Do they twirl their hair? Chatter their teeth? Bite their nails? The more detail you can add to the demographics, the more interesting the final performance will be and the more distinction there will be between characters in interpretation events where you will be playing multiple characters and having multiple perspectives. Be careful not to play into gender, racial, or other stereotypes of people, however. We have seen far too many humor rounds that rely on generalizations or mischaracterizations of groups of people to get laughs. There are thousands of ways to play women, don't just rely on the most obvious choices or the choices other often make to build a character. Often the best performances are ones that take stock characters and add something new and fresh to them. For example, I

watched a humor piece where the preppy, mean theater girl character didn't have a high-pitched voice and vocal fry. Instead, this interpreter took Judy Garland's accent and made that the voice of the preppy, mean theater girl. A bold choice, but one that really paid off. She got my one because she did something fresh, unique, and pushed against stereotypes.

3. What do other characters say, think, and do with respect to your character?

There is usually just as much truth in what others say about your character, as what the character says about themselves.

4. What is the physical environment in which your character or characters live?

Your characters might live in a world nearly identical to ours. Other times, they might live in the world of a Disney movie, historical event from generations ago, or a distant future hardly recognizable to us. You can gather so much about a character from their physical environment: where they live, what they wear, and what part of history they are living through. But, without sets, costumes, or props, interpretation artists must focus on embodying these aspects through their performance, making the character's world come alive for the audience. You don't just get to know a character by learning about them, you get to know them through understanding their world. And world-building itself is crucial for interpretation. We will talk more about world-building in a future episode.

Over the course of a season, you might get to know your character or characters as well as you'd know your own family, as every character has their own unique personality, traits, goals, hopes, fears, and dreams. Understanding your character is like breathing in their essence, and as actors and interpreters, it's our job to breathe life into them.

In the notes of this podcast episode, I have attached a handout from Hall of Fame coach Marcus Viney that details a character triangle. This worksheet is best for interpretation events where you play multiple characters, where you don't need depth of character as much as you need distinction between characters. It's called Character Grid where you determine facial expressions, stance, and vocal quality of each character. You

might not need emotional depth in humor, although I think some of the best humors have really great emotional depth, but you do definitely need clear distinctions between those 15 different people in the Don Zolidis piece. This handout will help you play those differences.

In our next episode, we'll take a journey through the brain of the play - the thoughts, ideas, and themes that shape the narrative.

#### **Episode 4: “Brain Matter Mysteries or Aristotle’s Thought”**

Welcome back to *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. In this episode, things are getting... abstract. We're diving deep into Aristotle's term, "thought," which we now understand as theme. Understanding theme is like deciphering the hidden world of a plot, and determining theme is a vital skill for any interpreter, especially when you go to write an introduction.

To start, let's differentiate between two critical concepts - subject and theme. The subject of a piece is what the plot is about at its core. It's often an abstract concept like justice, revenge, love, truth, or destiny. The Wizard of Oz is about friendship, family, and finding home. In *Macbeth*, the subject might be "power" because the play explores the consequences of being motivated by control and authority.

Theme is the attitude or point of view about the subject. It's the stance on the subject, the perspective the author has on the subject, or the insight the piece offers regarding that subject. In The Wizard of Oz, if the subject is friendship the theme might be (insert different vocals), “friendships are what get you through the hardest of times.” If the subject is family the theme might be “family is one of our most prized possessions.” Or, if the subject is about home or belonging it might simply be “you can travel to faraway lands, but what you wanted all along might have been in your own backyard the whole time.”

In *Macbeth*, the theme could be summed up as (insert different voices) "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." It's the perspective on power that the play conveys. So, why is understanding theme crucial?

Theme weaves through every aspect of the play, from plot to characters to dialogue. It gives the narrative a sense of purpose and direction. But how do you know if your interpretation of the theme is correct?

One way to verify your theme is to cross-reference it with your dramatic question. In a previous episode, we discussed how the dramatic question is the driving force of the plot - the question that the entire play seeks to answer. There shouldn't be inconsistencies between your dramatic question, the protagonist's goals, or your thoughts on what the theme of the piece is. They should harmonize, like different instruments in a symphony.

An invaluable window into the world of theme is analyzing the play's title. The title often holds the essence of the theme. Take Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, for example. Not only is the title a direct quote from the play's climax, but it also encapsulates the theme perfectly. It's about the consequences of one's actions when family by blood is more important than duty to larger society.

Understanding the title and why the author chose that title can be invaluable when trying to figure out the theme. It's a key that can unlock the hidden message.

If you're still having trouble grasping the theme, consider the author's background and their other works. Authors often have consistent themes or genres they explore throughout their career. They have their own artistic fingerprint and often gravitate toward telling similar stories again and again. If you are having difficulty deciphering the theme, take a look at other things the author has written. This could provide invaluable insight into your own piece.



Additionally, think about the time in which the play was written. It's different to perform a character in 2023 than a character in 1945. The cultural conditions of the characters, as well as the author, can significantly influence the theme.

An interpretation piece is not just taking on a character or characters and performing their dialogue. What is the story arguing for or against? What perspective does it have on humanity at large? Finding the theme is exactly what you should be summarizing in your introduction. I love writing introductions. It lets the audience know right away what argument you are going to make, told through your own words. It's arguably the reason you should be performing in the first place. You aren't just sharing a story, performing a plot, or embodying a character, although you are doing those things. You are crafting an argument, a unique perspective on a story that deserves to be shared right here, right now. Decide what story you want to tell. As interpreters and performers, theme can be a bit coded, but once deciphered, it guides the path through every step of the performance-making process. In our next episode, we'll get loud with the fifth element of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Diction.

### **Episode 5: "Unveiling the Vocal Cords: Diction According to Aristotle"**

Welcome back to *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. In this episode, we're diving deep into the world of Aristotle's Diction, a concept that's like the vocal cords of a play. When Aristotle referred to diction, what he meant was language - how it's used, shaped, and delivered - and it's a vital aspect of the performer's craft.

So, what exactly is diction? Diction is the careful choice and use of words in a play. It's not just about the words themselves but how they're pronounced, their definitions, the emotions they convey, and the patterns of repetition. It's the silence between the words, the unspoken messages, and the underlying meanings. In essence, diction is the vocal essence of the play. But why is diction important?

Think of diction as the instrument through which the characters and the theme are expressed. It's the vehicle that carries the play's message to the audience. Just as a skilled musician coaxes beautiful melodies from their instrument, a skilled performer uses diction to convey the nuances and depths of the text. Now, let's explore some key aspects of diction:

1. Emotion: Diction is the heart of emotional expression in a play. The way words are delivered can convey a wide range of emotions, from love and joy to anger and despair. It's like the melody in a song, setting the emotional tone for the scene.

2. Pronunciations and Definitions: How words are pronounced and their definitions matter. They shape the characters' identities and can reveal their education, background, and social status. It's like the accents and dialects that add layers to a character's personality. Consider the difference in pronunciation between a refined aristocrat in the 17th century and a plumber in 2023. They likely have different mannerisms, different perspectives, and, therefore, different vocal patterns.

3. Repetition: Repetition of words or phrases is like a musical motif, emphasizing key themes or ideas. It draws the audience's attention and underscores the play's message. In *The Wizard of Oz*, repetition plays a key role. Not only do we hear that classic “there’s no place like home” or some variation of it multiple times throughout the story, but we also hear repetition in the songs and speeches of the three friends. (Insert audio clips) “If I only had a brain,” “If I only had a heart” and “If I only had courage.” The repetition is melodic, and it stays in the brains of the audience like lyrics from a favorite song. It also reinforces the longing from the scarecrow, tinman and cowardly lion. In Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the repetition of "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" highlights the character Blanche's vulnerability.

4. Silence: The pauses, the moments of silence, are just as crucial as the spoken words. They're like the rests in a musical score, allowing the audience to absorb and reflect on what's been said. These silences can be pregnant with meaning, revealing the

characters' inner turmoil or hesitation. A lot of novice performers are scared of silence, but you can use it to your advantage as a performer in a variety of ways.

5. Subtext: Diction often conceals subtext or the unspoken thoughts and emotions lurking beneath the surface. It's like the hidden notes in a melody, waiting to be uncovered. Interpreters must dig deep to unearth the subtext, revealing the complexities of the characters' inner worlds.

6. Beats: Beats are usually a bit different than the classic pause. If you see this in a script, it means the characters' thoughts or objectives have changed. There is a shift of some kind, not just a moment of silence. What is that shift? Identify the subtext to find out.

7. Faithfulness to the Author's Words: Staying faithful to the playwright's words is like honoring the composer's score. Every word is meticulously chosen to convey specific meanings and emotions. Deviating from the script can alter the play's intended message.

In conclusion, diction is the vocal cords of the play, the instrument through which characters come to life and themes find expression. It's the nuanced use of language that makes a performance memorable and impactful.

So, as interpreters and performers, remember that your mastery of diction is key to unlocking the full potential of a text. In our next episode, we'll explore the beating heart of a performance: music - See you then!

### **Episode 6: "Hearing the Heartbeats: Aristotle's Music"**

Welcome back to *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. In this episode, we're diving into the fifth crucial element Aristotle identified for an effective performance - music. You might be quick to point out that most interpretation pieces won't have music, although plenty of performers have added song to their interpretation duos, dramas, and

even humors. But, as Aristotle meant it, it's not just about song; it's about any sound or rhythm during the performance.

So, if Aristotle didn't mean music from Spotify, what exactly does sound look like?

Music, as Aristotle saw it, is not limited to instrumental melodies or choruses or singers but encompasses all sounds in a performance. It's the voice of the performers, whether singing or not, it's the footsteps echoing on stage, the rustling of pages, and the laughter of a character. It's a sonic landscape that envelops the audience and enhances the storytelling experience.

But why is this element of interpretation crucial? Imagine a play without music or for that matter, sound of any kind. It would be like a symphony missing its orchestra. Music, in the form of the performer's voice, sets the tone, pace, and emotional depth of a scene. Now, let's explore some key aspects of music in interpretation:

1. **The Performer's Voice:** The performer's voice is the primary instrument in this orchestra. It carries the weight of the characters' emotions, thoughts, and dialogue. Just like a conductor leading an ensemble, the performer must master their voice to evoke the desired emotional response from the audience. And you do this by utilizing diction, which we covered in the previous episode.

2. **Controlling Focus with Sound:** Sound, including the performer's voice, can be used to control the audience's focus. It's like a spotlight in a dark room, guiding the audience's attention to specific moments or characters. Through variations in tone, volume, and pace, performers can emphasize critical elements of the narrative.

3. **The Importance of Sound Effects:** Sound effects, whether integral or incidental, add depth and authenticity to interpretation events. (insert sounds for each of the

following different sounds) Footsteps, doors creaking, or distant laughter can transport the audience into the world of the play.

4. Integral vs. Incidental Music: Integral music is music explicitly written into the script, while incidental music is used to enhance the overall atmosphere but isn't mentioned in the text. Both forms of music can evoke powerful emotions and contribute to the play's ambiance. Many national duo finalists have utilized incidental music to their advantage, by beginning and ending their piece with harmonized songs.

In essence, music is like the beating heart of the performance. It sets the rhythm of the play, infuses life into the characters' voices, and creates a multisensory experience for the audience. Music, in its myriad forms, is the symphony that elevates interpretation to an art form.

So, as interpers and performers, remember that mastering the art of music in interpretation is like wielding a conductor's baton, orchestrating a captivating narrative that resonates with the audience. In our next episode of *Anatomy of Interpretation*, we'll explore the senses through spectacle. Catch you next time!

### **Episode 7: “The Five Senses or Aristotle’s Spectacle”**

Welcome back to *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. In this episode, we're entering the final act of our journey through Aristotle's *Poetics*, and we're saving the grand finale for last - spectacle. You can think of spectacle as a “wow” factor. It’s not about the characters, diction, or plot, though it usually heavily considers these. It's the show-stopping element that takes interpretation to the next level. But what is spectacle, and why is it so vital?

Spectacle is the visual and sensory feast that unfolds on stage. It's the dazzling costumes, the mesmerizing set design, the lighting that sets the mood, and the special effects that make jaws drop in a theatrical performance. Even though we don't have

access to those in the world of interpretation, there are still many ways to work in a wow-factor. Spectacle will help you create a visually stunning and emotionally resonant performance.

Now, let's break down some major artistic genres that come into play when creating an interpretation performance:

1. Realism: Realism is about representing the world as it is, with meticulous attention to detail. It's like a photograph capturing life's candid moments. This genre can be incredibly effective for interpretation, as it allows the audience to relate to the characters and situations on a personal level. Typically, dramatic interpretation pieces, though not all of them, have a more realistic approach. They are raw emotion, usually from only one character perspective. Often times, watching dramatic interpretation is like watching a memoir come to life. You follow the story of a real person. Therefore, you do your best to make it as close to life as possible.

2. Selective Realism: Selective realism includes the same raw emotion as realism, but with a few heightened elements. Maybe in a dramatic duo you are telling the story of a brother and sister, their relationship is real, but the musical transitions the performers use between scenes elevates the performance into something more than just listing to a story, like in prose. Selective realism is important to consider in dramatic duos and POI.

3. Expressionism: Expressionism is the polar opposite, prioritizing emotional and subjective experiences over realism. It's like a vivid dream, where the external world is distorted to reflect inner emotions. This genre enables interpreters to delve deep into the characters' psyche and create visually stunning, emotionally charged performances, that don't feel like real life. The National Tournament duo champion *Never Swim Alone* was definitely an expressionist piece.

And then, there's symbolic value. Symbolic values are the hidden treasures in a play. They're like the secret codes that unlock layers of meaning. Every prop, every color,

every gesture can hold symbolic value, representing themes, characters, or the larger human experience. Interpreters must be like detectives, uncovering these symbols and using them to enhance the performance's depth. In conclusion, spectacle is the grand finale, the visual and sensory masterpiece that completes the interpretation. It's the flourish of the performer's costume, the magic of the set, and the transformative power of the stage.

As interpreters and performers, embrace the art of spectacle to engage your audience fully. Remember that it's the captivating spectacle that makes interpretation an unforgettable experience.

In our grand finale episode, we'll revisit the essence of play analysis, explore how to bring this knowledge into the classroom, and guide you on your journey beyond *The Anatomy of Interpretation*. It's the encore you won't want to miss.

### **Episode 8: Head-to-Toe Review: Putting it Back Together**

Well, we did it. We moved through Aristotle's *Poetics* to better reflect the world of interpretation. We've explored how the nuances of plot, the depth of characters, the power of thought, the resonance of diction, the emotion of music, and the allure of spectacle work in harmony to not only enhance our art but also resonate with the essence of human communication, argumentation, and expression.

So, where do we go from here? In the show notes of this episode, you will find is a list of resources that can help at every step in the interpretation performance process. Worksheets for performers, coaching advice for coaches, and a general review of exercises that might be helpful.

To wrap up this series I want to thank Lyle Wiley for founding the One Clap Speech and Debate podcast. It's a resource I so wish I had when I was competing. I'm

forever in awe of his generosity, creativity and commitment to providing resources for speech and debate students in the great state of Wyoming and beyond.

I would also like to thank my thesis chair, Rachel Hirshorn-Johnston, for her help on this project and many, many more in my time as an MFA candidate at Texas Tech. I am so thankful our paths crossed. I have learned invaluable lessons from you about artistry, storytelling, and the power of vulnerability. I would also like to thank my committee member Seth Warren-Crow. I never had class with you, and I am terribly upset by that. However, I know exactly where I need to go for anything sound related in the future. Thank you for your time and direction.

I want to thank the speech and debate community at large for providing so many life-changing experiences and opportunities for me. I truly don't know where I would be without this activity.

Finally, thank you to my mom, dad, stepdad, grandmothers and Marcus Viney for your non-stop support, advice, and kindness from day one of my MFA program to the end. My success is our success. I couldn't have done this without you.



## **CHAPTER III: CONCLUSION**

I have learned many invaluable lessons while creating this podcast series. While I have worked on podcasts before, I have yet to be tasked with creating my own and I found the journey to be both a challenging and rewarding experience. First, I am thankful to be able to create a podcast series that will help people in my own community. Speech and debate is something that shaped my artistry from a young age, and I am excited to be creating something I wish I would have had when I was a student and competitor myself. Second, I am thankful to be working with such creative and inspired individuals who gave me guidance such as people affiliated with the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast and my chair and committee member. Finally, while I was nervous about writing the scripts and translating that into a podcast episode, I now feel like I have the skills to do so. Podcasts are truly their own medium and I am thankful for more experience creating in this medium.

This podcast series was created in hopes of helping students, coaches, parents and anyone else just generally interested in learning more about different performance techniques. When it is eventually published through the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast, I hope that it reaches a wide audience and helps people around the globe. While there are many ways to learn how to be a better storyteller, artist, and performer, I found that using Aristotle's *Poetics* was a great entry point, as it really covers the basics of western tradition performance. While many resources exist for theatre directors at the middle school, high school, and college age, I found that nothing existed like this for anyone involved in speech and debate. Therefore, this series truly brought classic theory and modernized it by talking about contemporary practice.

### **Creating a Character**

One element that I found surprising about this project was how beneficial it was to create a character for the podcast series. Before talking to my thesis chair, I was adamant to simply speak as myself. After all, I am qualified to be discussing this work

with my current degrees and experience, but as I went in to record my first episode, I realized it was much more fun to take on a different persona as I was recording. Yes, I am qualified, but there was something about being Professor Patterson that contributed to the tone, mood, and ambiance of the podcast series itself. In fact, after recording the first episode, I quickly realized I wanted to go back through and create more of a specific environment for this character. I am not just playing a character, but asking pertinent questions about the world that character lives in and displaying answers to those questions as audience members listen to the podcast. I will discuss what I mean further in the next section of this conclusion.

### **Future Directions**

There are two distinct categories for future directions when it comes to this podcast series. First, what I would like to change about *The Anatomy of Interpretation* series as it exists right now before being fully recorded and published as well as future directions for my involvement with the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast. I also think it is important to have big goals in the future even outside of this organization and be creative in thinking about other ways I can help this specific sect of performers in 2023 and beyond.

First, while the structure of *The Anatomy of Interpretation* series is something that I found to be beneficial, both for me as I organized the series, but also for listeners of the series to follow along as easily as possible, I would like to go back through my episodes and change some content. For example, I want to make the character of Professor Patterson more robust, give her more of a personality with distinct traits and possibly even a different vocal pattern than what Bailey Patterson uses in her everyday life. I think this will both help in terms of content delivery, but also inspire greater audience interest. For example, I want to implement more of a dark academia theme to the show. *The Anatomy of Interpretation* already gives such academic vibes, with a bit of mystery and spookiness. With words like “anatomize” and the regular reference to the classical text *Poetics* by Aristotle, it already feels like dark academia. I want to lean into this idea even more. While I was considering trying to get this podcast series published by the end of 2023, I think there is some serious benefit to working on it even more, especially after

getting feedback during my defense, creating a stronger character, having a better vision for what this world she inhabits looks like, and effectively communicating that to the audience based on the content itself, my voice, and additional sound effects. When I first heard the music, I wanted to begin and end the episode with I was immediately inspired to dig even deeper into the concept of a dark academia undertone for this series.

While this series might be a bigger, more in-depth exploration than I originally thought, I am inspired thinking about how it could evolve before the next recording and publication. I am also considering other series I could create for the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast and their organization. First, I was considering a series that breaks down the critical pieces in writing and creating a platform speech, perhaps also as Professor Patterson, but this time focusing on public address events. Now that I am a full-time public speaking instructor, I think I am credible to create a similar series for these events. Additionally, there might be a benefit to creating a series where I do interviews with professional creatives and storytellers to hear their advice for young performers, either in theatre, speech, or any other activity. I think it would be fun and beneficial to create a series on opportunities for performers post high school graduation. This is, again, something I wish I would have had in high school and at the 2023 Wyoming Speech and Debate Coaches Conference I sat on a panel where we discussed potential college opportunities for high school performers. Many in the audience found this panel to be helpful and were quick to relay information to their own students. If what I know about the world of college and performance can help other people, I want to share that information, both from my own experience, but also from the experiences of others.

Finally, I always think it is best to end with a lofty goal for beyond this podcast series. I am quickly establishing a name for myself in the speech and debate community, both as a former competitor and as someone now creating content to help young competitors. In the last year, I have met a few people with connections to the National Speech and Debate Organization. They hold conference and workshops every year for students and coaches alike. While I would love to share this podcast with them, I believe it will always live with the One Clap Speech and Debate Podcast so that it can be accessible for everyone. However, I learned so much about intimacy choreography in my

time at Texas Tech University and it's something we need to be promoting in high schools. Not just in the world of theatre, but speech and debate as well. There are always questions about trigger warnings or content warnings, when to know if a piece is appropriate for a certain age group, or if students should be encouraged to tell stories with gender, racial, etc. trauma, even if it might retraumatize them in the process. These are important and critical conversations to be having and I want to be part of them, if not outright lead them as the activity of speech and debate evolves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In conclusion, I learned so much about storytelling through the medium of podcasting over the course of this thesis. *The Anatomy of Interpretation* was certainly a labor of love that I hope more than anything can help young performers thrive and become even more interested in artistry and developing stories they feel a need to share with their communities. As I continue with this project, and get creative with ideas for future projects, I have even more ideas for how to make this even more engaging as a performer and audience member alike. I also have big goals for what this could someday turn into.

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