

SPEECH ARTS AND DRAMA PROGRAM BENEFITS

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The common concern of parents considering the Speech Arts and Drama program is that they want their child to “speak with confidence.” This may stem from reports that a child doesn’t speak in class, from wanting a child to tell their play-acting stories, from the knowledge that being a good speaker will help with college interviews, or from the concern of immigrants that their child not struggle as they did when they first arrived in North America.

It should come as no surprise that parents see the value in communication skills, since many employers today identify communication skills as a top priority in job postings and hiring criteria. Educators, too, are beginning to note a shift in focus, from the testing of skills such as math and language as markers of achievement to a new emphasis on 21st-century skills of collaboration and communication.

Communication means many things in our technology-driven world. We keep in touch and connect on social media; we send and receive dozens of emails on a daily basis; our hand-held devices are rarely powered off and are nearly always within arm’s reach. Our world is seemingly smaller than ever, with many of us communicating with a network of friends and family that spans the globe. Our communications are often marked by brevity, convenience, and portability. And yet, the power of the speaking voice and the importance of face-to-face communication has never come into question. We know that everything from the “big interview” and the “major presentation” to summit meetings of world leaders still happens in person. There is no substitute for face-to-face communication. It remains the most human of connections as well as an invaluable opportunity for a speaker to make a point and for listeners to evaluate authenticity.

Parents come to the RCM Speech Arts and Drama program with the fairly simple, straightforward goal of helping their children find their voice and communicate with confidence. Many who come to the program with that goal have only a vague idea of what the training really entails or how the process works.

FOCUS ON LITERATURE

Students in the Speech Arts and Drama program work with poetry, prose, and drama, bringing them to the stage for audiences small and large. In exploring the rich experience of the interpreter and actor, we explore literal meanings, delve into theme, subtext, and connotation. We also guide students to explore what makes meaning—the ways language, sound patterns, rhythm, and structure intertwine in great literature, and the ways a speaker can use layers of sound and other details to create their own artistic moment. Students delve into the lives of characters, discovering motivation and intention and losing themselves in the acting process.

The practical, academic benefits of the training, from “nailing” an English exam in school or excelling in poetry at school, are evident early in the child’s studies. Parents soon see improved vocabulary and

comprehension. Immersion in literature, from classic to contemporary texts, and from poetry to prose and drama, gives Speech and Drama students a broad sensibility to, and insight into, the human experience. As students seek to understand and convey the meaning of pieces ranging from Winnie-the-Pooh to “Ode to the West Wind” and bring characters to life, they discover layers of thought, emotion, and meaning that profoundly affect who they are and how they see the world. In literature, we find ideas that resonate deeply inside us. In every piece, we find a bit of ourselves. Speech and drama help us understand who we are and how we see the world.

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND STORYTELLING

Public speaking and storytelling are major components of the Speech Arts and Drama program that benefit students in training them to think, create, and shape their own ideas and to share them with an audience in a manner that is in the moment, alive, and responsive. These are powerful skills. Public speaking training is the element of the program that is perhaps most closely tied to success in academic and work situations. Students learn to craft and deliver a message that will influence and persuade an audience, mastering the main goals parents have for them, which are to speak effectively and to achieve success.

Storytelling is a similar presentation style that may be even more powerful than public speaking. Storytelling accesses personal stories and our own repertoire of experience. The great benefit to students is in their ability to shape a narrative, to embellish it with unique details, and to connect with their audience. Storytelling is our most authentic and perhaps most primal means of communication, and it helps students find their own voice and personal speaking style.

FINDING YOUR VOICE—A REAL VOICE

The Speech Arts and Drama program is unique in its emphasis on training the voice and body as a unified instrument. The benefit is that speech and drama students have a voice that commands and takes them from the classroom to the stage with ease and style. Not only does a student learn to speak with clarity and use their voice to its maximum, healthy potential, they also master tools such as pitch, inflection, power, tone, and pace. To be present in communication depends on focused, physical energy and on a voice that is flexible, commanding, pleasant, and powerful. Speech and Drama students find their voice and learn to speak with presence.