THE MONODRAMA

The monodrama is a form of interpretation in which one person tells or acts out a dramatic story and assumes the one chief role. All attention is focused on this person and situation. Usually the speaker appears to be talking to an unseen person, whose unheard questions and statements seem to motivate the speaker's words and actions. However, in some situations the speaker is talking only to himself; this is called a soliloquy. Whether the speaker has a listener or not, he is not merely making a speech. The speaker is revealing innermost thoughts and feelings on some matter of personal importance, and thus is highly emotional. Monodramas may be written in prose or poetry. Some examples include Robert Browning's "The Patriot" and "My Last Duchess," and Tennyson's "Ulysses."

ALMOST AN ACTOR

Monodramatic readers border on being actors in some respects. They portray a single character through identification with the character by voice, gestures, and mannerisms. If the person represented is a villain, the reader must make his speech sound villainous. If the person represented is a king, the reader must make himself sound royal. Monodramatic readers draw upon all of their observations, past reading, and imagination to make the character come to life. Some even use makeup, costumes, and props to add impact to their reading. Others memorize their lines and don't use books or lecterns in their presentations.

KNOW THE CHARACTER

Successful presentation of a monodrama begins with complete understanding of the material being presented. Analyze your selection for its meaning and emotions, plot and climaxes, as outlined in Project One of this manual. Then turn your attention to the character who is speaking. Is the person strong or weak, timid or confident? Angry or sad? Does the character express true emotions or conceal them? To whom, if anyone, is the character speaking? What kind of relationship exists between the two people?

Once you've established the mental and emotional aspects of the character, you're ready to work on the vocal and physical aspects. What vocal elements—rhythm, inflection, pitch—would most accurately and quickly suggest the character to your audience? What gestures/body movements best reflect the physical characteristics of the person? Be sure to read the Appendix for tips on using gestures/body movement in interpretive reading.
PRESENTATION

When reading a monodrama, don't look directly at your audience. In these situations, your listeners are overhearing something that they were not meant to hear. Don't acknowledge their presence by looking at them.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Select, analyze, and present a monodrama. The monodrama may be in prose or poetry. Use your voice and body to convey the mental, emotional, and physical characteristics of the person who is speaking. Prepare an introduction (of no more than 45 seconds) to your selection. If possible, memorize your selection. If you can't do this, at least try to refer to the book as little as possible as you speak. You may use props if you feel they will add to the impression you want to make on your audience.

Since many people are not familiar with interpretive reading and its purpose, you may want to have the Toastmaster briefly explain the nature of interpretive reading before introducing you.
EVALUATION GUIDE FOR THE MONODRAMA

Title ____________________________________________
Evaluator ________________________________________ Date __________________________

Note to the Evaluator: In this project, the speaker was to present a monodrama, assuming a character who reveals his innermost thoughts and feelings on some matter of importance. All attention is focused on the speaker, and the speaker may seem to be talking to a second, unseen person whose unheard questions and statements seem to motivate the speaker’s words and actions. The speaker was to use voice and body to convey the mental, emotional, and physical characteristics of the person who is speaking. It is suggested you read the project and the Appendix before the presentation.

› Was the character clearly defined by the speaker?

› Did the speaker effectively express the conflict in which the character was involved?

› How effectively did the speaker use voice and gestures/body movements?

› Did the speaker successfully avoid eye contact with the audience?

› With what parts of the monodrama did the speaker appear most comfortable?

› Did the speaker display any distracting mannerisms?

› What could the speaker have done differently to improve the presentation?

› What did you like about the presentation?