GIFTS Exercise: Deep Thoughts: A Jack Handy Impromptu Exercise

Time Required: Approximately 5 minutes per student which includes preparation and speaking time.

Materials necessary: The instructor will need a prepared list of Jack Handy quotes. Students will need index cards and creativity.

Goal: This exercise was developed for a public speaking class to accomplish several objectives.
1. To give students impromptu speech topics that they can easily apply to their own lives.
2. To give students impromptu speech topics that can easily be expanded upon if instructors want students to delve deeper into the quote rather than relying on surface meaning.
3. To encourage creativity among students in creating their own “Deep Thoughts.”

Rationale: Impromptu speaking is the most common form of public speaking and we are called upon to do it several times a day. Rothwell (2004) says that students should do three things in preparation for impromptu speaking. First, anticipate the situation and start to prepare. Second, draw on your own experiences and knowledge when composing your speech. Finally, create a simple outline to use during impromptu speaking. All of these suggestions are incorporated into the “Deep Thoughts” assignment.

Directions: The class is given a list of “Deep Thoughts” by Jack Handy (Saturday Night Live) two class periods before their first practice impromptu speech. They are expected to look over the list and pick two or three of the quotes that they are able to speak about. For the first impromptu they are expected to include a full introduction/conclusion and the body should consist of two examples to support their thesis. The second practice impromptu is similar, but students are expected to expand the quote they have been given and use one example from their lives and at least two examples from other sources such as literature, science, communication theory, etc. For example, if a student picked the quote, “Probably the saddest thing you’ll ever see is a mosquito sucking on a mummy. Forget it little friend.” they may approach it in the following way.

Thesis: Sometimes the truth eludes us.

Example 1: Shakespeare: Romeo didn’t know the truth about the “poison” Juliet swallowed and in the end they both ended up dead.

Example 2: Racial profiling is a tactic used by many police forces across the country in attempt to catch criminals, however, stereotypes shade our perceptions and make finding the true criminal more difficult.

Example 3: Personal example.

There are several other ways this quote could be interpreted and students are encouraged to be creative with their interpretations as long as they explain their logic to the audience.

The final impromptu the students give is graded and they come up with their own “Deep Thoughts.” I have them turn in an index card the day of their speech with Aimee Brickner
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two original “Deep Thoughts” and I pick one. Each student receives two minutes of preparation time in the hallway with one blank index card and 2-3 minutes of speaking time where they are expected to have an introduction, conclusion, 2-3 main points, and transitions.

**Typical Results:** Students absolutely love this assignment! Impromptu speaking terrifies most of them in the beginning but after they do a couple and are given topics in advance, they become much more comfortable. In addition, by having students write their own “Deep Thoughts” they are given some control over the topic choice. They also allow the rest of the class to learn a little bit more about them based on the “Deep Thought” they create.

**Sample “Deep Thought” Quotes:**
- One thing vampire children have to be taught early on is, don’t run with wooden stakes.
- The face of a child can say it all, especially the mouth part of the face.
- I wish I had a dollar for every time I spent a dollar, because then, Yahoo!, I’d have all my money back.
- Somebody told me how frightening it was how much topsoil we are losing each year, but I told that story around the campfire and nobody got scared.
- Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in their shoes. That way, you’ll be a mile from them, and you’ll have their shoes.
- To me, boxing is like a ballet, except there’s no music, no choreography and the dancers hit each other.
- I think it’s a good idea to always carry two snacks of something when you walk around. That way, if anybody says, “Hey, can you give me a hand?” You can say, “Sorry, got these snacks.”
- During the Middle Ages, probably one of the biggest mistakes was not putting on your armor because you were “just going down to the corner.”
- I’d rather be rich than stupid.
- Dad always thought laughter was the best medicine, which I guess is why several of us died of tuberculosis.

**References:**

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