

Miriam Lutcher
Stark Contest[®]
in
Reading and Declamation
— ESTABLISHED 1904 —

JUDGES' HANDBOOK

PREFACE

This handbook has been developed to give judges a general overview of the judging procedure to be followed at both local and county levels of the Miriam Lutcher Stark Contest in Reading and Declamation (“Contest”). This handbook is not intended to replace the official Directors’ Rules and Guidelines for the Contest. *It is essential that judges review the separate Rules and Guidelines before judging either category of the Contest.*

The purpose of this publication is to emphasize the overwhelming importance and responsibility that judges have in evaluating and critiquing the presentations of contestants in the Stark Reading Contest. The preparation time that students and staff have devoted to their readings deserves a judge’s very best efforts.

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It is the policy of the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutcher Stark Foundation as sponsor of the Contest to not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion, creed, gender, age, or disability in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices.

OVERVIEW OF STARK READING CONTEST

Each year from 1904 to 1975, the Stark Family – beginning with Miriam Lutcher Stark and continuing with her son, Lutcher, and his wife, Nelda – sponsored a contest in reading and a contest in declamation in Orange, Texas public high schools.

In 1976, the Miriam Lutcher Stark Contest in Reading and Declamation became a qualified scholarship program of the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutcher Stark Foundation, a charitable organization established by Lutcher and Nelda Stark to enhance the quality of life in the Orange, Texas community through, among other things, the arts, culture and education. The contest, known throughout Orange County as the “Stark Reading Contest”, is now held every spring at the five public high schools in Orange County, Texas.

Individuals placing in first and second place in each of the initial contests at the local/school levels receive scholarships. Upon completion of the contest in any participating school, the First Place winners in each of the categories of reading and declamation meet and compete in a countywide final for determination of the best presentation in declaiming and the best presentation in interpretive reading.

Each first place contestant at the countywide final of the Contest will receive an additional scholarship and all 10 finalists receive a commemorative watch, which continues a long-held tradition that originated in the early years of the Contest.

The aim of the Contest is to encourage student participation and competition to enhance the literary and forensic quality and skills of students. While the visible work of the Stark Reading Contest is carried on through a series of local contests, culminating in the countywide contest, the fundamental philosophy is built upon the idea that no form of activity is more important than that of learning to speak effectively. The effectiveness of educational enlightenment may be lost if individuals are unable to express to others their ideals and beliefs.

JUDGES' PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the Stark Reading Contest embraces the encouragement of students at Orange County public schools toward participation in reading and declamation and subsequent refined human communication.

Since assigned judges are the intended testing guide, students' future activities are determined by the decisions of judges. Contestants should not be served by judges on a professional or highly restrictive basis, but rather with an open mindedness that recognizes the high school range of ability and training.

The judge is to be (1) knowledgeable in a current perspective for the assigned category; (2) receptive with a constructive and promotional attitude; (3) prepared to present the student with a tactful justification for any rating given; (4) willing to recognize that unfamiliar material may qualify as acceptable subject matter; and (5) informed of writings that exemplify literary merit, together with the concept of reading level difficulty assessment or measure.

JUDGES' CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Number and Naming of Judges. The panel of judges for any level of the Stark Reading Contest will consist of an odd number of judges of not more than five (5) and not less than three (3). The designated director for each participating school is responsible for securing a judging panel for the final round at that school/local level as well as any preliminary rounds of the local level of the Contest at that director's participating school. The Stark Foundation's Stark Reading Contest Coordinator will secure the judging panel for the county level of the Contest.

Qualifications. At a minimum, a judge must be a college graduate. It is preferred that a judge have a background in reading/language arts, communications, English/literature, speech, or journalism/broadcast media or similar field of study, work or discipline that emphasizes oration, public speaking, rhetoric, language or comparable skills or similar field of study, work or discipline.

Judges must not be related within the second degree of affinity (by marriage) or the third degree of consanguinity (by blood) to any participant in any level of the Contest in which the judge may be assigned, regardless of contest level.

Judge's Ethics and Information Forms. Each individual who serves as a judge at any level of the Contest should complete a Judge's Ethics Form and a separate Judge's Information Form. The Information Form provides basic contact and background information for each judge, including an acknowledgment that the judge is not related by blood or marriage to a contestant in the Contest that he/she is judging or to another judge on the panel on which he/she is serving. The Ethics portion of this form must be completed and handed to the School Director or Stark Reading Contest Coordinator before the start of the contest at which the judge is presiding. It is on the Information Form that a judge may choose to donate his/her time. Alternatively, to receive payment for his/her services, the judge must make an affirmative election for a stipend. The Stark Foundation will pay a stipend in the following amounts for each individual who serves in the capacity of contest Judge and who elects to receive a stipend, based on the following levels:

Preliminary Round Judge: \$75
Local Level Final Round Judge: \$100
County Level Final Round Judge: \$150

An election to receive the stipend must be made on the second page/separate form of the Judge's Information Sheet. Documentation for ACH direct deposit and a completed W-9 needs to be submitted to process stipends. Once all documentation has been received, payment will be processed for ACH direct deposit.

The Judge's Information Form may be obtained from the Stark Foundation website or from the Stark Foundation Stark Reading Contest Coordinator.

SCORING SYSTEM

1. **Scoring the Contestants.** At each level of the Stark Reading Contest, each judge will indicate a score for each contestant on the official Evaluation Form.
2. **Judges' Evaluation Form.** The Stark Reading Contest Coordinator will provide a separate Evaluation Form for each category of the Contest (i.e., form for Interpretive Reading, form for Declamation). The Evaluation Form for each category will be used at all levels of the Contest.

The form consists of distinct categories and applies different weights based on a point system ranging from 10 (highest) to 1 (lowest), or from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest), depending on the category. Level of difficulty of a selection and compliance with time requirements are also considered, but are completed by Contest officials.

The primary purpose of judges at the Stark Reading Contest is to provide the best possible evaluation of student presentations. An established format is used to provide experienced critiques, yet provide any novice judge an opportunity to learn.

The judges' evaluation policy is established to maintain consistency within contests throughout the various school/local levels in Orange County and to provide each student a fair, complete, and unbiased critique of his/her presentation.

A copy of judging instructions (including category descriptions and reading level measure information) as well as judging criteria will be given to each judge. Decisions of the judges at both the local and county levels are final. There will be no ties. Any ties will be broken using UIL Guidelines, as interpreted and applied by the Stark Foundation's Stark Reading Contest Coordinator.

JUDGING ETHICS

The professional ethics connected with judging warrants the common sense approach. For example, if students are expected to dress appropriately for contest appearances, judges are expected to set an example by being appropriately dressed. Judges should adhere to a formal, semi-formal or professional dress code at all levels of the contests.

A judge should always be attentive and interested in all students as they compete for scoring. This means he/she should display a friendly smile and show he/she is a caring person. A judge should exhibit a desire to assist the student in becoming a better person through the reading and speech experience.

A judge must show patience while in a contest situation. There is no reason for a judge to show any disdain toward a student appearing late or out of order since generally it is not the student's preference, but rather a necessity, that precipitated the change.

The general rule of ethics is to make all students feel as comfortable as possible when they are competing. The judges who attain that goal are the ones most respected by the students and their speech coaches. Judges should not give verbal feedback regarding students' presentations during or after the school or county level contests; rather, judges should note any additional commentary on the Judges' Evaluation Forms in the space for "Additional Comments."

If a problem arises during the Contests, the Judge should notify the School Director or the Stark Foundation Stark Reading Contest Coordinator.

SPECIFIC CONTEST CATEGORIES

The purpose of this handbook is to aid judges in focusing on elements that are of prime importance to each category.

In addition to the criteria in this handbook and on the Evaluation Form, each individual judge should provide his/her comments on the uniqueness of each individual performance.

INDIVIDUAL EVENTS:

I. DECLAMATION

DEFINITION

Declamation is a presentation of another author's material, i.e. a speech, address or other oratorical matter.

RATIONALE

Declamation encourages effective public speaking techniques.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Declamation should reflect suitable and appropriate choice of material with evidence of complete analysis.

The material should be such quality that it has and will continue to pass the test of time.

The presentation should display projection of thought and emotion, using appropriate, natural body movement and proper vocal techniques.

Acting is prohibited, and a contestant may not use costumes, props, or visual materials in connection with any part of his or her presentation at the Contest, including but not limited to his or her delivery of the selection. It is permissible for contestants to use a dark, stiff-backed folder to hold any manuscript or excerpt for a selection.

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II. INTERPRETIVE READING - POETRY/PROSE

DEFINITION

Poetry/Prose is the oral interpretation of a selection of poetic/prose material chosen by the Contestant.

RATIONALE

Interpretation of Poetry/Prose encourages comprehension, appreciation, and analysis of poetry/prose, demonstrating the ability to evoke an audience reaction through interpretation.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Poetry/Prose Interpretation involves the choice of material suitable for the Contestant, along with his/her development of interpretive techniques which reflect the tone, intent, and style/form of the selection.

The presentation should display effective vocal techniques along with facial expressions(s) and natural body movement and reactions to the text.

Acting is prohibited, and a contestant may not use costumes, props, or visual materials in connection with