

## IDS Coffeehouse Brews Connections to Poetry

*Middle School tradition enables students to connect on an advanced level to poetry, while providing the opportunity to use skills of poise and presence to perform on stage.*



*Hanna Rinner (left) performed the Shel Silverstein favorite, “The Giving Tree.” Lumiere Rostick and Jacob LaVoy supported her performance portraying the tree and the boy who grows into an old man.*

**March 16, 2011 (TAMPA, Fla.)** – The hallow patter of bongos resonating throughout the dimly lit Farish Center begins to soften. The aroma of coffee wafts through the air. Clad in a black turtleneck, beret and dark glasses, English teacher Michael Vokoun, in his “coolest cat” voice, coaches the audience to snap their fingers to show appreciation for the students as they complete their performances on stage.

“Instead of claps, snaps. Got it, daddy-o?”

So begins the 12<sup>th</sup> annual [Independent Day School-Corbett Campus](#) Poetry Coffeehouse.

Middle school students at IDS have numerous opportunities to develop their public speaking abilities: in the classroom, as part of academic lessons, during electives and clubs in musical theatre, forensics, and thespians, in addition to after school with the [IDS Community School of the Arts](#).

There’s also the popular middle school coffeehouse, which unites all seventh and eighth graders and brings them on stage for a single evening of live performance.

According to seventh and eighth grade English teachers Vokoun and Jenn Jagdmann, the emphasis on *performance* is what makes the IDS version of a coffeehouse special, as well as a favorite among the school’s many traditions.

“While recitation of poetry is great for experience, to actually *perform* poetry is taking the poem to a whole different level,” said Vokoun. “Performance requires a deeper knowledge of the poem and its meaning in order to allow for individual interpretation.”

“To act out a poem, its deeper meaning must resonate within your very soul,” said Jagdmann. “Students make more meaningful connections to poetry.”

The process of connecting on an advanced level to a particular poem began with students reading and discussing a variety of forms of poetry in class. Students then selected three poems that they wanted to explore more in depth, and one of those poems became the piece they performed at the coffeehouse.

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*Some students performed their poems in pairs and some in small groups. Slater Rice (left) and Brianna Hollander (center right) performed solo. Many students, including Reed Forehand and Dina Al-Hassani, supported their classmates' performances, in addition to performing their own pieces.*

Performing solo, in pairs and in small groups, students added costumes, props, music and even dance to their presentations. Selections covered a wide variety of both poets and subjects -from classics by authors such as Robert Frost and Edgar Allen Poe to whimsical pieces by Shel Silverstein and Ogden Nash. Themes ran the gamut, as well, with students lending their individual interpretation to poems about war, love, sports, nature, dance, death, and even a disco cow.



*(l) Garrett Anderson, Calvin Windisch, Tylor Kittredge, and Alex Rivera perform "Ode to War" by Mark R. Slaughter. (r) Jaclyn Cohen and Falisha Kurji selected Katy Perry's "Firework."*

While the poetry coffeehouse is foremost an academic endeavor to foster deeper connections to poetry, it is also a lesson in risk taking, empathy, and cooperation – key IB learner profile characteristics.

“It was gratifying to see how students were willing to go out on a limb, outside their own personalities, and become the person the poem asked them to be,” said Vokoun.

“It was also impressive to see the support they provided each other by participating in each other’s performances as secondary characters,” said Jagdmann. “That cooperation enabled the audience to enjoy the piece even more.”

*Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, nonsectarian private school located on Orange Grove Drive in northwest Hillsborough County with over 500 students from PreK3 through 8th grade. At IDS, all children experience the International Baccalaureate Programme in a highly academic and nurturing environment focused on excellence and excitement in learning. IDS-CC has become recognized as an exemplary school with over 6,500 visitors observing and learning from IDS-CC teachers. For more information, visit [www.idsy.es.com](http://www.idsy.es.com) or contact the Admissions Office at 813-961-3087 for a personal tour.*