

### I Don't Understand the Question

"When in doubt...don't understand the question."

Words of wisdom spoken by sophomore Casey Owen, second year debater. Asking that question meant getting more time to think about how to answer, and just a few seconds could make a difference in debate. Whether the students competed in debate or forensics that was one of the few "helpful hints" that carried over no matter what.

"I like the structure of debate more. It forces you to be able to have a conversation with someone in which you not only have to prepare evidence, but understand it," freshman Hannah Hall said, whose interest was sparked during a debate unit during seventh grade SEEK.

Preparing evidence and understanding it could be a challenge at times, especially when debaters were completely blind about the topic. The 2013 debate topic was transportation Infrastructure.

"You can prepare more [than forensics] and [you] use your brain," junior Nels Carlson said.

But no matter what their views of the class, everyone said that the best part was getting to lie and not worry about it.

"This is the one time that you're allowed to lie and get away with it," debate coach Natalie Ashley said.

But to some, like sophomore Riley Brennan, debate class was really tense compared to the atmosphere of forensics.

"Forensics is much more fun," Brennan said. "It's more performing instead of reading cards."

Forensics pieces ranged from poetry, prose, improvisation, informative speeches and there were even debate activities such as Public Forum and Lincoln Douglas Debate.

"Sometimes I have to look up how the person who wrote the piece talks, so I can get into character," Brennan said.

Forensics also allowed students to branch out.

"If you think you normally wouldn't do something like this in public...go for it," Ashley said.

At Brennan's first tournament she placed fourth in H-I (Humorous Interpretation) and second in poetry, which qualified her for state on Jan 27.

"Be bold!" Brennan said.

While communication drove debate, memorization drove forensics.

"No matter what you choose, though, you're going to have to get up early on a Saturday," junior Sophie Tapko said, "But it's all worth it."

It was obviously worth it for seniors Keith Monaghan and Mason Owen when they placed third in state for debate.

"It was a really good experience," Monaghan said.

Monaghan and Owen spent their past summers at various debate camps to practice and prepare for their upcoming seasons. At state, they ended up competing in eight rounds including their final round.

"The hardest part is having to adapt to the different judges, Most of them come in with decisions in their head and you have to try to persuade them," Owen said.

The Owen-Monaghan team persuaded the judges and brought home third, the first since 2009.

"I am so happy that the boys made it to state. They did really well no matter what they say. It's also the first debate trophy under the 'Ashley Regime,'" Ashley said.

This was Ashley's second year and she couldn't have been more pleased with her students.

"I expect many more trophies in the future from everyone." Ashley said.

Debate wasn't the only class that did well. At the first forensic tournament there were four medals given out and more transfers into the class at semester.

"More people joined forensics at semester than I've ever seen," Ashley said. "So my advice is to try things that you wouldn't, and if it doesn't work then at least you can say you tried."

Ashley was known to push her students to do their best. She expected everyone to take first. "You're going to be competing for the rest of your life and you'll always want to win. Debate and Forensics helps you learn how to take defeat, but also how to move on and succeed," Brennan said.