

## **Assembly 15 December 2008**

### **The Voice**

At last Friday's assembly we enjoyed the performance of the Senior Choir under the leadership of our Artist-in-Residence, Mr. Branko Stark. We were treated to three very different songs; a religious song, a Chinese song and a spiritual song. Each member of the choir worked hard to ensure that the best possible sound was produced. I am sure you would agree that their presentation was excellent and that the boys were clearly enjoying themselves. Mr. Stark has spent many years working with choirs of all ages, trying to instill passion and excitement in their singing. He has now enjoyed the same success in Hong Kong.

Singing is fun and often exhilarating. Singing is something that anyone can do, anywhere, at any age, with no equipment, with others or alone. The voice is the ultimate musical instrument and singing is the oldest form of musical expression. Indeed, the voice is more flexible and expressive than any man-made instrument. We should all understand the structure and workings of that amazing instrument inside our throats. It is a small yet powerful organ that brings together air and muscle to produce sound, music and communication. Our voice is extremely precious and needs to be well looked after and protected.

The voice is the supreme instrument in that it is the one means of expression used by every culture. Unlike man-made instruments, each with their slightly different national or regional variations, the voice is biologically the same across all peoples. The way in which it is used and the sounds that different peoples around the world choose to use those sounds is fascinating.

Singing is not the only way that you can use your voice. Many people keep their voices in good shape by public speaking. Public speaking is extremely important. Indeed, there will be many occasions during your lives when you will be called upon to speak in public. At St. Paul's we encourage you to be confident public speakers; be that in English, Cantonese or Putonghua. Of course, speaking in public is not easy and can put you under a great deal of pressure and anxiety. Over the course of a school year, many of you will be invited to speak at assembly: reading the Bible lesson; presenting a global classroom report; talking about the Scouts or Red Cross; giving the results of a Sport Carnival; promoting various clubs and societies; and so forth.

The reason I encourage you to speak at assembly is that I want you to experience public speaking and to have the confidence to stand in front of your classmates and teachers. I am sure that everyone who has stood on this stage will say that they have benefited from the experience.

The same can be said of debating. For those who have been asked to take part in a debate, I am sure you would agree when I say that speaking in a debate for the first time is a nerve-wracking experience. There will always be confident students who will quickly

volunteer to participate in a class debate. However, most of you would be reluctant to put up your hand and ask to be included. What you need to realise is that even the most experienced debaters get nervous before speaking in public. In fact, we ought to be concerned if they did not feel nervous – that would mean they are over-confident and possibly a little arrogant. It is perfectly natural to be nervous before speaking. However, a few nerves can lead to a more lively presentation. It is my experience that most young people are much better at public speaking than they imagine; they just need to be supported and encouraged by their teachers and classmates.

This is why drama is an excellent way of building confidence. Drama allows you to explore your creativity and to develop your acting skills. Drama is also fun and creates a strong feeling of team-work amongst the cast. It is also an excellent means of leaving your shyness and worries behind. There is nothing better for stimulating the imagination than drama. I look forward to the day, hopefully soon, when the College will once again have an active Drama section producing plays in English and Chinese. An Inter-House Drama Festival might be a very good place to start.

This morning I am delighted that some of our Form 2 boys will give a short drama performance. The English Department would like to demonstrate some of the 'Improvisation Drama' that the boys have been practising during Monday classes. As we watch and listen, let us remember the importance of our voice; in singing, public speaking, debating and drama. I invite each of you, at some point in your time at SPC, to stand on this stage, in front of classmates and teachers, and use your voice.

J.R. Kennard