



Oratorical Contest **Student Manual** 2024-2025

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INTRODUCTION

“A Constitutional Speech Contest”

The American Legion Oratorical Contest exists to develop deeper knowledge and appreciation for the U.S. Constitution among high school students. Since 1938, the program has presented participants with an academic speaking challenge that teaches important leadership qualities, the history of our nation’s laws, the ability to think and speak clearly, and an understanding of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship.

Young orators earn some of the most generous college scholarships available to high school students. Over \$188,000 in scholarships can be awarded each year. The overall national contest winner gets an \$25,000 scholarship. Second place takes home \$22,500, and third gets \$20,000. Each department (state) winner who is certified into and participates in the national contest’s first round receives a \$2,000 scholarship. Those who advance past the first round receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship. The American Legion’s National Organization awards the scholarships, which can be used at any college or university in the United States.

High school students under age 20 are eligible. **Competition begins at the post level and advances to a state competition.** Legion department representatives certify one winner per state to the national contest, where department winners compete against each other in two speaking rounds. The contest caps off with a final round that decides the three top finishers.

Speaking subjects must be on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with some emphasis on the duties and obligations of citizens to our government.

2024-2025 ORATORICAL CHAIRS

Department	Doug	Hockenberry	727-514-3742	Oratorical@legionmail.org
Central Area	Robert	Bober	727-572-1725	dvcbob_bober@yahoo.com
Eastern Area	Bruce	Pagel	352-283-5941	btPagel@gmail.com
Northern Area	Huey	Fourquet	757-879-1655	huey@flposst83.org
Southern Area	Traci	Caicedo	561-239-5104	traci.l.caicedo.mil@mail.mil
Southwestern Area	Laurene	Allen-Flower	845-238-4723	laursandstrom@yahoo.com
Western Area	James	Wood	850-502-9468	armyguyindestin@embarqmail.com
1st District	Nicole	Dickson	850-207-7445	franticpoet@gmail.com
2nd District				
3rd District	Huey	Forquet	787-879-1655	huey@flpost83.com
4th District	Doug	Hockenberry	727-514-3742	oratorical@legionmail.org
5th District	Meri	West	904-704-0936	meriwest454@gmail.com
6th District	Ron	Beasley	321-217-1380	rab5234@yahoo.com
7th District	Doug	Law	843-538-6682	douglas.law72@gmail.com
8th District	Misty	Tomanski	567-801-8606	mistylynn83@gmail.com
9th District	Alan	Cohen	954-562-2547	VAR@legionmail.org
11th District	Paul	Gish	931-409-0047	paul304@bellsouth.net
12th District				
13th District	Eric	Loyd	603-903-7707	schoolmedals@legionmail.org
14th District				
15th District	Glenn	Juman	571-277-5276	gjuman@yahoo.com
16th District	Bob	Bober	727-512-1725	dvcbob_bober@yahoo.com
17th District				

BEGINNING THE ORATORICAL JOURNEY

The American Legion National Oratorical Contest is a multilevel contest. In order to get to Florida's State Oratorical Contest, students must participate in:

1st Level – Florida American Legion Post Contest:

Reach out to your local American Legion Post to see when they are holding their contest. If you are the winner of the Post Level Contest, you will move on to the District Contest.

2nd Level – District Contest:

There are 16 Districts in the State of Florida and each District will host an Oratorical Contest. The winner of the District contest will go on to the Area Contest (check out page 5 to see what District your county is in).

3rd Level – Area Contest:

The state of Florida is broken up into 6 Areas. The District the Post is in will determine which Area contest the District winner will be a part of. The winner of the Area contest will go on to the State Contest (check out page 5 to see what Area your District is in).

4th Level – State Level:

6 contestants – one from each Area – will travel to Orlando, FL to compete for the State Oratorical Title. The first-place winner will go on to compete in the National Oratorical Contest.

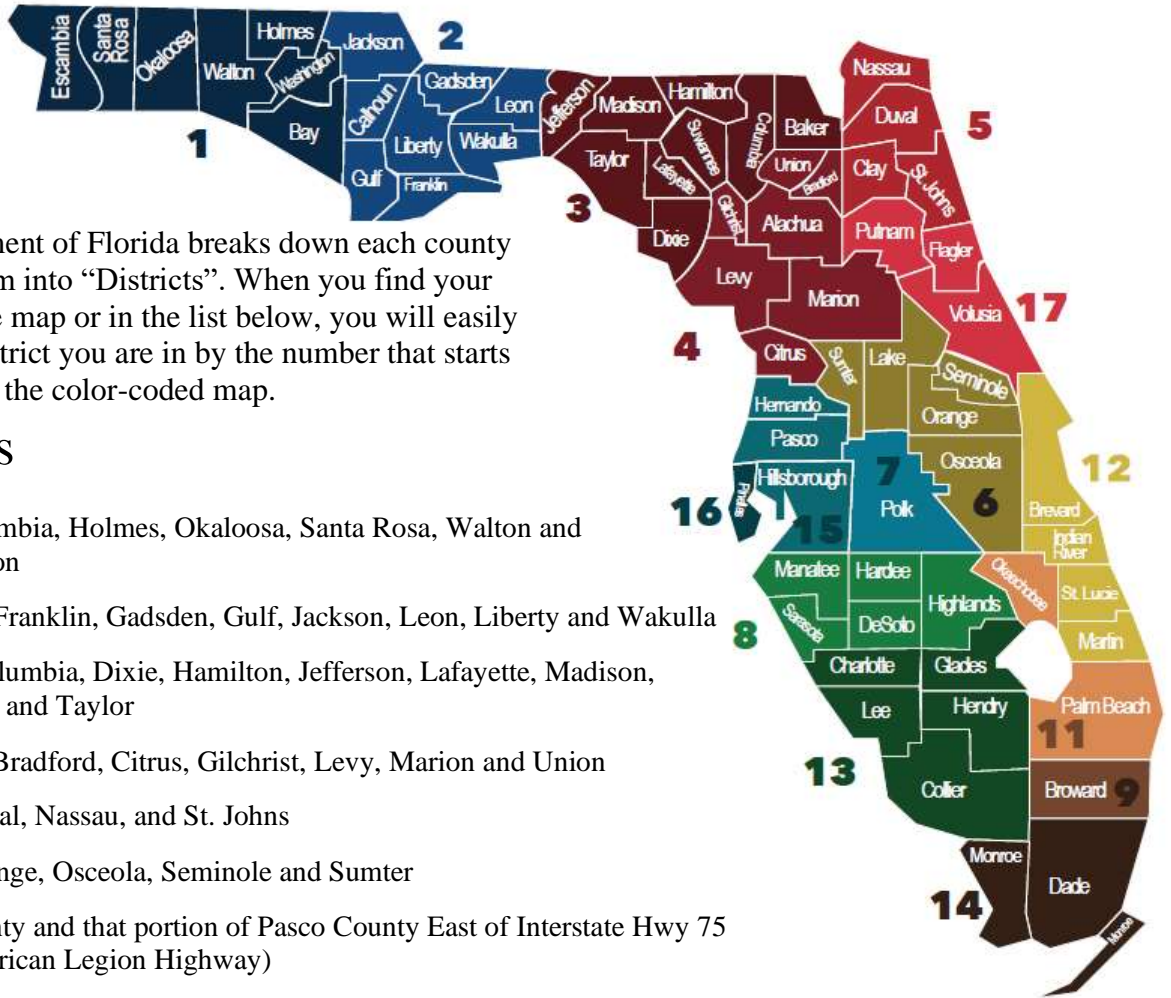
5th Level – National Contest:

The National Oratorical Contest is a three-day event where the winners from each state come together to compete in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Note:

- If you have any questions about the Oratorical Contest in your area you can contact the appropriate District, Area, and Department Chairs. They are here to assist you!
- The next page has a map of how the Districts and Areas are broken up so you can determine who the contact is for your local area.
- If you need any assistance with getting in touch with a chair or have any questions you can also contact American Legion, Department of Florida at 800-393-3378.

DISTRICT ORGANIZATION MAP

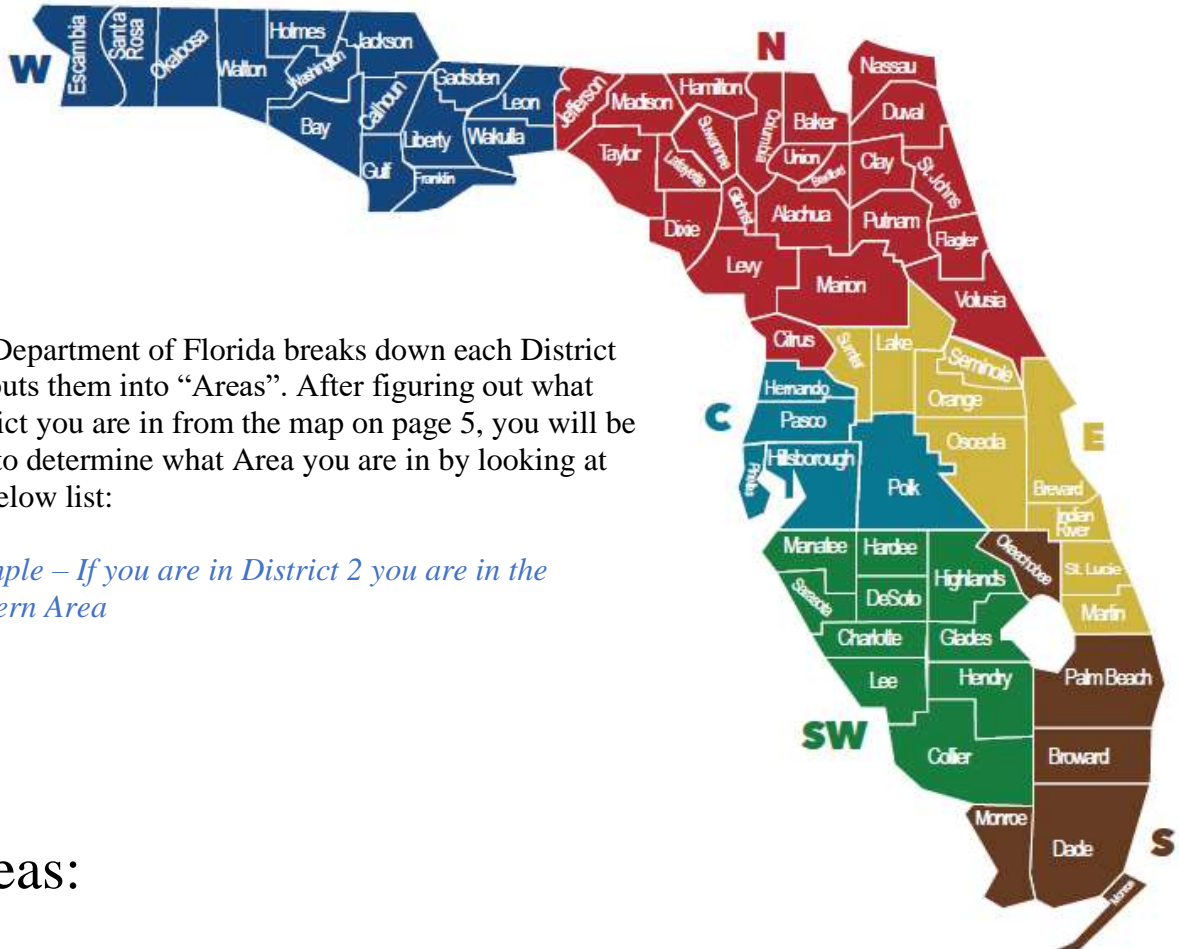


The Department of Florida breaks down each county and puts them into “Districts”. When you find your county in the map or in the list below, you will easily see what District you are in by the number that starts the list or by the color-coded map.

Districts

- 1** – Bay, Escambia, Holmes, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton and Washington
- 2** – Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Leon, Liberty and Wakulla
- 3** – Baker, Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor
- 4** – Alachua, Bradford, Citrus, Gilchrist, Levy, Marion and Union
- 5** – Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns
- 6** – Lake, Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Sumter
- 7** – Polk County and that portion of Pasco County East of Interstate Hwy 75 (The American Legion Highway)
- 8** – Sarasota, Manatee, Highlands, DeSoto and Hardee, and to include Post 113 Rotonda West
- 9** – Broward County
- 11** – Palm Beach, Okeechobee and Clewiston from Hendry County, Indiantown from Martin County and that part of Martin County south of the St. Lucie River
- 12** – Brevard, Indian River, Martin (except Indiantown and that part of Martin County south of the St. Lucie River) and St. Lucie
- 13** – Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry (except Clewiston) and Lee, except Post 113 Rotonda West
- 14** – Dade and Monroe
- 15** – Hillsborough County, that portion of Pasco County, except New Port Richey, Hudson, Holiday and Seven Springs West of Interstate 75, (The American Legion Highway), and all of Hernando County
- 16** – Pinellas County and New Port Richey, Hudson, Holiday and Seven Springs from West Pasco County
- 17** – Flagler, Putnam, and Volusia

AREA ORGANIZATION MAP



The Department of Florida breaks down each District and puts them into “Areas”. After figuring out what District you are in from the map on page 5, you will be able to determine what Area you are in by looking at the below list:

Example – If you are in District 2 you are in the Western Area

Areas:

Central - Districts 7, 15, 16

Eastern - Districts 6, 12

Northern - Districts 3, 4, 5, 17

Southern - Districts 9, 11, 14

Southwestern - Districts 8, 13

Western - District 1, 2

ORATORICAL CONTEST DATES

	Contest Date Recommendations	Updated Contest Dates
Post Level	December 1, 2024- January 19, 2025	Oviedo Memorial Post 243 9:00am, January 11, 2025
District Level	January 20, 2025- February 9, 2025	District 6 9:00 am, January 25, 2025
Area Level	February 10, 2025 – February 23, 2025	Eastern Area 9:00 am, February 22, 2025
Department Finals	March 15, 2025	March 15, 2025

DEPARTMENT CONTEST AWARDS

First Place	\$2,500
Second Place	\$1,500
Third Place	\$1,000
Fourth place	\$500
Fifth Place	\$500
Sixth Place	\$500

RECOMMENDED POST, DISTRICT & AREA AWARDS

	1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place
Post Level	\$100	\$75	\$50
District Level	\$200	\$100	\$50
Eastern Area	\$300	\$150	

NATIONAL CONTEST DATES

The 2025 National Finals will be May 16-18th in Hillsdale, MI. Quarterfinals and semifinal contests are scheduled for Saturday, May 17th, with the finals scheduled for Sunday, May 18th.

Quarter-Final Round	May 17, 2025
Semi-Final Round	May 17, 2025
National Finals	May 18, 2025

All contestants and chaperones will arrive the Friday of the contest weekend. All contestants and chaperones will stay at the official contest hotel.

A mandatory pre-contest orientation session for all contestants will take place Friday evening of the contest weekend. A banquet honoring all contestants will be Sunday afternoon, following the National Championship contest. All contestants and chaperones will depart for home later that afternoon.

Travel and hotel accommodations will be paid by the National Organization for each contestant and one chaperone to attend the National Contest. More detailed information can be found at www.legion.org/oratorical.

NATIONAL CONTEST AWARDS

First Place	\$25,000
Second Place	\$22,000
Third Place	\$20,000

Contestants who participate in the National Quarter-Final round competition receive \$2,000. Contestants who participate in the National Semi-Final round competition receive an additional \$2,000, except the winner who advances to the National Finals.

WHAT DO THE CONTESTANTS PREPARE?

THE PREPARED ORATION

The prepared oration must be on some **aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government.** The same subject and oration used in the Department contest must be used in the National contest. The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and must not take up less than eight minutes or more than 10 minutes for delivery. This aspect of the Constitution is the choice of the contestant but should have a strong emphasis on the obligations of a citizen to their government.

The Prepared Oration must be delivered in the English language. Contestants may have a hard copy of their oration in the first holding room to study but must give the copy to the escort when exiting the room to give their Prepared Oration. Cell phones or tablets are not allowed. In the prepared oration, as well as in the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such.

Where quotations are more than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally. Singing is not allowed and will result in immediate disqualification. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song, provided proper attribution is made.

A hard copy of the Prepared Oration should be given to your Oratorical Chair on the day of the contest. The Prepared Oration you give should remain largely the same at each level of the contest though minor changes are allowed.

THE ASSIGNED TOPICS

The assigned topic discourse may last between three and five minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of their research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution. The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before the last speaker begins delivery of his/her prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States as listed under assigned topics at www.legion.org/oratorical/topics.

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language on the same assigned topic. It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic in order to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. It is to be understood that the vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must still be delivered in the English language.

Assigned Topics for 2025 Oratorical Contest

ASSIGNED TOPICS FOR 2024-2025 ORATORICAL CONTEST

Amendment 1

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Amendment 7

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Amendment 18, Sections 1-3

Section 1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

Section 2. The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.

Amendment 26, Sections 1-2

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

CONTESTANT ELIGIBILITY

Eligible participants in The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest shall be citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States.

All contestants must be bona fide students herein described as any student under the age of twenty (20) years on the date of the National Contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, private or state accredited home school), in which the curriculum is considered to be of high school level, commencing with grade nine (9) and terminated with grade twelve (12). Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school during the time of participation at any level of The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest. Further, to participate in the Florida Contest, students must be residents of the State of Florida. Students whose parents are legal residents of another state must participate in that state.

CONTEST ATTIRE

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- Appropriate business attire is required for all contestants.
- Uniforms are NOT permitted.
- Contestants cannot wear awards, medal or ribbons from previous competitions or from other clubs or organizations.

ORATORICAL FORMS

Application:

There is no application that needs to be filled out to participate in the national Oratorical Contest. If you are interested in participating in this contest you will have to get in touch with your local American Legion Post and tell them that you would like to sign-up for their Post Level Contest.

You can contact The American Legion, Department of Florida for assistance with finding out who your local American Legion Post Chair is. Please contact:

Bekki Tibbs, Programs Director
Phone #: 800-393-3378 ext.235
E-mail: programs@floridalegion.org

2024-2025 Certification Form:

Once you have signed up to participate in a Post Level Oratorical Contest you will need to have your school principal complete the top portion of the 2024-2025 Certification Form which can be found as a separate attachment. *If you are home schooled, then your instructor and/or parent can fill out the top portion of the Certification Form*

This form must be complete and brought with you to the Post Level Contest so that the Post Oratorical Chair can complete their section of the page. If you are the winner of the Post Level Contest, this form will be forwarded to your District Oratorical Chair, so that they are aware of you participating in the District Level Oratorical Contest. This procedure is carried out for the Area and State Contests.

CONTEST OFFICIALS

One of the most important tasks is staging a successful Oratorical Contest is the appointment of qualified contest officials.

JUDGES

The judges are an integral part of the Oratorical Contest. Their qualifications should be considered carefully, as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is key to fairness and success of the program.

Post, District, and Area Contests are required to have three (3) judges at the contest. The Department Finals requires five (5) judges.

No publicity shall be given to the names of the judges in advance of the contest. During the contest the judges will be seated in different locations in the auditorium, and each judge will render their final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person. Official score cards, which the Chair shall provide, are available for use by the judges.

The contest chair should meet with the judges prior to the contest to ensure that the judges have a thorough understanding of their responsibility and have the necessary materials for the contest.

TABULATORS

Each contest should have **at least two (2) tabulators**; whose job it will be to make certain that the judges have fully tabulated and signed their scorecards before submitting them for final tabulation. Individuals appointed as tabulators should be well versed and experienced in working with numbers. They should be acquainted with the method of deciding a winner when two or more contestants receive the same placement point score total.

TIMERS

Each contest should **have two (2) timers**, whose job is to time each oration. They should have knowledge of reading a stopwatch. Equipment needed is stopwatches and timecards.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. The following policies are set forth by the Oratorical Committee. These policies are in effect and shall be adhered to for all contests held in the state of Florida.
2. The National High School Oratorical Contest rules prevail unless stated differently in the Department of Florida policy statement.
3. Any qualified student who is a permanent resident of the state of Florida may enter the Oratorical Contest provided that they are **sponsored by a Legion Post**.
4. Contest can have no more than 6 contestants. If your contest has more than 6 contestants, you will need to divide your contest into two days to accommodate all of the contestants.
5. **Certification of winners** must be processed and forwarded to the next higher level immediately following the respective Contest.
6. *Once a contestant enters the contest at the Post level, they may **not** participate in any other Post contest. For Example: If Suzie is sponsored by Post 1 and does not win the Post Contest, she is ineligible to participate in another Post Contest.*
7. *A **representative of the Post** sponsoring a contestant will accompany the contestant at each level of competition.*
8. At all levels, the contest time shall be given consideration in relationship to distance the contestants must travel.
9. There shall be **three judges** for any level contest below the state finals.
10. Discretion shall be used when selecting judges. People in education, forensics or debate, lawyers, judges, Toastmasters, and others familiar with speaking and the Constitution are excellent choices. For further clarification, contact the Department Chair.
11. It is recommended that Legionnaires **not** be used as judges. However, if it is necessary to use a Legionnaire as a judge, they shall be in uniform.
12. Prompting by parents, judges, or audience members will be considered a disqualification of a contestant.
13. Props of any kind will not be allowed.
14. No contest below the State level will be held in a hotel/motel. All contests should be held in local Posts, high schools, or other appropriate facilities.
15. **The script shall be followed exactly as written so that each contestant will have experienced the contest, as it will be conducted at both the State Finals and National levels. DO NOT DEVIATE.**
16. Contests with only one contestant shall be conducted under regular contest conditions and rules. Judging is not required but may be performed at the chair's discretion.

17. At no time shall a volunteer, Legionnaire or Oratorical committee member be alone with a student. This is particularly important for escorts in the holding rooms or escorting students to the restrooms. Also, at no time shall a Legionnaire touch a student, except to shake hands. There should be no hugging or putting an arm around a student's shoulders or waist before, during or after the contest, including photographs. We expect our Legion members to be above reproach when dealing with students who are typically minors or very young adults.
18. A Post is not required to hold an Oratorical Contest. Many Posts don't have a Chair and have other obstacles to holding a contest, such as lack of participants. However, it's conceivable that the National office could send a qualified lead to an area where there will simply be no Post Contest. Department will try to find a Post in the same District that can sponsor the contestant. The contestant should have the opportunity to give their oration in a setting similar to a regular contest setting.

Inspiration and Resources

One of the best ways to learn more about the Oratorical Contest is to watch videos of past winners. Because we are in Florida, I usually start with past National winners from Florida. The National website has some videos of past winners but it's just as easy to see videos on YouTube.

Here is Geeta Minocha, the 2015 National winner from Ocala, FL:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bSi3ofDpgY>

Podcasts

Presidential. A Podcast by Lillian Cunningham. In 44 episodes, notable historians and journalists explore the character, leadership and legacy of each of the American Presidents.

Constitutional. A Podcast by Lillian Cunningham. This series explores the Constitution and the people who framed and reframed it—revolutionaries, abolitionists, suffragists, teetotalers, protesters, justices, presidents—in the ongoing struggle to form a more perfect union.

More Perfect. A podcast by Radio Lab. Season 3 is all about the 27 Amendments and how the Supreme Court got so supreme. Seasons 1 and 2 are just as interesting.

We the People. A weekly show of constitutional debate hosted by National Constitution Center President and CEO Jeffrey Rosen where listeners can hear the best arguments on all sides of the constitutional issues at the center of American life.

Websites, Apps & Organizations

www.Constitutioncenter.org

www.ConstitutionFacts.com

www.USHistory.org

National Archives Charters of Freedom: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs>

The Avalon Project: The American Constitution. A Documentary Record:
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/constpap.asp

C-Span US Constitution Page: <https://www.c-span.org/classroom/>

Bill of Rights institute: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org>

Bill of Rights in Action: <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/>

Annenberg Classroom: <http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/>

Speeko or other downloadable apps for practicing your public speaking. Helps users to train against verbal habits, to motivate, track, and measure speech fitness.

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute Great Communicator Debate Series: <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/education/scholarship-programs/great-communicator-debate-series/>

Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation: They host some of the best student debaters in the country at the Coolidge Cup tournament. Their virtual library has speeches, press conferences, primary sources, essays, videos and other artifacts relevant to great oratory. <https://www.coolidgefoundation.org>