

## The 77th Tokushima Prefectural Senior High School English Speech Contest

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This year the 77<sup>th</sup> Tokushima prefectural speech contest was held at the October 9<sup>th</sup>. After a few years of precautionary changes in the program due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the year 2023 marked a return to normal for the annual contest. Once again, it was held at the Tokushima Education Hall on the second Monday of October matching the Sports Day national holiday. While I have helped students prepare for this contest for many years, this was my first time being on the judge panel.

This time 32 students participated from 18 different schools. The student's speeches received a rank from first to last, but all of them were extremely well done, so a low rank certainly does not reflect a low score. Speech contests are scored on the content, language, and delivery with the goal of giving the best performance. However, there are many skills they students improve on while preparing. Thinking clearly, finding new ways of speaking, dealing with timelines, as well as the stress of public speaking are skills that I think every participant levelled up and can carry into the future regardless of their score.

The contest venue, date, and structure may have returned to normal after the pandemic, but I was very impressed by the student's fresh topics and points of view. Balancing between a subject that can apply to a general audience while remaining personal can often be difficult for young students with little life experience. Likewise, students may passionately share a lesson they learned that changed their life, but giving nothing that can help society change. Occasionally, other students may focus on statistics too much and bury the listener with numbers and percentages, but not address the role of the individual. So, while in previous contests they are often reminded to find some statistics or real-world data to give weight to their issue. This year's group did an excellent job at finding balance and most of the students made sure to tie in outside information. The extra point that separated the top ranks from the middle was an ability to show nuance. Not every topic is black and white, so when a student ignores obvious aspects of a topic to make their point, it can come across as dishonest to the listener. The top-ranking participants this year showed not only an ability to see a problem in the world, but also acknowledge why others may disagree with their viewpoint. The rise of social media seems to favor an increasing divide between groups despite requiring cooperation to solve these topics. How can we find work together if we do not understand anyone different than ourselves? Seeing this next generation be able to show understanding to a topic that they are arguing against is truly encouraging to see! I am looking forward to seeing more of this in future competitions.