

Public Forum Goes to the Movies



The January topic draws its inspiration from
the big screen

Interpers have been known to study Academy Award winning actors endlessly, trying to decipher what it is that makes them so universally appealing to audiences. My husband, a former NFLer and champion interper, dissects every movie he sees. I can't tell you how many times I have heard about Meryl Streep's versatility or Sydney Poitier's depth. Myself...I'm a debater. I only recently saw *Sleepless in Seattle* for the first time. I'm so behind on movies that I thought *My Girl* was a new release.

Happily, debaters and interpers alike have a new reason to go to the movies. *The Great Debaters*, a major motion picture starring Denzel Washington and Forest Whitaker, was released by MGM on December 25th. Presented by The Weinstein Company, *The Great Debaters* is inspired by a true story which emphasizes the power of debate.

Judging from the movie trailer, available online, and its recent Golden Globe nomination, *The Great Debaters* is going to be a beautiful and inspiring choice for your winter break viewing pleasure (to see the trailer for yourself, go to:

<http://www.princetonreview.com/testprep/testprep.asp?TPRPAGE=2781&TYPE=LOBBY>

and click "Watch the Trailer"). Inspired by actual events, *The Great Debaters* chronicles Professor Melvin Tolson's struggle to transform a group of unlikely college students into a fiercely competitive debate squad. Teaching at an African American University in the Deep South, Professor Tolson battles constant criticism for his political views and unorthodox teaching style. By overcoming these constraints, he powerfully demonstrates the potential of speech to change the world and ultimately transforms his rag-tag squad into a prestigious group of intellectuals, complete with an invitation to engage an ivy-league institution in a historic debate.

Not only will you have fun at the flicks, watching the film will inspire part of January's forensic competitions. For the month of January, Public Forum debaters will discuss the resolution: Resolved: In a democracy, civil disobedience is an appropriate weapon in the fight for justice. This resolution,

which varies slightly in structure from previous resolutions, was chosen because of its modern relevance and historical gravity. Civil disobedience shaped the political landscape of the US, most recently in situations like the Jena 6 controversy and the Hollywood writers' strike. Historically, civil disobedience fueled the American civil rights movement and the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa. Despite these successes, debate continues over whether civil disobedience is more effective than working within a political system to create change.

The January Public Forum resolution also fuels the *Great Debaters* contest, sponsored by the Princeton Review, which asks students to debate it with a partner in a modified debate format. To enter the contest, students submit four minutes of videotape in which they and a partner debate the pro and con side of the civil disobedience topic or one of two other resolutions, available on the contest website. Sixteen finalist teams will compete for extensive prizes. Complete details of the contest are available at www.princetonreview.com under Improve your Scores and Skills/ News.

The January Public Forum resolution enables Public Forum debaters to participate in both NFL tournaments and the *Great Debaters* contest using the same body of evidence, effectively doubling the competitive opportunities associated with a month of research. Moreover, the topic encourages discourse on civil disobedience, a concept that continues to influence American politics. Perhaps most importantly, the January resolution allows Public Forum debaters to contribute to discussion about the film and its themes. In doing so, NFL hopes to increase public awareness and appreciation for competitive speech and debate.

Debaters and interpers may have different levels of expertise when it comes to pop culture, but at least they can now agree on the *Holiday* film to see. Of course, this isn't to say that we will be watching the movie in the same way. While my husband is admiring the theatrical stylings of this all-star cast, I'll be the woman flowing the movie in the back of the theater.

-Jenny Billman
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