

Portrait of a Sooner

Who's Tops in Speech Instruction

A University graduate who has made a notable record in speech and dramatic art work at Central High School in Oklahoma City during the last fifteen years has started something new by establishing a private School of Speech in Oklahoma City.

Speech work has received rapidly increasing attention in the public schools of Oklahoma in recent years. At the same time there grew up a demand for specialized instruction and coaching for both adults and young people that could not always be obtained in the public schools.

Seeing this need, Mrs. Mary Gray Thompson decided to establish the Mary Gray Thompson School of Speech this autumn, offering a broad field of instruction.

"I have had the idea of a speech school for a number of years," she said. "I know the tremendous advantages to be gained by speech training. I have observed the stimulating effect it has both mentally and spiritually on the student. And I realize its importance in the business and social world."

The school is designed to do these things:

"To give technical and artistic training in all phases of dramatic interpretation; to meet individual needs and develop the power of effective expression; to assist students in making social and educational adjustments; to establish a scientific approach to proper and effective speech for all ages; to develop personality for effective social and business contacts."

Mrs. Thompson's work as forensic coach at Central High School has attracted state and national attention. She has coached seven national oratorical and extemporaneous speaking champions; nine finalists and semi-finalists in oratory, extempore speaking and dramatic interpretation in the national forensic tournament; eighteen state champions in oratory, dramatic interpretation and extempore speaking; ten champions in local oratorical contests; two out of three state champion one-act plays; one national play-writ-



Mary Gray Thompson

ing championships; and fifty per cent of the state winners in the national constitutional oratorical contest.

After receiving a degree from the University in 1921, Mrs. Thompson did graduate work at the University of Michigan and Northwestern University. She also holds a teacher's certificate in stagecraft and acting from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City.

While at Central High School Mrs. Thompson built the Department of Speech from one class of twenty students to a departmental enrolment of 350 each semester, and two assistant teachers. In addition to the class enrolment, 150 students were taken care of each semester through forensic activities.

She produced forty major plays and many of lesser importance, coached debate for two years, and oratory and interpretation for the entire time.

She instituted a socialized form of class presentation of speech materials that gained national recognition. She organized seven of the present student organizations of Central High, and was first sponsor of them.

Mrs. Thompson has written numerous articles on the teaching of speech, and has served as an executive of the state speech organizations almost every year.

There are quite a number of speech studios in the state, but Mrs. Thompson's new project is believed to be the first real "School of Speech," offering a comprehensive and well graded curriculum of courses.

There is a high school and adult department, a junior department, speech training for children, a program service, and a special course for children of pre-school age. Both speech and dramatic art are taught.

While the school offers coaching for persons planning to enter contests, Mrs. Thompson sees its chief purpose as that of helping timid, self-conscious youths find themselves.

"I want to help boys and girls with speech defects learn how to express themselves," she explains. "I want to watch awkward, inarticulate youngsters release their inherent personality."

Mrs. Thompson believes that dramatic expression is inherent in every person, but that if a child is not encouraged in this he may become self-conscious.

Far from training children merely to be imitative, Mrs. Thompson's new school is designed to encourage creative ability in its pupils. Even tiny tots will have classes to teach them rhythm, bodily expression, creative dramatics and speech development. Elementary grade children will have children's theatre work and creative dramatic instruction.

The importance of speech instruction for adults is emphasized in a special course on practical speaking for the business world.

"This course is designed to give expert training in developing the speaking voice so that it may best represent its owner," Mrs. Thompson explains.