

Theodora Von Arnim

Report on International Public Speaking Competition Final 2015

In May this year I was thrilled to have the opportunity to travel to London for the International Public Speaking Competition. As the Australian public speaking representative I was fortunate enough to travel with the generous support of BBM Youth Support. The competition ran from the 11th – 15th of May 2015, and included a range of social activities in addition to the competitive rounds held on the last two days.

We began our week with introductions and icebreakers with the various other participants in the competition. There were over 50 countries represented, which brought a lot of diversity to the overall experience. On the second day a series of workshops were held at Dartmouth House (the English Speaking Union's headquarters), which covered a range of topics including impromptu speaking, manner, and even slam-poetry. One of my favourite parts of the trip was the evening activity on Tuesday, which was a trip to see "Matilda the Musical" on the West End. The next day we were able to see more of London's sights, visiting the Tower of London, and lunching on the South Bank. In the afternoon we visited Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and participated in a drama workshop conducted by members of the Shakespeare Theatre Company.

However on Thursday the fun and games came to an end, with the beginning of the heats. The topic for the heats was "Culture is Not a Luxury, but a Necessity", with speakers required to speak for five minutes and then answer questions posed by the audience. I spoke about the commodification and destruction of culture, with particular reference to Australia's indigenous culture. In particular the largely English audience appeared surprised to find that indigenous languages and culture were not taught in Australian schools. After the heats we were kept in suspense until Friday morning to find out who had progressed to the Semi-Finals. They kept us distracted with a boat cruise on the Thames River, and a bowling night in the evening.

The next morning I was excited to learn that I had progressed to the semi-finals, which involved an impromptu speech. Unfortunately I did not progress to the Grand Final, however it was an absolute pleasure to be involved, and deserved congratulations go to the representative of Iceland who went on to win the competition. A reception sponsored by HSBC brought the week to a close, with many heartfelt farewells between the 50 participants who had bonded over the week. Overall the competition was a phenomenal experience, and I am so thankful to have been able to participate in this international event.