



Announcing Revolutionary Rhetoric: Virginia's Speech & Debate Tournament

Cohosted by Colonial Williamsburg & the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative

WILLIAMSBURG, Va./RICHMOND, Va. (Sept. 25, 2024) - The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, in partnership with the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative and Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP, will host Virginia's first Revolutionary Rhetoric Speech & Debate Invitational on the Foundation's historic 18th-century campus from Oct. 10-12, 2024.

With the nation's upcoming semiquincentennial in 2026 on the horizon, top students from across the Commonwealth will step back in time by debating and speaking about topics related to Virginia's role in establishing America's independence in the historic buildings that housed those same debates 250 years ago. Topics may include boycotting British goods, the formation of independent militias, and Virginia's participation in the First Continental Congress.

"There is incredible power in place, which is why Colonial Williamsburg has spent nearly a century preserving the spaces and stories connected to the birth of American democracy," said Cliff Fleet, president and CEO of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. "We hope that Revolutionary Rhetoric provides students with the unique opportunity to experience the past in the present, ultimately inspiring them to apply what they learn to the future."

The tournament will consist of five events in some of Colonial Williamsburg's most iconic historic structures:

- **Student Congress:** Students emulate members of the United States Congress by authoring and debating pieces of legislation, including bills and resolutions.
- **Original Oratory:** Students deliver a self-written, memorized speech on a topic of their choosing.
- **Declamation:** Students deliver a portion or portions of a speech previously delivered.
- **Poetry:** Students perform one or more pieces of poetry written by another author.
- **Program Oral Interpretation:** Using selections from Prose, Poetry, and Drama, students create a 10-minute performance around a central theme.

All mock legislation and selected pieces must relate to events, real or imagined, that would have occurred between 1770 and 1775. The cornerstone student congress competition will be held in the Capitol building and additional events will take place in the Public Gaol, the Raleigh Tavern, and the Benjamin Powell House.

“The American Revolution was inspired by discussions and debates that took place in Colonial Williamsburg 250 years ago,” said Heather Crislip, executive director of the Richmond Forum. “The memories of those formative times remain alive today to inspire new generations and encourage new debates about how best to strive for a more perfect union. This October, with Colonial Williamsburg, the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative will host promising high school students to debate as our founders did, fulfilling our promise that the future will learn from the past.”

The invitational is generously sponsored by Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP.

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About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia’s 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 36 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg’s educational programs and preservation initiatives.

About the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative

Founded in 1986, The Richmond Forum is America’s largest nonprofit speakers series. Recognizing the absence of speech and debate programs at many of the region’s public schools and the inadequate funding for the teams that did exist, the organization launched the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative (RFSDI) in 2018 to start, grow, and support these vital academic programs.

In six short years in existence, RFSDI has:

- *Engaged more than 3,000 students in speech & debate in the region.*
- *Grown from 9 teams to 43, with 62 coaches.*
- *Created a tournament circuit with nearly 1,500 student registrations last year.*
- *Built a robust volunteer list of over 170 community members.*
- *Attracted the National Speech & Debate Tournament to be hosted in Richmond in 2026. The tournament will bring more than 11,000 visitors to Virginia’s capital.*

- CWF

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