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For many students, public speaking is a terrifying prospect. For some, writes **Joshua Lee**, there's nothing quite like it

For Gloria Leung, Keith Kwok Pak-hei, Chantal Lee Ching, and Harry Ching, there's nothing quite like the thrill of standing on stage and sharing your ideas in front of an audience. The four students represented Hong Kong at a national English public speaking competition last month, each winning top awards.

At the *China Daily* "21st Century New Oriental Cup" National High School English Speaking Competition, held in Hangzhou from April 13 to 15, students had to present a series of prepared and impromptu speeches to a live audience. They also had to respond to the judges' enquiries in a question-and-answer session.

Island School student Gloria won the second runner-up prize in the Grand Final of the Senior Division. At 15, she was the youngest student to win prizes in the senior division of the competition.

"There are so many people sitting in front of you, you are not sure whether they will enjoy your speech," Gloria said of the experience. "But once I was actually

standing up there with all of those people in front of me, I felt very happy, I just wanted that moment to last forever."

The four Hong Kong representatives were selected to take part in the competition after performing well at the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Standard

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Chartered Hong Kong English Public Speaking Contest earlier this year.

Even though the students had some experience of public speaking, performing at such a huge event was still nerve-racking.

"I think when I first stepped onto the stage, I felt quite nervous," explained Harry, 17, from La Salle College. "But after saying a few sentences, I felt as if I was really presenting myself to the audience."

Harry didn't make it to the Grand Final of the Senior Division, but he did

rank in the top 15, and received a Second Honour award.

"I don't have much experience of public speaking," he added. "I think getting such an award is an honour, and its kind of a recognition and proof of my ability."

Meanwhile, in the Junior Division, 14-year-old Keith, from Diocesan Boys' School, was awarded a first honour prize in the Grand Final, giving him a ranking between fourth and 12th place.

Ying Wa Girls' School student Chantal, 14, received a second honour award in this division, ranking between 13th and 32nd place.

All four students say public speaking gives them the opportunity to share their ideas with a large audience.

"I quite like the feeling onstage, especially when you make the crowd understand your point, or laugh at your jokes, or maybe just nod their heads in agreement," said Chantal. "After you see the crowd's reaction, you feel proud of yourself; you feel that you've accomplished something."

For Keith, the main appeal of public speaking is that it allows him to show off his personality and be creative. "I first started doing debate, but then I found it wasn't really my style [so] I decided to go for public speaking," he said.



"With public speaking, you can use more antics, you can use humour.

"I believe it really is a sort of recognition of yourself, that the audience knows and understands what you're trying to say and you can make an impact on the world."

Gloria is now responsible for training her school's public speaking team. She thinks that the skills used in public speaking can be helpful in all aspects of life.

"We should all learn how to communicate with one another," Gloria said. "You don't have to be on a stage to call it public speaking, you can just be talking to a group of people and that is already public speaking."

They are all keen to hone their skills and join more competitions in the future. "For me, joining competitions has sort of been an addiction," Keith joked. "Once I get something, I want more."

Gloria Leung (top right) and (from left, far right, below) Harry Ching, Keith Kwok, and Chantal Lee won top awards at a public speaking competition last month. Photo: Joshua Lee

We stand before you ...

