

Reflections on the Ceremony of Initiation

This program can only be given if there are no NON-PEO visitors in attendance! The program goes through the script of the Ceremony of Initiation, word for word, stopping periodically at certain points to discuss what is being said.

Items needed:

- 7 Ceremony of Initiation (COI) Booklets (in President's Box)
- 1 COI Prompters Book (in President's Box)
- This script

You will not need to set up the initiation table or use the initiatory emblem for this program. This program is solely to share a brief history of the COI and to reflect on its words.

This program requires only one person to present and she will read the following script and will also use the COI Prompter's Book. At the designated time, she will distribute the 7 COI among the members in attendance so they can share with their neighbors, since the material cannot be copied! She can ask for volunteers to read the different officer parts, or the actual officers can read their respective parts.

Presenter:

The Ceremony of Initiation is one of our most beloved traditions in P.E.O. Each one of us has stood in the circle, heard the words and taken the vows, and this is what binds us all together...a shared experience that has touched our hearts and made us sisters.

There has been a misconception that the original seven Founders wrote our Ceremony of Initiation that we use today and it has not changed since 1869! Here's the real story:

On that 21st day of January, 1869, Alice Bird wrote a 35-word oath, which consisted of a simple pledge of secrecy, a promise of self-improvement and a devotion to P.E.O.

Ella Stewart read this oath first to Alice and, in turn, Alice read the oath to the other six. This oath was used to initiate members until 1877, and like many traditions, the Ceremony of Initiation evolved over time, with at least seven revisions over the years.

Reflections on the Ceremony of Initiation

Our current ceremony and how we participate has been in place since 2013. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Initiation by Affirmation was designed to meet the need to continue to grow our Sisterhood.

Amendments to revise the COI are proposed at almost every Convention of International Chapter...evidence that our Sisterhood continues to inspire and evolve to ensure everyone feels welcome.

If you'd like to learn more about the history of P.E.O. and the Ceremony of Initiation, a great resource is the book *Out of the Heart*, by Stella Clapp, published in 1969. There is also an article in the Jan-Feb 2021 issue of *The P.E.O. Record* written by Kate Westercamp, Director of Communications and Historian of International Chapter, entitled: "The Same Ceremony of Initiation as Our Founders...or is it?", which can be found on the International P.E.O. website.

Let's get started:

Pass out the 7 COI Booklets.

You may not realize that our ceremony of initiation is divided into three distinct parts – each with a special purpose.

Part I — Introduces candidate to the importance we place on being a sister and the sisterhood

- This is where we ask the initiate if she wants to be a sister and she takes her first vow.

Part II — Explains our five virtues

- This is where we share the lessons of our virtues and the initiate takes 3 more vows and then chaplain prays

Part III — Now that candidate has taken our vows, this part explains the charm of the mystery of our Sisterhood

- We pin on the emblem
- We share the password and meaning of our letters
- And finally, she signs president's book

Part I. Ask for volunteers to read through to where the candidate has said, "I do," and the chapter is seated, then ask these questions and allow time for responses:

Reflections on the Ceremony of Initiation

Presenter:

What did you hear that you hadn't really heard before?

Was there something meaningful to you in what you heard?

Now let's proceed to Part II. This part of the ceremony explains our virtues and presents our vows.

Part II. Ask for volunteers to read through to where the Chaplain finishes the prayer, then ask these questions and allow time for responses:

Presenter:

What did you hear about our virtues that you hadn't heard before or perhaps had forgotten?

Did you find the ceremony presenting our virtues meaningful? Why?

Did you hear anything new in our vows?

Now let's continue to Part III of the ceremony. In this section, listen for the explanation about the charm of the mystery of our Sisterhood and how each part has meaning --

Part III. Ask for volunteers to read through to the end, then ask these questions and allow time for responses:

Presenter:

What did you think about the explanation of the mystery of our Sisterhood?

Did you hear something perhaps you hadn't really heard before?

Do you have special memories of your own initiation that you'd like to share?

Thank you so much for your cooperation in this program! Hopefully this has been helpful in gaining a better appreciation for our Ceremony of Initiation and how very special our Sisterhood is.