

# Reader's Theater



**Comprehension, Fluency and Fun !!**

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## **Objectives:**

1. To become more knowledgeable about what it is and how to do Reader's Theater
2. To develop an understanding of how Reader's Theater supports readers and writers
3. To develop an understanding of how comprehension and fluency can be developed through Reader's Theater
4. To understand how writing skills can be developed through RT
5. To practice writing a RT script

## **About Reader's Theater:**

".....introduces the element of drama into literacy learning and magically transforms the classroom into a stage. ....the reader is at center stage, totally absorbed in reading. The reader is a star."

"...highly motivational strategy that connects oral reading, literature, and drama in the classroom. ....does not require costumes, make-up, props, stage sets, or memorization. Only a script is needed, from which students read-aloud. Using only their voices, facial expressions, and bodies, they interpret the emotions, beliefs, attitudes and motives of the characters. A narrator conveys the story's setting and action and provides the commentary necessary for transition between scenes."

"The element of drama enables students to realize that reading is an activity that permits experimentation – they can try reading words in different ways to produce different meanings. Using volume, pitch, stress and intonation, readers delve into the Reader's Theatre text, making printed words come alive and giving their characters life. As they practice their roles, readers are also given the opportunity to reflect on the text and to evaluate and revise how they interact with it."

(Carrick, 2000)

## **I'M NOBODY**

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
Are you Nobody too?  
Then there's a pair of us!  
Don't tell!  
They'd banish us, you know!

How dreary to be Somebody!  
How public, like a Frog  
To tell your name  
the livelong June  
To an admiring Bog!

Emily Dickinson

## **What are the benefits of Reader's Theatre to children ?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

## **Materials Needed for Reader's Theatre:**

1. An enthusiastic, patient teacher !
2. Literature at an appropriate **independent** reading level for a group that can be developed into a script of appropriate level for group
3. 2 copies of the script for each child – one will be a plain Xerox copy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> will be a copy with all of the parts of one character highlighted (or sometimes with small parts several characters to be performed by one child)
4. Time and space for group practice
5. Time and space for group performance
6. An audience
7. Letter to Parents

# Implementing Reader's Theatre

*As you begin to implement Reader's Theatre, keep in mind the instructional goals of comprehension and fluency and how they relate to each other. The activity should be FUN but upon completion you should also recognize the instructional benefits. Making mini-lessons, observation, prompting and feedback part of the process will insure that this is time well spent.*

*Generally the process takes 5-10 days about 30-45 minutes/day depending on the children, their adeptness with the routines, and the difficulty of the scripts. It is VERY important that scripts be chosen with the reading levels of specific children in mind so that they can work independently and successfully.*

## **Preparing for Reader's Theatre:**

1. Carefully **select books** considering number of children available at any given reading level. Generally you should be able to have a low, average and high reading group that are combinations of smaller reading groups. Children will be receiving a lot of practice and support with a text so that will support those that the text may be somewhat too difficult for at first.
2. You may want to **read the original book** prior to beginning the Reader's Theatre. This will give the children further support in gaining the meaning of the text more quickly.
3. **Prepare the scripts** either using a pre-written script (*online resources and many professional books available*) or writing it yourself.
4. **Make 2 copies for each child** of the script for their group.
5. **Organize the groups** based on their reading levels.
6. **Practice reading the scripts** before sharing with the children so that you are modeling fluency and expression – bringing the story to life. Be prepared to discuss with the children your decisions and interpretations of the characters and events and how that impacted your oral reading.
7. **Plan your instruction.** Think about what you already know about your children in terms of their comprehension and fluency. What mini-lessons might they need along the way ? (Suggestions below)
8. **Decide on your audience for the final performance.** The audience might be the other groups, or principal or others from the office. It might be the children perform in another classroom or you might invite parents. It doesn't really matter WHO, but it is hugely important that there is a performance and audience of some kind !

## DAY ONE

*What is described below is implementation with the whole class divided into 3 groups all working on their scripts simultaneously. This is **ONE WAY** to do Reader's Theatre. There are other ways equally successful. You will want to allow 30 -45 minutes each day. Time is always the biggest issue but if you are careful to make this sound instructional time then you can afford to offer it as an option periodically for example once every 6 weeks in place of guided reading or other methods of reading instruction.*

1. Introduce the script to the appropriate group with title and author. If a new story for the children, allow a few minutes for predictions or connections. If a familiar story, discuss what they remember about the familiar story that was important and would therefore expect to hear in this abbreviated version.
2. Read the script to the group. I suggest you do not distribute the scripts yet so they are listening to the story and your interpretive reading. Read the story modeling fluency and expression – bring the story to life ! (Keep in mind that you may want to read the original book – if there is one – before the script.)
3. Following the reading of the script, take a few minutes to discuss/confirm predictions. Talk about the content and meaning of the story. Also discuss what you did as a reader. How did you show your interpretation of the characters and events with your voice? Keep in mind that the overall objective is the understanding that good readers create and extend the meaning of the story and their understanding of the story through fluency and expression. What was said in the story that made you sound sad or happy or excited? Why did you read slowly or even haltingly in some places and faster in others? (These points should have already been introduced in mini-lessons prior to beginning Reader's Theater.)
4. Following each reading you may want to develop a **not too lengthy** vocabulary chart which can be referred back to throughout the project for meaning and pronunciation.
5. Distribute the scripts to the children in each group. Explain what Reader's Theatre is if you have not already done so. Tell them they will be performing for an audience and will be practicing each day at school. Knowing they will perform for an audience is usually a great motivator. Be sure they understand they will not be memorizing the lines but will be reading them. Encourage them to take the script home and begin reading of the script. That copy of the script may remain at home. If budgets allow you may want to put the script in a manila folder for safe keeping.
6. Send the Parent Letter home at this time also so that parents understand children do not have to memorize parts, have costumes or props. Encourage help with the reading of the script. If parents are going to be invited to the final

performance, this would be a good time to invite them – you might even have children make the invitations as a writing activity.

## **DAY TWO**

1. Present a MINI-lesson on some aspect of fluency or comprehension or the relationship between the two. For example, why a reader might slow down or speed up, why “phrasing” is important, thinking about the character to know how to express through your voice what he/she is feeling, and possible “routines” such as how to give feedback to someone in your group or how to negotiate who will perform which role in a group. Use passages from the script for the modeling within the mini-lesson.
2. Distribute the “highlighted” copy of the scripts to the groups. You may also want to put these scripts into individual manila folders for safe keeping. Divide the groups into partners to do a paired reading of the script. They will read the entire script together alternating passages rather than taking parts. Children should not mark on the copies at this point. (You may want them to not mark on them at any point if you want to keep them for another time)
3. You will be moving among the partners listening for difficulties and checking for appropriateness of text. The text will be read and practiced many, many times across subsequent days so if reading is not perfect do not be concerned. At this point it may be at an instructional level of about 90% accuracy but should improve to an independent level read with accuracy and fluency over the course of the project.
4. Share as a whole group some of the things they are already becoming aware of as they read the scripts with a buddy. You will probably want to focus this discussion around the mini-lesson or your observations of what they were doing as readers in terms of fluency/comprehension.
5. Pick up the scripts.

## **DAY THREE**

1. Gather children in a group. Offer a mini-lesson again based on some relevant aspect of comprehension/fluency/RT routines as discussed in Day Two. The purpose of this lesson should come from your observations from the previous day and your knowledge of your children. MODEL !!
2. Have children gather in their groups. Distribute the highlighted scripts. Each child in turn will read whichever character part(s) is highlighted on his copy. After the group has read the script through once, each child will pass the copy to the person on their left and read it through again. They will do this several times as time allows. As they do so they are experiencing reading the different characters and how they sound as others read.

3. You circulate around the groups offering feedback, support and encouragement. Help children to think about how a particular character might sound dependent on the events in the story, how to read the punctuation – reinforce effective and fluent reading behaviors.
4. Again share what the children are learning. Draw attention to the language they heard you using as the model for the kind of feedback they will begin to give each other as they collaborate to decide how a character should sound at different points in the text.
5. Remind them to practice at home !

## DAY FOUR

1. This day will look like the previous day with another mini-lesson and continued practice until all parts have been read by all group members.
2. Again you will be giving feedback, offering support and encouragement.
3. Before share time allow about 5 minutes for children to “negotiate” which role they will perform – some children will have more than one role if roles are very small. A child may act as narrator or you as the teacher might. Reassure children they will be doing this many times and next time they may get the role they want if they didn’t this time. If necessary **help** them to devise a system for making the decisions.
4. Try not to take control ! 😊
5. Share as above.
6. Remind them to practice at home and to start focusing on practicing their specific character.

## DAY FIVE

1. Present another mini-lesson based on the needs you have observed.
2. Have children get into their groups and begin rehearsing their specific parts as a group. Remind them how to give feedback kindly and helpfully and help each other think about what the characters will sound like. (Consider at this point how many times they have read and heard this script)

3. During the last few minutes allow them time to make labels to wear with their character names. They will also need to decide how they will stand when performing. Will they want to add any simple motions ?

## **DAY SIX**

Depending on the texts used and the children's response this may be the performance day or they may need another day or two of practice following the routines above.

### **Additional Ways to Do Reader's Theater:**

## **Suggested Mini-lessons for Reader's Theater**

### **Good readers....**

- add meaning to text by reading with expression and fluency.
- "read" the punctuation !
- think about the characters...how they are feeling, what they are thinking and doing.
- interpret the characters and the words in different ways.
- pay attention to what is happening in the story!
- read with phrasing.

## Good readers and writers also.....

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Writing a RT Script

(What's different between these two pieces of text ?)

### Little Red Riding Hood - Narrative

*Once upon a time there was a little girl and her name was Red Riding Hood. One day her mother said to her, "Little Red Riding Hood, please take this basket filled with good things to eat to your grandmother."*

*"Yes, Mother," she said.*

*So Little Red Riding Hood started through the woods. The day was lovely, so she stopped to pick some flowers along the path. Little did she know that behind a huge tree lurked the wicked wolf.*

### Little Red Riding Hood - Readers Theatre Script

*Narrator 1: Once upon a time there was a little girl and her name was*

*Narrator 2, 3, 4: Little Red Riding Hood!*

*Narrator 2: One day her mother said to her,*

*Mother: "Little Red Riding Hood, please take this basket filled with good things to eat to your grandmother."*

*Little Red Riding Hood: "Yes, Mother."*

*Narrator 3 : So Little Red Riding Hood started through the woods.*

*Narrator 4: The day was lovely*

*Narrator 1: She stopped to pick some flowers along the path.*

*Narrator 2: Little did she know that behind a huge tree lurked.....*

*Voices 2, 3, 4: The wicked wolf!*

## Writing a Reader's Theatre Script as a Class

1. Depending on the level of the children, choose a book on which to base the script. In choosing the book, ask yourself:
  - Are the children familiar with the book?
  - Is it an appropriate level for them to be able to read once the script is written ?
  - Is the storyline simple enough that the script will not be too complex or long?
  - Does the story either have dialogue or lend itself to adding dialogue ?
  - How many parts do you want to have? What is the potential of the book for that number ? How many narrators? Are parts fairly evenly divided ?
  - Are there some potential teaching points ? For example, in the book "Owen" by Kevin Henkes, there are places that the meaning is in the pictures not the text. Children are inferring using the pictures. To turn it into a script, you will need to guide them through their inference and help them add text so that the story will be clear for the reader. A few places like this add to the value of the writing but you don't want too many.
2. Decide whether you will write the entire script as a class or will you model a few pages and then let children do some writing in small groups?
3. Will revising and editing be done ? And if so, how ?
4. What will you expect children to gain as writers and readers from writing a script ?
5. What is your timeline?
6. Will you be performing for others?

## **Tips for Kids for Doing Readers Theater:** (some might be mini-lessons)

Hold script at steady height but don't hide your face. You should be able to see your audience. Look up not down ! 😊

Talk at the appropriate pace for what the character is feeling or doing. But always speak CLEARLY and with expression.

Speak loud enough for the audience to hear you.

Speak with feeling !

Stand and sit straight. Keep still.

Add movements and expressions that will help your character come alive. (Ex: in Owl Babies, we touched the side of our heads to "show" the baby owls were thinking – *all owls think a lot*)

BE your character even when you are not speaking.

Narrators be sure to give characters enough time for their parts.

When performing:

If someone in the audience talks, don't pay attention.

If someone walks in the room, don't pay attention.

If you make a mistake, just keep going.

If someone needs help or skips their part, don't say anything – let the teacher take care of it.

**Practice, Practice, Practice !**  
**HAVE FUN !! 😊**

## **Resources for Reader's Theatre scripts and additional info:**

*(Just put in "Reader's Theatre" as a SEARCH term on the internet and you will find many resources !)*

Carrick, L. U. (2001), Internet resources for conducting Reader's Theatre,  
[www.readingonline.org/electronic/carrick/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/carrick/index.html)

Martinez, M., Roser, N., Strecker, S., (1999). "I never thought I could be a star: A Reader's Theatre ticket to fluency". *The Reading Teacher*, 52.4, pp. 405-413

Worthy, J., Broadus, K., Fluency beyond the primary grades: From group performance to silent, independent reading, *The Reading Teacher* 55,4, pp. 334-343

### ***Book That Can Be Turned into Scripts for Reader's Theater:***

#### ***Easy books***

- Alphin, E.M. (1996). *A bear for Miguel*. Ill. J. Sandin. New York: HarperCollins.
- Byars, B. (1994). *The Golly sisters ride again*. Ill. S. Truesdell. New York: HarperCollins.
- Byars, B. (1996). *My brother, Ant*. Ill. M. Simont. New York: Viking.
- Byars, B. (1997). *Ant plays bear*. Ill. M. Simont. New York: Viking.
- Eastman, P.D. (1960). *Are you my mother?* New York: Random House.
- Fox, M. (1987). *Hattie and the fox*. Ill. P. Mullins. New York: Bradbury.
- Kraus, R. (1970). *Whose mouse are you?* Ill. J. Aruego. New York: Aladdin.
- Marshall, E. (1981). *Three by the sea*. Ill. J. Marshall. New York: Puffin.
- Marshall, E. (1986). *Three up a tree*. Ill. J. Marshall. New York: Puffin.
- Marshall, E. (1994). *Fox in love*. Ill. J. Marshall. New York: Puffin.
- Marshall, J. (1993). *Fox on stage*. New York: Puffin.
- Minarik, E.H. (1957). *Uttle Bear*. Ill. M. Sendak. New York: Harper & Row.
- Wiseman, B. (1959). *Morris the moose*. New York: HarperTrophy.

### **Books for average readers**

Brown, M. (1991). *Arthur meets the president*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Brown, M. (1992). *Arthur babysits*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Champion, J. (1993). *Emily and Alice*. III. S. Stevenson. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

Champion, J. (1995). *Emily and Alice again*. III. S. Stevenson. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

Hall, D. (1994). *I am the dog, I am the cat*. III. B. Moser. New York: Dial.

Johnson, A. (1989). *Tell me a story, Mama*. III. D. Soman. New York: Orchard.

Marshall, J. (1986). *Wings: A tale of two chickens*. New York: Viking.

Mazer, A. (1991). *The salamander room*. III. S. Johnson. New York: Knopf.

Naylor, P.R. (1992). *King of the playground*. III. N.L. Malone. New York: Atheneum.

Schotter, R., & Sphotter, R. (1994). *There's a dragon about: A winter's revel*. III. R.W. Alley. New York: Orchard.

Stevens, J. (1995). *Tops and bottoms*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

Wood, A. (1988). *The horrible holidays*. III. R.K. Hoffman. New York: Dial.

### **Challenging books**

Ehlert, L. (1992). *Moon rope/Un lazo a la luna*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Karlin, B. (1992). *Cinderella*. III. J. Marshall. Boston: Little, Brown.

Kimmel, E.A. (1992). *Anansi goes fishing*. III. J. Stevens. New York: Holiday House.

Kimmel, E.A. (1994). *Anansi and the talking melon*. III. J. Stevens. New York: Holiday House.

Taken from Martinez, M., Roser, N., Strecker, S., (1999). "I never thought I could be a star: A Reader's Theatre ticket to fluency". *The Reading Teacher*, 52.4, pp. 405-413

# *We're Going to Be Stars !!*

*Dear Parent(s),*

*Your child is about to be a celebrity! In our classroom, we are beginning a project called Reader's Theatre. Just as the name suggests this is a very special kind of theatre production in that there are no lines memorized, no costumes to make and no scenery to build. The play is dramatized through the expressive reading of character parts.*

*Over the next week, your child will be practicing a script and a specific role or character part within the script. A copy of that script may be attached to this letter.*

*We will be doing lots of practice in class but it will also be important that he practice at home. The first few nights he will be reading and rereading the entire script. After several days though he will come home and tell you which part he is to learn to read WELL. It is important that he read with expression so that the listener can hear when the character might be happy, or mad, or sad. It is also important that the listener can hear complete ideas, questions or statements to be read with more excitement as indicated by an exclamation mark. Please help him figure out unknown words and provide support and encouragement for his practice. You might even read with him with each member of the family reading a part.*

*This is an important project focusing on improving children's comprehension and fluency as readers – two critical aspects to being effective readers.*

*He does not need to bring this script back but please put it in a safe place and remember to practice each night !*

*Thanks so much for your continuing support.*

*Love,*