

# Using Readers Theater to Motivate Readers



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## Readers Theater

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### Overview

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| <p>Group Size</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pairs</li><li>• Small Groups</li><li>• Whole Class</li></ul> | <p>Areas Addressed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students develop fluency in reading.</li><li>• Students practice reading their lines in the script with expressiveness.</li><li>• Students are able to develop voice intonation and inflection as they rehearse their script.</li><li>• Students improve comprehension through multiple interactions with the scripts.</li></ul> |
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Readers Theater is another way to enhance comprehension of text (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1999, pg. 204) as well as to create interest in and enthusiasm for learning (Ruddell, 1999, pg. 236). Readers Theater is unlike a traditional play where students have costumes, sets, and memorized lines. Instead, students read aloud from a script using their voices and facial expressions to share the story.

In this format, readers can develop a script after reading a literature selection or use an already written script (<http://www.aaronshep.com/rt>). An advantage to children writing their own script is that it helps to draw their attention to story elements, thus developing an understanding of characters, setting, problem, key events, and solution. Once the script has been developed, the children decide who will be responsible for each part in the script, they practice the script several times, and then present it to an audience of other classmates or students in the school. This particular format can be used across elementary grades, but it is most effective when used with readers who have gained some fluency with reading (Ruddell, 1999). Allington (2001) is supportive of the children writing their own scripts because it more actively engages students in the story, and focuses their attention on how authors embed dialogue in stories and books.

The Readers Theater format offers a way for readers to participate in repeated readings in a meaningful and purposeful context (Martinez, Roser, and Strecker, 1998/1999). In a study conducted over the course of ten weeks with second graders, Martinez et al. (1998/1999) found that the children had posted an average gain in reading rate of seventeen words per minute after participating in 30-minute daily sessions with Readers Theater. Using a five-point scale, Martinez et al. (1998/1999) also were able to document improvement in fluidity, phrasing, and expressiveness in all but 4 of the children.

## How to do Readers Theater

Martinez et al. (1998/1999) outline a 5 day instructional plan that can be followed by teachers wishing to try out Readers Theater. Their five day plan is based on thirty minute daily time blocks where children have the opportunity to practice the scripts numerous times. By the time the fifth day has arrived students have read the scripts about an average of fifteen to twenty times.

| Day 1   |   |
|---|---|
| Role of the Teacher   | Role of the Students  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model fluency by reading aloud the stories on which the week's scripts are based.</li> <li>• Offer a brief minilesson that presents explicit explanation of some aspect of fluency.</li> <li>• Discuss each of the scripts.</li> <li>• Encourage students to take these unmarked scripts home for further practice.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students begin to practice reading personal copies of scripts.</li> <li>• The eventual goal is to read all parts independently.</li> </ul> |
| Day 2   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher provides scripts for each group with specific parts highlighted.</li> <li>• Teacher circulates among the three repertory groups, coaching and providing feedback.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students gather in repertory groups.</li> <li>• Students read the script, taking a different part with each reading.</li> </ul>            |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Day 3   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procedures are the same as for Day 2.</li> <li>• Teacher encourages children to pay special attention to their newly assigned performance role when practicing at home.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students continue to practice roles in the scripts by taking turns reading highlighted parts then switching to practice another role.</li> <li>• During the final 5 minutes, students within each repertory group negotiate and assign roles for Day 5 performance.</li> </ul> |
| Day 4   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher monitors students as they practice their roles in the Readers Theater.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students read and reread the parts to which they are assigned within their repertory groups.</li> <li>• During the final 10 minutes, students make character labels and discuss where each will stand during the performance.</li> </ul>                                       |
| Day 5   |   |
| Students perform the Readers Theater in front of an audience.   |   |

A 5-day instructional plan for Readers Theater. From Martinez, Roser, and Strecker 1998/1999). "I never thought I could be a star": A Readers Theater ticket to fluency. *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 326-334.

## Designating Parts

To ensure that as many students as possible get to participate in the Readers Theater, there are several possibilities that can be considered regarding distribution of parts in the script. Your students' active involvement during this process is a key to its success, but it is always best to have options or suggestions available for groups having difficulty deciding on who gets to read each part. One possibility is for students to share "roles" in a script by having one student read lines for Jack (Jack and the Beanstalk) in Scene One and another student to read lines for Jack in Scene Two. A second possibility is for pairs or groups of students to read joint parts, such as a chorus if one is included in the group. Third, small groups could do the same script then compare presentation styles once performed before an audience. Lastly, groups can write differing script versions of the same book, or select entirely different books from which they will write a script. The "theater" aspect of this format tends to motivate children as they work to practice their script or select a few key props that will enhance their production.

## Informational Books

Remember to include some scripts that focus on informational topics. The use of Readers Theater provides a different context by which children can be exposed to texts focusing on poetry, science, social studies, or other content related topics. Educational consultant Lisa Blau (<http://www.lisablau.com/archives.html>) offers biographical scripts that focus on the lives of Helen Keller and Eleanor Roosevelt as well as informational scripts such as Stupendous Snakes and Japan-The Land of the Rising Sun.

## Summary

Educators have long elaborated on the benefits of using Readers Theatre and related strategies for increasing reading fluency and sight-word vocabulary, improving reading comprehension, providing opportunities to interpret dialogue and communicate meaning, and increasing awareness and appreciation of plays as a form of literature (Carrick, 2001, About Readers Theatre). This type of reading format is flexible in that it can be easily adapted to work with pairs, small groups, or even a whole class. Students use an already written script or develop their own, then practice the script by reading it several times to perfect voice inflection and intonation, then perform their production for an audience.

## Connections/Extensions

1. Analyze personality traits of major characters in the story. Cite examples from script that support each personality trait identified for the character.
2. Develop a story map that details character, setting, problem, events, and solution.
3. Identify examples of colorful and vivid language that are used to create images in the script.
4. Explore how to use dialogue to show spoken language by a character.

## Bibliography

Allington, R.L. (2001). What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based reading programs. New York, NY: Longman.

Burns, P.C., Roe, B.D., and Ross, E.P. (1999). *Teaching reading in today's elementary school* (7th Ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998/1999). "I never thought I could be a star": A Readers Theater ticket to fluency. *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 326-334.

Ruddell, R.B. (1999). *Teaching children to read and write: Becoming an influential teacher* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

*Adapted from Kimbell-Lopez, K. (2003, February). Just think of the possibilities: Formats for reading instruction in the elementary classroom. Reading Online, 6(6). Available: [http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art\\_index.asp?HREF=kimbell-lopez/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=kimbell-lopez/index.html)*

~~~~~Print Resources~~~~~

1. Blau, Lisa (March 1997). *Super Science! : Reader's Theatre Scripts and Extended Activities*. Bellevue, WA: One from the Heart.
2. Blau, Lisa (1997). *Winter Is Wonderful : Reader's Theatre Scripts and Extended Activities*. Bellevue, WA: One from the Heart.
3. Blau, Lisa (1997). *Fall Is Fabulous! : Reader's Theatre Scripts and Extended Activities*. Bellevue, WA: One from the Heart.
4. Fredericks, A.D., and Stoner, A.A. (1993). *Frantic Frogs and Other Frankly Fractured Folktales for Readers Theatre*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.
5. Shepard, A. (1993). *Stories on Stage: Scripts for Reader's Theater*. Bronx, NY: H.W. Wilson.

~~~~~Web Resources~~~~~

1. Aaron Shepard's RT Page--Scripts & Tips for Reader's Theater  
<http://www.aaronshp.com/rt/index.html>
2. Internet Resources for Conducting Readers Theater by Lila Carrick  
[http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/elec\\_index.asp?HREF=/electronic/carrick/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/elec_index.asp?HREF=/electronic/carrick/index.html)
3. Gander Academy--Readers Theater  
<http://www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/langrt.htm>
4. Around the Water Cycle--A Reader's Theater  
<http://www.teachers.net/lessons/posts/400.html>
5. Archived versions of scripts available at Lisa Blau's web site  
<http://www.lisablau.com/archives.html>
6. Reader's Theatre Scripts and Plays  
<http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm>
7. Welcome to Scriptito's Place  
<http://members.aol.com/vangarnews/scriptito.html>
8. Literacy Connections—Readers Theater Resources  
<http://literacyconnections.com/ReadersTheater.php>

~~~~~Sample Scripts~~~~~

1. "Casey at the Bat"  
<http://www.aaronshp.com/rt/RTE23.html>
2. Goldilocks and the Three Bears  
<http://pbskids.org/zoom/playhouse/goldilocksandthethre.txt.html>
3. Jack and the Beanstalk  
<http://pbskids.org/zoom/playhouse/jackandthebeanstalka.txt.html>
4. Stone Soup  
<http://pbskids.org/zoom/playhouse/stonesoupapuppetshow.txt.html>
5. Wiley and the Hairy Man  
<http://bms.westport.k12.ct.us/mccormick/rt/rtscripts/rtswiley.htm>
6. Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type by Doreen Cronin  
<http://www.teachers.net/lessons/posts/2277.html>
7. The BFG by Roald Dahl  
<http://bms.westport.k12.ct.us/mccormick/rt/rtscripts/rtsbfg.htm>
8. The Hat by Jan Brett  
<http://www.kids-learn.org/frosty/baldwin2.htm>
9. Town Mouse, Country Mouse by Jan Brett  
[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/reading/ReadersTheater/ReadersTheater019.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/reading/ReadersTheater/ReadersTheater019.shtml)

~~~~~Sample Props: Animal Masks, Puppets, Etc.~~~~~

1. Town Mouse, Country Mouse by Jan Brett - Finger Puppets  
[http://www.janbrett.com/puppets/puppets\\_town\\_mouse\\_country\\_mouse\\_main.htm](http://www.janbrett.com/puppets/puppets_town_mouse_country_mouse_main.htm)
2. The Gingerbread Boy by Jan Brett – Character Masks  
[http://www.janbrett.com/gingerbread\\_baby\\_masks\\_main.htm](http://www.janbrett.com/gingerbread_baby_masks_main.htm)
3. The Hat by Jan Brett – Character Masks  
[http://www.janbrett.com/hat\\_animal\\_masks\\_main.htm](http://www.janbrett.com/hat_animal_masks_main.htm)
4. The Mitten by Jan Brett – Character Masks  
[http://www.janbrett.com/mitten\\_masks\\_main.htm](http://www.janbrett.com/mitten_masks_main.htm)
5. Town Mouse, Country Mouse by Jan Brett - Character Masks  
[http://www.janbrett.com/mouse\\_masks\\_main.htm](http://www.janbrett.com/mouse_masks_main.htm)