

Readers Theatre

Readers theatre brings texts to life and is a valuable tool for any classroom. It supports oracy, reading development and enjoyment of literature by allowing children to take a piece of fiction or information text, interpret it, and adapt it into a script which can then be performed.

Repeated readings bring fluency, and encourage readers to re visit the book from which the text has been taken. Readers theatre is a relatively simple activity for the teacher, with no preparation other than making copies of scripts.

Almost any text can be scripted for reader's theatre, but some are easier and work better than others. In general, stories that are simple and lively, with lots of dialogue or action, and with not too many scenes or characters, work better.

Preparing a script, becoming familiar with roles

Readers Theatre- How to adapt a script

1. Choose a story or section of a book that is between 3-5 minutes long and photocopy it.
2. Decide what characters and narrators are needed and assign a marker colour to each.
3. Highlight all dialogue with the appropriate marker.
4. The text that is left is narration. Assign narration creatively by determining which character it pertains to and splitting it between the character and the character's narrator.
5. Add creative touches wherever possible.
6. You are now ready to assign parts and rehearse.

Narration

In scripts for younger readers, it's usually best to have two or more narrators. Besides creating extra roles, it spreads the responsibility for this very important function. It also helps retain audience interest during long narrative passages.

Dividing up the narrator role:

With two narrators, assign them alternate sentences, paragraphs and/or half-paragraphs. or switch to a different narrator with each new scene.

- Sometimes more than one person can read a word, phrase, sentence or section to add emphasis eg 'And they **ALL** lived happily ever after'.
- With two narrators, "bounce" back and forth between them in a way that reflects an author's strong rhythmic structure.
- "Sandwich" the dialogue. One narrator speaks both before and after a section of character dialogue. Then the next narrator does the same.
- Assign a narrator to each character. Each narrator reads all the lines that refer to their assigned character or that reflect their character's point of view.

If the group is small, and a story has more roles than there are readers:

- Assign to individual readers more than one role.
- Cut a character, or combine it with another.
- Use character narration in place of a separate narrator. With this approach, characters read the narrator parts that refer to themselves or that reflect their own point of view.

If there are too few readers:

- Use two or more narrators. This is usually a good idea anyway for young readers.
- Split characters into two or more. A character can sometimes be converted into a set of characters, with the speaking parts divided among them.
- Assign silent characters. Often stories have minor characters without speaking parts. You might also add speeches for them.

Cuts and Changes

Feel free to make cuts and changes in the story that will make your script livelier, simpler to understand, or easier to perform. But be sure to read through and check whether everything in the story still makes sense.

Some things you may want to cut:

- Tag lines. These are the lines that tell us “he said” or “she said.” In performance, these seldom do more than break up the flow of the story and trip up the readers. But leave in the ones that give extra information the audience must hear. Also leave in ones that an author has used to build rhythm.
- Long descriptions. Many stories include long sections of narration that slow the action. These can often be shortened or even removed.
- Minor characters or scenes. Cutting these can simplify the stage action and/or adjust for a small number of readers. Often, important dialogue or information can be shifted to another character or scene.

Rehearsal and Performance

- Hold your script at a steady height, but make sure it doesn't hide your face. If there's anyone in the audience you can't see, your script is too high.
- While you speak, try to look up often, not just at your script. When you do look at it, move just your eyes and keep your head up.
- Talk slowly. Speak each syllable clearly.
- Talk loud! You have to be heard by people in the back row.
- Talk with feeling.
- Stand and sit straight. Keep your hands and feet still.
- If you're moving around, face the audience as much as you can. When rehearsing, always think about where the audience will be.
- Characters, remember to be your character even when you're not speaking.
- Narrators, make sure you give the characters enough time for their actions.

Useful Websites:

www.aaronshep.com/rt/index.html

www.readerstheatedigest.com

www.thinkingscripts.co.uk

Useful Books:

William Adams (2002) Institute book of Readers Theatre: A Practical Guide for School, Theatre and Community, William Adams

Dixon, Davies and Politano (1996) Building Connections: Learning with Readers Theatre, Peguis Publishing.

JV/CLPE adapted from Aaron Shepherd – www.aaronshep.com/rt