

Introduction to Readers Theatre

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Using Readers Theatre

Readers theatre can be compared to radio plays. The emphasis is on an effective reading of the script rather than on a dramatic, memorized presentation. Generally, the presentation is formal, without props or costumes. The ease of incorporating readers theatre in the reading or library program offers teachers and librarians an exciting way to build reading fluency and automaticity.

Preparing the Scripts

Once scripts are chosen for reading, make enough copies for each character, plus an extra set or two for your use and a replacement copy. To help readers keep their place, have students use highlighter markers to designate their character's role within the copy. For example, someone reading the role of Narrator 1 could highlight the lines in blue, with another student highlighting his or her lines in yellow. Photocopied scripts will last longer if you use a three-hole punch (or copy them on pre-punched paper) and place them in inexpensive folders. The folders can be color-coordinated to the internal highlighting for each character's part. The title of the play can be printed on the outside of the folder, and scripts can be stored easily for the next reading. The preparation of the scripts is a good project for a volunteer. The preparation takes a minimum of initial attention and needs to be repeated only when a folder is lost.

Getting Started

For the first experience with a readers theatre script, choose a script with many characters to involve more students. Gather the students informally. Share any related picture books or other information about the focus of the script. Next, introduce the script and explain that readers theatre does not mean memorizing a play and acting it out, but rather reading a script aloud with perhaps a few props and actions. Select volunteers to do the initial reading, allowing them an opportunity to review their parts before reading aloud. If the script is based on a familiar story, such as a fairy tale, discuss any differences in the content. Write pronunciations on the board of any challenging names or words. While these students are preparing to read their script, another group could be review another script or brainstorm ideas for props or staging.

Once the students have read the scripts and become familiar with the new vocabulary, determine which students will read the various parts. Some parts may be more demanding than others, and students should be encouraged to volunteer for roles that will be comfortable. Once they are familiar with readers theatre, students should be encouraged to stretch and try a reading that is challenging. To expand the experience, a readers theatre workshop could be held periodically, with each student belonging to a group that prepares a script for presentation. A readers theatre festival could be planned with several short scripts with similar themes presented consecutively. Consider adding a photocopied program, program notes, an intermission, and refreshments to the event.

Presentation Suggestions

For readers theatre, readers traditionally stand—or sit on stools, chairs, or the floor—in a formal presentation style. The narrators may stand with the script placed on music stands or lecterns slightly off to one or both sides. The readers may hold their scripts in black or colored folders. On occasion, key characters might sit on high stools to elevate them above numerous other characters. Scripts may include a few suggestions for presentation, but students should be encouraged to create an interesting arrangement.

Props

Readers theatre has no, or few, props. However, simple costuming effects will lend interest to the presentation. Students should be encouraged to decide how much or little to add to their reading. For some readers, the use of props or actions may be distracting, and the emphasis should remain on the reading.

Delivery Suggestions

Delivery suggestions generally are not imbedded in readers theatre scripts. Therefore, it is important to discuss with the students what will make the scripts come alive as they read. During their first experiences with presenting a script, students are tempted to keep their heads buried in the script, making sure they don't miss a line. Students should learn the material well enough to look up from the script during the presentation. Students can learn to use onstage focus—to look at each other during the presentation. This is most logical for characters that are interacting with each other. The use of offstage focus—the presenters look directly into the eyes of the audience—is more logical for the narrator or characters that are uninvolved with onstage characters. Alternatively, have students who do not interact with each other focus on a prearranged offstage location, such as the classroom clock. Simple actions, such as gestures, can also be incorporated into readers theatre. Generally the audience should be able to see the readers' facial expressions during the reading. Upon occasion, it might seem logical for a character to move across the stage, facing the other characters while reading. In this event, the characters should be turned enough so that the audience can see the reader's face and hear the lines.

The Audience

When students are part of the audience, they should understand their role. Rehearse good listening practices, plus applauding. Ask students to think about how they would want the audience to react to the reading. Brainstorm what might go wrong during a reading and how to react appropriately.

The Next Step

Once students have enjoyed the reading process involved in preparing and presenting readers theatre, the logical next step is to involve them in the writing process by creating their own scripts. Use familiar short stories or poetry to build confidence.

Readers Theatre Online Resources

www.storycart.com

www.aaronshelp.com/rt/

<http://scriptsforschools.com>

Readers Theatre and Study Skills

Readers Theatre supports the usage or understanding of:

- Antonyms, homonyms, synonyms
- Enriched word meanings
- Context clues
- Expanded vocabulary
- Decoding
- Phonetic analysis
- Structural analysis
- Principles of syllabication
- Main idea
- Sequence
- Drawing conclusions
- Literary style
- Prediction
- Forming judgments
- Seeing relationships
- Evaluating information
- Generalization
- Fact vs. fiction
- Reading for enjoyment
- Role-playing
- Articulation
- Pronunciation
- Oral fluency
- Concentration
- Listening
- Effective communication
- Syntax
- Collaboration
- Stage presence
- Following directions
- Narrative order
- Author's purpose, point of view
- Plot, theme, tone, etc.
- Oral projection
- Fitting reading speed to purpose