



Readers' Theater in the Classroom and Library: Pathway to Increased Fluency and Comprehension

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WHAT IS READER'S THEATER?

Definitions

“Reader’s Theater is a **rehearsed group presentation** of a script that is **read aloud rather than memorized.**” (Flynn, 2004)

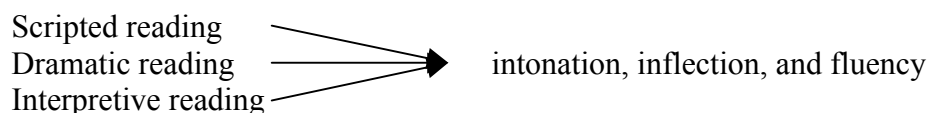
“Reader’s Theater is an **interpretive activity** in which children practice and perform for others a **scripted reading.**” (Rinehart, 1999)

“Reader’s Theater is **dramatic oral expression** that focuses on reading aloud rather than memorization.” (O’Neill, 2001)

“Reader’s Theater is an **interpretive reading activity** in which readers **use their voices to bring characters to life.**” (Martinez, Roser, and Strecker, 1999)

“The goal of Reader’s Theater is to read a script in which the story theme and character development are conveyed to the audience through **intonation, inflection, and fluency.**” (McAndrews, 2004)

Key Components of Reader’s Theater



Language activity with authentic communication purpose
Holistic in nature--integrates language experiences of:

- Reading
- Speaking
- Listening
- Thinking

Differences from Staged Drama

STAGED DRAMA	READER’S THEATER
Formal and complex	Informal and simple
Memorized script	Script interpretively read aloud
Emphasis on staged action and stage movement	Emphasis on spoken words and gestures
Scenery, costumes, props	Exists in minds of audience only

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METHODS

Assigning Parts

- * Choose scripts within readers' reach.
- * Match parts to reading abilities.
- * Don't force unwilling readers.
- * Ample rehearsal time is essential for struggling readers.
- * Pair English Language Learners with fluent readers to read a part chorally.

Rehearsing

- * Adequate time for practice and performance are essential.
- * Substantial practice leads to substantial improvement.
- * Highlight each character's part throughout a script.
- * Duplicate scripts for each reader—one to leave at school and one to take home.
- * Allow students to determine when they are ready to perform.

Interpretation

- * Encourage reading with expression.
- * Use voice to communicate character emotions.
- * Use facial expression to communicate character emotions.
- * Appropriate gestures increase retention.
- * Gestures make Reader's Theater more interesting to perform and watch.
- * Mime techniques add polish.

Setting the Stage

- * Use script binders (1/2 to 1 inch ring binders).
- * Music stands for scripts leave hands free for gesturing.
- * Make oaktag name tags with a neck string for each character.
- * Use rotating stools for readers (readers face forward only when reading their parts).
- * Keep old scripts and props as an LMC "center."

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BENEFITS

Reading Benefits for All

- * Repeated oral reading in rehearsals and performances supports text fluency.
- * Fluency is reading smoothly at an appropriate rate with accuracy, proper phrasing, and expression.
- * When performance is the goal, students are motivated to read, repeat, and review.
- * Re-reading is purposeful and fun.
- * Anticipation of an audience heightens the commitment to rehearsal.
- * Repetition enhances retention.
- * Reader's Theater improves sight word recognition.
- * Reader's Theater boosts listening and speaking skills.
- * Reader's Theater improves reader confidence.
- * Effective performance requires focus from all on script.
- * Student ownership and engagement in the process is high.
- * Because fluency and comprehension are closely related, fluent readers are high achieving students.
- * Supports the learning of Bodily-Kinesthetic learners.

Literature Comprehension/Appreciation Benefits

- * Reader's Theater encourages student insight into and appreciation of literature.
- * Reader's Theater helps students delve into the thoughts and feelings of characters.
- * Students demonstrate what they know about the text.
- * Reader's Theater inspires independent reading.

Social Benefits

- * The shyest kids often bloom in Reader's Theater.
- * Collaboration and teamwork are emphasized skills.
- * Reader's Theater promotes cooperative interaction with peers.
- * Reader's Theater encourages social interaction during reading time.
- * Reader's Theater encourages practice at home with family members and friends.

Reading Benefits for Struggling Readers

- * Reader's Theater makes the reading task appealing.
- * Scripts are less daunting because students don't have to read them all alone.
- * Students have an authentic reason for repetitive reading (which increases fluency).
- * Struggling readers listen to and join in with accomplished readers who offer good models of fluent reading.
- * Less-skilled readers have an opportunity to be on an equal footing with better readers.
- * Reader's Theater provides opportunities for instructional support and feedback.
- * Successful reading in front of a group empowers struggling readers and increases interest.
- * When part of a Chorus, struggling readers see and hear words simultaneously.

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Best Compiled Web Resources with Links

“Aaron Shepard’s RT Page: Scripts and Tips for Reader’s Theater (or Readers Theater or Reader’s Theatre or Readers Theatre or . . .)” *Author Online! Aaron Shepard’s Home Page: Stories, Scripts, and More*. 24 January 2011

<<http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/index.html#Tips>>.

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