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

- Scripted reading
- Dramatic reading
- Interpretive reading
- [intonation, inflection, and fluency]

Language activity with authentic communication purpose

Holistic in nature--integrates language experiences of:
- Reading
- Speaking
- Listening
- Thinking

Differences from Staged Drama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGED DRAMA</th>
<th>READER’S THEATER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal and complex</td>
<td>Informal and simple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memorized script</td>
<td>Script interpretively read aloud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on staged action and stage</td>
<td>Emphasis on spoken words and gestures</td>
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<td>movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenery, costumes, props</td>
<td>Exists in minds of audience only</td>
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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.”
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.
Readers’ Theater in the Classroom and Library: Pathway to Increased Fluency and Comprehension
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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

“Readers Theater.” Literacy Connections. 24 January 2011