

# READERS THEATER EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE

The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance (NCBLA) has designed this education resource guide to provide adults who live and work with young people the information, activity suggestions, and resources needed to engage young people with Readers Theater, whether you choose to do this in your classroom or during a weekend camping trip. We invite you to print and share these materials with others who are looking to teach and write their own Readers Theater productions. More information is available on our website [thencba.org](http://thencba.org). Under the EDUCATION menu, click on Readers Theater.

## What Is Readers Theater?

Readers Theater (RT for short!) is a performance in which readers read a script that has been adapted from a piece of literature. The audience pictures the action from hearing the script being read aloud. Readers Theater requires no sets, props, or costumes. Rather than acting, the performer’s goal is to read their part aloud so effectively that the audience is able to visualize what is happening. Therefore, the goal of this fluency instruction targets the improvement of prosody and meaning. The repeated and assisted practice that occurs during rehearsal will improve automaticity and accuracy in word recognition. Besides being an engaging and motivational activity, research (Young and Rasinski, 2009; Griffith and Rasinski, 2004) supports the potential of Readers Theater to improve reading performance.

## Benefits

The many benefits of using Readers Theater include:

- engaging students in the act of reading.
- increasing students’ motivation to read.
- increasing students’ level of comprehension.
- developing students’ fluency through repeated use of and exposure to text.
- providing students with an authentic purpose for reading.
- integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking into an authentic context for students.

## Characteristics of an Effective Readers Theater Reader

An effective reader:

- reads with expression, enunciating clearly, using his/her voice to convey meaning.
- is familiar with the part and can read it fluently.
- demonstrates poise and self-confidence.

## How to Implement Readers Theater?

The following outlines a potential schedule for implementing a Readers Theater performance in your classroom or other setting:

- On Monday discuss the purpose and procedures for Readers Theater with the class/group and assign the students their parts. This can be accomplished through auditioning or volunteering. Practice needs to occur silently as well as being done aloud. Introduce Readers Theater using already written scripts so that students can grasp the idea of Readers Theater, becoming familiar with the format of a script before writing their own.  
Teach the basic steps of performance; using highlighters to mark parts; reading expressively; how to hold the script. Review and pre-teach new or difficult vocabulary.
- On Tuesday and Wednesday, have students practice their parts in class, on their own, in their groups, and at home. The more proficient reader will establish a fluent pace, emphasizing prosodic aspects. The less proficient reader's goal is to mimic the more proficient reader. After repeated readings that are assisted, the students should be able to read the text independently, with good fluency.
- Thursday is the rehearsal day before the performance. By this time, the students have had repeated readings, have understood the meaning, and have experienced teacher-peer coaching that has prepared them for a fluent performance. The students practice one last time before the big day as a group, reading accurately and prosodically.
- Friday is "Opening Night!" Readers Theater can be performed for classmates and/or parents, and the stage can vary from performing for the class to performing for other classes, or the whole school.

## Selecting a Text for Readers Theater

Not all literature makes a good Readers Theater script. Look for literature that:

- has a strong story line, conflict, plot, action, humor, and interesting characters.
- uses dialogue.
- is not filled with lots of description/descriptive passages.

## Resources for Readers Theater Scripts

Check out the following web resources for accessing Readers Theater scripts:

- Aaron Shephard's RT Page: <http://www.aaronsherp.com/rt/index.html>
- Fiction Teachers: <http://www.fictionteachers.com/classroomtheater/theater.html>
- Literacy Connections: <http://www.literacyconnections.com/testReadersTheater.php>
- Margie Palatini: <http://www.margiepalatini.com>
- PBS Kids: <http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/playhouse/>
- Readers' Theatre Online: <http://www.vtaide.com/png/theatre.htm>
- Story Cart: <http://www.storycart.com>

- Teaching Heart: <http://www.teachingheart.net/readers theater.htm>
- Timeless Teacher Stuff: <http://www.timelessteacherstuff.com>
- “Sources for Reader’s Theatre” by Timothy Rasinski:  
[http://www.timrasinski.com/presentations/readers\\_theater\\_sources.pdf](http://www.timrasinski.com/presentations/readers_theater_sources.pdf)
- “*The Exquisite Corpse Adventure* Reader’s Theatre Production of Episode 27 ‘Over Easy’” by Katherine Paterson:  
[http://www.thencbla.org/Exquisite\\_Corpse/Reader%27s%20Theater%20Script%20for%20E CA%20Episode%2027.pdf](http://www.thencbla.org/Exquisite_Corpse/Reader%27s%20Theater%20Script%20for%20E CA%20Episode%2027.pdf)

## Engaging Students to Create Their Own Readers Theater Scripts

The following are some suggestions for engaging students in creating their own Readers Theater scripts:

- Have a discussion with the students about the script roles of narrator(s) and character(s).
- Demonstrate how to identify the specific script roles, delineating between narration and dialogue using a scripting sheet.
- Organize the students into teams of four, with each team receiving a copy of one of the scripting sheets.\* The students are to read through the story silently. Then, as a group, the students should identify the roles in the story and assign parts to each of the members of the group.

The members of the group should go over the story together, deciding who will read what and also what to cut. Each student is marking, on your own sheet, in pencil, crossing out the cuts and highlighting their own speeches. Try out your script by reading together. Go back and change it as needed.

In fifteen or twenty minutes, each group will have a script it can read to the others!

After practicing with these story excerpts, students can try short, complete pieces. Arnold Lobel’s book *Fables* is excellent for this. Longer pieces can also be scripted this way. Expository scripts can be written, demonstrating students’ understanding in the content areas. Readers Theater scripts can also be adapted from favorite trade books (*Brown Bear Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin and from poetry; e.g. Bruce Lansky’s [GigglePoetry.com](http://www.gigglepoetry.com))

\* Examples of scripting sheets can be found at <http://www.aaronshp.com/rt/sheets.html>

## References

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Henry, L.A. Readers Theater Lesson Plan. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/readers-theatre-172.html?tab=4>.

Rasinski, T. Dr. Tim Rasinski on Implementing Reader's Theater. <http://www.literacyconnections.com/rasinski-readers-theater.php>

Young, C., & Rasinski, T. (2009, September). Implementing Readers Theater as an Approach to Classroom Fluency Instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(1), 2-13. doi: 10.1598/RT.63.11.