

Reader's Theatre

Skills Focus

Identifying Main Idea and Details, Writing

Connection to Habits of Good Readers

Determining Importance, Evaluating

Overview

Acting out texts is one way to really “get into” them. Sometimes we shy away because we don't think we can memorize lines. Reader's Theatre is a great way to exercise your acting potential without having to memorize a script. Reader's Theatre is a way of reading aloud by creating and performing scripts from parts or chapters of favorite books.

Guiding Questions and Talking Points

The following questions and talking points might be helpful in sparking a conversation about Reader's Theatre:

- How is reading a play different from reading a story?
- What is a script?
- Reader's Theatre is not the same as acting out a typical drama production—you do not have to have special costumes and you do not have to memorize the lines (you will read).

Intro Activity

Imagine that you were going to turn a familiar Mother Goose nursery rhyme into a script to be acted out or read aloud. Pick another family member and choose a nursery rhyme. Then, together, write a script for the nursery rhyme. Think about the setting and characters. What lines would each character say? How would he or she sound when the lines are read? Possible nursery rhymes include Hickory Dickory Dock, Little Bo Peep, and Little Boy Blue.

Before (Background Knowledge and/or Vocabulary)

To build background knowledge, explain that Reader's Theatre usually involves short scripts that are either original or adapted scripts. Actors do not have to memorize lines. Instead, they read directly from their scripts just as they are reading a book aloud. Voice and inflection are extremely important in these productions so you may want to have a little fun practicing different types of voices first.

The following terms might be helpful to children as they learn about drama and Reader's Theatre:

- **Script:** copy of the written text of a play.
- **Dialogue:** the conversation spoken between characters in a literary work.
- **Staging:** the act, process or manner of presenting a play on stage.

During

Select a favorite chapter book or children's story that you would like to turn into a play. Read through the story as a family. As you read, determine when and where the story takes place, the main characters, the conflict, and the most important parts of the story. Then choose one page, section, or chapter that you would like to turn into a script. Your script should include the setting and a list of characters. Then, it should include the lines each character will say, along with any specific directions about how the line should be said or what the character is feeling or thinking. You may want to use a highlighter to highlight the parts of the story you want to include in your script.

Work as a family to create a script that accurately conveys the most important parts of the text. Then, have fun reading the script aloud.

- **Emerging readers** can use the sample Reader's Theater scripts on the identified website as a model for your scripts. Prior to writing their script, have your child highlight the most important lines from the original text that should be included in some way in the adapted text. Gain practice reading aloud by practicing one line, using appropriate inflection and tone.
- **Proficient readers** can write portions of the script themselves directly from the text and include notes about what the characters might be thinking or feeling. They can then apply these notes as they read aloud the script.
- **Advanced readers** can create a script that draws from various sections of the original text. The new script should maintain the integrity of the original text, and provide a more complete representation of the text as a whole, as opposed to one particular scene. They should work to read each line of the script, using expression, intonation, and inflection.

Reader's Theatre (cont.)

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After (Extension Activities)

- Perform your script for friends and family.
- Look in a local newspaper to see what dramatic productions are playing at local theaters or libraries. Attend a production as a family.
- Create an original Reader's Theatre and perform it for friends and family.
- Create a script using suggested books. Record a performance of your script. Compare a scene from your performance to the movie version of the same scene.

Web Resources

The following websites provide useful information about Reader's Theatre:

- www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm
- www.aaronshp.com/rt/
- www.storiestogrowby.com/script_body.html

Suggested Readings

Harriet the Spy, Louise Fitzhugh
Because of Winn Dixie, Kate DiCamillo
James and the Giant Peach, Ronald Dahl
Cat in the Hat, Dr. Seuss
Summer of the Monkeys, Wilson Rawls