

## Reader's Theater

We have an innate interest in stories. Telling and listening to stories is simply a characteristic of being human. The origins of this practice can be traced all the way back to the paintings found on the caves of our prehistoric ancestors. Reader's theater is minimal theater that builds on this foundation for storytelling. In short, reader's theater puts literature into a simple dramatic form that engages an audience. This minimal theater builds on literature and readings and supports students' developing reading skills in:

- Imagining pictures as the text is read
- Improving reading fluency through multiple readings of the text and practice with a selected text
- Creating interest and skill in reading
- Practicing and improving skills in reading for meaning and inference

The fact that *reader* is in the term *reader's theater* suggests that the reader is the main focus of this activity. There are no props, costumes, or strategies. Reader's theater is presentational, not representational, and the images from the text are not created on the stage but rather in the minds of the readers. It is also a helpful tool for struggling readers and students with special needs because it is another way in which to examine and experience text. Given the linguistic complexity of many of the classic literary texts that are a mainstay in our literature curricula, it is an effective strategy for supporting students as they attempt to decode and interpret text. Following is an example of reader's theater from *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*: the tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, translated by Sir Thomas Mallory.

**Arthur:** Thou shalt promise me by the faith of thy body, when thou hast jousted with the knight at the fountain, whether it fall ye be on foot or on horseback, that right so ye shall come again unto me without making any more debate.

**Griflet:** I will promise you as you desire.

**Narrator:** Griflet took his horse in great haste, and dressed his shield and took a spear in his hand. He rode a great wallop till he came to the fountain and thereby he saw a rich pavilion and thereby under a cloth stood a fair horse well saddled and bridled, and on a tree a shield of diverse colors and a great spear. Griflet smote on the shield with the butt of his spear, that the shield fell down to the ground. With that, the fair knight came out of the pavilion.

**Griflet:** For I will joust with you.

**Knight:** It is better ye do not, for ye are but young and late made knight and your might is nothing to mine.

**Griflet:** As for that, I will joust with you.

**Knight:** That is me loath but sith I must needs, I will dress me thereto. Of whence be ye?

**Griflet:** Sir, I am of Arthur's court.

**Tips**

To begin creating reader's theater scripts, check these sources: novels, poems, short stories, and essays. You may also pull scripts from Web sites such as Screenplays for You (<http://sfy.ru>). Select a text for the script. Choose a text that supports many different voices. Assign readers for the different parts and begin to edit.

**Suggestions for editing the script for performance**

- Omit superfluous characters.
- Decide who will be the narrator.
- Determine whether a reader can portray multiple roles.
- Create a focus for the script.
- Edit the text so that only the most essential information that develops the story is included.

**Suggestions for practice and rehearsal**

- All parts should be clearly marked.
- Assign numbers for readers.
- The script should flow.
- There should be a balance of voices among the readers.
- Confirm that the script, with the edits, still flows logically.

**Suggestions for the script format**

- Begin with a title page, with text title and author.
- Characters should be clearly designated in the script.
- Check that performance directions are clearly marked.

The following is an example of an evaluation form.



## Example: Reader's Theater Evaluation

Text Selected \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_

Readers \_\_\_\_\_

### **Tone of the Introduction to the Reader's Theater Selection (5 points):**

- The actors created the proper tone for the reader's theater selection.
- The audience became interested in the selected piece.

### **Development and Use of Script (5 points):**

- Script is edited and developed so that the audience understands the plot and characters of the selected text.

### **Performance (5 points):**




- The author's performances effectively employ voice and gestures to develop the different characters and plots of the reader's theater script.
- Pauses and utterances are appropriately placed.
- Readers clearly rehearsed and developed their performances.

A reader's theater lesson plan is shown in Exhibit 3.8. The rubric follows in Exhibit 3.9.

### Exhibit 3.8 Reader's Theater Lesson Plan

During-Reading Lesson	
<b>Reader's Theater</b>	
Objective	To use role-playing and dramatic performance as a tool to develop a personal connection with canonical text, as well as an understanding of the themes and major plots of canonical text
Materials	None
Time	1–2 class periods
<b>Procedure</b>	
Step 1	Before the students read a text, take a basic theme from the canonical work or from a few of the chapters and instruct students to create a situation in which they reenact that same theme.
Step 2	Have the students enact the scenes for their classmates.
Step 3	Conduct a large-group discussion about the themes and ideas that were presented by the different student groups. Bridge the information that the students presented in their presentations to the text that they're about to read.
IRA/NCTE Standards	<p><b>3.</b> Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).</p> <p><b>12.</b> Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).</p>

### Exhibit 3.9 Rubric for Reader's Theater Lesson

	Exceeds standards	Student has demonstrated a strong understanding of the theme through the creative output of the role-play. The role-play is creative and demonstrates originality.
	Meets standards	The role-play demonstrates the student's understanding and interpretation of the theme or topic.
	Does not meet standards	The role-play does not demonstrate the student's understanding or interpretation of the topic.

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