

Now I get it!

In this lesson, students are introduced to and encouraged to explore Readers' Theatre as a way to increase their reading comprehension.

Summary

In this lesson students are introduced to the basic elements of drama through Readers Theatre. Students will utilize this information by presenting a dramatic interpretation of a story that is being read in class. Then, they will reflect on how the process helped them understand the content of the text through oral discussion and written work.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss authorial tone and the role of a narrator in a story.
- Convey elements of a story such as character, setting, and plot through a dramatic performance.
- Compare and contrast written text to a dramatic interpretation.
- Identify techniques used by actors and actresses to convey information to an audience.
- Use group discussion skills.
- Use oral presentation skills.
- Participate in a variety of independent literacy-building activities.

Teaching Approach

- Arts Integration

Teaching Methods

- Hands-On Learning
- Reflection
- Discussion
- Experiential Learning
- Role Playing

Assessment Type

- Informal Assessment

Lesson Setup

Teacher Background

- You should be familiar with Readers Theatre (see handout).
- Your choice of books can reflect other topics the students are studying or authors that you are focusing on.

Prior Student Knowledge

- Students should be familiar with the basic elements of a story and classroom expectations for group activity.

Grouping

- Individualized Instruction
- Small Group Instruction

Staging

- Set up desks/tables and chairs to accommodate a "stage" area at the front of the classroom.
- Distribute scripts.
- Test technology, if being used.

What You'll Need - Student Supplies:

- One printed, highlighted script per child

Resources:

- Printed Readers Theatre Script

Required Technology

- 1 Computer per Classroom
- Projector

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ENGAGE

1. Ask students to summarize what has been happening in a book you are reading as a class. This will help identify characterization qualities and will open the students up for group discussion. Potential prompt questions include:
 - Where does the story take place?
 - Who is the narrator? What are they like?
 - What characters are there in the story? How old are they?
 - What happens to the characters in chapter ____?
2. Invite the students to tell you about a time that they have seen someone act a story out. If students are uncertain what counts as "acting" prompt them with questions about movies, television shows, or live performances. Ask the students how we know these people are acting and how they tell a story. Then ask how an actor is similar or different to a narrator in a story (text).
3. Tell the students that they will learn how to use acting to help tell the story that you are reading in class. Ask students how an actor or actress can use their body and/or voice to show the audience the character's thoughts, words and actions. Work with the students to practice expressing emotions as a group by using their voices and faces (ie: smiling, frowning, whispering, yelling, etc.).

BUILD KNOWLEDGE

1. Introduce the students to the basics of Readers Theatre, which includes covering any expectations for behavior during the activity. Ask them how Readers Theatre is similar or different from doing a full play in your classroom.
2. Project the words to the readers theatre script onto the board so that it is visible to all students. As a class, read the script together, stopping at any unfamiliar words to work on pronunciation. After reading the script, ask the students so summarize the text and how they think the characters look, sounds, and use their bodies.

APPLY

1. Pass out a copy of a readers theatre script to each student with a character pre-selected (with their parts highlighted); characters can either be assigned to specific students or passed out randomly. Practice reading the script as their characters.
2. Continue to practice using the script, moving from reading it sitting down to standing up and slowly using their bodies and voices to reflect what they are reading.

REFLECT

1. Have the students come back together for a discussion after the activity. Ask the students to reflect on what they experienced:
 - Was it the same as reading the text in a book? If not, why was it different?
 - What did they learn about the author and how they write?
 - How do they see the characters now? Is it the same as what they thought at the beginning of class?
2. Have the students journal about the similarities and differences of a written text and drama - this can focus on a specific area or can be broad.

EXTEND THE LEARNING

- Have the students make their own Readers Theatre scripts based on stories or poems being read in class.
- Let the students perform their Readers Theatre for another class or for their parents.
- Have students take the role of director or audience and provide feedback to other students.

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READERS THEATRE 101

What is Readers Theater?

Readers Theater is a dramatic presentation of a written work in a script form and is very effective when you use a simple story that involves repetition or a predictable pattern. Readers read from a "script" and reading parts are divided among the readers. No memorization, costumes, blocking, or special lighting is needed.

How much work is it to plan a Readers Theater Lesson?

Presentations can easily be done in a classroom without much preparation ahead of time because scripts are held by the readers and lines are not memorized. The focus is on reading the text with expressive voices and gestures, which makes comprehending the text meaningful and fun for the student.

How can I make my own Readers Theatre script?

Making your own Readers Theatre script is easier than you think! If you are reading a book in class that has the text available as an electronic version, simply separate the narration and dialogue into separate "parts" so that all the students can actively participate. It is typically best to highlight the parts before distributing the parts out to the students, as they may be unfamiliar with using a script.

How can I get all of my students involved?

You will need to move chairs around and organize the students in order to help control the flow. Everyone can be in charge of a sentence strip or a single character and you can use very minimal props. You can also have the members of the class who are not playing a particular role serve as the chorus to say a repeating part on cue. Having students help think of the simple actions each character can make and very simple ideas for costumes and props (even a yellow scarf for a canary, etc.) also deepens their comprehension.

What if my students all read at different levels?

One of the best ways to make sure that every child is comfortable participating in Readers Theatre is to slowly read the script out loud as a whole class first. By doing a read-aloud as a full class, students have a chance to read the script when it is broken by parts, which may be a new concept, and can practice pronouncing any challenging, new or unfamiliar words. It is also helpful to have the students read their parts in pairs, which makes them feel more at ease about reading out loud in front of the class. If you are aware of different ability levels or reading challenges among your students you can also assign specific parts accordingly.

Where can I find pre-made Readers Theatre scripts?

Teaching Heart.net: <http://www.teachingheart.net/readers theater.htm>

Mr. Young's Class: <http://www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html>

Aaron Shepard's RT Page: <http://www.aaronsherp.com/rt/RTE.html>

Timeless Teacher Stuff: <http://www.timelessteacherstuff.com>

The Reading Lady: www.readinglady.com

Ms. Gurian's Class: <http://it.pinellas.k12.fl.us/Teachers3/gurianb/ReadersTheater.html>

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Drama Vocabulary

Actor/Actress: A male or female person who performs a role in a play, work of theatre, or movie.

Character: A personality or role an actor/actress re-creates.

Characterization: The development and portrayal of a personality through thought, action, dialogue, costuming, and makeup.

Costumes: Clothing worn by an actor on stage during a performance.

Creative Drama: An improvisational, process-centered form of theatre in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect on human experiences.

Dramatic Play: Children's creation of scenes when they play "pretend".

Dress Rehearsal: The final few rehearsals just prior to opening night in which the show is run with full technical elements. Full costumes and makeup are worn.

Formal Theatre: Theatre that focuses on public performance in the front of an audience and in which the final production is most important.

Informal Theatre: A theatrical performance that focuses on small presentations, such as one taking place in a classroom setting. Usually, it is not intended for public view.

Pitch: The highness or lowness of voice.

Play: The stage representation of an action or a story; a dramatic composition.

Playwright: A person who writes plays.

Position: The orientation of the actor to the audience (e.g., full front, right profile, left profile).

Props: Items carried on stage by an actor; small items on the set used by the actors.

Rehearsal: Practice sessions in which the actors and technicians prepare for public performance through repetition.

Run-through: A rehearsal moving from start to finish without stopping for corrections or notes.

Script: The written text of a play.

Stage: The area where actors perform.

Volume: The degree of loudness or intensity of a voice.

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Theatre Etiquette Guidelines

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Unlike television and movies, theatre is an art that thrives on the participation of the audience. Audience reactions and responses can be heard by the performers and have a direct effect on the quality of the entire performance. The following are guidelines to help new theatergoers understand the importance and responsibilities of being a good audience member. Appropriate audience behavior ensures a good experience for everyone.

Be orderly and prompt. Safety is the primary concern. Please respect other audience members and the theatre building by entering and exiting in an orderly fashion. Please, no running, pushing or horseplay. It is best to arrive fifteen minutes early, as latecomers can disrupt the performers and the audience. Please visit rest rooms before or after the performance.

Read. A playbill is often provided to inform you about the play, production and actors that you are about to see. Reading it before the lights dim will provide you with a deeper understanding of what you see and hear on stage.

Listen and observe. There is so much to hear (dialogue, music, sound effects, and voice inflection) and so much to see (costumes, props, set design, lighting effects, and architecture of the theatre). Unlike videos, you cannot rewind if you miss something. When the lights dim before the show begins, it is the audience's cue to stop talking and begin listening.

Unplug. Please turn off or silence all electronics and anything that beeps: cell phones, cameras, watches, pagers, etc. If you are with a person who has a hearing aid that emits a high pitch please politely alert him/her to silence it. Inappropriate noises are forbidden as they distract both the actors and the audience. Even whispering to your neighbor is considered an inappropriate distraction.

Please, don't feed the audience. Food and gum are not allowed inside the theatre. Katherine Hepburn, a great stage and screen actress, once stopped a Broadway performance when she heard an audience member crinkling a candy wrapper! Eating and drinking, while permitted in movie theatres, is extremely distracting to live performers.

Laugh out loud. Positive audience sounds are encouraged. You may freely and honestly respond to the performance by laughing, applauding, crying, and expressing any other forms of appreciation and emotion. And, by all means, please do participate if asked by the actors to contribute a verbal response.

Think. Think about your theatre experience during and after the performance. How does the material apply to your life? Are there lessons to be learned? Would you make the same decisions as the characters in the circumstances given? Did the performance inspire you? Are you happy, angry, bored, or encouraged by what you saw? Think it through and talk about it with others after the show.

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MISSISSIPPI ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS FRAMEWORKS 2nd GRADE

2. The student will apply strategies and skills to comprehend, respond to, interpret, or evaluate a variety of texts of increasing levels of length, difficulty, and complexity.
- a. The student will use text features, parts of a book, text structures, and genres to analyze text. (DOK 2)
- 4) Genres – fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.
- b. The student will analyze texts in order to identify, understand, infer, or synthesize information. (DOK 2)
- 1) Answer literal and simple inferential who, what, when, where, why, how, and what if questions.
- 2) Answer literal and simple inferential questions about main characters, settings, and events.
- 3) Answer literal and simple inferential questions about characters' actions, motives, traits, and emotions.
- 4) Identify the main idea and some details in narrative text or the topic and some details in informational text.
- 5) Determine simple cause and effect relationships.
- 6) Identify simple fact and opinion.
- 7) Draw conclusions based on information from narrative and/or informational text. 8) Identify and discuss the theme of a text.
- c. The student will recognize or generate an appropriate summary or paraphrase of the events or ideas in text, citing text-based evidence. (DOK 2)
- 1) Retell a story orally and in writing including characters, setting, problem, important events, and resolution.
- 2) Arrange in sequential order a listing of events found in narrative and/or informational text.
- d. The student will analyze, interpret, compare, or respond to increasingly complex literary text, literary nonfiction, and informational text, citing text-based evidence. (DOK 3)
- 1) Interpret text through moving, drawing, speaking, acting, or singing.
- 3) Compose visual images.

3rd GRADE

2. The student will apply strategies and skills to comprehend, respond to, interpret, or evaluate a variety of texts of increasing length, difficulty, and complexity.
- b. The student will analyze texts in order to identify, understand, infer, or synthesize information. (DOK 3)
- 1) Answer and generate questions about purposes for reading.
- 2) Answer literal and inferential questions about main characters, setting, plot, and theme.
- 3) Answer literal and inferential questions about characters' actions, motives, traits, and emotions.
- 4) Identify the stated main idea of a narrative text or the topic of an informational text.
- 5) Arrange in sequential order a listing of events found in narrative and/or informational text.
- 6) Identify cause and effect as stated in text.
- 7) Identify simple fact and opinion.
- 8) Synthesize information stated in the text with prior knowledge and experience to draw a conclusion.
- 9) Predict an outcome based on information stated in text and confirm or revise the prediction based upon subsequent text.
- 10) Use key words in text to justify prediction(s).
- 11) Identify important themes from texts and examine from more than one point of view.
- c. The student will recognize or generate an appropriate summary or paraphrase of the events or ideas in text, citing text-based evidence. (DOK 2)
- 1) Retell a story orally and in writing including characters, setting, problem, important events, and resolution.
- d. The student will analyze, interpret, compare, or respond to increasingly complex literary text, literary nonfiction, and informational text, citing text-based evidence. (DOK 3)
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COMMON CORE CURRICULUM STANDARDS 2nd GRADE

Reading Standards for Literature

1. Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
2. Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
3. Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
4. Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.
5. Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.
6. Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.
7. Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

Speaking and Listening Standards

1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
 - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
 - b. Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
 - c. Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.
2. Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
3. Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.
4. Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.
5. Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

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MISSISSIPPI THEATRE STANDARDS

2nd GRADE

1. Plan and record improvisations based on personal experience, heritage, imagination, literature, and history. (CP, HC, C)
 - a. Create real and imaginary scenes with a beginning, middle, and end from life experience, diverse cultures, times, and places in guided dramatic play.
 - b. Dramatize stories from the folklore of other cultures, times, and places.
 - c. Improvise dialogue to tell stories, and formalize improvisations by writing or recording the dialogue.

2. Act by assuming roles and interacting in improvisations.
 - a. Develop body awareness and spatial perception through movement and pantomime.
 - b. Develop expressive use of voice.
 - c. Develop sensory awareness of all five senses.
 - d. Use skills in pantomime, tableau, and improvisation to create characters and to demonstrate their feelings, relationships, and environments.

3. Design by visualizing and arranging environments for creative play. (CP, C, A)
 - a. Comprehend the concept and role of technical theatre elements such as props, costumes, and scenery.
 - b. Interpret stories by creating appropriate environment and mood through the use of props, costumes, and scenery.

3rd GRADE

1. Demonstrate ability to create improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience, heritage, imagination, literature, and history. (CP, HC, C)
2. Act by assuming roles and interacting in improvisations and scripted scenes. (CP)
 - a. Demonstrate the ability to utilize the body and voice (e.g., breath control, diction, concentration, and isolation) for creative self-expression in thought, feeling, and character.
 - b. Dramatize stories from literature through dialogue, movement, and acting a variety of emotional states (e.g., happy, sad, frightened).
3. Design by visualizing and arranging environments for classroom dramatizations. (CP, HC, C, A)
 - a. Know the technical theatre elements of sound, props, lighting, makeup, costumes, scenery, and stage management in formal and informal dramatic presentations.
4. Direct by planning classroom dramatizations. (CP, CA)
 - b. Demonstrate responsible behavior such as sharing, flexibility, and effective use of time.
 - c. Understand the dynamics of a character's outer action and inner thought process.
 - d. Demonstrate various ways of staging classroom dramatizations.