

Readers' Theater

Readers' Theater is drama without costumes, props, stage, or memorization. It is done in the classroom by groups of students who become the cast of the dramatic reading.

Staging

Your classroom is the stage. Place four or five chairs or stools in a semicircle at the front of your class or in a separate staging area. If you have no stools, have students sit on the tops of their desks, facing the audience. Students may use simple costumes like hats or coats, but generally no costumes are used in this type of dramatization.

If you have plain robes or simple coats of the same color or style so that everyone looks about the same, this can have a nice effect. Students dressed in the same school uniform or colors create an atmosphere of seriousness. Props are not needed, but they may be used for additional details.

Scripting

Readers' Theater can be done using a standard play format. It is also easy to convert well-written dialogue from children's literature into a dramatic format.

Keep the number of actors to four or five. The most important reader with the largest amount of text is the narrator. You can easily have the narrator role divided between two actors, if the text is long.

If you choose a children's book, such as *Bobby Baseball*, find a selection with a good deal of exciting or interesting dialogue.

- Assign the narrator to the sections without quotes.
- Assign separate actors to each role in the dialogue, such as Dad, Bobby, Mom, Jason, and Grandpa. If there are too many roles, have one actor do two parts. (Make sure these two parts don't have to talk to each other.)
- Drop the inter-dialogue remarks such as "he said," "answered Dad," or "remarked Jason."
- Copy the text so that each child has a clearly marked, useable script.
- Place scripts in folders that are uniform in color and size.
- Allow children to practice for several days before presenting in front of the class.

Performing

Students should enter quietly and seriously into a dimly lit room, with their scripts held in the same position. Actors should sit silently and unmoving on the stools or desks and wait with heads lowered or alternatively focusing on a point above the audience such as a clock. The narrator should start reading and the actors will then focus on their scripts. The actors should focus on whoever is reading, except when they are performing.

Extensions

Encourage students to add movement and memorization to performances after several experiences with Readers' Theater. They can introduce mime to the performance and add props or costumes, as the circumstances allow. Some students may begin to add accents as they become more familiar with the drama.

Readers' Theater *(cont.)*

Readers' Theater Activities

1. Convert one of the following sections from *Bobby Baseball* to a script for Readers' Theater.
2. Practice reading the scripts with the group for several days.
3. Present the Readers' Theater to your class audience.

Selection Choices from *Bobby Baseball*

Pages 8, 10, and the top of page 11

Dialogue between Bobby and his brother, Sammy

- Use three actors: Narrator, Bobby, and Sammy.

From the middle of page 23 to the middle of page 25

Dialogue between Bobby and his father

- Use three actors: Narrator, Bobby, and Dad.
- Write a brief introduction to the scene for the Narrator.

Pages 28, 30, and 31

Dialogue between Bobby and his friend, Jason

- Use three actors: Narrator, Bobby, and Jason.
- Write a brief introduction to the scene for the Narrator.

Chapter 10—Pages 50–57

The first team practice

- Use five actors—some will do two parts.
- Narrator, Bobby, Dad, Sammy, Mouth, Jason, Second Girl
- Write a brief introduction to the scene for the Narrator from page 50 and the top of page 51.
- Bobby could use page 57 for his final lines.

Chapters 19 and 20—Pages 112–21

Dad removes Bobby from the game.

- Use five actors—some will do two parts.
- Narrator, Bobby, Dad, Sammy, Mouth, Jason, Freddie, Ned, and Nan
- Write a brief introduction to the scene for the Narrator for page 112, and a brief narration between the dialogue through page 121.
- Create dialogue for Mouth, Nan, Jason, Ned, and Freddie to reduce the amount of narration.

Pages 128–130

Dad replaces Bobby in a game.

- Use three actors: Narrator, Dad, and Bobby.
- Write a brief introduction to set the scene for the audience.

Readers' Theater *(cont.)*

Converting Stories to Drama

You can write and perform your own Readers' Theater scripts by using the following suggestions:

- Write an inning-by-inning account of an imaginary game as described by two television or radio commentators. Use the pages titled **Baseball Lingo** (page 48) and **Baseball Vocabulary** (page 47) to help you.
- Be sure to fill the story with plenty of action and make the game close and exciting.
- Convert this creative-writing activity into a script with two announcers. You may adopt the names of real announcers, ballparks, and players, or make up your own. This may be a Little League game or a professional one. Feel free to add commercials and interviews with players and fans.
- You will need two main readers for the announcers and one or two other readers for the fans, players, commercials, and other commentary. You might want to add props, such as fake microphones, or add sounds to make the game seem real.

Converting Other Books

Choose a chapter, with several characters and a lot of dialogue, from one of your favorite books. Use a narrator for the basic introduction and text and different readers to do the dialogue. Remember to drop the "he said's" and other unimportant words.

