READERS THEATRE
A SECONDARY APPROACH

Neill Dixon

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This book is dedicated to Linda for her continued love and encouragement, and to Craig and Tracy for their love and for helping me to see the forest beyond the trees.
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While every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyrighted materials, someone may have been inadvertently missed. If infringement has occurred, I apologize; please contact the publisher so corrections can be made in subsequent editions.
Introduction

Who Is This Book For?

Readers Theatre: A Secondary Approach has been designed for busy middle-
school and secondary teachers seeking another learning strategy in their
classrooms. I believe that teachers, faced with many different styles of learning,
will find that Readers Theatre activities and skills give students a sense of ac-
complishment and improve standards of oral expression, self-confidence, self-
image, and creativity, which, for many students, may seem out of reach. Having
worked for years in theatre, in university classrooms, in program development,
in workshop situations, and in school classrooms, I’m glad to pass on the simple
yet effective strategies that I’ve learned along the way.

This book includes

• instructions on effective ways to use Readers Theatre in your classroom
• ideas for developing scripts from scratch
• models for scripting your own material
• exercises for improving expression
• techniques for developing scripts from material currently being used in
  the classroom
• methods for scripting short stories, poems, novel excerpts, and other ma-
  terial for effective presentations
• suggestions for staging Readers Theatre in its various forms
• ways to use Readers Theatre in other subjects
• information on evaluating Readers Theatre scripts and performances

As you read through this book, you will find many suggestions, ideas, and tech-
niques. Some are new. Others are modifications of old ideas. Not all can (or
should) be used for every classroom situation, but all of them have worked well
for other people at one time or another. They are included only as examples. You
are encouraged to try, adjust, modify, enhance, and improve upon the ideas and
techniques in this book. You might also want to come up with your own, too,
and share them with others.
Chapter 1

Readers Theatre Explained

What Is Readers Theatre?

Readers Theatre involves people telling a story by reading aloud from scripts rather than by acting. The emphasis is on vocal expression to help audiences understand the story. The features of conventional theatre, such as scenery, props, costumes, make-up, and intricate blocking, are absent.

Readers Theatre is particularly appropriate in the school setting. Students learn to write their own scripts, read aloud, and work together to produce a meaningful and entertaining performance for an audience. The process has a number of benefits. Students develop a greater understanding and enjoyment of literature or other subjects in the curriculum. By delving more deeply into content, they sharpen their critical thinking skills. By listening to and learning from each other, they find the rewards of working collegially. And by becoming comfortable performing for an audience, they grow in poise and confidence.
Why Use Readers Theatre?

Readers Theatre uses simple staging. The time between a script’s creation and its presentation is measured in minutes and hours, rather than in the days and weeks of conventional plays. Students are involved in the process from its beginning and learn the skills necessary for success quickly and painlessly.

Readers Theatre relies on the voice. Neither the traditional elements of staged theatre—scenery, props, costumes, or make-up—nor physical interaction between participants is necessary, though either may be used with discretion. Instead, participants read from scripts, interpreting a work in such a way that an audience can imagine the setting and the action.

Readers Theatre is a wide-ranging art form. It is suited to elementary classrooms, secondary classrooms, or to theatre groups, and it is suited to many different subjects. For instance, various types of literature—fiction or nonfiction, classic or modern, poetry or prose—can be easily turned into scripts and presented to audiences. Current affairs, too, can be scripted, which students often find to be a rewarding exercise.

Readers Theatre emphasizes reading. By acting out the text, students improve their overall reading skills. They learn to better understand the text, including its component parts, and are often encouraged to read entire works as a consequence. They gain confidence, too, by learning to project and inflect the text so that listeners understand its message.

Readers Theatre focuses on the process of learning. As students interpret text for oral delivery, they learn to engage in critical thinking and problem solving.

What Are The Benefits Of Readers Theatre?

Readers Theatre works well for both students and teachers and can be used in all areas of the curriculum to communicate subject matter in ways that are meaningful and fun. With Readers Theatre, students

• are actively engaged in their learning
• do not require special equipment
• enjoy the activity
• have success in presenting
• work together to achieve a satisfying performance
• further develop their reading skills
• learn the processes of scripting all types of material
• gain confidence
• learn more about the writing process
• retain information through repetition
With Readers Theatre, teachers
• facilitate active learning
• are not at the mercy of budget restrictions
• work with the students rather than instructing from outside
• encourage success
• use excellent reading material in a variety of ways
• enhance their teaching skills through developing group work
• suggest different genres of reading material
• allow students to make group decisions
• have a means for students to make presentations to other groups
• enjoy the thrill of success with their students
Appendix A

Reproducible Scripts

Note: The scripts in this section can be reproduced, or changed and adapted by readers for their own situations.
Legend/Symbols

reader (with script)

level above the floor (usually 8"-10")

2 levels above the floor (8" + 8")

music stand/podium for script
(usually used by narrator—but not necessarily)

chair

stool

table/desk

performance area

up stage

stage right

down stage

stage left
**The Moth and the Star**

by James Thurber

A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He told his mother about this and she counseled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead. “Stars aren’t the thing to hang around,” she said. “Lamps are the thing to hang around.” “You get somewhere that way,” said the moth’s mother. “You don’t get anywhere chasing stars.” But the young moth would not heed the words of either parent. Every evening at dusk when the star came out he would start flying towards it and every morning at dawn he would crawl back home worn out with his vain endeavor. One day his father said to him, “You haven’t burned a wing in months, boy, and it looks to me as if you are never going to. All your brothers have been badly burned flying around street lamps and all your sisters have been terribly singed flying around house lamps. Come on, now, get out of here and get yourself scorched! A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him!”

The moth left his father’s house, but he would not fly around street lamps and he would not fly around house lamps. He went right on trying to reach the star, which was four and one-third light years, or twenty-five trillion miles away. The moth thought it was just caught in the top branches of the elm. He never did reach the star, but he went right on trying, night after night, and when he was a very, very old moth he began to think that he really had reached the star and he went around saying so. This gave him a deep and lasting pleasure, and he lived to a great old age. His parents and his brothers and his sisters had all burned to death when they were quite young.

Moral: *Who flies afar from the sphere of our sorrow is here today and here tomorrow.*
The Moth and the Star

by James Thurber

Roles for Readers                  Student Names

Mother:                           _____________________________________

Father:                           _____________________________________

Narrator:                        _____________________________________

Narrator:  A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He
told his mother about this and she counseled him to set his heart on a
bridge lamp instead.

Mother:                           Stars aren’t the thing to hang around,

Narrator:                        she said.

Mother:                           Lamps are the thing to hang around.

Father:                           You get somewhere that way,

Narrator:                        said the moth’s father.

Father:                           You don’t get anywhere chasing stars.

Narrator:                        But the moth would not heed the words of either parent. Every evening
at dusk when the star came out he would start flying toward it and every
morning at dawn he would crawl back home worn out with his vain
endeavor. One day his father said to him,

Father:                           You haven’t burned a wing in months, boy, and it looks to me as if you are
never going to. All your brothers have been badly burned flying around
street lamps and all your sisters have been terribly singed flying around
house lamps. Come on, now, get out of here and get yourself scorched!
A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him!

Narrator:                        The moth left his father’s house, but he would not fly around street lamps
and he would not fly around house lamps. He went right on trying to reach
the star, which was four and one-third light years, or twenty-five trillion
miles, away. The moth thought it was just caught in the top branches of
the elm. He never did reach the star, but he went right on trying, night
after night, and when he was a very, very old moth he began to think
that he really had reached the star and he went around saying so. This
gave him a deep and lasting pleasure, and he lived to a great old age. His
parents and his brothers and sisters had all burned to death when they
were quite young.

All:                               Moral: Who flies afar from the sphere of our sorrow is here today and here
tomorrow.