

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygoris-Coe, V., 2006)

Narrator: A teacher approaches a man after an educational conference. She has a large bag of materials on one arm that she picked up at the vendor stands. She is excited to meet Dr. Timothy Rasinski, a literacy researcher and leader.

Teacher: Dr. Rasinski, I was wondering if I could ask you a question. My students seem to be having some issues with fluency. Their automaticity, when reading a text, is lacking. I can tell that many of them have a rather limited sight word vocabulary and struggle with prosody and expression. I know about how fluency and comprehension walk hand-in-hand. I'm just not sure what to do now.

Dr. Rasinski: You make a good point here about the connection between comprehension and fluency. Fluency, the ability for readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good expression is a key component of effective literacy instruction.

Teacher: Yes, I agree. I see the link every day with my students. Sadly, sometimes, I see my students struggle with comprehension due to lack of fluency. We do paired readings and repeated readings to build fluency. These do help but do you have any other suggestions that might be more fun and exciting?

Dr. Rasinski: Why, yes! I think you might consider trying **Reader's Theater**. It's an authentic and entertaining activity that helps students improve their word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

Teacher: I don't know if this is for me. I don't have a great deal of time to put on a theatrical play with props and costumes.

Dr. Rasinski: That's the great part about Reader's Theater! It requires no props, costumes, or scenery unless the teacher and students want to include them.

Teacher: This sounds great. What are the steps?

Dr. Rasinski: Let me share with you how this strategy works...

~Adapted
from *The
Fluent
Reader*
by
Timothy
Rasinski

Rationale:

Oral reading fluency is one of the five major components of a research-based reading program (National Reading Panel, 2000). Reading fluently refers to the ability to read text with automaticity, accurately, and with good prosody. When students read fluently they are able to spend less energy on decoding and pronunciation strategies and focus more on the overall goal of reading: constructing meaning from text. It has often been found that students, who struggle with comprehension, also struggle with fluency (Rasinski, 2003).

Rasinski offers four ways to build reading fluency including modeling good oral reading, providing oral support for readers such as with choral reading or paired reading, offering plenty of practice opportunities as with repeated readings, and encouraging fluency through phrasing (Rasinski, 2003). Use of these instructional suggestions, along with discussion on the importance of fluency, can help students who believe that a "good reader" never makes mistakes understand that accuracy without expression or comprehension is not true reading. When considering fluency instruction there are many strategies and techniques to consider to best support your learners.

Reader's Theater, a "highly successful classroom instructional model for fluency based on sound theory and research" (Scraper, 2006, p. 2), provides students with modeling, practice, support, and a focus on expression and phrasing. Reader's Theater is an oral and sometimes, visual activity in which students read scripts or stories, each taking the part of one of the characters or narrator, to bring the text to life (Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 1999; Prescott-Griffin & Witherell, 2004). There is no need for an actual production of a play or theatrical event although props may be used. The goal of this strategy is to help students with their fluency and comprehension by allowing them rehearsal time to practice reading with expression and prosody, the opportunity to read and reread for meaning, and the ability to focus on word meanings.

Why Use Reader's Theater?
<p>Reader's Theater:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increases listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. ● Increases vocabulary. ● Assists students with phrasing, rate, inflection, and pause. ● Provides opportunity to reflect on text. ● Enhances content-area learning, including facts, ideas, and concepts. ● Motivates reluctant readers. ● Capitalizes on children's imagination for dramatic play. ● Allows for practice in public speaking. ● Enables students to get to know a character. ● Calls attention to word meaning.
<p>Scraper, K. (2006, May). <i>What a character! Bringing out the best in your students through reader's theater</i>. Paper presented at International Reading Association, Chicago, IL. Retrieved November 6, 2006, from http://www.edwriter.com/downloads/2006_IRA_Handout.pdf</p>

Reader's Theater, a type of performance reading, can benefit students by allowing them to focus on fluency, comprehension, and word recognition while in a fun and supportive atmosphere. It is an "authentic, entertaining, and educationally powerful way to read and communicate meaning" (Rasinski, 2003, p. 105).

How to Use the Strategy:

Using the Reader's Theater strategy can be done through a variety of approaches. Some teachers may decide, at least in the beginning, that a minimalist approach will better suit their learners. Others may desire to offer an abundance of activities and consider integrating other fluency activities with Reader's Theater.

Reader's Theater: A Quick Guide (Rasinski, 2003)

- Before the week begins, choose a script or prepare one based on a text. Make copies for the group, two for each member.
- On Monday, discuss the purpose and procedures for Reader's Theater with the class/group. Assign students parts by having them volunteer or audition. Practice needs to be done aloud and also silently.
- On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, have students practice their parts in class, on their own, in their groups and at home. This activity can also be done during center time or as part of an anchor activity.
- Friday is performance day. Students can read/perform their scripts for an audience of classmates, parents, or even the principal. Remember, this is not a performance based on memorization. They are reading the script they have practiced over the week.

Reader's Theater: 5-Day Process (Scraper, 2005)

Day One

- On day one, give each student a script, introduce the title, author, setting, and characters, and provide any needed background information.
- Display, pronounce, and define vocabulary words and ask students to make predictions about words and what they think will happen in the text. Read aloud the text as the students follow along.
- Discuss text, revise predictions, and ask students to make connections to the text based on their own experiences. You may also want them to consider making connections with other texts or things they relate to the happenings in our society.

Day Two

- Review vocabulary from text with students. Provide a fluency activity, such as echo reading or choral reading, as you read the entire script. Echo reading involves the teacher fluently reading the text while students reread, or echo, the same text. Choral reading offers students the ability to read a text together, at the same time.
- Assign parts and model the expectations for rehearsal. Provide time for students to rehearse with a partner and gain feedback on pronunciation, expression, and reading rate.

Day Three

- Review with students the criteria they will be assessed on with regard to their group work and independent work.
- Have students practice in groups. Use "side-coaching" to give the character, not the student, feedback on the reading. Have other readers give positive feedback to fellow characters.
- Decide on a staging area, entrances/exits, and what other props will be needed, if any.

Day Four

- Conduct a rehearsal, reminding students of expectations.

Day Five

- Perform the Reader's Theater for classmates, other classes, administrators, or other guests.
- Consider video taping the event for further use and modeling.

Other Activities

After the Reader's Theater is presented there are still other activities that can benefit students. Some of these include:

- Conduct running records of the script.
- Have students complete a journal writing about their experiences and their progress in fluency/comprehension.
- Work with students on analyzing the text using graphic organizers like Venn diagrams and story maps.
- Have students paraphrase the text.
- Have students write a new ending and or beginning to the script.
- Create a poetry/coffee house where students can read poetry from famous authors or themselves.
- Conferencing with students based on performance and fluency.

Teacher Created Scripts

There are many books and websites available that contain a wide variety of pre-made scripts. Although useful, a teacher may want to take a book they are using in the classroom and modify it into a Reader's Theater script.

When writing a script, teachers must take into account:

- Student interest
- Reading level
- Word choice
- Number of readers
- Performance time
- Theme
- Genre
- Setting
- Props

When writing or adapting a book to a script, teachers can take some liberties by changing, deleting, and even adding in characters and dialogue into the script. The original text can still be used as a support in their writing.

The following is a sample script based on and adapted from *The Man Who Was Poe* by Avi. It is geared toward intermediate to middle school students.

Reader's Theater Script Example
Book: <i>The Man Who Was Poe</i> by Avi
Cast: Narrator, Edmund, Mr. Throck, Mr. Poe
Narrator: Edmund, a young boy in search of his sister, brings Mr. Throck to see Mr. Poe in a small room they are staying. Mr. Poe has been writing a great deal and seems to be slightly insulted by the interruption.
Edmund: Mr. Poe!
Narrator: Poe continues to write.
Edmund: Mr. Poe, it's me, Edmund. I've brought Mr. Throck.

Throck: Evening to you, Mr. Poe.

Poe: Ah, yes. They threw me out of the army too. Why did you bring him here? He's no longer part of the story.

Throck: Mr. Poe, this boy here, he says you can tell us where his sister is.

Poe: His sister is here! (Poe points to his writing.)

Narrator: Throck looks at Edmund confused. What is the meaning of this, he thinks.

Edmund: He think she's in the story he's writing. Mr. Poe, you can find her. I know you can!

Poe: This is what's important, Edmund! (Poe points to his writing.)

Narrator: Throck, moving suddenly, grabs the writing from the grasp of Mr. Poe.

Throck: Find Sis, or I'll destroy it.

Avi. (1989). *The man who was Poe*. NY: Avon Books

Student Created Scripts

Students can also benefit from creating their own scripts and will become energized at this option. They may choose to adapt their own favorite novels, songs, or even music videos. Making sure they include literary elements is an important aspect to consider. Having them visualize the end product will be beneficial. Prescott-Griffin and Witherell (2004) offer the following suggestions for helping students write and perform their own scripts.

- Help your students choose a topic or text on which they wish to base their script on.
- Guide students in preparing their script. Remind them of important aspects like characters, plot, setting, and their choice of lines for the script. You may want to work as a class, in small groups, or, if they are ready for it, individually.
- Have the class read the script in unison.
- Decide how to group students.
- Have students rehearse and perform the script.
- Discuss the performance and the audience reaction.

Content Area Scripts

Reader's Theater can be used in any content area subject. Teachers will need to create a script based on the concepts covered in the text and class. The teacher may want to add in a fictional dimension of characters for students to identify with when reading the material. Or, the concepts themselves can become the characters through the use of personification. The following is a sample script based on a middle school science text. For this particular script a teacher may want to have students hold up a picture of the concept they represent.

Reader's Theater Script Example
Topic: Classification of galaxies
Cast: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Spiral Galaxy, Irregular Cluster Galaxy, Barred Spiral Galaxy, Elliptical Galaxy
Narrator 1: Our sun and over 200 billion stars make up the Milky Way Galaxy. A galaxy is a large system of stars. You know when you watch Star Wars and you see all those stars? Well, they're flying through a galaxy. Not the Milky Way though; probably one made by Mr. George Lucas on one of his computers.
Narrator 2: Galaxies are classified by shape. There are four main shapes.
Spiral Galaxy: When you see me, you'll notice I have large curved arms of stars. You'll see I have red in my middle because of all the red giants. My arms are blue because I have young stars in my arms.
Barred Spiral Galaxy: I'm a lot like you, Spiral. Yet my arms trail from two bar-shaped clusters of stars that are in my middle or my "core".
Elliptical Galaxy: I'm the most common type of galaxy. I'm usually smaller than you, Spiral, and I don't rotate too much. You're always getting dizzy anyway.
Narrator 2: What about you, Irregular Galaxy, we haven't heard much from you.
Irregular Galaxy: Well, I've never been very popular. I'm usually the smallest group of galaxies. I really don't even have a shape. I'm just a loose collection of stars.
Frank, M, Jones, R., Krockover, G., Lang, M., McLeod, J., Valenta, C., Van Deman, B. (2000). <i>Harcourt science</i> . Orlando: Harcourt.

Assessment:

Students' oral reading errors can be analyzed to assist teachers with determining students' reading problems. There may be decoding, grammar, or even metacognitive errors. Tracking reading rate and noting expression are other ways to assess fluency.

In order to assess the effectiveness of Reader's Theater you may want to employ an assessment rubric. The rubric should be provided to students ahead of time so that they know what is expected from them and can assess themselves, as well. The assessment can be based on the performance, the collaboration, the improved fluency, and/or the understanding of text used.

The following rubrics assess students for their performance during the Reader's Theater presentation.

Rubric for Reader's Theater Skits

<http://cosee-central-gom.org/ovweb/ships%20and%20shipping/readersrubric1.html>

Specific Assessment Rubric: Presenting a Readers' Theatre
http://www.pearsoned.ca/sightlines/gr_9/common/rubrics/rubric02.html

The following self-assessment checklist will provide students with a way to rate and reflect on their own fluency based on their performance during the Reader's Theater presentation. A teacher may want to use this after having the student view a video recording of the presentation.

READER'S THEATER STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT	
Directions: Put a check mark by the areas you feel you accomplished. Then write how you will improve this in the areas where you did not have a checkmark.	Check
Fluency and Fluency	
1. read longer, meaningful phrases.	
2. paid attention to the author's language.	
3. made my words sound natural and not forced or like a robot.	
4. had good expression.	
Pace	
1. used appropriate speed when reading.	
2. read without hesitations or unnecessary pauses.	
Accuracy	
1. recognized words and was able to read them correctly.	
2. was able to read quickly and yet make my words sound meaningful.	
Total:	
Personal Reflection Area	
Next time, to improve my reading fluency, I will	
I plan to do this by	

Resources:

Reader's Theater
http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/units/readers_theater.htm
 This site provides a wealth of information on the process and scripts behind the strategy.

Readers Theatre
<http://www.cdii.ca/CITE/langrt.htm>
 This site offers thoughts on using scripts and writing scripts for Reader's Theater.

Readers' Theater
<http://www.literacyconnections.com/ReadersTheater.php>
 Check out this site to learn more about books and scripts.

Reader's Theatre Basics
<http://bms.westport.k12.ct.us/mccormick/rt/RTHOME.htm>
 The authors of this site offer how to adapt a Reader's Theatre script.

Internet Resources for Conducting Reader's Theatre
<http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/carrick/>
 This article provides a brief description of Readers Theatre and its many benefits for literacy learning, and goes on to describe Internet sources for scripts and activities.

Reader's Theater
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=172
 Geared for students in grades 3-5, this lesson will provide ideas for students to develop scripts, perform in groups, and practice using their voice to depict characters from texts.

Novel News: Broadcast Coverage of Character, Conflict, Resolution, and Setting
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=199
 This twist on Reader's Theater invites high school students to prepare original news programs based on incidents in a recent reading.

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