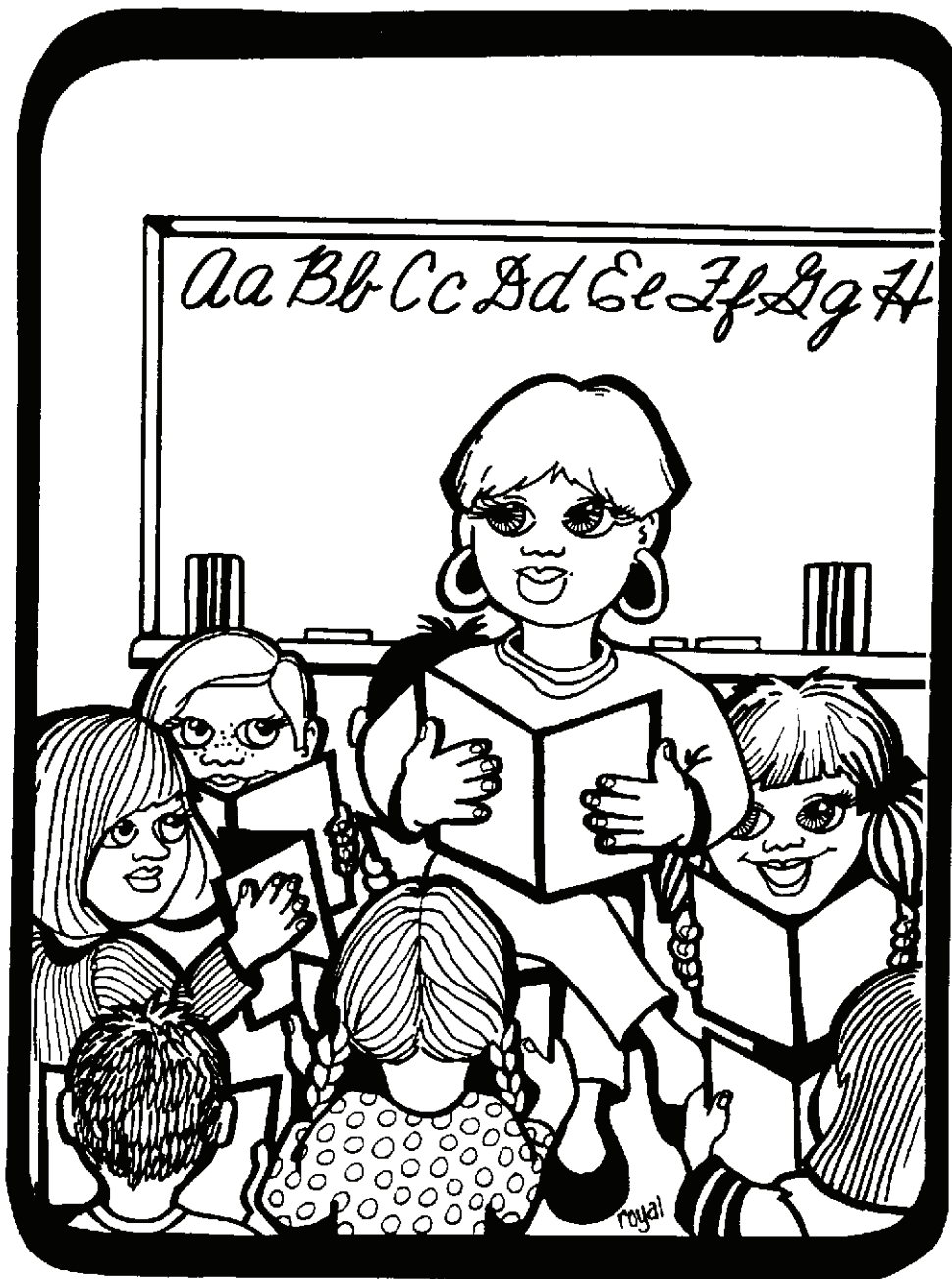


Using Readers Theatre at the Elementary Level

1. Primary Readings 2. Round Robin Readings
3. Instant Readings 4. Cooperative Readings 5. Rehearsing
6. Staged Readings 7. Four Specialized Applications
-



Implementation

READERS THEATRE is so new that some of its forms are still emerging. Ways to implement readers theatre range from Primary Reading, Round Robin Reading, Instant Reading, Cooperative Reading, or Staged Reading experiences to more sophisticated Chamber Theatre and Story Theatre approaches. For elementary classroom purposes PRIMARY READINGS, ROUND ROBIN READINGS, INSTANT READINGS, COOPERATIVE READINGS, and STAGED READINGS are the most useful and effective. Following are procedural descriptions for these five methods.

Primary Readings: Seven Steps to a Successful Primary Reading

When reading with primary reading levels, early ESL, or remedial reading groups, it is important to choose scripts which feature predictable stories where special words and phrases are repeated throughout the reading.

In most Primary Readings, the teacher takes on the role of the major narrator while children participate by reading (or reciting) simple words, phrases, chants, and repeated lines. This method resembles participation storytelling where young children assist the storyteller in telling a story by listening and then repeating on cue.

Because young readers who believe they can read actually will become readers, it is important to duplicate scripts and distribute them to all children, regardless of reading abilities. The scripts contain the actual words of the story and help children relate the story they are about to hear read aloud to words on a page.



**CHOOSE
PREDICTABLE STORIES
FOR PRIMARY READERS!**

SEVEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL PRIMARY READING:

- Step 1: Duplicate and distribute scripts.
- Step 2: Read the script out loud to the children and encourage all children to join in on the repetitive words and phrases marked ALL.
- Step 3: After the story has been read once or twice, you may wish to help children underline the ALL lines.
- Step 4: Then, you and the children will be ready to read the script again, identifying each underlined section as it comes along.
- Step 5: If simple solo lines or character parts are needed, assign or ask for volunteers. Help these readers underline their parts in different colors. Rehearse the lines with each reader.
- Step 6: Read the story again, including all readers.
- Step 7: Encourage readers to illustrate their scripts and start their own script collections in colorful binders. These scripts may be taken home for re-reading with siblings or adults.

Throughout the year, parts may be swapped, and scripts read over and over again. Perform your favorite and most practised stories for parents on Parents Day!

Round Robin Readings: Eight Steps to a Successful Round Robin Reading

Round Robin reading allows children to read all the different parts, experiment with voices, and, eventually, choose favorite roles! This method helps build reader confidence because it is non-threatening, non-competitive, and gives all readers a chance to read all roles.

EIGHT STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL ROUND ROBIN READING:

- Step 1: Duplicate Classroom Scripts for your readers. (To get you started, two Classroom Scripts are included at the back of this guide.)
- Step 2: Ask your readers to silently read through the entire story.
- Step 3: After all readers have read the story silently, gather readers into a large circle. Include yourself in the circle, if possible.
- Step 4: Next, begin by asking the reader on your left to read the first reader's part in the script, the next person to read the second reader's part, and so on. No individual reading parts are assigned at this point. Each reader reads in turn around the circle. Teacher can join in on the reading too.

- Step 5: When the circle has completed the story, take time to discuss reader parts. What does each character look like? What kind of personalities do they have? How might they sound? How would each character stand or sit? What might each character wear?
- Step 6: Discuss the importance of each narrator. Explore how the narrators introduce the story, fill in all the narrative details, set the proper mood for the story action, and help the character readers set and keep the right reading pace.
- Step 7: Review meanings and pronunciations of any difficult words.
- Step 8: Now, ask your readers to volunteer for specific reading parts. Ask each volunteer to underline his or her lines, then read the script aloud again. Swap parts and scripts around the circle and read again. Continue until interest lags or time runs out.



ROUND ROBIN READINGS
HELP BOOST
READER CONFIDENCE!

Instant Readings: Eight Steps to a Successful Instant Reading

INSTANT READINGS are perfect rainy day activities, or a great way to fill in a few minutes during or at the end of a day. A script may be read once or twice, put away, then reintroduced throughout the school year. By following the steps below, a teacher can immediately involve students in a meaningful reading activity.

EIGHT STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL INSTANT READING:

- Step 1: Duplicate Classroom Scripts, as needed.
- Step 2: Pass scripts to all class members, or ask students to share scripts in pairs.
- Step 3: Ask students to read through the scripts silently. Younger children can listen as teacher reads the story aloud.
- Step 4: Assign parts to various members of the class. Ask them to take a few minutes to underline their assigned lines in the script. Ask readers to write their character name or reader number on the front of the script.

- Step 5: Now, assigned readers can read story aloud from their seats. Correct pronunciations, clarify meanings, and ask readers to make notes on their scripts, if needed. Try to keep the story moving, however!
- Step 6: Next, ask same readers to assemble in front of class for the second reading.
- Step 7: When this reading is completed, discuss (story, reading, or both), reassign parts, swap scripts, and read again.
- Step 8: Continue until interest lags. Collect scripts. You might want to have a classroom reading of this type on a regular basis, once or twice a week.



**INSTANT READINGS
ARE GREAT
RAINY DAY ACTIVITIES!**

Cooperative Readings: Six Steps to Successful Cooperative Readings

If you are planning to involve your entire class in cooperative reading groups, simply duplicate scripts with appropriate numbers of readers. (Many READERS THEATRE scripts feature 5-8 readers. Five scripts needing five readers will equally divide a class of 25, etc.).

SIX STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COOPERATIVE READINGS:

- Step 1: Assemble students into groups. Pass out scripts.
- Step 2: Ask students to read through their scripts silently. Then assign practice spaces to each group. Groups may now break away and go to their practice spaces.
- Step 3: Using cooperative learning techniques (use the specific techniques which work best for you or see Practising Cooperative Learning techniques on page 38 for more information), each group assigns parts and rehearses its script. Suggestions for improvements, additions or changes must come from the group. Teacher may move from group to group encouraging the readers. Check to see that scripts have been underlined, as previously mentioned.

Step 4: Ask readers to take scripts home so that some home rehearsal may be accomplished. Suggest reading script aloud with various family members.

Step 5: Allow groups to practice two or three times, or until they feel ready for an audience.

Step 6: Schedule the group presentations. You might feature one group presentation per day for a week, or hold a "Friday Festival" and present them all on the following Friday afternoon.

NOTE: You need not include all class members in a cooperative reading presentation. Selected groups may rehearse scripts for presentations at different times throughout the school year.



**READERS THEATRE
"FRIDAY FESTIVALS"
ARE A FESTIVE WAY
TO END THE WEEK!**

Rehearsing the Instant and Cooperative Readings

Charlene C. Swanson suggests the following rehearsal plan when using an Instant, Cooperative, or Round Robin reading approach. It is an eight point procedure which enables any teacher to get the most from elementary school readers. She says,

"The rehearsal is the essence of readers theatre. Here is where students get practice becoming fluent oral readers. They must understand the story before they can use their voices to convey that interpretation to others. Repeated readings in a readers theatre setting is not tedious, but fun."

The eight point procedure:

1. First, students read the script silently to get the main idea. Younger students can read it aloud with the teacher or listen to an older group of children performing the script. They might follow along with their fingers while they listen.
2. Then, assign the parts to individual students. Be sure that longer, more difficult parts do not go to the poorer or less confident readers for the first few readings of a script.
3. When using a script for the first time, have students find and underline the name of their part each time it appears in the left margin of the script. Then have them write that character's name on the front of the script. As students change parts, they exchange scripts.
4. Students then rehearse their parts and ask each other or the teacher for help with unknown words.

5. Now read the script aloud. Remind students to say the line the way that the character would say it and to follow any voice directions included by the script writer. Also, remind them to follow along when others are reading so they will be ready to read when their turn arrives.
6. After the first reading, discuss the story as a group. Focus on how each character feels in this situation. Explore some different ways a reader might communicate feeling through voice.
7. Now have the students do a second oral reading, keeping the same parts.
8. Use of a particular script with a particular group of students can end at this point, but some groups will not be ready to stop. One option is to switch parts. This is a good time for the less able readers to read a larger part. The swapping of parts may take place over several days. Stop each day's lesson before students become bored. Time limits will vary with age and script."



**REHEARSAL
IS THE ESSENCE OF
READERS THEATRE!**

Staged Readings

Staged Readings require a rehearsed, polished, and more stylized READERS THEATRE performance. Readers are assigned positions in a designated "stage" area, entrances and exits are planned and rehearsed, and close attention is paid to gestures, facial expressions, simple costume pieces, and other performance aspects of the chosen script. The two scripts found at the back of this guide include special "TEACHER versions" which suggest possible stage set-ups, entrance and exit techniques, and other important directorial information which you may want to use when planning a Staged Reading.



IT'S SHOWTIME!
STAGED READINGS
REQUIRE COMMITMENT,
PLANNING, AND POLISH!

Staged Reading Try-Outs: Five Teacher Guidelines

GUIDELINE 1: Make scripts available to all readers who are interested in taking part in the Staged Reading. The scripts may be taken home for practice before try-out day.

GUIDELINE 2: On try-out day, assemble readers in a Round Robin circle as described in the Round Robin section of this guide. To warm up your readers, simply ask your readers to read the script Round Robin style in a fun, non-threatening way.

GUIDELINE 3: When the group is warmed up, assign specific parts to specific readers and read through the script again. Encourage all readers to volunteer for the parts they like best, paying close attention to any shy or reluctant readers in the group. Read the script through over and over again until all readers are satisfied.

GUIDELINE 4: If possible, cast the Staged Reading as you sit there in the circle. Ask the readers to help you choose the cast. If fun is your goal, why not let each reader choose his or her own favorite part? If this approach is not possible, you will make the decision. Announce the casting and also post a cast list somewhere in the room.

GUIDELINE 5: You will also need to post a rehearsal schedule to let your cast know when and where practices will be held, how much time will be required, and the date, time, and place of the actual performance.



**KEEP TRY-OUTS FUN, FAST MOVING, AND
NON-THREATENING!**

Staged Reading Rehearsals: Twelve Teacher Guidelines

GUIDELINE 1: At the first rehearsal, make sure each reader has a script. Ask your readers to write their character names and their real names on the front of their scripts. Next, ask cast members to highlight or underline their own lines. Provide colorful highlighters, pens, pencils, or crayons for this job.

GUIDELINE 2: Once highlighting is done, seat readers in a circle and ask them to read the script aloud. Many READERS THEATRE scripts feature special sections where all readers read in unison, together. (A choral reading approach). Pay special attention to these sections, rehearsing the readers until they develop a feel for the proper rhythm and flow of the words or phrases.

GUIDELINE 3: From the very beginning, suggest improvements to a readers projection, posture, pronunciation, intonation, facial expressions, etc. by referring to the character rather than the actual reader. To soften criticism, try saying, "Witch, use your loudest cackle and scariest voice on that line," rather than, "Janice, I can't hear a word you are saying!"

GUIDELINE 4: As rehearsals progress, try to practice in the actual room where you will be giving your performance. If this is impossible, mark off an area which is similar to the stage or performance space you will be using on performance day. Arrange your readers, seated, standing, or both, in that space and continue to work on interpretations.



**SOFTEN CRITICISM BY
REFERRING TO THE "CHARACTER"!**

GUIDELINE 5: When directing, always use proper stage directions. STAGE RIGHT and LEFT are your reader's right or left, not yours as you stand facing the readers. UPSTAGE is behind your readers. DOWNSTAGE is in front of your readers, just in front of the audience:

UPSTAGE

STAGE RIGHT (Readers) STAGE LEFT

DOWNSTAGE

+++++

AUDIENCE

GUIDELINE 6: Rehearse entrances, exits, and any stage movements until they run smoothly and readers feel comfortable with them. More specific information about entrances can be found on page 33 of this guide.

GUIDELINE 7: You will probably find that lack of vocal projection will be your biggest rehearsal problem. Encourage your readers to project, shout, yell! If your readers speak too quickly or too slowly, remind them to practice at home, concentrate on the specific problem, and go over their lines so often that they become very familiar with them. This type of familiarity usually makes for a well-paced performance in the end.



**ENCOURAGE YOUR READERS
TO PROJECT, SHOUT, YELL!**

GUIDELINE 8: All through the rehearsal process, ask for the opinions of your cast members. Be open to creative suggestions about practice and presentation. Try out new ideas and ask cast members to help decide what works and what does not.

GUIDELINE 9: If costume pieces, props, sound effects, or special signs have been added to the presentation, have at least two full dress rehearsals (including all additions) just prior to the performance date. Iron out any extra problems these additions cause during these rehearsals.

GUIDELINE 10: Stress oral interpretation. Rehearse until the piece runs smoothly, but don't ask readers to memorize lines. This is still a readers presentation.

GUIDELINE 11: If possible, hold one last full dress rehearsal in front of an audience. Perhaps another class will act as audience or the principal and office staff. It is always a good idea to work in front of a live audience at least once before the actual performance.

GUIDELINE 12: On performance day, be positive! READERS THEATRE is fun. If the cast enjoys themselves, so will the audience. It's guaranteed!



**ASK CAST MEMBERS
FOR THEIR OPINIONS
AND
CREATIVE SUGGESTIONS!**

Polishing the Reading

During rehearsals, the director should encourage readers to explore each character part in depth. Emphasizing eye contact, diction, character development, controlled movement or mime, and performance energy will help achieve a well-paced, well-rehearsed performance.

When appropriate, help readers examine the feelings of each character. How does a character feel at the beginning of the tale? How and why do those feelings change as the story progresses? In what ways might each reader communicate these feelings to the listeners? Encourage the use of vocal and volume changes, facial expressions, posture, and varying tempo patterns to help each character come alive.

Encourage readers to use their imaginations by adding more elements to the reading performance, if desired. Special hats or costume pieces, masks, props or signs can often help readers tell the tale in a more theatricalized fashion. Keep the additions simple, remembering that some readers will be required to hold the script folder in one hand while managing a prop in the other.



Staged Reading Entrances

READERS THEATRE scripts often include suggested entrance directions for all cast readers. Usually, the actual direction from which a cast member enters will not matter. Readers may enter from any offstage areas. Don't be concerned if no offstage areas are available to your performing space. It is possible to have readers enter from the back of the room, walking through or around the audience.

Of course, formal entrances are not necessary, but they do have a place in polished Staged Reading performances. If done correctly, staged entrances help the audience identify certain important characters, and set the mood and tone for the entire reading.

Here is a simple entrance which might be used for any READERS THEATRE script reading:

Arrange readers offstage as they are listed, in order, at the front of your script. Each cast member will carry his or her script in the upstage hand (furthest from the audience), or in the same hand (left or right).

On a given signal, all cast members walk into the performance space, line up in a semicircle, and face the audience. On another signal, readers lift their script folders to chest height and open scripts to the first page.

At this point, you may wish to have each reader introduce him or herself. One by one each reader steps forward: "My name is Janice Cook and I am reading the part of the witch!" Each reader steps back into line when finished. After the last introduction, the reading begins.

READERS MAY ENTER FROM ANYWHERE IN THE ROOM!

Speaking to the Audience

As a general rule, ask your cast members to speak directly to the audience, not to each other. (There may be some special times when you will break this rule and ask characters on stage to look at and react to each other). Generally, however, cast members will focus upon the audience just as a storyteller focuses upon the listeners. It is sometimes helpful for cast members to focus eyes slightly above the heads of audience members.

**A STORYTELLER FOCUS IS USED WHEN PRESENTING
READERS THEATRE!**

Script Folders

If possible, place cast scripts in colorful folders. Ring binders allow for smooth and easy page turning. If ring binders are not available, staple cast scripts into simple cardboard folders along left hand side. Crease the pages about a half an inch inside the staples for easy page turning.

- * Remind readers to hold script folders down and away from their bodies. Readers may need to experiment to find comfortable and workable positions. Explain that facial expressions must be seen by the listeners, and spoken words must not be muffled by folders.
- * Music stands which can be adjusted to various heights are valuable READERS THEATRE tools. Placing script folders on the stands frees your readers' hands for gesturing. Make sure stand height is adjusted to ensure easy page turning, space for any required movement and proper audience/reader sight lines.

**PLACE SCRIPTS IN RING BINDERS FOR EASY PAGE
TURNING, PROTECTION, AND STORAGE!**

Educational Values of Readers Theatre Rehearsal

Whether you choose a simple instant reading approach or a polished staged reading, remember that your readers will get more from the scripted experience if they are encouraged to "rehearse" by reading the stories repeatedly. Words and phrases which might be beyond a reader's demonstrated reading level can, through repetition, be more easily assimilated into a working vocabulary. Words are absorbed through repetitive drill, but done so without a tedious list of unrelated drill words. Instead, "drill" becomes "rehearsal" for the telling of a story, a play of words, a theatrical experience.

<p>THE MOST IMPORTANT READERS THEATRE STRATEGIES ARE -- REPETITION AND REHEARSAL!</p>
--

Additional Strategies

A teachers approach to the reading experience will vary with the ages of the readers and the difficulty of the script. Here are some additional strategies a teacher might try:

- * Encourage class members to research the tale in depth. Is it a folk or fairy tale, myth or legend? In what country was the story originally told? Has the story motif been identified in other countries too? If so, what special form did the story take? Are there similarities and/or differences?
- * Discuss story with readers by examining the individual characters, type of story, and story themes. Is the story worth rehearsing and sharing? Why? Why not?

- * Encourage readers to speak their lines the way their character would say the lines. Experiment with theatricalized voices.
- * Discuss with readers how each character feels as the story progresses. Suggest some different ways the readers can show the characters' inner feelings through their voices, facial expressions, and posture.
- * Suggest that readers write notes upon their own scripts. Readers might underline important words to be stressed, mark pauses and inflections, or indicate good places for taking a needed breath. Other performance tips may be written in the margin.
- * Encourage all readers and listeners to help "direct" the reading by commenting, critiquing, adding suggestions.
- * Stress oral clarity. Is the reader reading too fast, or too slowly? Does the reader need to concentrate on enunciation, articulation, or pronunciation of certain words? Can the reader be heard by all listeners?
- * Suggest the addition of costume pieces or props, if desired. It's important to remember, however, that readers theatre scripts don't really require any theatricalized effects. They need only to be read aloud with expression, enthusiasm, and enjoyment! These scripts have been written and designed to make oral reading fun.

Remember that much of your instructional task will be automatically transferred to your students. According to Dr. William Adams, Director of the Institute for Readers Theatre,

"The child becomes engrossed with the fun of 'giving a play' and the oblique learning follows naturally from this self-motivating force. The student is aware of the pleasures of the activity, and only the teacher is aware of the many skills being taught ... Children have a natural curiosity and ability to create. Somewhere in the educational process, unfortunately, these innate talents are often stifled, and the students begin to restrict their imaginations. Readers theatre is an effective device which can be used to restore young people's rightful progression to imagine and create."



**READERS THEATRE
CAN HELP
REKINDLE THE IMAGINATION!**

Four Specialized Applications for Readers Theatre Scripts

Cooperative Learning * ESL * Special Child Mainstreaming * Buddy Reading

Cooperative Learning

Divide class into groups, then distribute scripts to each member in the group. Ask each group to work together to prepare the script readings for oral presentation. Group members will be responsible for assigning parts, preparing a rehearsal schedule, rehearsing, selecting, designing, and creating stage props or costume pieces (if needed), and encouraging effective, fluent, expressive oral readings.

Stage movement may be taken directly from the suggestions in the Teacher Script versions, or, created and devised by the group itself. Encourage group members to contribute their own ideas and to express support for the ideas of other group member. All group members should be encouraged to participate.

For true cooperation to take place, each member must realize that all readers are needed to produce a polished, successful presentation. No one reader can carry the performance. Any individual effort is just one part of the finished product. As in any traditional "theatre" project, all actors must work together toward a successful "opening night!"

After the readings have been presented, ask all group members to think back over the experience, identify the problems which arose during rehearsal and performance, and write them down. Then ask group members to record everything the group did to solve the problems. Ask group members to list what they would do differently the next time they prepare a reader script for performance, focusing only on constructive, not negative behaviors. Give the students ten minutes to discuss this information within their groups, then ask each group to report to the rest of the class the behaviors which worked for it.

FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTIVE, NOT NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS!

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Students who speak little English especially enjoy the reader scripts which feature simple plots, rhyming or chanting, and extensive use of repetitive words and phrases. Younger students easily join in the reading of these scripts as the teacher or more accomplished student reader acts as major narrator. Older students enjoy rehearsing primary level scripts and then performing the story for younger children. This procedure may also be used by ESL adult readers who work together to prepare a simple story which will be performed for younger ESL listeners.

Rehearsal is the key! As ESL students rehearse a script over and over again, strange words become familiar, confidence is built, and readers start to feel more comfortable with their second language. As in most theatre experiences, participants develop a "team spirit" through rehearsal which helps them feel part of a larger "whole," working together toward a final goal. In READERS THEATRE, no one feels alone. This is important to all readers, but is especially important to ESL readers who may already feel quite "alone."

Because the ESL student assumes the role of a character in the reader script, a contextual framework is established for reading out (speaking) the part. This allows the ESL student to experience dialogue, not memorize a list. This context assists with learning the connotative, as well as, denotative meanings of words.

**READERS THEATRE ALLOWS THE ESL STUDENT
TO EXPERIENCE DIALOGUE,
NOT A LIST OF UNRELATED WORDS!**

Special Child Mainstreaming

Special children may feel apprehensive when mainstreamed into the regular classroom. Having a child take a part in a READERS THEATRE experience is one way to involve the special child with either a small or large classroom group immediately. Depending upon the child's abilities, he or she may take a reading part and quickly become an important member of a classroom reading performance. As part of a group which is working closely together, the special child takes a giant step toward mainstreaming.

Like all children, students with special needs enjoy make believe, play acting, and group activities. Watching " a play" performed is also fun. Do not underestimate what enthusiasm and interest can do to enhance learning.

A student with Speech Language problems may find READERS THEATRE a comfortable way to listen to and practice speech patterns and sound/symbol relationships.

It would be a wise move for the classroom teacher to confer with the specialists working with special needs students in order to plan involvement of the special child in a READERS THEATRE experience.



**AN INTEREST IN
"PUTTING ON A SHOW"
ENHANCES LEARNING
IN ALL CHILDREN!**

Buddy Reading

READERS THEATRE scripts may be read aloud by two or three readers simply by doubling up on parts. If your school uses Buddy Reading, Reading Grandparent, or Reading Parent Programs, READERS THEATRE scripts can be valuable resources. When reading from a READERS THEATRE script, simply assign the appropriate reading part (or parts) to the reluctant reader. An older "buddy" reader reads all the other parts. As the story is read over and over again, your reluctant reader will become so familiar with the text that he or she may ask to take over more of the reading! Don't forget that "buddy readers" may also wish to rehearse and then perform for the class or other "buddy" pairs.



**RELUCTANT READERS
OFTEN JOIN IN HAPPILY
WHEN TAKING PART IN
READERS THEATRE!**