Reader’s Theater Scripts
Improve Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension
Grade 1

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Shell Educational Publishing
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Introduction

The Connection Between Fluency and Reader’s Theater

Reader’s theater gives students at all levels the motivation to practice fluency. It has become an important addition in classrooms across the nation. With reader’s theater, students use scripts to practice for a performance. The students do not memorize their lines, and costumes and props are minimal, if used at all. The students must convey the meaning of the words using their voices; therefore, interpretation of the text becomes the focus of the activity. Reader’s theater is similar to the radio plays broadcasted in the 1930s. The students must reread the script many times to give a good performance, and this repetition produces gains in reading. The U.S. Department of Education’s *Put Reading First* (2001) says: “Reader’s theater provides readers with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. Reader’s theater also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing.”

The Report of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) investigated scientifically-based research in the field of reading and identified five critical factors that are necessary for effective reading instruction. These factors are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The No Child Left Behind Act and the Reading First federal initiative have incorporated these five reading components.

While four of the five areas have long been part of reading instruction, fluency instruction has not been part of the regular routine in classrooms for many years. As teachers began to emphasize silent reading and round-robin reading, they neglected oral reading, which is required for fluency development.

Reading fluency is the ability to read quickly and accurately with meaning, while at the same time using vocal expression and proper phrasing. The fluent reader groups words in meaningful ways as he or she reads in a style that should closely resemble the reader’s spoken language. Fluency both directly affects and intertwines with reading comprehension (Kuhn and Stahl, 2000). It bridges the gap between word recognition and comprehension for readers.

Fluency is particularly important for children first learning to read. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) state that readers have a limited amount of attention to focus on reading. Those students who expend too much effort decoding words lower their understanding of the material because not enough attention has been focused on extracting meaning from the text. Teachers notice this phenomenon when, after listening to a struggling reader, they find that the student cannot explain what he or she has just read. The struggling student has used all available concentration to decode the words and thus fails to grasp the full meaning.
The Connection Between Fluency and Reader’s Theater (cont.)

In contrast, the child who reads fluently can focus on understanding on what he or she has read. The fluent reader has enough attention in reserve to make connections between the text and his or her own background knowledge, which gives this reader a much richer understanding of the material. Timothy Rasinski (1990) found that grouping words into phrases improves comprehension. When the text sounds like natural speech, students are better able to use their own knowledge and experiences to enhance comprehension.

Fluency takes time. It develops gradually and requires practice. Rereading is one way to build fluency. As adults, we have all experienced the need to reread something that we did not understand on the first reading, whether a technical manual, a recipe, or even a newspaper article. We were able, through rereading, to pull the meaning from the words.

Samuels’s 1979 study supports the power of rereading as a fluency builder. In this study, students with learning problems were asked to read a passage several times. Each time the students reread the selection, their reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension increased. The most surprising finding in Samuels’s study is that these students also improved on initial readings of other passages of equal or greater difficulty. They not only increased fluency on practiced passages, but also transferred this fluency to new, unseen passages.

Morgan and Lyon (1979) also found repeated reading to be a helpful strategy for poor readers. Their study of junior high students found that six months of repeated reading instruction resulted in students gaining over 11 months on a standardized comprehension test.

While the research reveals rereading to be a powerful tool, accomplishing it in the classroom requires planning and thought. Many children balk at reading a selection multiple times. The struggling readers, who need the practice most, may be particularly unmotivated. If told to read silently, these students often only pretend to read, while the advanced readers are bored by rereading because they feel that they understood the text the first time.

The research on reader’s theater shows that reading gains can be achieved even if this strategy is used for brief periods of time. Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) conducted a 10-week study of second graders using reader’s theater. The students received mini-lessons on fluency and practiced scripts at school for 30 minutes per day in preparation for an audience on Fridays. Students also took home copies of the script for extra practice. The results of the study showed a gain of 17 words per minute over the 10-week study period, while the control group, which did not use reader’s theater, achieved only half that gain. In subsequent informal reading inventories administered to determine progress in overall reading and progress in comprehension, the reader’s theater students demonstrated gains more than double that of the control group.
The Connection Between Fluency and Reader’s Theater

Of the 28 students in the reader’s theater group, nine tested two grade levels higher and 14 moved up one grade level.

Because the reader’s theater script includes parts for several children to read or sing together, the students also participate in a limited form of paired reading, another proven fluency strategy. In paired reading, a stronger reader is partnered with a weaker reader. The better reader provides a model for the weaker one and helps him or her to move through the text at an appropriate rate. By listening to the fluent reader, the poor reader learns how voice, expression, and phrasing help to make sense of the words.

Research on paired reading shows it to be beneficial. In 1985, Limbrick, McNaughton, and Glynn found that students participating in paired reading for six to ten weeks gained at least six months in reading achievement. In 1989, Topping found that students in another study made at least a three-month gain for each month of paired reading when the strategy was used for 10–15 minutes per day.

Reader’s theater is not only effective in developing reading fluency, it is capable of transforming a class into eager readers. It is one activity within the school day in which struggling readers do not stand out. With teacher support and repeated practice, all students can read their lines with accuracy and expression and gain confidence in their own reading abilities. Reader’s theater also enhances listening skills, vocabulary development, decoding, comprehension, and oral speaking skills. It is a simple tool that supports multiple aspects of reading and nets significant gains in reading for the students.

An Open Note to Teachers from a Working Teacher

This book can make a teacher’s life easier and provide students with beneficial reading activities. After more than 20 years as an elementary teacher, I thought I’d seen everything come down the reading pike until my school became a Reading First School. As part of the Reading First grant, our K–3 staff received extensive training on the National Reading Panel’s five components of reading. Direct instruction on fluency surprised and impressed me.

I became interested in the research about the power of rereading and the use of reader’s theater as a teaching tool. Reader’s theater, by its very nature, encourages students to reread and to use expression and phrasing to convey the meaning of words. It does not require large blocks of classroom time, because students do not need to wear costumes or to memorize lines. It is an activity that both challenges the proficient reader and motivates the reluctant reader.
An Open Note to Teachers from a Working Teacher

This book provides an easy, effective way for teachers to add extra fluency instruction to the literacy curriculum. These reader’s theater scripts are a supplement to basal literature. Scripts are categorized by themes and subjects to aid teachers in integrating reader’s theater into an existing reading program. Nonfiction selections are paired with fiction choices as a means of building background for the students. By reading the Connections section of the lesson plan, teachers can incorporate these particular scripts into their schools’ curriculum.

Each script in this book has its own ready-to-use, teacher-friendly lesson plan. The lesson plan and script can be used as one day’s guided reading instruction, or the plan can be halved for two days’ instruction, depending upon available class time. Used as is, the lesson plans cover three of the Reading First components: vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. The discussion questions go beyond the literal in an attempt to raise the students’ comprehension level. A written response is included for those teachers desiring a writing connection. Graphic organizers are an important part of the lessons, offering direction and bringing closure to the day’s activity.

The scripts are designed with classroom management in mind. Each reader’s theater has five or six student parts so that the class can be divided into small groups and easily monitored by the teacher. Parts for all readers are purposely included as a way to awake the daydreamers. Plus, choral reading, another strong fluency strategy, can be developed through reader’s theater.

Some teachers may elect to use this book in other ways. Teachers seeking fluency practice only might distribute the scripts on Monday with parts pre-assigned for a performance on Friday. Used in this way, the reader’s theaters scripts are not part of guided reading, but rather used as a homework assignment for the week.

These reader’s theater scripts can also be an addition to classroom Literacy Work Stations. This option allows the teacher to place copies of the scripts in a Drama Station or a Fluency Station. The students assigned to that station choose parts and practice with minimal teacher intervention. The discussion questions from the lesson plans are printed on index cards as part of the station materials. The graphic organizers from the lessons can be enlarged on poster paper as a culminating activity for the station. Lamination and dry-erase markers add a reusable element of student accountability to that literacy station.

Cathy Mackey Davis, M.Ed.
3rd Grade Teacher
## Standards Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Title</th>
<th>McREL Language Arts Standard</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every Family Has a History</td>
<td>Knows setting, main characters, main events, sequence, and problems in stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working It Out</td>
<td>Relates stories to personal experiences (e.g., events, characters, conflicts, themes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposites Attract</td>
<td>Uses meaning clues (e.g., picture captions, title, cover, headings, story structure, story topic) to aid comprehension and make predictions about content (e.g., action, events, character’s behavior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the Weather?</td>
<td>Uses mental images based on pictures and print to aid in comprehension of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fossils</td>
<td>Summarizes information found in texts (e.g., retells in own words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving the Red-Eyed Tree Frog</td>
<td>Understands the main idea and supporting details of simple expository information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are Family</td>
<td>Knows setting, main characters, main events, sequence, and problems in stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The History of Airplanes</td>
<td>Summarizes information found in texts (e.g., retells in own words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even Bananas Take Trips!</td>
<td>Summarizes information found in texts (e.g., retells in own words)</td>
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<td>A Community of Helpers</td>
<td>Relates stories to personal experiences (e.g., events, characters, conflicts, themes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks: An American Hero</td>
<td>Relates new information to prior knowledge and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Ancestor Potluck</td>
<td>Relates stories to personal experiences (e.g., events, characters, conflicts, themes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About Standards Correlations

Shell Educational Publishing is committed to producing educational materials that are research and standards-based. In this effort, we have correlated all of our products to the academic standards of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. You can print a correlations report customized for your state directly from our website at http://www.seppub.com.

Purpose and Intent of Standards

The No Child Left Behind legislation mandates that all states adopt academic standards that identify the skills students will learn in kindergarten through grade twelve. While many states had already adopted academic standards prior to NCLB, the legislation set requirements to ensure the standards were detailed and comprehensive.

Standards are designed to focus instruction and guide adoption of curricula. Standards are statements that describe the criteria necessary for students to meet specific academic goals. They define the knowledge, skills, and content students should acquire at each level. Standard are also used to develop standardized tests to evaluate students’ academic progress.

In many states today, teachers are required to demonstrate how their lessons meet state standards. State standards are used in development of all of our products, so educators can be assured they meet the academic requirements of each state. Complete standards correlations reports for each state can be printed directly from our website as well.

How to Find Standards Correlations

To print a correlations report for this product, visit our website at http://www.seppub.com and follow the on-screen directions. If you require assistance in printing correlations reports, please contact Customer Service at (877) 777-3450.
We Are Family

Connections

Literature Connection—*Going Home* by Eve Bunting
*Going Home* is a story of a family returning to Mexico to visit relatives. The wonderful language and beautiful illustrations in this book can be shared with students doing this reader's theater.

Content Connection—Social Studies, Ancestry
Read *We Are Family* while studying families. A study of ancestors, countries around the world, or different cultures could be incorporated into this lesson.

Objective

Students will learn about setting, main characters, main events, sequence, and problems in stories.

Vocabulary

1. Write each word on the board. Read each aloud and review the definitions.
2. After students read the script, review the vocabulary words as a group.
3. Provide graph paper for a word search using the vocabulary words listed below. Students can trade papers to complete each other's word searches.
   - abuela—the Spanish word for grandmother
   - abuelo—the Spanish word for grandfather
   - adios—the Spanish word for goodbye
   - carne asada—a meat dish that comes from Mexico
   - cousins—children of a parent’s brother or sister
   - engines— parts of the plane that keep it flying
   - luggage—suitcases and other items packed with clothes for a vacation

Before the Reader’s Theater

1. Read the title of the script. Explain that this is a story about one family’s trip to visit relatives in Mexico. Ask students to think of a family trip that they have taken to visit with relatives. Let students share their experiences in pairs.
2. Talk with students about the different elements of a story. Review each, if necessary. Write the following elements on the board: *setting, main characters, events, sequence, and problems*. If necessary, use another story as an example and discuss each story element in more detail.
We Are Family (cont.)

Before the Reader’s Theater (cont.)

3. Show students *Parts of a Story Map* (page 55). Explain that they will be looking for these story elements as they read the reader’s theater and will complete the map when they are finished reading.

4. Read the script aloud, modeling appropriate reading strategies. It is important for the students to hear the script read aloud before practicing the parts on their own. This will help them with fluency and comprehension.

During the Reader’s Theater

1. Divide the class into groups of five to read and practice the script.
2. Students work as a group to choose and highlight their parts in the script.
3. Give students a few minutes to practice reading with expression, and to practice any actions (arm movements, walking, etc.) to be used during the performance. In addition, students may choose a few props or materials to use during the performance. These items should be easily acquired or quickly assembled in the classroom.
4. After practicing, each group performs the reader’s theater for the class. They may also perform for another class.

After the Reader’s Theater

1. Give each student a copy of *Parts of a Story Map* (page 55). Let them choose to work independently or in pairs. Discuss parts of the story before asking students to fill in the story map.
2. Each student should complete the map, representing the events of the story with either pictures or words. Remind students that the events must be shown in the correct sequence. Have students share their completed work in small groups or as a class.

Response Questions

Group Discussion Questions

- Why is it important for Abuela to speak both Spanish and English?
- Does Diego’s family remind you of your own? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the author has Diego say “Adios” at the end of the story?

Written Response Question

- Why might it be important for Diego to continue to practice his Spanish?
Parts of a Story Map

Setting

Characters

Event #1

Event #2

Event #3
We Are Family

BY CHRISTINE DUGAN

A reader’s theater with five parts

Narrator: The airplane engines roar. The Chavez family is excited about this trip. They are going to Mexico to visit their relatives.

Diego: Mom, how long will it take to get to Mexico?

Mom: A few hours, Diego. We will be there by tonight.

Diego: What will Abuela make us for dinner?

Mom: I do not know. Let’s wait and see.

Narrator: Diego had never been to Mexico. His family had moved to America before he was born.

Diego: Dad, are you excited to go home to Mexico?

Mom: Yes. I want you and your sister to see Abuela and Abuelo.

Diego: I have never been to Mexico. And my Spanish is not very good. What if I cannot even talk to them?

Dad: Well, Abuela speaks some English. And maybe you can learn to speak Spanish better on our visit.
We Are Family (cont.)

**Diego:** All of my friends speak English.

**Dad:** But Spanish is a part of who we are.

**Narrator:** The plane lands. Diego and his sister, Gabriela, wait to get off the plane. Soon, they are picking up their luggage.

**All:** Abuela!

**Abuela:** Diego! You are such a big boy. Come give Abuela a hug.

**Narrator:** Diego was shy. But he hugged his grandmother. He knew she missed him a lot.

**Abuela:** Are you hungry?

**Mom:** Yes, we are!

**Abuela:** Well, let’s go home and have dinner. We have some people waiting to see you there.

**Narrator:** They arrive at Abuela’s house. Many aunts, uncles, and cousins are waiting for them. Diego’s grandfather is there. Everyone calls him Abuelo.

**Abuela:** My little Diego. What would you like to eat?
We Are Family (cont.)

Diego: Do you have pizza?

Abuela: No pizza. I have tortillas and frijoles.

Diego: Frijoles? What is that, Abuela?

Abuela: Beans.

Diego: Oh, that is right. I forgot what the word meant.

Abuela: I know. It is easy to forget a language if you do not use it every day.

Diego: But you know so many English words.

Abuela: That is because I use it every day at work. I also speak English when I call your mom. I like to know the languages that everyone in my family speaks.

Narrator: Diego knew some Spanish. But he did not know enough. He could not even talk to Abuelo.

Diego: My Spanish should be better.

Abuela: Oh, do not worry. You are doing a good job. Just practice while you are here. You will get better quickly.
Narrator: Diego and his family stayed in Mexico for three weeks. They did many things. Diego spent a lot of time with Abuelo.

Mom: It seems like you and Abuelo get along well.

Diego: He is helping me with my Spanish.

Mom: I thought you did not want to use your Spanish.

Diego: Abuela says it is important to speak the languages that family members speak. I decided that I wanted to speak Spanish more at home.

Mom: Well, I am glad you feel that way.

Diego: Mom, will you make carne asada when we go home?


Diego: I do, but I like other things, too. I like the foods Abuela cooks for me.

Mom: Maybe Abuela could teach you how to make carne asada.

Diego: Great idea. I will go ask her. Adios!

All: Adios!
Reader's theater is the best way I have found to have meaningful, purposeful, and engaging fluency practice in my first grade classroom. When I first heard about reader's theater, I imagined the kids sitting quietly, holding scripts, and taking turns reading. I knew there was no way my primary students could do this. It wouldn't work for me because it's for upper grade kids. Thanks, but no thanks. But I couldn't get it out of my mind. So I started searching for appropriate reader's theater for a primary classroom, but I didn't find much. Use these Blank Reader's Theater Templates to write your own scripts with your learners! *Grab the free printable reader's theater downloads at the END of this post. Click on the teal download button. Just recently, my three learners (1st grade, 3rd grade, and 4th grade) and I worked together to write a play adapted from a familiar fable. They practiced it several times, and then they performed it. There are many reasons why I loved this activity (and plan to do it again soon). When learners work to write their own script, they have to By using Reader's Theater Scripts, you encourage students to read with expression and to practice important fluency attributes, such as pause, inflection, and intonation. Taking on character roles helps students understand literary elements, such as motivation and characterization. Students also improve listening skills as they follow along silently and listen for spoken cues. How to Use Readers Theater Scripts. Reader's Theater Scripts can be original scripts or scripts based on leveled books. Reader's Theater Editions are free scripts for reader's theater (or readers theatre) adapted from stories written by Aaron Shepard and others mostly humor, fantasy, and world tales from a variety of cultures. A full range of reading levels is included, with scripts aimed mostly at ages 8-15. Special features are available for many scripts. These can include printable color posters, photo features, audio recordings, extended author notes, fun writing exercises, and additional story formats. Reader's theater is a strategy for developing reading fluency. It involves children in oral reading through reading parts in scripts. In using this strategy, students do not need to memorize their part; they need only to reread it several times, thus developing their fluency skills. The best reader's theater scripts include lots of dialogue. When to use: Before reading.