

Reader's Theater

Step-by-step instructions

Before class

1. Make copies of the script for all students.
2. Identify and select three students who read fluently, or invite three colleagues to assist you in modeling the procedure.
3. Provide time for the students (or colleagues) to read the script and practice.
4. Prepare assigned student groups prior to class. Include a stronger reader in each group.
5. Ensure Criteria Chart slide can be projected for easy viewing or create a poster with Criteria Chart before class begins.

Introduce the Strategy

6. Explain to students that they will be participating in an activity to help them increase their understanding of characters in different stories. Tell them they will read a script, divide into smaller groups, and practice reading a section of the script. They will then perform their section for the class.
7. Ask students if they are familiar with scripts, what scripts look like, the purpose of scripts, and when scripts would be used. Make sure students understand scripts are used when writing plays, movies, or television shows. They are written primarily with all dialogue, but also may include stage directions or directions for the characters (e.g., how to react to a statement). Scripts can be used for fictional and non-fictional purposes and for narrative, expository, or persuasive purposes.
8. Tell students they will each be assigned a role. Once they have their role, explain to the students they will need to read and practice their part several times so that when they perform for the class, they will sound as if they are talking rather than reading. They will also practice with the other members of the group so they sound as if they are talking to each other and having a conversation.
9. Tell students before you model what they need to do when they are practicing and performing, you are going review *criteria, or rules*, they need to follow when working together.
10. Display the Criteria Chart slide. Tell students there are 5 Criteria they will need to follow and they include:
 - Readers speak clearly and use an appropriate volume.
 - Readers read the text accurately.

- Readers read text with expression.
 - Members of the group cooperate with each other during rehearsal time.
 - The group uses their rehearsal time wisely.
11. Discuss each of the rules. Ask students to elaborate on the rules, explain why they are important, and seek volunteers to provide examples and non-examples.
- Ask students to model appropriate volume and non-appropriate volume.
 - Explain if the text is not read accurately, the meaning of the text can change. The author of the script selected specific words when writing the script and it's important to respect the author's choices.
 - Ask students to read a sentence written on the board (e.g., *Today, we are going to the zoo*) with different expressions (e.g., happy, sad, confused).
 - Focus on encouraging students to support each other during their practice time and helping all students improve their reading when discussing members of the group cooperating.
 - Explain to students they will not have a lot of time to practice before they perform for the entire class. Let students know it is important that they practice their lines and know when it is their turn to speak.
12. Ask the class to repeat the five criteria. Post the Criteria Chart in different areas of the room as a reminder for the students when they divide into groups and begin practicing.

Model

13. Ask your student helpers or colleagues to join you in the front of the classroom. Read the introduction to the script to explain the background.
14. Model a rehearsal time. Assign a role to each student. Review the Criteria Chart. Point to the first criterion and suggest each student say the first line to check and make sure everyone is using appropriate volume levels. Provide behavior specific praise for appropriate volume levels or corrective feedback if the volume level is too loud.
15. Point to the second criterion. Suggest everyone, in the order of the script, read their lines aloud. Model reading a word incorrectly and having another person provide corrective feedback. Once everyone has read through the lines, model thanking group members who helped with words you may have stated incorrectly and state the importance of saying the correct words.
16. Point to the third criterion and suggest everyone, in the order of the script re-read their lines, but this time group members will pay attention to everyone's expression. Encourage group members to stop after everyone has read 2 – 3 lines and ask about their expression (e.g., *How was my expression? Did I use enough?*). Model providing compliments to group members (e.g., *I liked the way you showed your anger. It was great the way you said...It made me feel really sad.*).

17. Point to the fourth criterion. Model thanking group members for their help, both with helping correct words and suggestions/feedback on expressions used while reading.
18. Point to the fifth criterion and model checking the time and suggesting re-reading the passage. Once the passage has been read correctly and with expression, complete another time check. Model praising group members for staying focused, working collaboratively, and having several opportunities to read the passage.
19. Ask the rest of the class to identify the behaviors they saw and the behaviors they did not see. Ask if they have any questions about what they should do when they are in their groups and respond accordingly.
20. Tell the class you will now perform the script.
21. Read through the script, everyone modeling appropriate volume, accuracy, and expression.

Guided Practice

22. Assign students to their groups. Pre-write group names on the scripts and assign roles before class begins to ease the transition and keep students on task for the first few classes you use Reader's Theater. Also, tell the groups where in the room they will meet to practice the scripts.
23. Remind students about the five criteria and point out the Criteria Charts around the room.
24. Tell students they will have 25 minutes to practice and that you will check in on their progress. Set a timer.
25. Walk around the classroom. Sit with different groups of students and listen to students read the script and practice. Provide praise and/or feedback on students' reading, expression, and interactions with each other (e.g., group cooperation).
26. Ask the students for their attention when the timer beeps. Check to see if different groups completed the reading at least once by thumbs up or thumb down.
27. Tell the students when the next class begins they will have an opportunity to practice with their group again before they perform. Collect the scripts, and elicit feedback for what the students liked best. Focus on the positive.

Independent Practice

28. Review the activities completed the previous day. Identify the main points. Provide students with an agenda for today's activities (e.g., *continue rehearsing [time]*, *performing for the class*).

29. Display the Criteria Chart. Ask for volunteers to read the expectations of Reader's Theater. Call on students to elaborate and explain.
30. Ask students to get into their groups and pass out the scripts to the students. Depending on your class scheduling set enough time for practice and for group performances. Remind students how much time they have to practice. Set the timer for the practice session.
31. Rotate through the groups, to answer any questions and to ensure the students are prepared to perform.
32. Call the class back together when the timer beeps. Groups can stay seated together, but remind them to give the performers respect. Tell students their group numbers are in a basket. Explain to the students, when their group number is called, each student should move quickly to the front of the room and stand.
33. Ensure that every group performs.
34. Discuss with the groups and the class the strengths of the performance and suggestions to improve the performance after each performance.