

A *Very* Basic Guide to Reader's Theatre

Compiled by Friends of the Venice Library

- ❖ Reader's Theatre is a theatrical way of presenting literature in a simple, stripped-down fashion with little or no scenery, props, costuming, or overt stage movement.
- ❖ The actors' (or readers') only tools are their voices and faces and the words of the author. They carry these words in black notebooks with their lines highlighted but know their parts so well that the script is almost not necessary.
- ❖ Traditionally, readers dress in simple black shirts and pants/skirts (although color can be used for emphasis), and they sit on multi-level chairs or stools arranged to show relationships.
- ❖ Sometimes script notebooks can even be used to suggest props that are not physically present. The notebooks are always completely or partially open from the beginning to the end of a scene. The exception to this is if a character passes away; then the notebook slowly closes as the reader bows their head down.
- ❖ Narrators fill in story and details and often sit to one side; generally, they directly address the audience with their reading.
- ❖ Other readers when their character is not in the scene focus their gaze downward but lift their face when the character is called for. Often, they do not read directly to another character but focus on some spot above the audience as they speak their lines.
- ❖ In other words, Reader's Theatre relies heavily on the creativity and imagination of the readers AND the audience.
- ❖ If you want to adapt a piece of literature into a Reader's Theatre script, it is very important to preserve the language and tone of the author's original work, although story points and characters may need to be condensed down to achieve a reasonable length. An RT script is NEVER a simple plot summary; words and flavor matter.

[See 2 practice RT scripts attached]

Reader's Theatre Packet Resources:

Latrobe, Kathy Howard and Mildred Knight Laughlin. *Readers Theatre for Young Adults*. Teacher Ideas Press, 1989.

Ratliff, Gerald Lee. *Introduction to Readers Theatre – A Guide to Classroom Performance*. Meriwether Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Shepard, Aaron. *Readers on Stage*. Shepard Publications, 2017.

White, Mel. *Readers Theatre Anthology*. Meriwether Publishing Inc., 1992

The Little Girl and the Wolf by James Thurber

LAWYER/NARRATOR: *(Removing real or imaginary glasses & speaking to audience)* Legal Disclaimer: This story is in no way intended to advocate the use of violence in this or any other scenario.

WOLF: One afternoon a big wolf waited in a dark forest

NARRATOR: For a little girl to come along carrying a basket of food to her grandmother.

LITTLE GIRL: Finally, a little girl did come along and she was carrying a basket of food.

WOLF: "Are you carrying that basket to your grandmother?" asked the wolf.

LITTLE GIRL: "Yes, yes, I am," the little girl said.

WOLF: So the wolf asked her where her grandmother lived

LITTLE GIRL: And the little girl told him *(pointing to left:?)*

WOLF: And he disappeared into the wood. *(Hiding behind script)*

LITTLE GIRL: When the little girl opened the door *(Turning imaginary knob)* of her grandmother's house she saw

NARRATOR: That there was somebody in bed with a nightcap and nightgown on.

LITTLE GIRL: She had approached no nearer than twenty-five feet from the bed when she saw

WOLF: That it was not her grandmother but the wolf!

NARRATOR: For even in a nightcap, a wolf does not look any more like your grandmother than the old MGM lion looks like Calvin Coolidge.

LITTLE GIRL; So the little girl took a pistol out of her basket

WOLF: And shot the wolf *(Wolf wobbles & partially closes script)*

NARRATOR: Perhaps merely giving him a fright. We have insufficient data at this time to say for sure.

LITTLE GIRL: Moral: It is not so easy to fool little girls nowadays as it used to be. *(And winks)*

{End of scene: Readers pause, lift their gazes to audience, and take a bow}

Original story = "The Little Girl and the Wolf" by James Thurber, 1940. Reprinted in Introduction to Readers Theatre - A Guide to Classroom Performance by Gerald Lee Ratliff, 1999, by permission of Rosemary A. Thurber

Reader's Theatre Script Adaptation by Friends of the Venice Library, 2020

Excerpt from A Christmas Carol
by Charles Dickens

NARRATOR 1: Marley is dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner, Scrooge. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail.

NARRATOR 2: Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners – and Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, his sole mourner. Yes, Scrooge knew he was dead, but he never painted out old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterward, above the door – SCROOGE AND MARLEY. It was all the same to him. (*Scrooge enters from side stage and goes to down center stool.*)

NARRATOR 1: Oh, but a tightfisted hand at the grindstone, was Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say:

VOICE (MAN): My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?

NARRATOR 1: No beggars implored him:

VOICE (WOMAN): Please, a farthing – or a crust of bread!

NARRATOR 1: No children asked him:

VOICE (CHILD): Do you have the time? Please, sir, what time is it?

NARRATOR 1: No one ever once in all his life inquired:

VOICE (MAN): Can you tell me the way to the Exchange?

NARRATOR 1: But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked – to edge his way along the crowded paths of life, keeping all human sympathy at a distance.

NARRATOR 2: (Change of pace in the narration to mark a transition) Once upon a time – of all the good days in the year, upon a Christmas Eve – old Scrooge sat busy in his countinghouse. It was cold, bleak, biting, foggy weather, and the city clocks had only just gone three, although it was quite dark already. The door of Scrooge's countinghouse was open so he could keep his eye on his clerk, Bob Cratchit, who, in a dismal little cell beyond, was copying letters. Suddenly the silence was broken by a cheerful voice, the voice of Scrooge's nephew, Fred.

FRED: A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug!

FRED: Christmas a humbug, Uncle? You don't mean that, I'm sure!

SCROOGE: I do. Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money, a time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer. What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

FRED: (*Determined to be cheerful*) Well then, what right have you to be dismal? You're rich enough. Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE: What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding!

FRED: (*Pleading*) Uncle!

SCROOGE: Nephew, keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED: Keep it! But you don't keep it! (*Placatingly*) Don't be angry, Uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow! . . .

SCROOGE: Good afternoon!

NARRATOR 1: Fred, the nephew, gave up, and left the room without an angry word. . . . The clerk, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in. They were pleasant, portly gentlemen, and now stood, hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed.

MAN 1: Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE: Scrooge. Marley's been dead these 7 years. He died 7 years ago this very night.

MAN 2: We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner. At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and the destitute. . . .

SCROOGE: Are there no prisons? And the workhouses? Are they not still in operation?

MAN 1: (*Somewhat taken aback*) Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christmas cheer of mind or body, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE: Nothing.

MAN 1: (*Not understanding*) You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE: (*A bit vehemently*) I wish to be left alone! . . . I help to support the establishments I have mentioned – they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.

MAN 2: Many can't go there – and many would rather die.

SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they'd better do it and decrease the surplus population. Besides, it's not my business. . . . Good afternoon, gentlemen!

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Original story = *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, 1843. Adapted for Reader's Theatre by Melvin R White. *Readers Theatre Anthology*. Meriwether Publishing Inc., 1992. Narrator adjustments by Friends of Venice Library.