

Dramatising the EFL classroom through Reader's Theatre

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Quick guide

- » **Key words:** Drama, script, writing, oral, performance
- » **Learner English level:** Beginners to advanced
- » **Learner maturity:** Elementary to university
- » **Preparation time:** 30 minutes
- » **Activity time:** 60 to 90 minutes per class
- » **Materials:** Tape recorder or video recorder

Reader's Theatre is a presentational performance based on principles and techniques of oral interpretation with the purpose to entertain, instruct, and persuade (Adams, 2003). Readers first read a story and then transform it into a script involving several characters. Unlike conventional drama, which relies mainly on physical movements or actions, the script is performed for an audience using only the voice elements (articulation, rate, tone, pitch, voice projection, etc.). Reader's Theatre has been adopted in Western educational settings to improve the reading fluency and to enhance the reading comprehension of students (Henry, 2011). However, I have adopted Reader's Theatre as a means to teach oral communication skills such as proper pronunciation, voice projection, appropriate tone, and voice flexibility.

Preparation

Step 1: Select a story scene appropriate to the class level of English and interest from any graded reader (see Appendix A). It is highly recommended that the teacher choose a story scene with at least two characters engaged in a

conversational dialogue.

Step 2: Based on the story scene selected, prepare a scenario (see Appendix B) for the script writing.

Step 3: Prepare a tape or video recorder to record students' performances.

Procedure

Step 1: Before class, assign students a story scene from the graded reader to familiarize students with the background of the story scene. In class, conduct a pre-reading activity such as explaining the pertinent vocabulary, and then have students read the story scene individually and discuss their impressions of the characters in groups of three or four. I normally ask students to comment on their favourite characters in the story scene by asking them several questions such as: *Which is your favourite character? What would you do if you were in his or her situation? Do you think there are people who behave similarly to the characters in the real world?*

Step 2: After students have gained sufficient background knowledge of the story scene, introduce script writing and briefly explain the role of a narrator and different characters in drama scripts. Next, assign students the task of writing the script guided by the scenario prepared by the teacher (Appendix B). Explain that each group will write an original script involving different characters and a narrator (see sample script written by students in Appendix C). Allow students time to negotiate the scripts and provide suggestions if students have difficulties in writing the script.

Step 3: When a group has finished writing, check the completed script and have members in the group rehearse it before you. Prior to rehearsing, instruct them to perform their parts using only voice elements and the hand-held scripts. Correct pronunciation or highlight important delivery skills (such as the proper use of tone, volume, or voice projection) when students are rehearsing their scripts. While you focus your attention on the first group, instruct other groups to continue working on their scripts. Usually students appreciate the teacher giving them time to rehearse on their own first, as they can then modify their scripts to bring about the desired

effects. If you have a large class, you may want to create groups with more than five or six members to include more characters or narrators.

Step 4: When all students are ready to perform the teacher records their performances using a tape or video recorder.

Step 5: Play back the recording and encourage students to comment on their peers' performances. You should also take the opportunity to stress the importance of good articulation, voice projection, and flexibility for effective communication in English.

Conclusion

Students generally have positive comments regarding Reader's Theatre (see Appendix D). They often develop a sense of investment in the lesson because they are not only reading a script, but also performing the script through interpretation of the characters. It is also energising for teachers as they watch students read, interpret, and perform a piece of literature, knowing that students are holistically involved in the process of learning.

References

- Adams, W. (2003). *Institute Book of Readers Theatre: A Practical Guide for School, Theatre and Community*. Chapel Hill, NC: Professional Press.
- Henry, L. (2011). Readers Theatre. *ReadWriteThink International Reading Association*. Retrieved from <readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/readers-theatre-172.html>

Appendices

The appendices are available from the online version of this article at <jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare>.



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Tic-Tac-Toe for vocabulary revision

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Quick guide

- » **Key words:** Vocabulary, recycling, Vocabox, tic-tac-toe game
- » **Learner English level:** Elementary and above
- » **Learner maturity level:** All
- » **Preparation time:** 5 minutes
- » **Activity time:** 15 minutes
- » **Materials:** Vocabulary cards, whiteboard, marker

Language learners are faced with the task of acquiring and retaining new vocabulary on a daily basis. One of the main tasks of a language teacher, then, is to help students develop a sufficiently large vocabulary. Nevertheless, some language teachers ignore this fundamental fact, assuming that the vocabulary will take care of itself through repeated exposure and classroom activities. As Nation notes in *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* (1990), developing a principled and systematic approach to teaching, as well as learning, vocabulary can be a valuable use of class time.

One of the most important aids to memory retention is recycling. The learner needs to meet the lexical item several times, preferably in different contexts. There is a greater probability of this happening incidentally if learners read and listen extensively. As Nation (1990) has rightly argued, real vocabulary learning comes through both receptive and productive use.

The teacher also needs to help the students to recycle recently learned lexis in subsequent lessons. It is especially important to do this the day after it has been taught as we have seen how

Appendix A: Introducing the scene from *The Little Mermaid*

“What do you want?” the old woman said. “You want to have two feet and live on the land? You want the prince to love you and give you a soul? I can help you but you will be very unhappy. Here’s a magic drink. Take it to the land, then drink it. You will have feet, but they will hurt. Do you understand? Do you really want to be a land person? You can never be a mermaid again.”

“I do want to be a land person,” the mermaid answered.

(Penguin Graded Reader: Tales from Hans Andersen, p. 18)

Appendix B: Sample scenario by the teacher

Imagine you are the little mermaid. You really want to have the magic drink so that you can be a human. Write a script to show how you would persuade the old woman to give you the magic drink.

Appendix C: A sample script by students

The Little Mermaid

M: Little Mermaid

O: Old Woman

N: Narrator

N: Today, our Reader’s Theatre will share a scene from a fable, “The Little Mermaid.”

M: Hello, I want you to help me.

O: What’s your problem?

M: Please give me human legs, please.

O: I can give you human legs, but it will hurt you and furthermore, you won’t be able to speak anything when you get human legs. In addition, you won’t be a mermaid again.

M: I don’t mind about it. I just want to be a human and I want the prince to love me.

O: If you become a human, there is no guarantee that he will love you. If you are not loved by him, you will die and become bubble of the sea. Do you still want human legs?

M: Yes, I do. Whatever will happen to me, I will never regret what I did.

O: Okay, Then there is a magic drink. When you reach the land, drink it and you will get human legs. But remember that your legs will hurt and you won’t be able to speak anything.

M: I understand. Thank you so much.

Appendix D: Students' comments on say about Reader's Theatre

- *I spoke English in public for the first time. Everybody in the class spoke English very well.*
- *Because of this activity, we can learn how to speak English more fluently. It was also fun watching other groups perform.*
- *I think this activity was one of the good ways to improve our spoken English because we could find many new phrases or expressions that are casual (conversational English).*
- *We have to practice the pronunciation more, so this activity is good.*