

Subject Area: Science

Grade Levels: Upper Elementary through High School.

Title of Instructional Strategy: Reader's Theatre

Description of Instructional Strategy:

Reader's Theatre is a great science strategy for children in the upper elementary grades. Kinniburgh and Shaw state that science is being overlooked in schools being that high-stakes testing primarily focuses on reading. Students at the elementary level move through school with a large deficit in their vocabulary which makes it difficult for them to be able to read the technical language in the science textbooks. Science textbooks contain bolded words which are content-specific words and require the students to look them up in a glossary. Unless the classroom teacher requires the students to look up these words, the students will not do so. It is impossible for students to comprehend the text if they do not understand the vocabulary. Comprehension is the main purpose of reading, therefore, it becomes apparent to establish meaning to create fluent readers. Readers' Theatre allows comprehension to be established because it allows students to become fluent readers as they read difficult science content (2007). According to Leah Kinniburgh and Edward Shaw Jr., authors of *Building Reading Fluency in Elementary Science through Readers' Theatre*, reader's theatre is a strategy in which students read a scripted text for an audience. Reader's theatre allows students to uncover the meanings of the science vocabulary and elaborate on confusing or puzzling concepts as they read and write the scripts to be performed.

References:

1. Corcoran, C.A. & Davis, A.D. (2005) A study of the effects of readers' theater on second and third grade special education students' fluency growth. *Reading Improvement* 42, 105-11.
2. Kimbell-Lopez, K. (2007) Readers Theatre. *Reading Online*. Retrieved August 27, 2007, from http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=kimbell-lopez/index.html.
3. Kinniburgh, L. & Shaw Jr., E. (2007, Spring) Building reading fluency in elementary science through readers' theatre. *Science Activities*, 44 no 1 . Retrieved August 27, 2007, from <http://firstsearch.oclc.org/html/webscript.html:%3Asessionid=fsapp13-45881-f5wdkuev-7x32o2:sessionid=fsapp13-45881-f5wdkuev-7x32o2:>.
4. Crazy *dinner table tricks or how heat conducts itself*.. Retrieved August 28, 2007 from <http://gvc03c32.virtualclassroom.org>.

“How-to” Information:

Materials:

- The science text book or any science book
- Pencils for the students to use
- Paper for the students
- It is necessary for the teacher to decide which section of the text is best suited for this strategy. It is also important to decide how many “parts” the text will allow. If there is too much information and too few students they can get overwhelmed and the purpose of the strategy is lost (Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007).

How-to:

- It is important to relay all of this information to the students (i.e. why are we doing this activity?, What is “script format”?). It is important to thoroughly explain the activity to the students before implementing.
- It is also important to stress to the students the need to be energized and into the activity for it to be effective.
- The main idea of this strategy is for students to use, repeat, rehearse, and teach the vocabulary/ information within the text assigned by the teacher. This way the students have used the material many times and are familiar with the information.
- Break the students into small groups and assign each group a text to create a script. It would be helpful to divide the students according to reading levels.
- The script will most typically be written in “script format”, with each student’s name and then the part they will speak. Depending on the grade, the student’s may need more or less help in developing this (You may need to write the entire script for you students).

Ex. Cindy “Do you know what an ocean is?”

Tommy “Is there water involved?”

- When writing the script it is important to elaborate on definitions. Instead of using textbook definitions, they could be in the student’s own words.
- After the scripts have been fully written (whether by the students or the teacher), they need to be rehearsed. A great suggestion by Kinniburgh and Shaw is to have the students practice the scripts as a language arts activity (2007).
- The recommended time for students to practice these scripts is at least two days. This allows the students to become familiar with the parts as well as trying out different techniques and making changes if needed. “The length of the rehearsal is contingent upon the individual group, the

length of the script, and how well the students work together” (Kinniburgh and Shaw, 2007).

- When each group has finished their rehearsal and are ready to perform, they will present their Readers’ Theatre to the class. It is up to the teacher to decide when the presentations will take place.

Important Items to Remember:

- Even though the students are rehearsing their scripts it is not important for them to memorize them. They can carry the scripts with them.
- The students should be able to “perform” with expression and fluency.
- The scripts that have been created do not have to tell and story or involve characters, necessarily. It can be in the form of a “[...] speech, poem, or other appropriate text, [...] (Corcoran, 2005).
- Students do not necessarily need costumes or sets. This can be as minimum or as elaborate as possible.
- The important thing is not only for students to enhance their comprehension and fluency in content area, but also to have fun.

This is a great activity for students because it is not only fun, but it increases fluency and comprehension as well. Children and teachers alike will enjoy this strategy.

Implications for Practice/Other Considerations:

- The pros of this strategy are students are able to gain reading comprehension across subject areas and it helps increase reading fluency. It is hands on, group activity that students can make their own by adding their personality and flare. It is fun group work where students can develop leadership and patience skills when working with others.
- The cons of this strategy are that the Reader’s Theatre may take more time to use than most strategies. It may take more explaining for students to grasp all of the requirements in this task.
- Readers’ Theater can be used in many settings. In Reading and Language Arts it can be used to act out plays and scenes from a book. In Social Studies students can write their own readers’ theatre based upon a historical figure.
- Other things to consider are the grade level and skills of your students and the time and setting that you will need to carry out a good reader’s theatre.

This strategy lends itself to a variety of learning situations and classrooms. Reader’s Theatre can be used not only for upper elementary classrooms, but also high school students would enjoy this strategy as well. Reader’s Theatre allows students to express themselves in their own words, while learning important material. Elementary students will enjoy the chance to participate in group activities, and high school students will be thrilled with the idea to speak their own language.

Any child can participate in Reader's Theatre. The extent of the participation depends on the student. Because Reader's Theatre does not require any elaborate actions, costumes, scenes, or settings, the teacher can decide the participation of any student.

Reader's Theatre does not only increase reading fluency and comprehension, but it can also raise students' confidence in reading. The results of a study conducted by Corcoran, suggest that readers' theatre programs had a "positive impact" on second and third grade students attitudes towards reading and their reading confidence level. The second and third grade students receiving special education services also progressed their fluency scores by participating in readers' theatre (2005). If a student finally understands a text, he or she will more than likely feel more confident.

Additional Links for Further Information:

Free Science Reader's Theater Scripts <http://gvc03c32.virtualclassroom.org>
Readers' Theatre Editions <http://www.aaronshp.com/rt/RTE.html>
Readers' Theatre Scripts and Plays <http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm>

EIU Candidates:

Garnet Jelley
Jacy Brasher
Katherine Weathers
Christine Kuspa
Laura Buchanan
Rachelle Parr

Example:

The following script is an example of a Reader's Theatre being used for a Science topic. It can be very useful for experiments and other fun activities.

Example A.

Dinner Table Tricks

or

How Heat Conducts Itself

Materials:

- ◆ kitchen matches (not the flimsy advertising matchbook kind)

- ◆ fork and spoon of similar size and weight (like maybe a matching pattern but don't use your mom's best silver!)
- ◆ drinking glass (reasonably tall with a cylinder shape)
- ◆ a strainer
- ◆ a candle.

Characters: The Andle family:

Mom – careful type, likes everything in its proper place

Dad – fun-loving type

Kay Andle – older daughter, a bit of a daredevil

Bart Andle – bratty younger brother

Grandpa Jones – likes to tell stories about – back in the days

Script:

Bart: Tuna surprise, AGAIN!!!!!!!!!!!!

Mom: Aren't you surprised?

(Dad enters to the dinner table)

Dad: Honey, I'm home! What's for dinner?

Mom: Tuna surprise

Dad: Tuna surprise, AGAIN!!!!!!!!!!!! (mumbles) I'm not very surprised!

(The phone rings)

Mom: I'll get that. I'm expecting a call.

(All but mom gather at the table that is nicely set with candles.)

Kay Andle:(whispers to dad) I learned a new trick today at school. But I have to play with matches.

Dad: Cool. Show it to me quickly before Mom comes back.

Kay:(loudly) COOL!

Mom: (from other room) What are you yelling about?

Kay: Oh, nothing.

Kay: Dad, Watch this. I am going to put this fork and spoon together.

(Push the bowl of the spoon into the outer prongs of the fork. The inner prongs are covered by the spoon).

Now, I am putting a matchstick through the fork's upper prong and will balance the matchstick with the spoon and fork over the side of the glass.

Bart: (Moves closer) What are you doing?

Kay: Nothing, get away

Bart: No, I am telling mom if you don't let me help

Kay: O.K., o.k., stay

Bart: Really?

Kay: No

(Bart runs out of room screaming for mom)

Dad: O.K. Now that he is gone, what's next?

Kay: Balance the match on the glass

Dad: It keeps falling, though.

Kay: Dad, just let me do it

(Kay balances the match)



Dad: How did you know how to do that?

Kay: The teacher taught us.

Grandpa Jones: (who has been watching quietly) I'll bet your Mom could have done it!

Dad: O.K., fine. Let's just get on with it!

Kay: Now light the match at both ends evenly and always light the bottom first. What do you think will happen?

Dad: (lights the match) I think the match will burn up and the spoon and fork will fall and make noise and your mother will run in here alarmed.

Dad: (after lighting the match) Hey! Why did the fire stop?

Kay: The heat traveled around the metal and the glass.

Dad: Whoa!

Grandpa Jones: That's the same trick that made the Davy Lantern's work.

Everyone: What's a Davy Lantern?

Grandpa: I'll show you, but we need to borrow a strainer from your mother.

Mom: (walks in holding a strainer) Like this?

Grandpa: Yes. ... Humphrey Davy invented a lantern and headlamp for miners

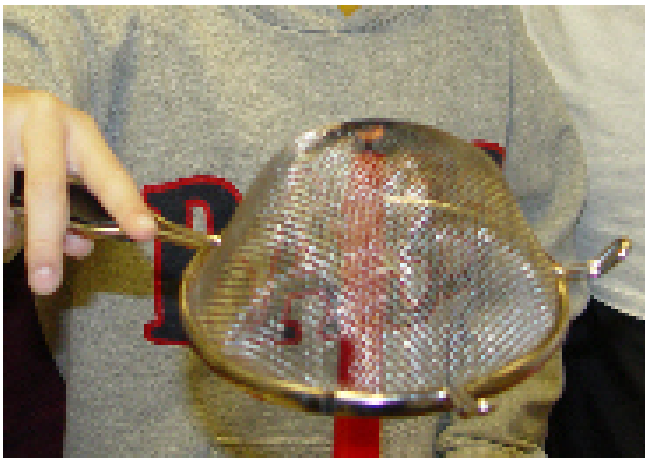
that used metal to conduct heat and keep the flame from igniting the dangerous gases present in mines.

Kay: (impatiently) O.K., fine. What's the first direction?

Grandpa: Girly, pass me one of those candles.

Grandpa: (lighting the candle) Next, you have to light the candle. Then we get the strainer and put it over the flame on the candle.

Everybody except Grandpa Jones: (yelling) No! It'll burn!



Grandpa Jones: Hold your britches! It ain't gonna' burn. (He reaches to the counter behind him and picks up a sheet of paper.) In fact, I'm going to hold this sheet of paper just over the strainer as I put it over the flame. What do you think will happen?

Kay: Whatever, but I still think it will burn.

Grandpa Jones: Now as you see, when you put the strainer on top of the candle the flame goes down and comes back up as you lift the strainer.

Dad: Wow that's amazing I thought the flame was going to go through.

Mom: That is what I thought, too. That is so weird.



Everybody except Grandpa Jones: That was so amazing!

Example A. was retrieved on August 28, 2007 from <http://gvc03c32.virtualclassroom.org>