

Reader's Theater

Description:

Students perform a section of text by reading as characters from that text. This activity helps to develop students' reading and improvisational skills through understanding and interpreting characters.

Duration: Varies, depending on length of text

Preparation:

Choose a relevant section of text for the students to read. This activity works best if the text has significant portions of dialogue. Ensure that each student has a copy of the text. At times before a class we have adapted the text ourselves deleting all the narrative. Preparing the text in this way can also be a good process for the students.

Procedure:

1. Give the students the section or pages to read, "I'm going to give you a few minutes to read through this part before we start."
2. As they read, remind them to be thinking about the characters, trying to get in the characters' minds. "Try to keep track of who is saying what. What does each person's voice sound like? How does each person feel? Which person do I want to be when we do the Reader's Theater later in class? When you read as the father, I should be able tell from that one line your full understanding of the father's role."
3. When all the students have had a chance to read through the text, have them form a semi-circle with their desks. At the top of the semi-circle, there should be as many chairs as there are voices in the section of text (excluding the narration). The teacher may ask students to determine this: "How many different voices do we need here? How many different readers?" Then each desk should be labeled with the name of the character who will sit in that seat.
4. Ask for initial volunteers for each character to take the chairs at the top of the semi-circle. Remind students to "pay attention to when your character talks. Read it with emotion." If you are including the narration assign one part as the narrator.
5. While the rest of the class is listening to the Reader's Theatre, you can assign something for them to focus on, "What is the most critical line in this section of text? Mark it in your text when you hear it?" or perhaps "What do we learn about the characters in this part of the book?"
6. If the section of text is shorter, the teacher may choose to use the same character-readers all the way through. For longer sections, offer students the option to jump-in as

characters. To read as a character, a student simply gets up and taps the shoulder of the person they want to replace. That person moves to an empty desk in the semi-circle. Encourage students to “wait until the character is not talking. You don't want to interrupt the flow.”

7. Finally, before beginning, the facilitator should make sure everybody is comfortable with the content of the text. “Are there any words we need to cover for pronunciation or meaning? Is there anything you're uncomfortable saying?”

Reflection:

What happened in the text? How did the readers convey the emotions of the characters? If you read as a character, what did you do to perform your character? If you read as a narrator, what's different in this activity from jump-in reading? Ask students to share their ideas about the focus question that was introduced in Step 5.