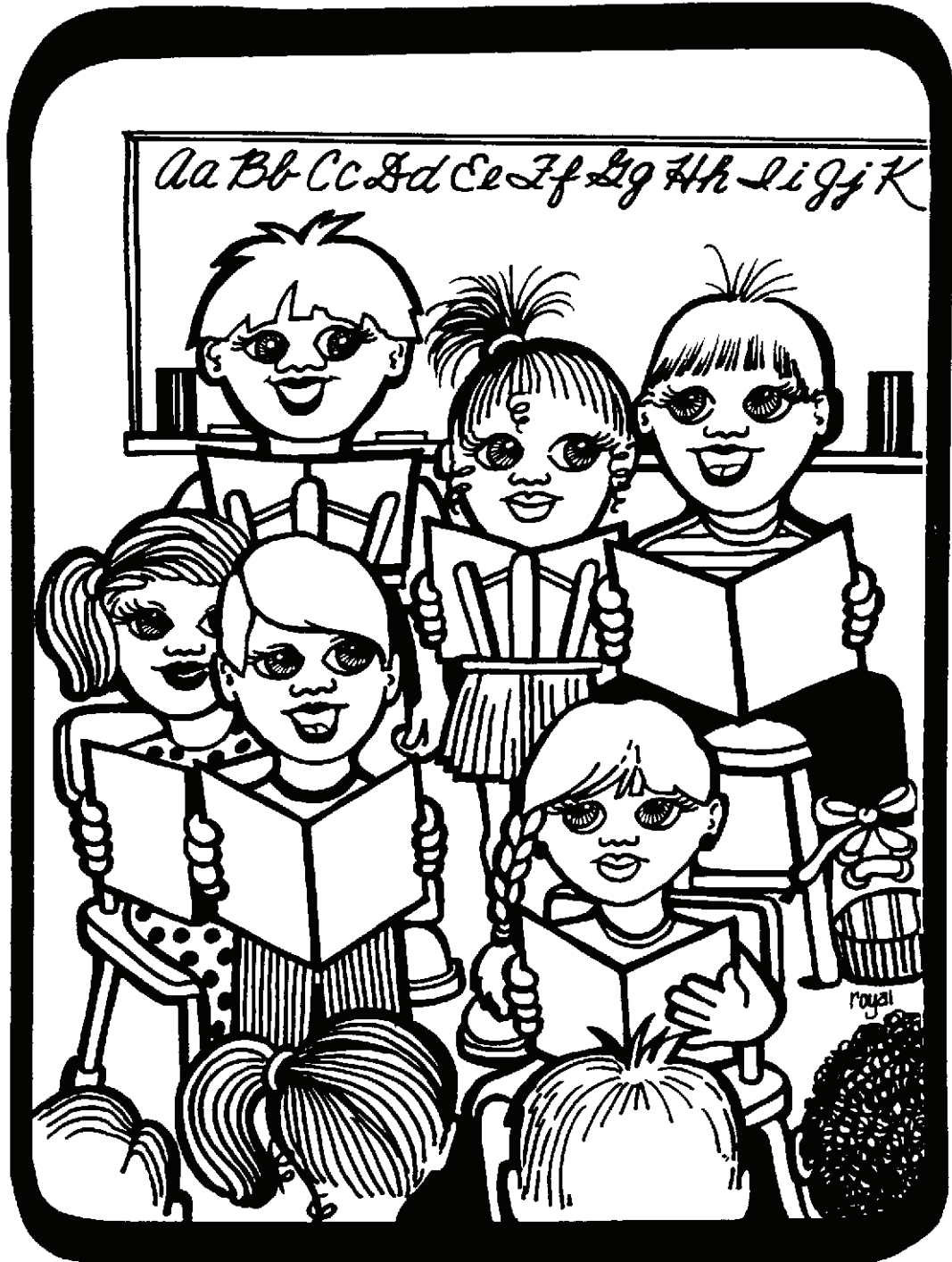


# What is Readers Theatre?

1. Readers Theatre in the Elementary Classroom
2. Imagine this Scene
3. Overcoming the Overwhelming Obstacles



# Readers Theatre in the Elementary Classroom

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If you hadn't come in contact with the term READERS THEATRE until now, it was probably only a matter of time! The concept of preparing scripts for reading rather than acting is not new, but is a growing practice which has spawned a variety of learned publications, university courses, Script Services in the United States and Canada, a yearly international Readers Theatre Summer Institute and more. As a teaching strategy, READERS THEATRE procedures have been examined and publicized through publications of the International Reading Association and the Australian Reading Association among others. The list continues to grow.

So, what is READERS THEATRE? It is literature-based oral reading which communicates story through oral interpretation rather than through acting. In its most simple form, READERS THEATRE is hardly theatre at all! As in theatre, a script is used, but the story information is communicated by readers who take on narrator and character parts. Lines are read rather than memorized. The story is read by readers who stand or sit in fixed position and address their lines directly to a listening audience.



**READERS THEATRE  
IS A READ-ALoud ACTIVITY,  
NOT AN ACTING EXERCISE!**

# Imagine This Scene

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A group of grade four/five students gather together to read the adaptation of an old folk tale, "The Fast Skipping Pot." They have rehearsed the story in small group sessions, and are now ready to "perform" it for the rest of the class.

Some sit, some stand at the front of the classroom, facing their audience. A narrator stands behind a music stand, opens the colorful folder upon the stand, and begins to read.

"Once upon a time when pigs could whistle and pots could talk, there lived a poor hungry husband and wife. The couple lived in a dusty house and owned one skinny pig."

The husband gives the audience his most hungry look and waves weakly. "I'm the husband," he says. "And I'm the wife!" exclaims his wife. "Oink!" adds the pig. The story continues.

The hungry man and wife decide to sell their skinny pig and set off to market. "Nobody will be interested in buying a pig as skinny as this pig!" moans the husband. But the pig is finally traded to a dwarf for an old black cooking pot. The dwarf hopes his new pig will learn to whistle "The Star Spangled Banner."

As the reading progresses, the readers speak their narrations or character lines fluently. They read with enthusiasm from the scripts in front of them.

Home again, the wife prepares to cook their last potato in the old black pot. But once she places it over the fire, the pot starts to make strange noises! The noises grow louder and louder until the pot cries out,

"It's a fast skippin' pot  
'At's what I be.  
I must skip so  
SET ME FREE!"

All readers join in on the phrase SET ME FREE and shout it loudly. As the words SET ME FREE are repeated again and again throughout the story, both readers and audience members join in on the chant.

The story progresses and the fast skipping pot skips into a troll's cave, an ogre's barn, and a witch's shack, then rewards its owners with pots full of bread pudding, grain, and golden coins. But the troll, ogre, and witch chase the fast skipping pot and end "smack, splosh, swish" in a vat of hamburger soup. The witch screeches,

"You silly skipping pot! You can skip to Alaska for all we care! Just get us out of this hamburger soup!"

Of course, the pot keeps on skipping. It skips right past the dwarf's house where a pig is whistling "The Star Spangled Banner" by the side of the road. And nobody has seen the pot since. That's not surprising, our readers tell us, because:

"Alaska is a long way away - even for a  
FAST SKIPPIN' POT!"

The readers stand and bow. The audience applauds. Everyone is smiling.

# Overcoming the Overwhelming Obstacles

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In an article for the Australian Reading Association, titled "Reading and Writing READERS THEATRE Scripts," Charlene C. Swanson compares READERS THEATRE with drama as tools for teaching in the elementary classroom. She says that "both drama and READERS THEATRE provide students with rich learning opportunities. Yet many primary teachers shy away from involving students in dramatic performances because certain aspects of a dramatic performance appear to be overwhelming obstacles: directing, costuming, blocking, set design, props, makeup and rehearsal time. Even when teachers feel competent to handle these details, the reality of the increased work load involved in producing a play may be enough to reduce their efforts to one performance a year. But readers theatre is much easier to implement."



**READERS THEATRE  
IS FUN AND EASY  
TO IMPLEMENT!**