

## **Scripting for Reader's Theatre**

Since the piece of literature is central in Reader's Theatre, choices in scripting will reflect the nature of the literature. Choices that are made in scripting always center on the questions, "How can I best convey this piece of literature?" and "What is the most simple form that can be used to express this piece of literature?"

The first choice that needs to be made is the selection of the part of the literature that will be included in the script. Will one "scene" of the story, the entire text, or selections from the entire text be included in the script? This will vary with the amount of time available to share the Reader's Theatre, the age of the readers, the place/situation/context of the reading, and the script writer's understanding of the piece of literature. Not every piece of literature can be scripted to fit into a ten minute time frame, and not every piece of literature can be developed into a script that last one hour.

Once the selection of the section of literature to be scripted has been made, the script writer will explore the "voice" of the literature. Whose (or what) voice is telling the story, or what voice do you want to have tell the story. This voice may be found in the narration of the text, but the script writer may need to explore more deeply the one from whose perspective the selected story is told. One may find that the story is told from the perspective of the main character, from their current perspective or at a later time (first person narration), it may be an outside omniscient narrator (one who can tell the reader the inner thoughts of one or more of the characters), a limited narrator (one who looks on from the outside), or it may be another character within the story, sharing their own perspective.

After identifying the narrator or narrators of the story, the next things to identify are the individual "voices" within the piece of literature. This may be as simple as dividing the existing dialog of the characters in the story between the reader's voices. A script writer may find that one character has several different voices that are more clearly understood if divided among multiple readers. Occasionally, dialog by several minor characters can be

given a single voice, in other words one reader may speak for several characters.

Once the voices are selected by the script writer, the next choice to make is exactly what to include within the script. Unlike formal theatre, Reader's Theatre often includes what would be called stage directions to help to express content of the piece of literature. For example, a script could read:

Nancy: As she looked around at the group surrounding her, Nancy exclaimed, "Don't hurt me!"

or

Narrator: As she looked around at the group surrounding her, Nancy exclaimed...

Nancy: Don't hurt me!

A Reader's Theatre script writer needs to include enough of the action to clarify for the listeners what is happening. The amount included will vary with each piece of literature. Script writing is always about making the piece of literature clear for the listener, easy to understand and follow, and to embody the literature in a script that lets the "voices" of the literature speak clearly. When script writing, one needs to create the most simple dramatic form that expresses the piece of literature.

This article was written by Dr. Carmel Tinnes, Ed.D, Union-PSCE , who currently serves as Director of Christian Education at the First Presbyterian Church of Royal Oak, Michigan.