

What is Reader's Theatre?

Reader's Theatre is a dramatic form that is on a continuum between storytelling and formal theatre. There are many variations within this dramatic form. Reader's Theatre can be staged simply by having two people standing still and reading from scripts, or more complexly by using costumed readers, engaging one another with eye contact, moving and gesturing in role. These multiple variations allow Reader's Theatre to be an extremely flexible dramatic form. Reader's Theatre involves the sharing of literature that generally includes fewer of the dramatic externals - sets, lights, costumes, and make-up - but it can also include some or all of these theatrical elements. "The twin keys to reader's theatre are simplicity and suggestion."ⁱ In Reader's Theatre, the imagination of the listener is key, as they are expected to be able to "see" the details in the literature through the readers' expressiveness.

Because the number of external dramatic elements can vary greatly, there are several choices one needs to make when scripting for Reader's Theatre. Although Reader's Theatre begins with a piece of literature, and attentiveness to the literature is central, decisions need to be made about the best means to communicate that piece of literature. The form of the script will take into account the type of literature, the readers, and those who will be listening to the text when it is read. The simplest dramatic form that will express the piece of literature is the best choice to use in Reader's Theatre. Listeners will use their imagination to visualize the setting, characters and action of the story if guided with a well read script. The readers will use their voices to create the characters, narrate action, or share information. This will help the listeners "see" the story as it come to life in the well done Reader's Theatre.

Why Reader's Theatre in the Church?

Reader's Theatre is a wonderful dramatic form to use in the church. It requires less rehearsal time because memorization is not necessary. It is a form that can be done without financial outlay. Since you will create the script there are no royalties. You do not need costumes or sets, as these

images will be created in the imaginations of the listeners. You do not necessarily need to use props as these can also be in the imagination of the listener. There is one caveat with the use of Reader's Theatre. Since so much of understanding the meaning of the piece of literature depends on reading the text well, much energy and rehearsal needs to go into making sure that the text is well read.

ⁱ Gordon C. Bennett. Acting out Faith: Christian Theatre Today. St. Louis, Missouri: CBD Press 1986, p. 103.

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