



Table of Contents

UNIT I. THE ART

CHAPTERS

1. Getting Started.....	1
2. Identifying: RT is IT	9
3. Presenting: The Presentational Approach	13

UNIT II. THE MATERIAL

4. Selecting the Material.....	27
5. Analyzing the Material	33

UNIT III. THE SCRIPT

6. Adapting the Material.....	43
7. Releasing Textual Voices	47
8. Experiencing Varied Arrangements	53
9. Orchestrating Textual Voices	61
10. Compiling Scripts	71

UNIT IV. THE INTERPRETER

11. Sensitizing the Interpreter's Voice	83
12. Coloring the Words	89
13. Packaging the Ideas	95
14. Animating the Body	101

UNIT V. THE PRODUCTION

15. Staging the Script	111
16. Completing the Production Concept	127
17. Producing the Script	183

APPENDIXES

A. Glossary of Readers Theatre Terms	153
B. Warmups for Body and Voice	159
C. Rehearsal Schedule Sample	161
D. Evaluation Sheet for Readers Theatre Productions	162
E. National Organizations and Periodicals	163
F. Where to See Readers Theatre	163
G. Successful Readers Theatre Material	164
H. Compilation Suggestions	167
I. Sources for Readers Theatre Scripts	168
J. Available Readers Theatre Scripts	169
K. Sample Scripts	173
“My Client Curley” and photo essay	192
“Justice Comes To Sharp Stick”	197
L. End Notes	209
M. Bibliography for Students, Instructors, and Libraries	212
N. Activity Sheets and Instructor's Evaluation Sheets	215

INDEX	265
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Preface: To the Instructor

An exciting and effective way to instill appreciation of literature and theatre in students is to use Readers Theatre in your classes. Readers Theatre—sometimes called Interpreters Theatre—is a unique art form that combines oral interpretation and presentational theatre. It features a group of animated readers who interact with a literary form for the purpose of generating within the audience member’s imagination a vitalized, empathic response to the material.

Traditionally, Readers Theatre uses only minimal, if any, stage trappings. Instead, it focuses on language; the spoken word is enlivened to stimulate mental sensory responses. Through hearing, the audience is able to see imaginatively.

All over the nation, educators are finding that Readers Theatre is a special approach that has value as a technique for involving students with literature and as an art for encouraging students to improve their communication skills through rehearsal and performance.

Popularity

In the last decade the popularity of Readers Theatre has burgeoned in educational theatre where both process and product are stressed. Colleges, universities, and secondary schools now offer Readers Theatre as a legitimate course of study, with main season production slots being reserved for this art form. Shows range from simple reading on stools to elaborate presentational theatre with stylized theatrical accoutrements. Intercollegiate forensic tournaments have endorsed Readers Theatre as a viable competitive event, as have many high school speech and drama contests. Annually throughout the United States, numerous Readers Theatre festivals are held, where devotees share shows, techniques, and adjudications.

Values

DRAMATIC QUALITY. Many values flow from this art form. Bringing out the dramatic quality in all types of literature is a primary value of Readers Theatre. Using a plethora of materials ranging from plays to poems, short stories, novels, diaries, letters, songs, and newspaper columns, Readers Theatre productions can serve numerous functions: to teach, inspire, persuade, amuse, entertain, or to raise social consciousness.

LITERATURE APPRECIATION. Second, Readers Theatre fosters exciting study and appreciation of literature. As students prepare for production, they are stimulated to read intensively and to analyze critically. For in order to interpret the material aloud appropriately and to command the body and voice to respond empathically, students must delve not only into what the author feels and says, but also into the author’s painting of characters, choice of words, molding of form, and structuring of action. To suggest the author’s experiences, the students as cast members, must have a detailed knowledge of the literature. Moreover, as the students embrace the material and comprehension matures, their appreciation of new ideas, of other people, and of diverse situations expands.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. A third value is to nurture personal development. In order to bring their own form and that of the text into harmony, readers must polish their instrument. They must hone their voices to suggest expressively the emotions and nuances of the material; they must tune their faces and bodies to reflect the muscular tensions of attitude and character. In so doing, they will add dimension to their imaginations, which must soar to the demanding heights of the literature. Cultivating the imagination might indeed be the most important personal gain. As Albert Einstein remarked, “The gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge.”

As students exercise interpretative skills, they develop self-confidence and are able to control stage fright. They also learn to be a part of a team. Readers Theatre, perhaps more than any other type of production, requires ensemble playing. Because the total cast is usually in audience view throughout the whole show, cast cooperation is needed to secure proper audience focus. The presentational style that weaves together narration and dialogue and uses vocal orchestration promotes a sharing among cast members. Readers must work hard to create a unified whole as they enliven the literary experience.

COOPERATION. A fourth value fosters a cooperative venture between performers and audience. Readers Theatre is a shared participatory event. Through their performances, creative readers, stimulated and enriched by the material, entice audience members into suspending disbelief and into imaginatively completing the descriptions, actions, and characterizations suggested by the readers. Such immersion into the literature creates a harmonious blending, a feeling of oneness between readers and audience who, together, create theatre.

Interaction between readers and audience is further stimulated by physical arrangement. Generally, a small, intimate playing area is preferred to encourage an audience to share in the event. It is not necessary to perform solely in traditional theatre spaces. The literature might suggest less conventional playing areas. Many shows have been successfully produced in such diverse settings as boxing arenas, children's playgrounds, auction blocks, church sanctuaries, and school libraries.

PLEASURE. Finally, Readers Theatre is fun! It is fun to ferret out the life in literature and, with fellow cast members, to create effective ways to extend the literary experience to the audience. Such fun is not frivolous. Pleasure is rightly placed in the value list, for pleasure is a positive force that produces favorable by-products so necessary in educational and theatrical undertakings. Studies show that positive effects of pleasure include greater self-confidence, a more alert mind, and a more cheerful attitude. The happy environment that Readers Theatre can generate will do much towards achieving growth in students and quality in production.

Purpose Of This Book

This book was written primarily to help students become knowledgeable and successful participants in Readers Theatre. But it was also written for the teacher of speech and drama, who constantly faces demands on creativity and resourcefulness. This text will ease teaching preparation by providing numerous learning activities for student involvement.

Each chapter features one basic project that is presented in detail. Information the student needs to know in preparing and presenting the activity is given in easy-to-follow steps. After reading each chapter, the student will know what is expected. This text will release the instructor from assignment details. The instructor will thus have more free time to give students the special attention they need as they become resourceful, self-confident, and creative individuals.



Suggestions for the Instructor

1. This textbook has been divided into five units featuring the art of Readers Theatre, the material, the script, the interpreter, and the production. The units and the chapters within each have been carefully developed along a cumulative approach. Every chapter assigns a basic project. Since early chapter activities present a background upon which later projects build, students must have a command of the fundamental skills before attempting the more difficult ones in later chapters.

2. Each chapter begins with a **Chapter Focus** that supplies behavioral objectives for the students—indicating what they should learn from the material. Require that the students read the Chapter Focus section before they start the chapter content. Chapter Focus statements may be used as quick quizzes.

3. Because of the nature of the material, some chapters are longer than others. Divide these into workable reading assignments. Insist that everyone reads the complete **Manuscript Memo** section before undertaking a project.

4. The **Terminology** section features Readers Theatre jargon and related words that the student needs to learn. A vocabulary quiz should be part of mastering each chapter. Word definitions are included in either the chapter or the glossary (in the Appendix).

5. Repetition or varying of projects in the text is encouraged, and often helpful in laying foundations. To avoid monotony, vary the specifics and encourage a sense of creativity.

6. Because Readers Theatre is built upon the imaginative process, it is necessary to nurture an attitude of exploration within the class. Encourage students to share their ideas as well as to respect the ideas and talents of others. With proper class stimulation, students usually make very effective contributions for sharing the literature with an audience.

7. Help the class understand the role of audience member. If a shared experience is to occur, reader and audience should work together as friends. When students are not performing, they should be carefully watching and listening, for they learn from their classmates and thus improve their own work.

8. On the activity sheet at the end of each chapter is an evaluation list specifically designed for that chapter's assignment. This list should facilitate the grading of student work, since you need only check the rating columns. The symbols of **P, A, G, E** stand for poor, average, good, and excellent. There is space for written comments.

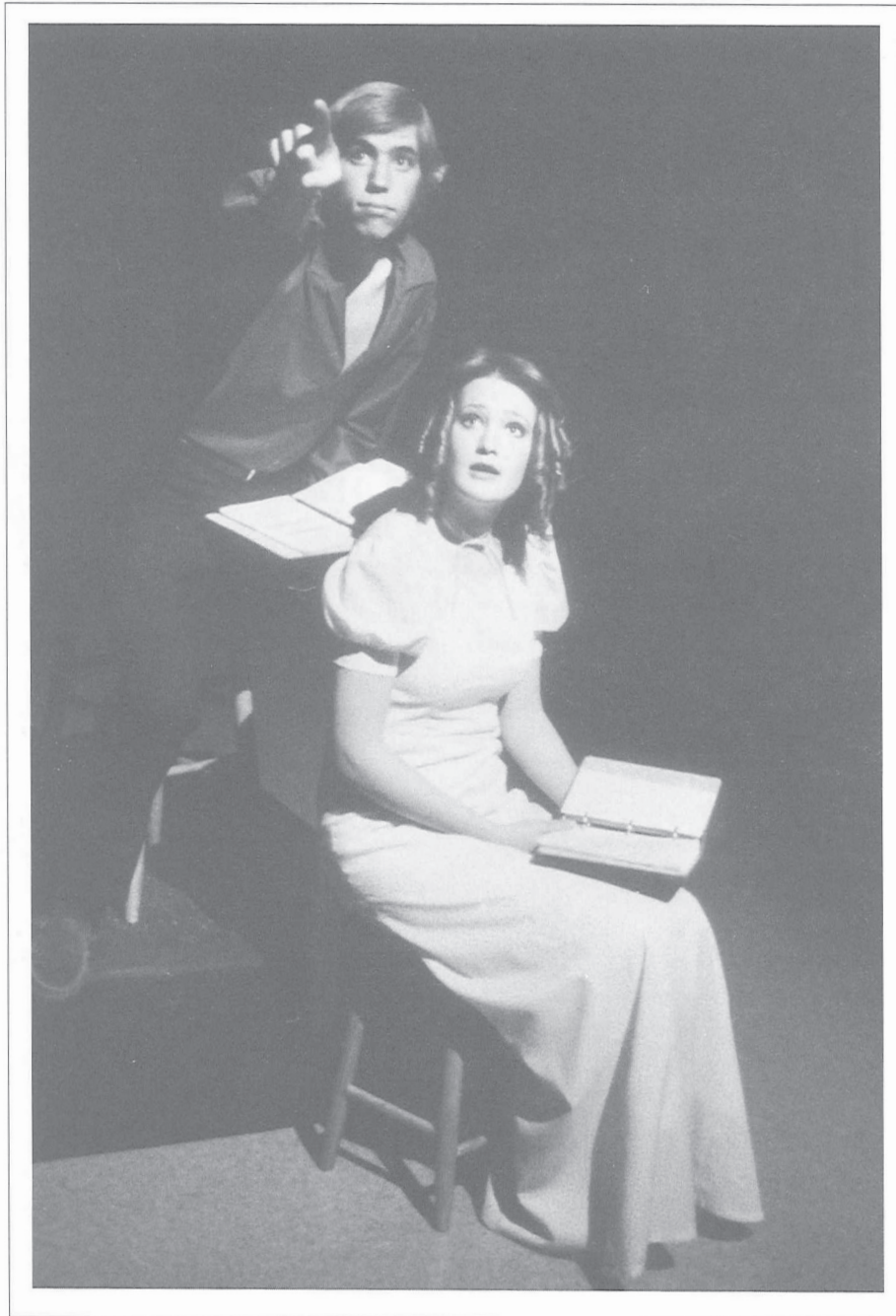
9. Call for completed activity sheets two or three days before a presentation. This insures advance preparation. Do not allow a student to participate if a completed activity sheet has not been turned in. To do so will encourage inferior work that wastes class time and is of little benefit to the student.

10. On days when students are to perform, prime them for action by starting class with basic body and voice warm-ups (see the Appendix). When a basic routine is established, appoint class members to lead the warm-ups, starting immediately as they enter class and continuing until roll is taken. Vary the warm-ups periodically.

11. Look for class presentations that may be given as a program for community groups or for the school. Since Readers Theatre productions are inexpensive to mount, with royalty fees and ensemble costuming usually being the only costs, good entertainment can be offered on a very limited budget and in a reasonably short frame of production time.

Unit I
THE ART





Both characters are “in-scene” with intense concentration and strong full front offstage focus. Stools and platform create interesting levels. *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Lawrence and Lee.

On the previous page:

Various body angles, levels, and facial expressions bring alive Shel Silverstein's poem, “Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout.”



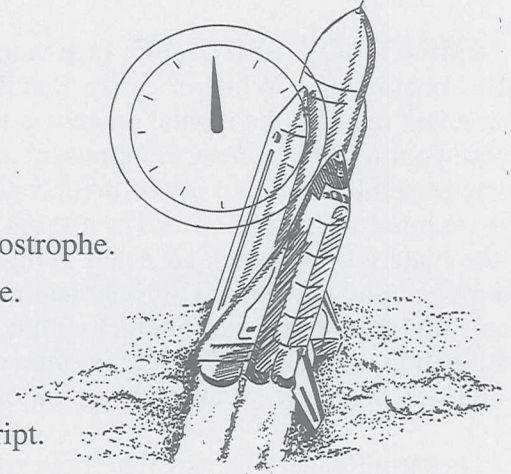
Chapter 1

GETTING STARTED

Chapter Focus

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define Readers Theatre.
2. Explain why the term Readers Theatre does not use an apostrophe.
3. Discuss the relationship of imagination to Readers Theatre.
4. List synonyms for the term Readers Theatre.
5. Identify values from doing Readers Theatre.
6. Experience Readers Theatre performance in a practice script.



Terminology

After studying this chapter, define the following words. Compare definitions with the glossary.

empathic response

imagination

Readers Theatre

Manuscript Memos

IMAGINATION. Lights flash on the control panel. The words “all systems are go” signal that intricate modern inventions are in readiness to function. The satellite circles the world, a rocket ship soars into outer space, video games light up, robots receive commands. While all of us recognize that these inventions employ sophisticated technology, few of us may realize that the impetus behind such present day devices came from a special seed that allowed mankind to dream, to fantasize, to create. That seed is imagination. Before a space ship or a computer could actually be built, an individual first had to envision the apparatus. The idea had to be imaginatively created before it could be brought into reality.

Not only does imagination play an important part in scientific technology, it is also the lifeblood of the arts. As you begin this study of Readers Theatre, you will become increasingly aware of the importance of imagination. You will learn how to stimulate your own imaginative force so that it will become a valuable asset. You will also learn how to activate the imagination that other people possess in order that they, too, may be enriched.

You are in for a treat. Whether or not you have ever participated in this art form you will find it is fun, creative, and challenging. Throughout the nation, students at all school levels are studying, rehearsing, and performing Readers Theatre. Colleges, universities, and community groups feature Readers Theatre, as do an increasing number of professional companies. In fact, for years it has been gaining in popularity and its fans continue to grow.



READERS THEATRE. What is Readers Theatre? It is a presentational art form where two or more oral interpreters employ vocal and physical suggestions to make all kinds of literature live vividly in the audience's imagination rather than literally on the stage. The goal is to share the experience embodied in the literature. An author attempts to capture with written language a keenly felt event. The oral reader, in turn, serves as the author's interpreter or translator by breathing life into the words—to resurrect, as it were, the printed symbols that serve as metaphors for the author's experience.

EMPATHIC RESPONSE. In Readers Theatre the interpreters' imaginations must arouse the audiences' imagination. While effective Readers Theatre enlivens and clarifies literature more intensely than does silent reading, the mental process is much like what happens when you, as a silent reader, conjure up within your mind the ideas, emotions, characters, and setting the author describes. When engrossed with a story, remember how vivid the mental pictures are? Imagination has activated the literature. The same process must occur in Readers Theatre. As a cast member, your purpose is to stimulate the audience to relate to the material, with the end result being a satisfying and exciting creative partnership between author, interpreter, and audience. This interaction is called an empathic response. The oral reader and the audience "feel into" the literature or interact with it. This living literary experience occurs because of the powers of imagination, so Readers Theatre is often called the "Theatre of the Mind" or, as Irene Coger and Melvin White say, the "Theatre of the Imagination."¹

The term Readers Theatre does not carry an apostrophe. Why? The reason is that Readers Theatre is not a theatre belonging to readers—hence, no possessive apostrophe. Rather, it is a theatre for readers. It might be said that both interpreter and audience are, in a sense, reading. Together they are creative participants.

There are other labels for Readers Theatre, including Interpreters Theatre, Group Reading, Listeners Theatre, Chamber Theatre (this term is used solely for producing narrative material), Multiple Reading, Concert Theatre, Story Theatre, Platform Reading, and Staged Reading. The most widely used terms are Readers Theatre and Interpreters Theatre. In this text the term Readers Theatre will be used.

The study of Readers Theatre should be fascinating. As you progress, knowledge of literature will increase. You will activate your voice and body to be responsive to words, and you will learn much about yourself in the world as you explore with fellow classmates the responsibilities and techniques of creating theatre. For the performer to be able to share literature successfully, talent and technique are required. The purpose of this course is to develop both areas, allowing the performer to become an effective participant in Readers Theatre.

Project and its Purpose

The first assignment is to help you get a feeling for Readers Theatre by working with other class members on a short selection that has been divided into various parts. Plan to discuss the material, rehearse it, and then present it to the class.

How to Prepare

1. The instructor will divide the class into casts and assign roles from one of the scripts at the end of this chapter. Voices in each cast should have a variety of sound while being appropriate to the material.
2. Read the selection silently to get an overall feeling and idea about the author's intent.
3. As a cast, discuss the material and (with the instructor's assistance) decide the material's dominant mood and basic idea. Identify phrases or words which are significant and need to be emphasized with the voice.



4. Individually, fill out the activity sheet for this chapter on page 215.
5. As a cast, repeatedly rehearse aloud the selection. Try to suggest with voice the experiences that are being read. For example, if a line says, "He was afraid," rehearse various vocal ways to suggest fear. Have fun experimenting! Remember, there is no one way to read lines. The aim is to make a part come alive for the listener while being true to the author's intent. Be sure that words are clearly pronounced and are loud enough for the listener to hear easily. Some of the selections call for the whole cast to say parts together. In rehearsing these sections, listen to the other cast members as you say the line, so the phrase can be read in unison with the proper feeling. As a group, decide where each will stand or sit. For this assignment, movement or gestures aren't necessary. Concentrate instead on the voice.
6. Choose a cast member to announce the title and author of the selection the group is performing.
7. Tear out the activity sheet for this chapter and hand it to the instructor before performing.

How to Present

When the teacher calls on your cast, go to the playing area and group yourselves as you rehearsed. The announcer should give the title and author of the piece. Present the selection to the class, looking up from the script as much as possible when giving lines. Be sure to read slowly enough to be understood easily. Many beginners have a tendency to rush through their selections, which leaves the audience feeling breathless and confused. Try to relax and enjoy sharing the material with the class.

SAMPLE SCRIPTS

"The Salutation of the Dawn"

from the *Sanskrit*

For five voices:

[Written some 1200 years B.C., this ancient poem urges us to appreciate and to enjoy today. Adapted for Readers Theatre by Fran Tanner.]

- 1: Listen to the exhortation of the Dawn!
- All: Look to this day!
- 2: For it is life, the very life of life.
- 3: In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence:
- 4: The bliss of growth,
- 5: The glory of action,
- 4: The splendor of beauty,
- 2: For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision:
- 3: But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness,
- 2: And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
- 5: Look well, therefore, to this day.
- 1: Such is the Salutation of the Dawn!



“The House That Jack Built”

For eleven voices:

[This nursery rhyme allows for a lighthearted and rhythmical tone, several characterizations, and varying moods. Adapted for Readers Theatre by Fran Tanner.]

- 1: This is the house that Jack built.
- 2: This is the malt, that lay in the house that Jack built.
- 3: This is the rat,
2: That ate the malt,
1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 4: This is the cat,
3: That killed the rat,
2: That ate the malt,
1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 5: This is the dog,
4: That worried the cat,
3: That killed the rat,
2: That ate the malt,
1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 6: This is the cow with the crumpled horn,
5: That tossed the dog,
4: That worried the cat,
3: That killed the rat,
2: That ate the malt,
1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 7: This is the maiden all forlorn,
6: That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
5: That tossed the dog,
4: That worried the cat,
3: That killed the rat,
2: That ate the malt,
1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 8: This is the man all tattered and torn,
7: That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
6: That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
5: That tossed the dog,
4: That worried the cat,
3: That killed the rat,
2: That ate the malt,
1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 9: This is the priest all shaven and shorn,
8: That married the man all tattered and torn,
7: That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
6: That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
5: That tossed the dog,
4: That worried the cat,
3: That killed the rat,
2: That ate the malt,



- 1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 10: This is the cock that crowed in the morn,
 9: That waked the priest all shaven and shorn,
 8: That married the man all tattered and torn,
 7: That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
 6: That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
 5: That tossed the dog,
 4: That worried the cat,
 3: That killed the rat,
 2: That ate the malt,
 1: That lay in the house that Jack built.
- 11: This is the farmer who sowed the corn,
 10: That fed the cock that crowed in the morn,
 9: That waked the priest all shaven and shorn,
 8: That married the man all tattered and torn,
 7: That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
 6: That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
 5: That tossed the dog,
 4: That worried the cat,
 3: That killed the rat,
 2: That ate the malt,
 1: That lay in the house that Jack built.

“The Bruneau Desert”

by William Studebaker

For three voices:

[The strong, rugged, quiet beauty of a Western desert is suggested with word painting in this selection. Adapted for Readers Theatre by Fran Tanner.]

- All:** This is where God spent a day,
 1: rough-framing the canyons,
 2: troweling the flats.
 3: Said he'd be back.
 2: Hasn't been,
 3: except at night.
 1: I hear him then, settling down in the King's Chair:
 2: the canyons fill with sound only the wind can make;
 3: owls limp their way through the darkness;
 2: the smallest rock holds its breath;
 1: sand dunes freeze.
- All:** There is something God loves here:
 3: things still inside the earth,
 1: cliffs full of figures,
 2: a place where even He can brood.
- 1: On nights like this,
All: we all wait.
 1: His hand could come,
All: anytime.

“hist whist”

by e. e. cummings

For three voices:

[The double-edged spooky excitement of the supernatural, with evil witches and their bag of tricks, allows for vocal creativity. Voiced for Readers Theatre by Fran Tanner.]

[1] hist [2] whist

[3] little ghostthings

[1] tip-toe

[2] twinkle-toe

[1] little twitchy

witches [2] and tingling
goblins

[3] hob-a-nob [2] hob-a-nob

[1] little hoppy happy

[3] toad in tweeds

[1] tweeds

[2] little itchy mousies

[1] with scuttling

eyes [2] rustle and run and

[3] hide [2] hide [1] hide

[3] whisk

[1] whisk [3] look out for the old woman

with the wart on her nose

what she'll do to yer

nobody knows

[2] for she knows the devil [1] ooch

[3] the devil [2] ouch

[3] the devil

[1] ach [2] the great

green

dancing

devil

[1] devil

[2] devil

[3] devil

All: wheeEEE

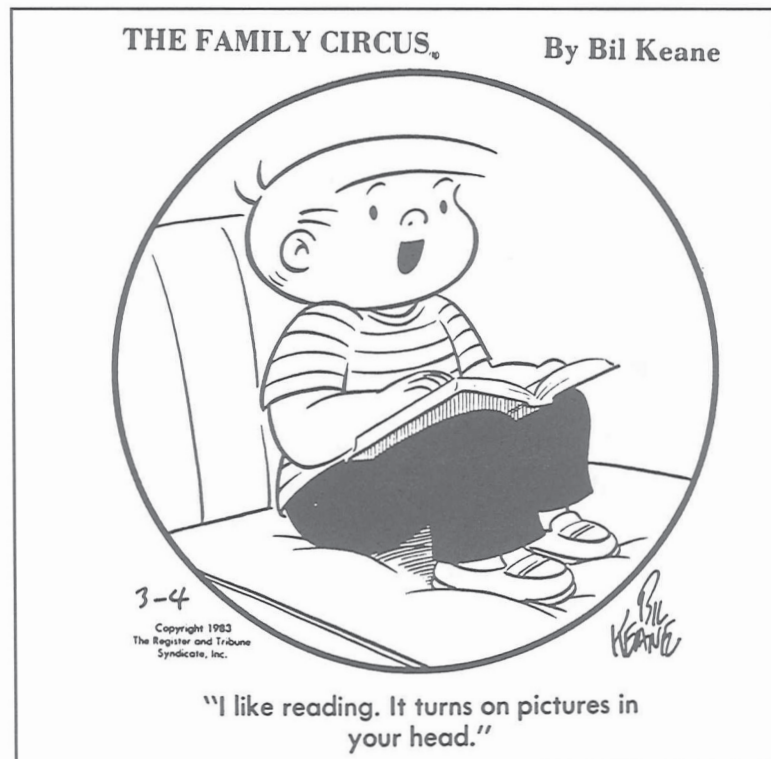


“Whistle, Whistle, Old Wife”

For three voices:

[This is a traditional ballad based on the folk idea that it is bad luck for a woman to whistle. But sometimes a woman will defy superstition, and therein lies the humor! Adapted for Readers Theatre by Fran Tanner.]

- MALE:** Whistle, whistle, old wife and you will get a hen.
FEMALE: “I wouldn’t whistle,”
NARRATOR: said the wife,
FEMALE: “if you could give me ten.”
- MALE:** Whistle, whistle, old wife and you will get a coo.
FEMALE: “I wouldn’t whistle,”
NARRATOR: said the wife,
FEMALE: “if you could give me two.”
- MALE:** Whistle, whistle, old wife and you will get a gown.
FEMALE: “I wouldn’t whistle,”
NARRATOR: said the wife,
FEMALE: “for the best one in town.”
- MALE:** Whistle, whistle, old wife and you will get a man.
FEMALE: “Wheuple, Whoople,”
NARRATOR: said the wife,
FEMALE: “I’ll whistle if I can!”





Expressive facial and physical response enlivens a story. (Photo courtesy of the Institute for Readers Theatre.)



A large cast works together as a chorus with offstage focus in a compilation called *Halloween Haunts*. Notice variety of head levels so that each can be seen.