

# Reader's Theater Exercise 25:

## Help Struggling Readers in Middle School and Beyond



Today, our secondary schools are faced with a surprising number of students who cannot read at a basic level. With most high school classes presuming a certain reading ability level of the students, those who are below grade level may easily fall further and further behind.

It is impractical for subject area teachers who see their students for only one hour or less per day to be solely responsible for teaching reading fluency. However, if teachers can relate fluency-building activities to their normal curriculum, it can be very helpful.

For example, one of the goals of a secondary-level English class is to develop critical thinking and writing skills. Playbook® stories certainly provide opportunities for interpretation and analysis. Playbook® stories also come with specific educational content areas such as history or science, allowing you to teach your subject in a way that is sure to captivate students' attention. For example, our Journeys of Discovery series for Grades 5-8 teaches the stories of the Aztecs' journey to their homeland and the Pilgrims' voyage across the sea. View more Playbook® content areas.

So, this exercise provides an excerpt from a Middle School to High School level Playbook®, Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors. It is accompanied by a writing assignment asking your students to relate the themes found in the play to possible modern-day events. This way, your students can practice reading skills and critical thinking skills at the same time.

### Teacher Instructions:

First, examine the script and student assignment on the attached pages of this document. Then have your students read the script in small groups, using the Recommended Reader Assignment guide to assign roles. Keep in mind student social dynamics so that quieter students have the benefit of more outgoing students to bring out expression in their groups. The groups should have four readers each to match the number of parts in the script.

After the students have completed the script several times, pass out the assignment sheet and have the students complete their stories and explanations during class time or as homework.



# The Comedy of Errors

A play by William Shakespeare

**Directions:** You will read this short script, a portion of a Reader's Theater version of the Shakespeare play. You will then complete a writing assignment asking you to use your critical thinking skills to interpret the passage you read. Below is a synopsis of the story to help you understand the context of the scene.

**Synopsis:** *This merry mix-up employs the classic ruse of mistaken identity. Not one, but two sets of identical twins, separated shortly after birth, and totally unaware of one another, romp through the ancient city of Ephesus causing mass confusion and hilarity. To these four basic characters, add a doddering father, an irate wife, and an incompetent witch-doctor, among others, and you have a Shakespearean comedy of epic proportions.*

**NARRATOR:**

Antipholus of Ephesus has just finished dining, and now, accompanied by his servant, Dromio of Ephesus, he is on his way to Balthazar the merchant's house.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS:** While I go to the gold merchant's house,  
You are to buy a rope, and I'll bestow it  
Among my wife and her confederates  
For locking me out of my own home today.  
But wait a minute, here comes Balthazar now....  
You go and buy the rope, and bring it home to me.

**DROMIO OF EPHEBUS:**

If that's what you *really* want, I'll buy a rope!

**NARRATOR:**

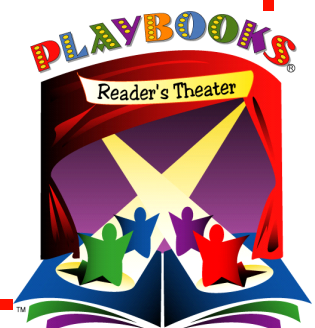
The servant trots off to do his master's bidding, and Antipholus has a conversation with Balthazar. And now follows the great gold chain mix-up: the gold merchant wants his money for the chain, Antipholus says he won't pay because he never received the chain, and Balthazar says he gave the chain to Antipholus only half an hour ago. Actually he did give the chain to Antipholus—but it wasn't *this* Antipholus, it was Antipholus of Syracuse.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS:**

I see that I can put no trust in you.  
I was promised that you would come with the chain,  
But neither came to me.

**BALTHAZAR:**

Excuse me, good sir, I was delayed, but here's your bill.  
I've written down how much your chain weighs,  
The fineness of the gold, the tasteful design,  
For which I charged three ducats more.  
And, I pray you, good sir, to pay me promptly  
For I myself am indebted to another merchant  
Who's bound to sail on the tide, and waits only for payment.



**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:**

I'm not presently carrying that much money,  
But go to my house with the chain, and bid my wife  
To pay you the amount on your bill.  
And I'll be there with you soon.

**BALTHAZAR:**

Then *you* will bring the chain to her yourself?

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** No, take it with *you*, because I might be a little late.

**BALTHAZAR:**

Well, good sir, that would suit me.  
Do you have the chain on you?

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** (*mimicking him*) Well, *good sir*, if *I* don't, then I hope *you* do.  
Or else you'll return without your money.

**BALTHAZAR:**

Come, come, sir, give me the chain.  
The gentleman I spoke of is waiting to set sail,  
And I have kept him here too long.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** Good Lord! You are using this delaying tactic  
To excuse your broken promise to come to dinner with my lady friend.  
I should have berated you for not bringing it,  
But no—*you* began to argue.  
If you'll just give my wife the chain, she'll fetch your money.

**BALTHAZAR:**

Come, now, you know I *gave* you the chain already.  
Either send the chain back to me, or send me my money.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** (*getting angry*) For shame! Now I'm really out of  
humor.  
Where is the chain? I pray you, let me see it!

**BALTHAZAR:**

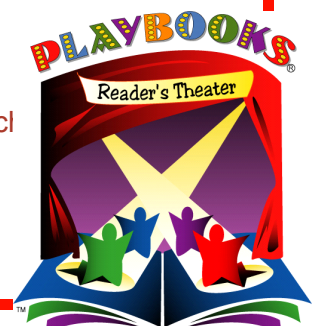
That's it! My friend's ship can wait no longer.  
Either answer to me, or I'll summon an officer to arrest you!

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** (*furious*) I answer to *you*! What should I answer to  
you?

**BALTHAZAR:**

*Only* the money you owe me for the chain!

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** I owe you *no* money until I receive the cl



**BALTHAZAR:**

You know I gave it to you not a half hour ago.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** You gave me nothing. You do me wrong to say so.

**BALTHAZAR:**

You wrong me more, sir, to deny it.  
Consider how this affects my credit.  
This matter touches my good reputation  
Either consent to pay this sum to me,  
Or I will have you arrested!

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** (*outraged*) Consent to pay you for something I never had!

Arrest me, you foolish fellow, if you dare!

**BALTHAZAR:**

I would not spare even my brother in such a case,  
If he should scorn me so openly. Officer!

**NARRATOR:**

An officer appears very conveniently and places Antipholus of Ephesus under arrest. But just at that moment, Dromio of Syracuse runs in and addresses Antipholus of Ephesus, thinking he is his master, Antipholus of Syracuse.

**DROMIO OF SYRACUSE:**

Master, there is a ship from Epidamnum  
All ready to sail. She awaits her owner to board,  
And then she bears away. I've taken all our baggage  
And carried it aboard. I've bought the goods as you directed.  
The ship is in good trim. The merry wind blows fair.  
It waits for no one, Master, but the owner and you.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** What are you! A madman! What are you talking about? What ship from Epidamnum waits for me?

**DROMIO OF SYRACUSE:**

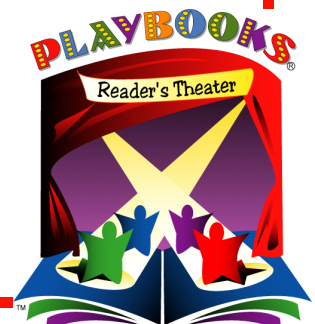
The ship you sent me to book passage on.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS:** You drunken slave! I sent you for a rope!  
I told you what it was for.

**DROMIO OF SYRACUSE:**

You didn't send me for a rope at all!  
You sent me to the pier. To seek a ship.

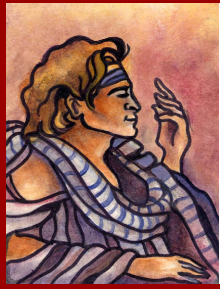
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# Recommended Reader Assignment

FOR TEACHER'S USE ONLY - NOT FOR STUDENT USE

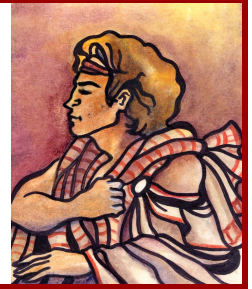


## *A Comedy of Errors*

Originally by William Shakespeare

Adapted to....

Playbook® Format



Reader No.	Story Character	Group 1 Reader	Group 2 Reader	Group 3 Reader	Group 4 Reader	Group 5 Reader
1	Antipholus of Ephesus					
2	Dromio of Syracuse Dromio of Ephesus					
3	Balthazar					
4	Narrator					