

**PLAYBOOKS®**

# Teacher's Guide

## Multi-Leveled Reader's Theater



**Being a Star Makes Reading Fun!™**

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# Multi-Levelled Reader's Theater Playbooks® in the Classroom Teacher's Guide



## Introduction

Research has shown that **Repeated Guided Oral Reading** is one of the few proven methods for building reading fluency especially when it includes reading role models. **Reader's Theater** (RT) is the most popular form of Repeated Guided Oral Reading. Students simply read aloud like a play, but without all the preparation of putting on a theatrical show. Reader's Theater provides easy-to-implement dramatic scripts that don't require memorization, props or a stage making it a practical daily or weekly activity. It also engages students like no other reading activity can. Students absolutely love it and don't even realize they're improving their reading abilities while they're having fun!

Only the patented Playbook® format provides an enhanced form of RT with dialogue for each story character presented in a different color and, more importantly at different reading levels. The colorized text gives students a sense of security and ownership of their role, but does not represent a certain reading level, so students are not aware that certain roles are easier or harder than others. The multi-levelled Playbook® format allows teachers to privately assign easier roles to younger or struggling readers yet group these students with older or higher level readers to bring a story to life together. Because children have a higher listening comprehension than their reading comprehension, their reading skills grow when listening to richer vocabulary being read fluently. Every student reading at his or her own ability level creates confidence, enthusiasm, rapid reading growth and improved comprehension, even for fluent readers. Instead of just reading fast and accurately, these readers learn to project inflexion and meaning from watching struggling readers who seem to have a better aptitude for creative and dramatic expression.

Role-play reading in a supportive environment helps to build confidence and self-esteem in children, strengthens oral communications skills in students of all reading levels, and helps to build or strengthen social/emotional bonds between members of a group. When children can read with success in front of their peers, their confidence and enthusiasm soar, and their reading and communication skills grow at a more rapid pace.

**Drama, like poetry, sometimes gets neglected in the literature curriculum, yet it offers an abundance of opportunities for improved learning.** Plays inherently come with built-in strategies to help students read better. Dramatic text offers opportunities for creativity and expression, and the acting out of story dialogue, even in a simple reading form, compels readers to work more closely with the text to interpret and project meaning into the shared reading experience. *For these same reasons, Playbooks® also present enhanced opportunities for learning English as a second language (ESL/ELD).*

Although designed to be read aloud like a play, reading a Playbook® is as simple as reading any other story, but a lot more fun, powerful, and effective. Students find security in having one color assigned to them and seem to take "ownership" in that color and its associated character. As a result, the stress of reading aloud in front of peers is greatly reduced, and students are quick to become deeply involved in the reading activity. Rather than simply decoding words and reciting sentences, readers become enthralled in the story, action, and events that make up the play. As a result, students come away from reading a Playbook® story with improved comprehension and retention.

## Playbooks® are Designed for Small Reading Groups

Playbook® stories are best read and enjoyed by small reading groups (rather than sharing parts with *all* students in the class). A small reading group creates a safe "reading activity" atmosphere, versus a frightening performance in front of the entire class.

## Playbooks® are Designed for “Integrated” Reading Groups

Playbook® **Multi-Leveled Reader’s Theater** stories are designed to be read by **low/medium/high level readers** all in the **same group** with each reading at his or her own level with accuracy and confidence. There is typically great disparity in the reading abilities of students within the same grade/classroom (students reading at, above, or below grade level). In after school programs and other special groups, students are typically from different grades representing a span of ages. Combining students of varying ages and reading abilities to read aloud in the same group creates a dynamic and powerful reading activity. There are obvious benefits for low level readers exposed and listening to higher level readers reading higher level text (a child’s listening comprehension is typically two grades higher than his reading comprehension). Listening to richer vocabulary, proper inflexion, and cadence helps a child improve his or her own reading abilities.

There are also great benefits for medium and high level readers exposed to lower level readers in a role-play reading format as low-level readers tend to have a better aptitude for creative and dramatic expression. Where advanced readers may do well with oral pronunciation, speed and accuracy, they may have little proficiency with expression and *dramatic* inflexion. Therefore, all students benefit from reading and listening to a Playbook® in a small integrated reading group.

## Meeting State Educational Standards-Language Arts

As an educational tool, the use of Playbooks® meets numerous state educational standards. Visit [www.playbooks.com/schools/standards.htm](http://www.playbooks.com/schools/standards.htm) for Playbook® applicability to standards for your state.

### Teacher Preparation

#### Determine Type of Reading Activity/Performance & Grouping

There is a difference between reading aloud “**in front of**” other students and reading aloud “**with**” other students.

If you plan to have your students read “**with**” each other in small groups, you can just dig right in and get started with little or no preparation other than mindfully assigning character roles. Because Playbooks® are multi-leveled, students can be assigned roles they can read with accuracy and confidence. Therefore, students do not typically need to practice their lines before reading aloud in non-threatening small groups. All of the character roles in Playbooks® are specially created to address a wide range of reading abilities. They are designed to be a fun and compelling way to read a story for the first time in a safe small group environment. The elements of surprise and exploration help to foster a love of reading and build a sense of community in the classroom. Treating all students equally will help empower struggling readers; the more they are challenged by impromptu reading, the more they will improve their fluency. All readers, from low level to high level, need to accept responsibility for reading aloud in order to meet listening and speaking standards. When students read their parts silently, for practice purposes ahead of time, they may lose the discovery element of reading aloud in a group. Children enjoy improving their portrayals and performances each time and love to read a Playbook® story over and over.

If you plan to have students read the story “**in front**” of other students (who are not part of the reading group and have not been given a role), or in front a larger group for “performance” purposes, be sure to allow students ample time to practice their roles in the small non-threatening groups first or on their own (or both).

It is best for each student to have his or her own copy of the Playbook®. Most sets come with one copy for each character in the story, so they are designed for one small reading group at a time. If you have multiple titles, you can assign a different story to each small group. If not, you can rotate small groups through the same story. While one small group of students reads the story together, other groups can be doing cross-curricular supplemental activity sheets that come with the story sets, or some other reading curriculum activity.



Playbooks® can also be used as a **choral reading** tool by reading aloud together as a class. If there are several **ESL/ELD students** in the class or **shy or non confident readers**, it can be very helpful to read the story first as a “choral reading” before the students have to read their parts “solo” in their small groups. This still allows readers to discover the story without reading silently ahead of time, but also gives them a little practice before reading aloud in front of their small group peers. There are two types of choral reading. You may choose to read the entire story with all students reading at the same time and then gradually release the responsibility to them as they master the vocabulary. However, students can get lost in the noise and activity when all students read all parts together. Structured character groups provide a more supportive type of choral reading.

For example, in reading the story, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, you would group all the readers assigned to the role of Jack into one corner, all the readers assigned to the Giant in another corner, etc. The story is then read aloud in its entirety, each structured character group reading it’s part in turn. You or a parent volunteer can direct each group with respect to expression, inflection, etc. This helps students to become familiar with how to read their lines (without going solo first) and as a result, they might be more confident and expressive when reading their part in the small group than if they had only practiced reading silently. Although one book can be shared amongst as many as three readers, more book copies are typically needed for this choral group reading. Playbooks® are available in “Classroom Sets” providing up to 30 copies of a given story.

### Assigning Story Characters to Readers

With multi-leveled Reader’s Theater stories, you should **assign** the character roles rather than allowing students to choose. Character roles should be *privately* assigned based on matching the reading level of the reader as closely as possible with the level of a given character so that each reader has the opportunity to read his or her part with accuracy and confidence. *See the next section for information on Playbook® Reading Levels and the optimum method for matching them to students.*

For an easier method of assigning roles, simply identify your highest level students and your lowest level students. Then, the students that fall in between become your medium level students. Assign the highest roles and the lowest roles carefully using the **Recommended Reader Assignment (RRA)** chart provided with the Playbook story and record the readers for each character on this chart. Then assign the remaining readers to the middle roles (which are typically the largest section of roles). The length and sentence structure of passages and difficulty of vocabulary determine the leveled character roles. Using the **RRA** chart will allow you to group students of different ability levels together, accommodating up to five separate group assignments. The **RRA** may also serve as a record of student participation and improvement. If you have to select a higher or lower level for a student than his or her reading level, it may be better to select the lower until students become familiar with the format (remember, we want students to read with confidence in front of their peers).

**The color of text used for any particular character has no relation to a reading level.** So that children *don’t* associate a certain color of text as being written for lower or higher ability readers, colors are assigned to characters randomly for each story. *Most students don’t realize that certain parts are written at easier or harder levels.* This is because great care is taken during the editing of Playbooks® to interweave and balance each *main* character role as much as possible so that a low level reader feels he is reading as much as a higher level reader. Although a given character role written at a higher level may comprise 20% of the story, and only 5% of the story when written at an easier level, the character still speaks consistently throughout the story. In actuality, the low level reader is not reading *as much* text, but *is* reading *as often* as a high level reader, which again, is why most students don’t realize they’re reading less text. This does not apply to roles labeled “Small Parts” as these incidental characters may speak only once or twice in only a small portion of the story. Typically it’s best to assign “Small Parts” to the reader who has been assigned the Narrator allowing this reader to have at least a small dramatic story character role.

If your Playbook® story is in **single-level format** (as for upper grades), then assign roles based on reader gender and role size (assign stronger readers to larger roles and the narrator role, or you can allow students to choose roles). Remember, students also enjoy playing opposite gender roles, so don’t worry if you don’t have enough readers or parts for each gender. Children also enjoy taking more than one role and the challenge of portraying two different characters when needed.

The Playbook® Recommended Reader Assignment chart provides combination recommendations when necessary in order to balance each reader in stories that may have semi-main characters whose roles are only in portions of the story (e.g., a recommendation would be provided to have one reader take both a character role that only appears in the first half of the story and a character that only appears in the second half of the story).

### Playbook® Reading Levels - Determine for Each Student

There are six Playbook® Reading levels (shown below). Choose the one that best suits each student and record this information on your class list. You can determine the optimum level by having each student take the **Online Playbook® Readability Test**. If you can, set aside some time to test all students at [www.playbooks.com/schools/readtest.htm](http://www.playbooks.com/schools/readtest.htm).



|   |                                      |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| ★ | <b>Stage 1 - Early Reader</b>        | <b>Kindergarten/1st Grade</b><br><i>Typically Ages 4-6</i> |
| ★ | <b>Stage 2 - Beginning Reader</b>    | <b>Grades 1-2</b><br><i>Typically Ages 5-8</i>             |
| ★ | <b>Stage 3 - Transitional Reader</b> | <b>Grades 2-3</b><br><i>Typically Ages 6-9</i>             |
| ★ | <b>Stage 4 - Intermediate Reader</b> | <b>Grades 3-4</b><br><i>Typically Ages 8-10</i>            |
| ★ | <b>Stage 5 - Advanced Reader</b>     | <b>Grades 5-6</b><br><i>Typically Ages 10-13</i>           |
| ★ | <b>Stage 6 - Expert Reader</b>       | <b>Teen/Adult Reader</b>                                   |

## Preparing the Students

### Character Summaries

A Character Summary is provided in the front of each Playbook® story and provides a brief description of each character’s personality written in first person form. Before beginning any Playbook® story, have students first ***read silently their character’s summary*** so that they can begin to understand the persona of their assigned character. Suggest that students bring their characters to life with creativity, expression, and enthusiasm, and try to speak their parts with the personality of their character throughout the entire story. Suggest that readers try different voices or accents to develop stronger characters and not to be afraid to use body language and gestures to enhance their character’s persona. Using an expressive voice, give suggestions like, “Mr. Bear talks in a deep voice, like this, and Millie Fieldmouse would probably talk in a high squeaky voice, like this!” Help students have fun developing their characters! Also suggest that they pay attention to and employ cue text as much as possible to enhance their character portrayal. Finally, ***before*** beginning the actual story, have each student ***read their character summary ALOUD***.

A **legend** appears at the top of each page of the story that shows each character’s name in its presented color. This legend helps all readers stay consistently in tune with which character is which and can enhance comprehension and the involvement of everyone in the story.

### Cue Text

Reading with expression enhances the listening enjoyment for others. **Cue Text** is provided for certain passages throughout the story to encourage the use of vocal variations, volume and tempo changes, facial expressions and different posture positions. Cue Text is always in (parentheses) and *italics*, and is not actually read-aloud. It is helpful for students to *hear* an example of the style and volume of applied cue text in the expression of a line of dialogue. For example, the teacher may read the line: (*surprised*) **"Good Gracious! It's hard to believe that's a wild creature!"** using a “surprised” expression in her voice and putting her hand on the side of her face.

## Coaching

**Expressive reading is not limited to vocal variety. Properly used, actions are also important to conveying meaning.** Actions include facial expressions, posture, hand or arm movements, gestures, and physical movements, large and small. **Facial expressions can convey distinct feelings such as surprise, fear, happiness, confusion, disgust, interest, disbelief, anger, and sadness.** Posture reflects an attitude and suggests character. Hand or arm movements may include waving, pointing or drawing with the finger. An open palm often is seen as giving or receiving. Gestures are a specific type of body movement made with the head, shoulders, legs, feet, hands or arms. A shrug of the shoulders may indicate ignorance, irony or perplexity. Physical movements are when the reader changes position or location. They may also include running, hopping, skipping, stomping, or other movements. **All these types of actions help the reader get into character and emphasize the content of the story. Coach students by example in expressive reading.**

**Direct students in the following performance techniques by asking them to:**

- Hold the book so their faces can be seen and their voices heard.
- Speak character dialogue slowly, clearly, and loudly enough for the entire group to hear and understand.
- Use voice, face, and body to express the character personality and the action of the story. “Cue Text” provides prompts to help bring the characters to life.
- Be good listeners while others are reading their parts. Keep up while others are reading aloud so you are ready when it’s time to read your parts. Be polite and try to stay quiet and not create distractions while you’re waiting for your turn.
- Stand or sit still; fidgeting distracts from the performance.
- Try to involve the audience (if there is one), by looking up from the book and making eye contact.
- Keep going if they make a mistake.
- Relax, breathe and have fun!

## Appropriate Behavior

Kids have fun reading Playbooks®! So much fun, in fact, that sometimes they can lose focus during the reading. It’s important for teachers to help kids maintain self-control so that they don’t miss out on the benefits of reader’s theater. Try using one of these strategies to re-direct the attention of your students if they stray too far from the text: use Director language such as, “*cut,*” or “*quiet on the set*” or use a bell or whistle. Make sure the children know what the signals mean and how they are supposed to respond before you start reading.

Sometimes it can be helpful to ask students to tell adults what needs to be done in order to accomplish a goal. When children feel responsible for the guidelines they are more likely to follow their own rules. Before you read, ask your students to describe the things they should do in order to complete the story and things they should not do.

## Positive Reinforcement

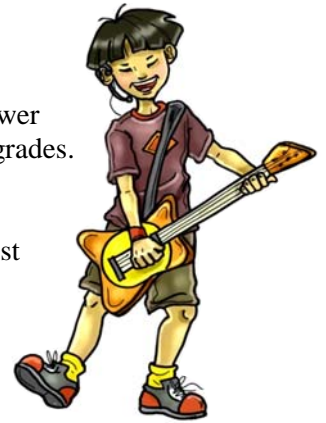
It’s important that students succeed while they are having fun. Focus on what each student does well, instead of where they stumble. By reinforcing the positive, children are more likely to continue to improve; they will also become motivated to read more often. Try using statements that begin with the phrases, “I like the way you...” or “I see how you...” or “I notice...” Children want the attention of adults, so let them know you are watching and noticing their efforts even when they are reading in independent groups.

## Recognizing Star Performers!

Rewarding students for expression, articulation, good manners, and being ready to read when it’s their turn improves their reading ability and makes reading a Playbook® even more enjoyable. It is recommended that the teacher (or any other adult moderating a reading session) recognize and choose a **Star Performer** at the end of the reading. A small prize (stickers, pencils, etc.) or an Award Certificate might be given. Teachers may download a full color Playbook® Performance Award Certificate at the following website location: [www.playbooks.com/schools/award/certificate.htm](http://www.playbooks.com/schools/award/certificate.htm).



Recognizing and rewarding star performers are great practices that many times results in confidence-boosting recognition for lower-level readers (as they tend to be the better performers). Having students choose the Star Performer is usually only recommended for lower grade level classrooms as it unfairly tends to be a popularity contest with upper elementary grades.



### Assessment

Following the reading session, ask the students questions about the story plot, moral etc. Most Playbook® stories include extensive supplemental activity worksheets that meet cross-curricular state standards. These activities are also an effective means of assessment. The following provides additional activities that typically fill state educational standards for language arts:

- Students retell the story in a piece of writing, dramatic presentation, or “plot” flow chart.
- Students create a book poster which answers who, what, when, where, and how of the story.
- Students create a book poster for each discussed story element: plot, setting, characters, as well as beginning, middle, and end in the story.
- Students create a “problem/solution” chart for the story.
- Students generate alternative endings to the story.

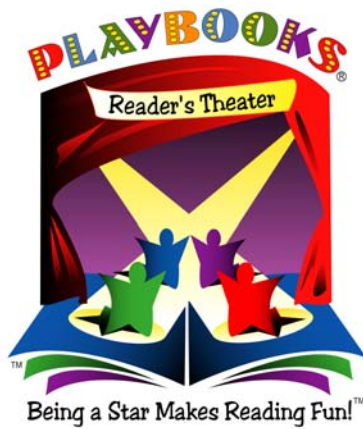
### Step-by-Step Implementation

1. Plan the reading activity type, grouping, and assignment of roles (teacher preparation).
2. Prepare the students. Designate their roles, and review etiquette and performance tips. Make it fun!
3. Direct students to read their assigned character role’s “Character Summary” *silently*.
4. Choral read the story (if you have purchased a classroom set or have enough books for all readers). The story is read in its entirety by groups of students reading their parts in unison with other students assigned the same role.
5. Discuss the choral reading with the class emphasizing good performance for each character. (e.g. “How could we make Jack seem really scared when the giant chases him?”)
6. Break into the small integrated groups you assigned for the reading. These small groups read the entire story at their own pace giving each student the opportunity to read their role alone with a small group of their peers and the chance to be a star. Depending on the number of books or stories available, other groups may do follow-up activities, practice or plan for an upcoming performance while another group or groups reads the story. If time allows, it is helpful to sit with each group during their reading. This gives you an opportunity for individual assessment and positive reinforcement.
7. Assess and present award certificates to readers. This could be like an academy award ceremony or maybe just a simple presentation for doing a particularly good job in one area. Present as many or as few as you like.
8. Discuss the reading and brainstorm ideas for a “performance” if you like. If you have several groups reading different stories, everyone can vote on a favorite.
9. Perform the students’ favorite story for the entire class, other classes, or parents. (*optional*)



The Playbook® story awaits the imagination of you and your students with endless possibilities! The creativity you use when reading a Playbook® is up to your cast of characters! Your readers may even choose to dress up like his or her character using special clothes, make-up, and props, or things as simple as a hat or sunglasses that they can bring in from home. Without memorizing any scripts, Playbooks® are ideal for use in traditional Theater form.

**Always remember, being a star makes reading fun!**



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