

Expressive Oral Reading Activity Packet and Guide: Progression of Involvement for Oral Reading Introduction

This packet provides guidelines and fun exercises in a specific order for introducing expressive oral reading to students as a simple performing arts activity, or as preparation for a reader's theater program. This page outlines the recommended progression of involvement for building student confidence, thereby enhancing their engagement, participation, and success. As you read the instructions for each exercise, refer to the corresponding handouts.

Volunteer Exercise

Ask for courageous **volunteers** to set examples for the group with the following easy exercises. Do not assign certain students; just ask for volunteers. Offer a small incentive if you can in the form of a simple prize or token. All individual volunteers should come up and stand in front of the class for these exercises.

First Exercise (Sheet 1A) - Using Costumes and Props for Character Identity: Ask for one volunteer to read the following sentence in front of the class without any props or costumes, as shown on the handout: "Courage is like a muscle; we strengthen it with use." Then, have the same student read the same sentence several more times while wearing or holding a different costume piece or prop each time (microphone, dog ears, cowboy hat, princess crown, etc.). Hopefully, the volunteer will naturally show (without coaching) that when you put on a costume and take on another identity, it's easy to get into character, and change your voice, and use a different emotion, attitude, or body language.

Second Exercise (Sheet 2A) - Vocal Expression: Vocal expression has a 38% impact on human communication, while the actual words we use only have a 7% impact. This activity is designed to show how others interpret what you say based on how you say it. Ask for six volunteers to read the sentence "I didn't say she liked him," out loud in front of the class. Each volunteer will read the sentence emphasizing a different word (bolded and underlined on the handout), demonstrating how bringing your voice up or down on certain words can project completely different meanings for the sentence. *Volunteers take turns reading the sentence (they do not all read at the same time).* Explain to students after the exercise that this proves that it's not what you say, but how you say it that counts!

Third Exercise (Sheet 3A) - Body Language: Body language has a 55% impact on human communication, and this activity is designed to show how strongly body language impacts how others interpret or believe what you say. Before asking for volunteers, fold the activity sheet on the dotted line so that the right hand column is hidden. Next, ask for four volunteers. Set the example by reading the first sentence (in the first column) in a way that will convince your audience that you really aren't mad, like the sentence says. Then ask each volunteer to read the next sentence out loud to convince their classmates that what they are saying is true. After all the sentences have been read, unfold the paper and ask the volunteers to each read his or her sentence a second time, but this time to use the designated emotion revealed next to their sentence. Encourage the volunteers to focus on body language and how it can convey a different meaning than the words. After each one reads, ask the audience, "Which do you believe, the words or the body?" After the exercise is complete, explain to students that this proves actions speak louder than words!

Choral Group Exercise (Safety in Numbers)

Everyone participates in a choral expression exercise in a small group from their tables, standing up and reading all together as a chorus.

Choral Reading Exercise (Sheets 4A-4G): After watching volunteers in the first exercise, all students now get a chance to be expressive without going solo, but instead by reading simultaneously with their peers. This exercise begins to build confidence and courage for reading expressively. Choral reading is magical! When all of the students' voices come together, it creates a sense of energy and there is safety and power in numbers. Each small group is given one sheet of paper with a sentence and a form of expression on it (seven different sheets are included for this activity). Each group will read the sentence provided aloud together while following the expression tip. First have all groups practice quietly at the same time, then have each group of students read their sentence with expression in front of all the groups, but let them stay at their table and simply face the majority of students in the room. Remember, nobody should read alone during this activity, and be sure to involve all students.

Expressive Oral Reading Activities *(continued)*

Volunteer Overacting Exercise. (Sheet 5A): With most anything, when we first “overdo” something, it makes it easier to do again more naturally. This holds true for acting. When we can “overact” (or watch someone else overact), it makes reading expressively become easier and more natural. Ask for three volunteers to overact the sentences provided using the character suggestions given (cut along the dashed line on this activity sheet to distribute the three examples to volunteers). Explain that overacting means using exaggerated expression with your voice, face, and body language. Have the other students try to guess the designated character and problem or emotion.

Group Overacting Exercise (Sheets 6A-6B): Now everyone will get a chance to overact in his or her non-threatening small group. Each small group should receive the Group Expression Exercise handout. Each table should elect a leader to facilitate. The leader will be the first to choose any sentence from the sheet and any character/emotion from the list, and will go first. The leader will stand up at his or her table and read his or her sentence with over-acting expression, using the actor tips provided on the handout or their own creativity. The person on the leader's left will go next, and so on, each standing up while they read and performing only for the students in their small group. Each person reads a different combination of sentence and character type. It's okay to mix and match, but the goal is that each student does something different. All groups do this exercise simultaneously. Similar to a restaurant where people all talk at the same time yet don't hear those at other tables around them, students will have safety in only performing for their small group of peers in a non-threatening way. Before beginning the exercise, tell students you'll be asking them to pick the best performer from their own group. Then, at the end of this exercise, have each small group vote for the best performer, and ask each best performer to stand at their table and read their overacted sentence to the larger group for everyone to enjoy.

Ready for Small Group Reader's Theater

After students experience all the above opportunities to be expressive, they are now warmed up and have established some courage and confidence for reader's theater. Each student is then assigned a role in a reader's theater story and reads it aloud with expression only in front of their peers in their small non-threatening group. Each small group brings a different story to life while sitting in a circle at their own table.

Finally, everyone gets the opportunity to perform their reader's theater story for all groups together, or for a larger audience, after repeated small group practice. Each student should have the opportunity to read their role at least 3-4 times with their small group before having to perform in front of a larger audience. Students will beg to read the stories again and again. Reward students for excellent expression and performance with the Awards Certificates provided.

Review of Progression of Involvement (Building Confidence Step by Step)

- Courageous volunteers set example for others with an easy expressive exercise they perform in front of the class.
- Small groups each do the Choral Expression Exercise in front of all groups while standing at their tables.
- Additional volunteers perform “overacting” exercises again setting an example for others to be courageous and to have fun.
- All students are assigned different overacting roles in small, non-threatening groups and each performs their exercise only for their small group while standing up at their table upon their turn.
- Each small group votes for the best performers within their group from the above exercise. These best performers each perform for the entire class, one by one, while standing at their own table.
- Each student is assigned a role in a story and reads it aloud with expression only for their small, non-threatening group while sitting in a circle at their table.
- Students get the opportunity to perform a story for a larger audience after repeated small group practice. Certain students can be selected to perform the favorite story for a much larger audience such as additional classrooms, parents, or even the community.

Exercise 1 - Using Costumes and Props for Character Identity

Please read this sentence....

**“Courage is like a muscle;
we strengthen it with use.”**

Exercise 2: Vocal Expression

It's not what you say, but how you say it that counts!

I didn't say she liked him.

I didn't say she liked him.

I didn't say she liked him.

I didn't say she liked him.

I didn't say she liked him.

I didn't say she liked him!

Exercise 3 - Body Language: Read the following sentences, matching your body language to the content of the sentence.

Now use body language that expresses this:

“I’m really not mad.”

• *Angry*

“This is a lot of fun!”

• *Bored*

“That was brilliant!”

• *Sarcastic*

“Sure, I believe you.”

• *Skeptical*

“I’m very calm.”

• *Nervous*

Fold here to cover up this list during the first time students read the sentences. Then uncover the list for the second reading.

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 1

As a group, say the sentence below:

**“Have you ever heard
anything so foolish?”**

Use the following facial and vocal expression:

... as if you are toothless

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 2

As a group, say the sentence below:

**“What do you want...a note
from my mother?”**

Use the following facial and vocal expression:

... crying and sobbing

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 3

As a group, say the sentence below:

“If you can’t fix it with duct tape,
you haven’t used enough.”

Use the following facial and vocal expression:

... while holding your nose

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 4

As a group, say the sentence below:

“I tried to daydream, but my
mind kept wandering.”

Use the following vocal, facial and body expressions:

... like a robot

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 5

As a group, say the sentence below:

“I wondered why the Frisbee was getting bigger, and then it hit me!”

As a group, agree on using one of the following expressions, focusing on the body:

Flying
Hopping
Balancing on one foot
Dancing
Jogging
Spinning

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 6

As a group, say the sentence below:

“If at first you don’t succeed,
then skydiving isn’t for you.”

As a group, agree on using one of the following expressions, focusing on the voice:

Singing

In a baby voice

Like a cackling witch

In a high-pitched voice

In a low-pitched voice

With an accent (choose accent)

Choral Reading Exercise – Group 7

As a group, say the sentence below:

**“I used to be indecisive,
but now I’m not so sure.”**

As a group, agree on using one of the following expressions,
focusing on the body, face and voice:

Giggling
Wiggling
Yawning
Shivering

Make up your own

Volunteer Overacting Exercise

"The weatherman says it's supposed to rain cats and dogs!"

Say the line above as if you were a....

Dog with fleas

(focus your expression on your body and voice)

***(Don't say your character type aloud.
Let the audience guess)***

Cut Here

"I left early today, but I still missed the bus."

Say the line above as if you were a....

Dizzy ballerina

(focus your expression on your body and voice)

***(Don't say your character type aloud.
Let the audience guess)***

Cut Here

"My teacher announced today that book reports are due on Friday!"

Say the line above as if you were a....

Sleepy Surfer Dude

(focus your expression on your body, face and voice)

***(Don't say your character type aloud.
Let the audience guess)***

Group Overacting Exercise

_____ *Reader* “Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re going to get.”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

A Cowboy with poison ivy

Actor tip: Speak with a western drawl and stand bowlegged with your hands on your hips. You might also pretend to twirl a lasso above your head. As you speak your lines also scratch your sides or legs every few words. You might end with a Giddyup or Yeehaw!

_____ *Reader* “You should never forget the secret Golden Rule, "righty-tighty, lefty-loosey.”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Paranoid Pirate

Actor tip: Speak like a pirate and say “arrgh” and/or “matey” in between words and nervously look over your shoulder.

_____ *Reader* “Don't just stand there let's get to it. Strike a pose, there's nothing to it.”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Shouting Cheerleader

Actor tip: Chant your lines loudly and pretend to shake pom poms in front of you as you say each word. Make cheer movements to the rhythm of your voice.

_____ *Reader* “So where are we going next? You know I’m always game!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Chicken with the hiccups

Actor tip: Fold your arms and flap them, making chicken noises as you say your lines. Hiccup every few words.

_____ *Reader* “You know, we’re only as sick as our secrets.”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Hungry Vampire

Actor tip: Pretend to show your fangs when you say your lines. Talk in an evil tone, but smile as much as you can. Try to roll your "r"s when you speak, using a Transylvanian accent.

_____ *Reader* “If you don’t want to get stung, you have to stay away from the bees!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Crying Opera Singer

Actor tip: Sing your lines with a high-pitched opera voice, but pretend to cry, wiping your tears and sniffing heavily.

Group Overacting Exercise

Reader “Thanks for letting me borrow this outfit; it’s fantastic!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Proud Muscle Man

Actor tip: Clench your fists and slowly raise and lower your arms as you speak. Try to show off your muscles and pose as you talk in a deep voice.

Reader “What was that noise? It startled me!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Itchy Hula Dancer

Actor tip: As you say your lines, scratch your head and body while swaying your hips and arms.

Reader “Who could have sent me this lovely Valentine?”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Escaped prisoner

Actor tip: Put your hands together as if they are in handcuffs. Frown and look worried as you say your lines. Partway through each phrase, pause to look over your shoulder, then breathe a sigh of relief and continue.

Reader “Please stop taking my pencils out of my pencil box!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Far-sighted grandma

Actor tip: Squint as you read your lines. Talk in a high-pitched, shaky voice and pretend to pinch the cheeks of the other readers.

Reader “Don’t worry, I’ll save you!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were a....

Friendly Vampire

Actor tip: Pretend to show your fangs when you say your lines. Talk in an evil tone, but smile as much as you can. Try to roll your “r”s when you speak, using a Transylvanian accent.

Reader “I haven’t eaten in weeks! I’m starving!”

Stand up at your table and read the sentence above as if you were....

Tarzan with a sore throat

Actor tip: Beat your chest and yell your lines like Tarzan, but with a hoarse voice. Put your hand to your throat to show that it is sore.