



# Reader's Theater, Jr.®

## Teacher's Implementation Guide

This **Playbooks® Reader's Theater, Jr.®** set comes with one **Easel Book** (which is the complete reader's theater story) and five **Mini Transition Books** (which break the story into smaller sections). It is designed for students who know most of their letters and letter sounds and are ready to start putting them together to read aloud and be a part of a story. Reader's Theater, Jr. is a new, exciting, and non-traditional reading method for early readers. It is designed to inspire and enable students to choral read or echo read very small parts written at emergent levels in order to gain a personal association with story characters and the act of reading. Because students at this age already enjoy imaginative play, allowing them to be involved in roleplay reading can lead them toward a love of reading and create a successful reading experience for them very early in their educational journey.

As with most Playbooks®, the dialogue text in a Reader's Theater, Jr. book is color-coded by character role, and there are easier and harder roles in the story. The **dark blue role** is designed for the **teacher or instructor to read aloud to students** and is representative of the highest level role. This role is the most challenging, but is still easy enough to fall within the listening comprehension of Pre-K to 1st Grade students. The text in **other colors** each represent a particular story character and is to be read aloud throughout the duration of Mini Transition Book and the Easel Book **by choral reading teams** of at least two students who have been assigned that role. Two of these student parts are easy, and two others are slightly more difficult or larger roles.

The Mini Transition Books each focus on a certain element of the main story in a much shorter and easier format. They are used to introduce concepts covered in the topic set, words that students will need to recognize in order to read their parts in the Easel Book, and the color coded format of the roles. The Mini Transition Books are designed to be read in a specific sequence (shown on the front cover of each with the book numbers 1-5), and serve as stepping stones to prepare students to successfully read their parts in the full Easel Book and potentially perform the story for a small audience.

Each Mini Transition Book follows a basic pattern that allows students to become familiar with dialogue in that particular section of the main story through listening and following along, reading certain key lines as a class, and taking on their own easy role for one or two lines in smaller choral reading teams. Each book has oversized text so you can hold or display it in front of your full group of students as they follow along. Each topic set includes a rhyming poem that all readers repeat several times throughout the story. Another function of the Mini Transition books is to teach these poems (like memorizing a song or chant) so students will know them and enjoy repeating them whenever they see them later in the Easel Book.

The text in a Mini Transition Book is repetitive in order to reinforce learning of words and concepts. Each book stands on its own, with a beginning and an end, although each represents content from 1/5th of the full story shown in the Easel Book. This allows students to learn the story in five smaller chunks of time and content. Using the Mini Transition books is optional, but usually ideal for emergent and non-readers. If you're working mostly with students who can already decode simple words and have mastered basic sight words, you may wish to work only with the Easel Book, reading it in sections or all at once based on time and attention span from your students.

Each story package includes a printed **Character Strip** that you can place on the easel so that all students can see the colors associated with each story character. These strips are provided separately from the mini books, but are included on each page of the Easel Book.

## How to Begin

To begin your Playbooks® Reader's Theater, Jr.® reading program, first display the Easel Book. Then, introduce the Character Strip, and tell students which role/team he or she has been assigned to read and point out the designated color of their text. (*See next section for role assignment guidelines.*) Open the Easel book, flip through the first couple of pages, and draw students' attention to the character strip at the top of the pages and the different colored text. Explain that when it's their turn, they will read the part that is in their assigned color when it appears in any of the books. Have teams shout out their colors as you point to their colored text. Then explain that **black text** means all students read together at the same time. Next, make it clear that eventually they will all get to be part of the story and will be pretending to be one of the characters as they read along with their friends on their reading team, but that you will be reading all the parts the first time around.

Next, with great expression and excitement, read the entire Easel Book to the students and track with your finger only the parts that will later be read by students. As you read and track each student part, point to the group of students that will later read this part. Get students excited to be part of the story for the next session.

At the next reading session, review the sight words (sight word cards are included in the topic set) with the students for the first Mini Transition Book. These are printed on card stock and can be cut into flash cards. You can also glue the small flash cards to felt and use them on a felt board to read aloud and to create sentences. Review and read aloud each sight word and allow students to repeat them back to you. (*You can also send flash cards home with students for parents to help students learn and memorize the words!*)

Next, read aloud the first Mini Transition story. Just as with the Easel Book, you should read the entire Mini Transition Book aloud to the class and track all student parts. You may even want to give an example of reading with expression vs. monotonous, "robot" reading. Then, on a second reading, student teams should be ready to echo read their parts with you. Because student roles are made up of simple words and sentences, you can teach non-readers their parts like you would teach them a song or help them memorize a poem. Although they may initially memorize their lines, rather than decode and read them, this builds the alphabetic principle foundation of grapheme/phoneme correspondence through association between what they see and what they are saying.

For subsequent readings, students can then be ready to choral read all the colored parts as assigned in teams and the black parts as a full group. You can then work to reinforce decoding the words using the sight word cards with non-readers and emergent readers. This may seem like a reverse process, however, the goal for "Reader's Theater" is for students to want, or even to love, being a part of a story, instead of just being read a story by an adult. This motivates young children to move toward independence in reading as they build a foundational desire to want to participate in literature.

Depending on your students' abilities, interest and attention span, as well as the time you have available, how often and how quickly you move through the Mini Transition books is completely up to you. You might go through one Mini Transition Book per day, or one per week. Use your best judgment for **your** students.

For more advanced student groups, you may want to read the Mini Transition Books only once and move to the full Easel Book for the bulk of your repeated reading practice. Otherwise, it might be better to repeat the Mini Transition Books several times each. When ready, and based on your student's progress and success, rehearse the full Easel Book using the character props (if you have them) and prepare for an audience presentation. Allow students on each reading team to take turns holding up their character prop when their team reads a part. (See next section for use of props.)

Reader's Theater, Jr.® has been designed to accommodate a large span of age ranges from Pre-K to 1st Grade and is very flexible. Of course, within each of these grades, there are weaker and stronger readers. So some parts may be too hard or too easy for certain students. Therefore, you will need to adapt your teaching plan to the needs of your students. The most important goal is to allow every student to be assigned to a reading team to read or to recite a role. Students gain from a sense of ownership of a character role in a story, even when that ownership is shared. Be sure to encourage students to take on their roles, pretend to be the character they are assigned, and to use expression in their voices!

Be sure to give students the opportunity to perform their Reader's Theater, Jr.® story for an audience of parents or other students. Parents love seeing their children doing "Reader's Theater" and will help you reinforce a love of reading with roleplay reading both at home and in the classroom by supporting their child in their role, their performance, and the roleplay reading experience.

### How to Assign Roles to Choral Reading Teams

Reader's Theater, Jr.® stories have differentiated reading levels, designated as Good, Better, or Best, in order from easiest to most difficult. Roles are color-coded across the entire Reader's Theater, Jr.® line to simplify the role assignment process, as shown below.

**Red:** Good

**Green:** Good

**Light Blue:** Better

**Purple:** Better

**Dark Blue:** Best (*Teacher Role*)

**Orange:** (*Additional teacher role included in some stories*)

Use the Role Assignment Chart provided to fill in the names of the students who will be reading at each level based on their reading skills. Your assignments can be used for all Reader's Theater, Jr.® stories since the color and level coding is consistent.

### Role Assignment Chart designed for 12 Students

Character Role	Reader Name	Reader Name	Reader Name
<b>Red:</b> Good			
<b>Green:</b> Good			
<b>Light Blue:</b> Better			
<b>Purple:</b> Better			
<b>Dark Blue:</b> Best	<b>Teacher/Aide</b>	<b>Teacher/Aide</b>	<b>Teacher/Aide</b>
<b>Orange:</b> Best	<b>Teacher/Aide</b>	<b>Teacher/Aide</b>	<b>Teacher/Aide</b>

There are two strategies for assigning roles based on student ability. One is to assign the "better" readers to the Light Blue and Purple parts in pairs or in teams of two or three students. Then assign the other students to the red and green roles. A second strategy is to assign a "better" reader with each "good" reader or team of "good" readers so that the "good" readers can read aloud with a student more capable of carrying the text. Depending upon the levels of your students, you can decide to employ either method at any time. In most cases, the second strategy works the best for emerging readers.

## Using Props for Performance

Each Reader's Theater, Jr.® story has **Character Props** available as a purchasing option. Character Props are signs/images on sticks displaying character pictures. Each reading team holds up the sign matching the role they are reading when it is their turn to read, and especially during a performance for an audience. Students can take turns holding the sign, passing it off after each line of their role. This helps young students identify with their reading role and adds a fun, hands-on aspect to the reading activity.

## Supplemental Activities to Reinforce Story Concepts

Use your own creativity to provide supplemental activities to reinforce story themes, from art projects and activity sheets to student-directed stations where they can have hands-on access to the Mini Transition Books and sight word cards in order to read or pretend to read with their friends. Activity sheets can include simple matching exercises for students to demonstrate their understanding of the story lessons, prompts asking students to draw pictures of events in the story or something about themselves relating to story concepts, connect the dots images reflecting story themes for students to practice their counting, and more. **Because most emergent readers are limited in their ability to read textual content, many supplemental activity sheets will require the teacher/instructor to read the question or exercise aloud to the students and work closely with them to answer or complete the activity.**

## Performance Award Certificates for Expressive Reading

Encourage students to be expressive while they read their parts. Explain that they are reading dialogue just like actors do on television and they can pretend to be a character and read or speak like people talk by bringing their voices up and down with expression and emotion. Encourage them to have fun with their parts and to perform like an actor! Recognize and reward those students who use expression and emotion in their voices with the Performance Award Certificates provided with your Playbooks® Reader's Theater, Jr.® set.

### Quick Start Implementation Steps

1. Assign levels to students and complete the Role Assignment Chart.
2. Introduce the book set showing students a closed Easel Book and five Mini Transition Books.
3. Introduce the Character Strips and tell students which role they have been assigned and the designated color of the text. Explain that they will always read that color when it appears in any book.
4. Explain that black text means all students read together at the same time.
5. Review the sight words with the students for the first Mini Transition Book.
6. Begin reading the first Mini Transition Book. The first time through, you can read all the parts aloud if your students are not ready to read the colored text parts. For the next reading(s) you continue to read all the blue parts, but you can also echo read all the non-blue parts with the students. For subsequent readings, students should be ready to choral read all the colored parts as assigned in teams and the black parts as a full group.
7. For more advanced student groups, you can read the Mini Transition Books only once and move to the full Easel Book for the bulk of your repeated reading practice.
8. Rehearse the full Easel Book using the props and prepare for an audience presentation.
9. Perform the Easel Book for an audience of students or parents. Encourage students to be expressive!