



Written by
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“Phillip and the Ethiopian”

Scripture: Acts 8: 26-38

Dramatic Category: Reader’s Theater

What is “Reader’s Theater”?

Reader's Theater is dramatic literature presented by readers who are seated and who read the script using the techniques of oral interpretation, characterization, and pantomime to create a theatrical effect. The scriptural passages presented in this fashion will breathe new life into what we “think we have heard.”

NOTE:

See the "Ten Commandments for Reader's Theater" after the script. There, you will find helpful hints to maximize this creative art form to communicate the truth of God’s Word.

This Reader's Theater selection also contains the elements of a skit, in that you may opt to have interaction between Phillip and the Ethiopian. In this case you mix the dramatic genres to create a "Reader's Theater Skit." The Narrator stands off to the side and reads the story while a re-enactment of the biblical narrative takes place at center stage.

Topic: Evangelism

Performance Time: 4 minutes

Number of Players: 2 male players + 1 narrator (*male or female*)

Objective:

To show the readiness of people to receive the Gospel if someone will stop and explain it to them, and answer the questions they have on their hearts.

Synopsis:

This "Reader's Theater" tells the story of the "Phillip and the Ethiopian." In this parable, the Ethiopian is reading the scroll of Isaiah and wonders who he is talking about when he prophesies regarding the sufferings of Christ. Phillip obeys the voice of the Lord and runs alongside the chariot to explain to the Ethiopian what he is reading. The message of evangelism is clear in the skit: we, too, are to run alongside people who ask about the Lord and be ready to explain salvation and answer their questions.

Cast:

Narrator: *Stands at stage right and reads the story between the action and lines of the other players.*

Phillip: *an energetic young man*

Ethiopian: *a sophisticated man with a commanding presence*

Costumes:

For Phillip: comfortable clothes, and tennis shoes for running
(You may opt to dress him in biblical attire for realism, but the casual modern-day disciple look works fine, too.)

For the Ethiopian: *sophisticated clothes, possibly a 3-piece suit.*
(If you opt for the biblical look, he should be in a royal-looking robe, with ornate trimmings and a headdress because he was an official in the court of Queen Candace.)

Props:

A small black notebook for the Narrator's script
A scroll
2 chairs side-by-side up on a platform
2 music stands (for readers)

Lights: General stage lighting

Sound:

A standing mic for the narrator
A standing mic (or wireless) for the Ethiopian
A wireless mic for Phillip

Staging Note:

Two chairs up on the platform to make it look like the Ethiopian is higher than Phillip, who is at ground level, standing. *(See the stage plan below.)*

Readers have their scripts on music stands in front of them, facing the audience.

Be sure the music stands are not too high, or you will block the audience's view of the actors' pantomime and facial expressions.

The Narrator holds the script in a small black notebook, and uses the free hand for gestures.

Narrator

Phillip

Ethiopian

The Script:

NOTE:

You have the option of memorizing the lines, and acting out this skit as a narrated skit; if so, remove the music stands and scripts.

(Phillip stands and the Ethiopian sits, both have heads bowed when the scene opens.)

LIGHTS: LIGHTS UP ON NARRATOR AT STAGE RIGHT

Narrator: Our scripture reading this morning is the story of Philip who ministers to the Ethiopian found in Acts 8: 26-38.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip,

(Phillip Looks up)

"Go south to the road--the desert road-- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."
So he started out,

(Phillip Begins walking using the "mime walk." If you opt to act this out, and he does not know how to walk in place, he must stand a distance behind the Ethiopian and take small steps forward.)

and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch,

(Eunuch looks up.)

an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace,
queen of the Ethiopians.

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home,
he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah, the prophet.
The Spirit told Philip,

"Go to that chariot and stay near it."

(Phillip looks up as though he heard a voice from the sky)

Then Philip ran up to the chariot

(Phillip Runs in place.)

and heard the man reading Isaiah, the prophet.

(Phillip leans in to hear)

Philip: *(Philip looks up to his left, listening.)*

(while running in place) "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Narrator: So, the Ethiopian invited Philip to come up and sit with him.
The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture:

(Phillip either mimes this, or actually steps up onto the platform if you are acting it out in a skit-fashion)

Ethiopian: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

Narrator: The eunuch asked Philip,

Ethiopian: *(Turning to his left as though Philip were seated there.)*
"Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about,
himself or someone else?"

Narrator: Then Philip began with that passage of scripture and told him the good news about
Jesus. As they traveled along the road,

(Phillip moves his body like he is riding in a chariot and miming conversation.)

they came to some water and the Eunuch said:

Ethiopian: *(looking down into the audience)*
"Look, here is water.
Why shouldn't I be baptized?
And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water
and Philip baptized him.

(Phillip and the Ethiopian either bow their heads to signal that they are finished with the scene, or they exit down the stairs out in the direction of the audience)

The End

The Ten Commandments of Reader's Theater

1. **Formation** is a key visual. Arrange the characters in such a way that relationships between them are clear. Place the main character(s) either downstage, alone, or at a higher level. Make it clear who is driving the scene.
2. **Characterization** is achieved by dressing the readers up in full character costume, including character props (providing they do not pass the props around.) Also use any accents, and peculiar behaviors connected to the character: i.e., nervous, angry, etc.
3. **Pantomime** is the theatrical skill used to create the environment. Readers use pantomime to react to the events in the script or to the environment suggested by the story: i.e., a hot day, setting the table, writing a letter, etc.
4. **Focal points** determine the location of the scene or the person who is speaking. The eyes of the readers shift to different points, just like eyes shift in real life.
 - a. **By location:** All readers who are in a particular scene will focus at one common spot just over the heads of the audience. When all their eyes go there, it means they have all “met” at one location: i.e., the kitchen, or the barn, etc.
 - b. **By speaker:** When the entire scene happens in one location, such as in a courtroom, the focal points change based on who is speaking. Each character has his/her own focal point, and when that character speaks both the character and the others in the scene focus on that point.
5. **Props** are handed off from character to character using a technique called the “**mime pass.**” No actual prop is used. Character “A” extends his/her hand in the direction of the focal point, while Character “B” hands an imaginary object off in mid-air in direction of the same focal point, toward Character “A’s” outstretched hand. Character “A” then appears to receive the object, and Character “B” appears to let it go. NOTE: Whichever character can be seen by the other leads the action. Use “key words” in the dialogue to signal when one “A” grabs the item and “B” lets it go; this is easier for players than merely watching. **No lateral movement or contact is made between the characters. They never look at or touch each other. They meet only with their eyes at focal points.**
6. **Selection of dramatic literature:** Scenes in which 3 or more people engage in some important, witty, interesting exchange of items and ideas make interesting Reader's Theater selections. Usually the turning point of a play, a moment of crisis or comedy, or a key scene is best. Children's stories, parables, Bible stories, fables, folk tales are wonderful.

7. **Narration** is critical when the characters change locations or engage in some activity in the course of the story that cannot be portrayed in mime, such as “They began to build the house,” or “Fern ran across the grassy field.” In that case, the narrator reads the transitional text that moves the story along. Drop all the “He said,” “She said while drying her tears,” etc. out of the text. We can “see” as the character portrays the dialogue.
8. **Line memorization** is not word-for-word essential, since the script is in front of the readers on music stands, leaving hands free for pantomime; however, the lines should be almost memorized so the eyes can lift off the page for focal points. The script is a crutch.
9. **On and Off Stage** is shown by the character bowing his/her head down which means, “I am not in this scene,” and lifting the head up and moving to the focal point to signify participation in the scene.
10. **Practice, practice, practice!** Reader’s theater is an extremely difficult art form. When done correctly, it is one of the most effective tools of communication in theater; when done poorly, it does the dramatic literature a horrible disservice. To coordinate the “mime pass,” the focal points, and to achieve accurate characterization through oral interpretation require tremendous amounts of practice.