



*Written by
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“Unbound and Free, The Raising of Lazarus”

Scripture: John 11: 1-6, 17-27, 38-44

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.

Topic: Resurrection

Performance Time: 4 minutes

Number of Players: 4 players (*1 man, 3 women*)

Objective:

To proclaim a message of hope that Jesus has power over death and those who hear His call will resurrect from the dead.

Synopsis:

This "Reader's Theater" is a re-telling of the "Raising of Lazarus" enacted, while the text is read by a narrator. In this parable, Mary and Martha mourn the death of their brother and lament that Jesus was not there to perform the miraculous healing that He had become known for performing. Jesus shows them that He can heal more than sickness; He can heal even death.

Cast:

Narrator: *Stands at stage right and reads the story between the action and lines of the other players*
Jesus: *a strong, commanding presence*
Mary: *a deeply sensitive, fragile person*
Martha: *a strong, capable woman*

Costumes: Dress them in black and white or biblical attire if you prefer

Props:

3 chairs
3 music stands
A small black notebook for the Narrator's script
A platform for Jesus

Lights: General stage lighting

Sound:

A standing mic for the narrator
3 standing mics for the readers (3 wireless mics for them would be ideal)

Music: A triumphant, powerful, instrumental theme

Staging Note:

Characters are seated with their scripts on music stands in front of them, facing the audience. Jesus is seated on a platform, above the other readers. (See the stage plan below.)

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

Jesus

(elevated on a platform)

Mary

Martha

The Script:

(Characters are seated with their heads bowed when the scene opens.)

Narrator: Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

Narrator: When he heard this, Jesus said,

(Jesus and Martha raise their heads)

Jesus: “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

(Jesus and Martha bow their heads down to signal being out of the scene)

Narrator: Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus. Yet, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where He was two more days.

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

(Mary, Martha, and Jesus raise their heads)

Mary: *(Weeping, overcome with emotion)*
“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Jesus: “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life.
He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.;
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.
Do you believe this?”

Martha: “Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ,
the Son of God who has come into the world.”

Narrator: Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.
It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

Jesus: *(emotional and powerful)*
“Take away the stone.”

Martha: *(panicked)*
“But Lord, by this time there is a bad odor; he has been there for four days.”

Jesus: “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

Narrator: So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said,

MUSIC: *(Begin the powerful music, softly)*

Jesus: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.
I know that you always hear me,
but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here,
that they may believe that you sent me.”

Narrator: When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice,

Jesus: “Lazarus, come out!”

MUSIC: *(Play the music in the background during this resurrection scene.)*

Narrator: *(dramatically)*
The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen,
and a cloth around his face.
Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “Take off the grave clothes, and let him go.”

(Mary, Martha, and Jesus look expectantly out into the audience.)

MUSIC: *(Play triumphant, powerful music, then fade out.)*

LIGHTS: FADE OUT

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.