



*Written by
Cora Alley*

The Power of Prayer, “Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin”

Scripture: Acts 4

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: The power of prayer

Performance Time: 6-8 minutes

Number of Players: 10-16 players (*at least 5 men*)

Objective:

To encourage believers to pray earnestly to God for boldness and protection and never to let anyone silence their preaching and their praise of God.

Synopsis:

This "Reader's Theater" enacts the story of "Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin," while the text is read by a narrator. In this story, Peter and John are called before the Sanhedrin after they heal the crippled beggar in Jesus' name. Peter and John are ordered to be silent about this Jesus because too many people are beginning to believe in Jesus. Peter and John are undaunted in their praise of God, and the believers join them in a triumphant declaration of the power of God.

Cast:

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

The Sanhedrin:

Ruler *A commanding presence*

Elder *A commanding presence*

Teacher *A commanding presence*

The Disciples:

Peter: *A bold, outspoken man*

John: *A sincere spokesman*

The Believers: *(4 – 10 people) Praise team who also reads the praise lines in this script.*

Costumes:

Sanhedrin: 3-piece suits

Disciples: Jeans, t-shirts (*with no print*), tennis shoes

Believers: Clothes appropriate for church

Props:

4 music stands

4 small back notebooks with the script in it for the Believers who stand on the risers behind Peter and John

Choir risers

A raised platform

Lights: Four light pools:

Pool 1: Peter and John at stage right

Pool 2: The Sanhedrin on the platform at stage left

Pool 3: The Believers on the choir risers behind Peter and John

Pool 4: Spot on the narrator at stage right

Sound:

A standing mic for the narrator

5 standing mics for the readers (5 wireless mics for them would be ideal)

Believers use choir or standing mics

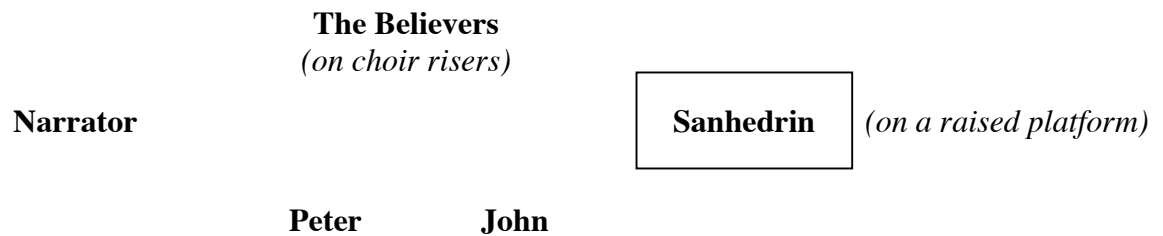
Music:

Play the instrumental rendition of songs like, "Our God is an Awesome God," or "The Battle Belongs to the Lord," at the start of this selection as well as various times throughout. Play it triumphantly at the end, and have the congregation join.

Staging Note:

NOTE: All the characters stand for this presentation, so raise the music stands high enough for them to read their lines, but not so high that it blocks their facial expression.

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



The Script:

LIGHTS: UP ON NARRATOR AT STAGE RIGHT

(All characters stand with their heads bowed when the scene opens.)

Narrator: Today’s message is entitled, “The Power of Prayer.”
Our scripture reading is Acts, the 4th chapter, which records the story of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin after they healed the crippled beggar in the power of Jesus’ name.

Acts, chapter 4:

The priests, and the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in the jail until the next day. But, many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

LIGHTS: SPOT UP ON PLATFORM, STAGE LEFT (SANHEDRIN)

Narrator: The next day, the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

(The Sanhedrin “mime” (without making a sound) a conversation among themselves, pointing and slandering Peter and John who are downstage at their right.)

LIGHTS: SPOT UP ON CENTER STAGE RIGHT (PETER & JOHN)

Narrator: They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them.

Ruler: By what power or what name did you do this?

Peter: Rulers and elders of the people, if we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you, healed.

John: He is the stone you builders rejected which has become the capstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Narrator: *(Sanhedrin confer)*
When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Ruler: What are we going to do with these men?

Elder: Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.

Teacher: But, to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.

Narrator: Then they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.
But, Peter and John replied:

Peter: Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.

John: For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Narrator: *(Mime threats from the Sanhedrin)*
After further threats, they let them go because all the people were praising God for what had happened.

LIGHTS: OFF ON THE PLATFORM AT LEFT (SANHEDRIN)

Narrator: On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people

LIGHTS: UP ON THE CHOIR RISERS

and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

LIGHTS: FADE OUT SLOWLY PETER AND JOHN

Narrator: When the believers heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

MUSIC: PLAY INSTRUMENTAL PRAISE MUSIC UNDER THESE LINES:

Believer 1: Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

Believer 2: You spoke the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David.

Believer 3: Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

Believer 4: The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.

Believer 2: Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed.

Believer 1: They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

Believer 3: Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

MUSIC: PLAY INTRO MUSIC TO A PRAISE SONG

Believer 4: Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

MUSIC: FINISH THE SONG AS A CONGREGATION

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.