



Written by
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“The Stoning of the Apostles”

Scripture: Acts 5: 27-42

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: Bold witness

Performance Time: 3-5 minutes

Number of Players: 7 players (*men*) + 1 male or female narrator

Objective:

To show an example of believers who were persecuted for their faith, yet refused to let anyone silence their preaching and their praise of God.

Synopsis:

This "Reader's Theater" enacts the story of "Stoning of the Apostles," while the text is read by a narrator. In this story, Peter and the other Apostles are called before the Sanhedrin for preaching in Jesus' name. They order them to be silent because too many people are beginning to believe on the name of Jesus. Peter and the other Apostles are flogged, but leave undaunted in their praise of God, as they exit the stage witnessing to people in the audience.

Cast:

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

The Sanhedrin:

High Priest *A commanding presence*
Gamaliel : *A compassionate man*
Pharisee *A commanding presence, no lines*

The Apostles:

Peter: *A bold, outspoken man*
Apostles: *(1-3 men) Sincere spokesmen*

Costumes:

Sanhedrin: 3-piece suits
Apostles: Jeans, t-shirts (*with no print*), tennis shoes

Props:

3 music stands (*Apostles and Sanhedrin can share*)
A black notebook for narrator's script
A raised platform

Lights: Three light pools:

Pool 1: Peter and John at stage right
Pool 2: The Sanhedrin on the platform at stage left
Pool 3: 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)

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.

Narrator

Sanhedrin

(*on a raised platform*)

Peter

The Apostles

The Script:

LIGHTS: UP ON NARRATOR AT STAGE RIGHT

Narrator: Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.

LIGHTS: UP ON THE SANHEDRIN AND THE APOSTLES

High Priest: "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Narrator: Peter and the other apostles replied:

Peter: "We must obey God rather than men!"

Apostle 1: The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

Apostle 2: God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things

Apostle 3: and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

Narrator: When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

(Commotion among the Sanhedrin)

But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.

Then he addressed them:

Gamaliel : *(The Pharisees focus on him)*

"Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing.

After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case, I advise you: Leave the men alone! Let them go! For, if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

MUSIC: INTRO. OF INSPIRATIONAL MUSIC

(Sanhedrin confer as music intro continues)

Narrator: His speech persuaded them.
They called the apostles in and had them flogged.

MUSIC: PLAY TRIUMPHANT PRAISE MUSIC

(Apostles respond to flogging, but we do not see anyone flogging them.)

Narrator: Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

LIGHTS: OUT ON THE SANHEDRIN

Narrator: The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus.

(Apostles enter the audience, preaching as they exit)

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

MUSIC: SING A TRIUMPHANT PRAISE SONG

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.