



Written by
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“Jesus and Nicodemus”

Scripture: John 3: 1-10

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: Being born again

Performance Time: 2 minutes

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

Objective:

To present the wondrous miracle of being "born again" as Jesus describes it and explore the skeptical reaction that people have to the wondrous miracle of salvation.

Synopsis:

This "Reader's Theater" enacts the story of "Jesus and Nicodemus" while the text is read by a narrator. In the account of this interview, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be "born again." This raises the skeptical reaction in Nicodemus that is mirrored by so many who do not understand the spiritual conversion to Christ.

Cast:

Narrator *Stands at stage right and reads the story between the action and lines of the other players*
Jesus: *A compassionate, commanding person*
Nicodemus: *A skeptical Pharisee*

Costumes:

Jesus: Jeans, T-shirt (*with no print*), tennis shoes
Nicodemus: 3-piece suit

Props:

2 music stands
A black notebook for narrator's script

Lights: Two light pools:

Pool 1: Jesus and Nicodemus at center stage
Pool 2: Spot on the narrator at stage right

Sound:

A standing mic for the narrator
2 standing mics for the readers (2 wireless mics for them would be ideal)

Music:

Play the instrumental rendition of songs like, "Amazing Grace," or "Rock of Ages," etc. Play these 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

Jesus

Nicodemus

The Script:

LIGHTS: UP ON THE NARRATOR AT STAGE RIGHT

Narrator: Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus,

(Nicodemus raises his head and looks around. His brow is knit.)

He was a member of the Jewish ruling council.
He came to Jesus at night and said:

(Nicodemus steps forward. Jesus looks up and meets Nicodemus at a focal point with his eyes.)

Nicodemus: Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God.
For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.

Jesus: I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus: How can a man be born when he is old?
Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born?

Jesus: I tell you the truth,
unless a man is born of water and the Spirit,
he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.
You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again."
The wind blows wherever it pleases.
You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.
So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus: How can this be?

Jesus: You are Israel's teacher, and you do not understand these things?

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.