

## Helping Students Write with Voice

**Summary:** “Voice” can be one of the most difficult writing concepts to teach, and one that students struggle the most to understand. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, reading expert Timothy Rasinski and a classroom teacher discuss a strategy of having students create Reader’s Theatre scripts out of books they read to have them experience voice in a new way.

### Practical Applications

The authors propose that having students develop Reader’s Theatre scripts from other types of text forces them to reckon with how characters talk or react, and give them a much more concrete way to think about voice and then implement it in their own writing. The strategy has several steps (note: the teacher has a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class but this is modifiable for most grades):

1. **Modeling the Strategy.** This involves a read-aloud using children’s literature that exemplifies strong voice. The teacher points out how the author is having characters speak or act in certain ways, and also connects that idea to student’s lives by asking them how different students might react to certain situations in distinctive ways. Then, as a class, the teacher leads the students in converting the literature into a Reader’s Theatre script through discussion and think-alouds (depending on the length of the text, you may convert the entire story or only one part). Students must figure out what parts are needed, how they will handle narration, any additions/deletions to the story they want to make, and the creation of the script, which will be performed at the end of the lesson(s). For larger classes, multiple texts can be scripted at once.
2. **Working towards Independence.** Students work in pairs or small groups to practice scripting. It’s important to make sure they have stories that are easily scripted, at least early on, and the teacher needs to be actively involved in “coach[ing] and monitor[ing] the groups.” The peer groups can be especially important in identifying key dialogue.
3. **Independence.** Students begin to script on their own.

The authors suggest there are many different possible extensions once students are comfortable with the method of scripting into Readers Theatre format, including utilizing different forms of text, such as:

- Expository text (much more narration, of course, and consider a focus on historical figures)
- Creating a parody of an already-existing Reader’s Theatre script
- Scripting poetry, whether already-existing or the student’s own work
- Scripting research projects once complete
- Having students in a different grade perform the Readers Theatre play, and having your students evaluate the voice that their scripting produced

### Conclusion and Citation

For students to be able to write with voice, they must understand what voice is and how to engage with it. Having students translate text into Reader’s Theatre scripts is a fun and effective way to achieve this goal.

Rasinski, T. & Young, C. “Enhancing Author’s Voice through Scripting.” *The Reading Teacher*, 1.65 (2011), pp. 24-28. <http://bit.ly/rugh1w> (subscription only).