Characters

Narrator  Thomas
Johnny Appleseed  Jane
Elizabeth  Thundercloud

Setting

This reader’s theater begins in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, in 1786, at the home of Nathaniel and Lucy Chapman and their family of 12 children. Down a dirt trail from the house is an apple orchard planted by 12-year-old Johnny. The trees are full of big, red apples.

Act I

Narrator: As the sun rises over the Chapman house, Johnny is sitting on the front steps. With 11 siblings, this is the only time it is quiet enough for him to think. Johnny is thinking about what he wants to do with his life. His older sister, Elizabeth, comes out to join him.

Elizabeth: What are you doing out here all by yourself, Johnny? The sun’s only barely coming up. You’ll catch your death of cold!

Johnny: I’m just thinking, Elizabeth. Don’t you ever just like to sit and think about life?

Elizabeth: With all the commotion from our little brothers and sisters, it’s hard to hear yourself think around here!

Johnny: I know what you mean. I’m looking forward to the day when I can be out on my own. Seems more and more people are moving from New England and heading west to settle. It makes you wonder what life is like out there and what it would be like to be a true pioneer.
Old Johnny Appleseed
Anonymous

Grandpa stopped, and from the grass at our feet,
Picked up an apple, large, juicy, and sweet;
Then took out his jackknife, and, cutting a slice,
Said, as we ate it, “Isn’t it nice
To have such apples to eat and enjoy?
Well, there weren’t very many when I was a boy,
For the country was new—e’en food was scant;
We had hardly enough to keep us from want,
And this good man, as he rode around,
Oft eating and sleeping upon the ground,
Always carried and planted apple seeds—
Not for himself, but for others’ needs.
The apple seeds grew, and we, today,
Eat of the fruit planted by the way.”

John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt
Traditional

John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name is my name, too!
Whenever we go out,
The people always shout
There goes John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt!
Da da da da da da da . . .

(softer)
John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name is my name, too!
Whenever we go out,
The people always shout
(louder)
There goes John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt!
Da da da da da da da . . .

(softer still)
John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name is my name, too!
Whenever we go out,
The people always shout
(louder still)
There goes John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt!

Building Fluency through Reader’s Theater

American Tall Tales and Legends

Grades 3–5

Author

Jamey Acosta
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I am not ashamed to say that I am a reader’s theater nut! I really get pumped when I see kids perform scripts. I am equally excited to see the fire in teachers’ eyes when they begin to use reader’s theater with their students. Thus, it is no understatement to say that I am thrilled to see Teacher Created Materials publish this fine reader’s theater program. Let me explain why I am such an advocate for reader’s theater.

As someone who has studied reading fluency, I know that repeated reading is one of the best methods for developing students’ fluency in reading. However, it disturbs me greatly to see the manner in which students are often asked to engage in repeated reading. I see students do repeated reading with an aim at improving their reading speed—“Read this one more time to see if you increase your reading rate.” To me, this is not a terribly authentic way to engage in repeated readings. As a result of such a focus, I have seen many students develop the idea that repeated reading is done to make them faster readers and that reading fast is what reading is all about. Through such an approach, we run the risk of developing readers who sacrifice comprehension in order to read fast.

To do repeated reading appropriately, students need an authentic reason to repeatedly read or rehearse a text. I think the most natural reason to practice is performance. If you want students to engage in repeated readings, have them perform what they are practicing for an audience. With performance as a goal, students now have a natural reason to engage in repeated readings. Reader’s theater is a performance genre—it is a type of reading material meant to be performed. Moreover, because the focus of the practice is to convey a meaningful interpretation of the text to an audience, reader’s theater is also a natural vehicle for developing reading comprehension. I believe that reader’s theater is one of the best and most authentic ways to engage students enthusiastically in repeated reading to build reading fluency and improve overall reading performance.

My second reason for being a reader’s theater nut is easy to express—reader’s theater is fun! We all like to be a star at one time or another. Reader’s theater is a perfect vehicle for allowing students to become the star. I remember doing reader’s theater with the elementary and middle school students I taught. They could not get enough of it. They absolutely loved it. And, as their teacher, I loved it too. I loved to see students perform with their voices, watch their excitement, and enjoy their growth as successful readers.
Moreover, through the opportunity to perform and see themselves as successful in reading, many of the struggling readers I worked with began to believe in themselves again. Many struggling readers give up on themselves as they are forced to plod through one unsuccessful reading experience after another. The enjoyment, success, and fulfillment that are part of reader’s theater can help to break this cycle of despair and failure in reading for so many students who find learning to read difficult.

Third, reader’s theater is a natural way to connect all areas of the school curriculum. Social studies, literature, science, art, and other curriculum areas can easily and effectively be explored through reader’s theater. The scripts that are part of this program, in particular, have been developed to make those connections. Students can become so engaged in the process of rehearsal and performance that they may not even be aware that they are learning important content that goes beyond the reading experience!

I know reader’s theater works. Nearly every teacher I have met who uses reader’s theater on a regular basis feels that it is one of the best and most engaging ways to grow readers, and to instill in them a sense of reading success as they learn important content. I hope you will give reader’s theater a try. I know you, too, will become a reader’s theater nut!

Timothy Rasinski, Ph.D.
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Kent State University
Johnny Appleseed Lesson Plan

Objectives
• **Fluency**: Students will read passages fluently and accurately and with proper pacing, expression, and intonation.
• **Content Area—Language Arts**: Students will write a narrative and deliver an oral presentation to the class.

Summary
This script tells the story of John Chapman, a young boy with big dreams. John loved nature and as soon as he was old enough, he set off to share his love with as many people as he could. He did this by planting apple seeds all across the Western frontier. This is how John Chapman became Johnny Appleseed. He was a pioneer who brought a lot more than apple seeds to the country; he brought a feeling of hope and peace to all he encountered.

Materials
• *Johnny Appleseed* script booklets
• *Johnny Appleseed* Character Masks (pages 26–31 or Teacher Resource CD)
• copies of Take-Home Script (Teacher Resource CD)
• Performance CD and CD player or computer with a CD drive and speaker
• *Johnny Appleseed Goes a’ Planting*, by Patsy Jensen

Introduce the Literature
Read the book *Johnny Appleseed Goes a’ Planting*, by Patsy Jensen, aloud to the class. This book is a great way to introduce the legendary Johnny Appleseed to students. Written using kid-friendly language, it is easy to read and comprehend. After reading the book, discuss the story of Johnny Appleseed. Encourage students to share what they have learned about Johnny from the details in the story. Record their responses on the board or on chart paper.

ELL Support
Have English language learners work with more fluent readers to discuss the story. Then have them answer five comprehension questions about the story. Remind them to refer to the text if necessary.

Involving All Students
For this experience, allow students to work in groups of six to practice the script using the Take-Home script copies (Teacher Resource CD). This way all students have opportunities to get involved and practice their fluency skills. Different groups can perform different scenes for the class.
Reading the Script

1. Before reading the *Johnny Appleseed* script with students, explain that legends and tall tales are exaggerated stories about people, both real and fictional, and their experiences. Oftentimes the legendary figure accomplishes great tasks that are thought to have helped shape American history. Use the *PowerPoint®* edition of the script (on the Teacher Resource CD) to conduct a whole-class reading. Encourage the class to figure out what makes Johnny so special.

2. Have students review the vocabulary words by using the words in the glossary. Write the words on the board. Have students help define them. Then have students work independently, or with partners, to write a sentence for each word. You may also want to do this for any grade-level appropriate high-frequency words found in the script.

3. Play the professional recording of the script for students. Remind them to pay close attention to the intonation and expression used by each character. Play the recording again and have students follow along in their scripts. Encourage students to recite their assigned character’s lines chorally with the recording. Point out that each character’s voice is a reflection of his or her personality.

4. Tell students that reading comprehension helps build fluency. It is not enough to simply read a script; in order to deliver an accurate performance, a reader must understand the point of view and feelings of each character, as well as be able to recall details about the plot, setting, and sequence of events. Complete the following tasks with students.
   - Put students in small groups to answer at least five comprehension questions about the story. Encourage them to refer to the text if necessary.
   - Have each student work with a partner to retell the story and discuss the sequence of events. Ask students to illustrate what happens in the beginning, middle, and end of the story and write a few sentences or a paragraph describing each picture.
   - Write each character on the board. Using details from the text, have the class offer words or phrases to describe each character’s personality. You may want to do a mini-lesson on the use of adjectives. Give students adjectives that are not used in the script, but could be used to describe various characters and have them match the adjective with the appropriate character.

ELL Support

After reading the script, work with English language learners in a small group setting. Tell them to describe Johnny Appleseed. What did he look like? Why do they think he became such an important part of American history? Have students draw a picture of Johnny based on the description given in the script. Depending on the reading levels of the group, they could write words, sentences, or a short paragraph describing their pictures.
Assigning Roles
The roles of the characters are written on three different proficiency levels. Assign roles to students based on their reading proficiency. Remember that when students practice fluency, they should read materials at or below their reading levels. This helps them to focus on prosody (accuracy, expression, and reading rate). If a student is reading text that is too difficult, his or her attention will be focused on decoding words rather than reading with fluency.

These are approximate reading levels for the roles in this script:
- **Johnny Appleseed:** 2nd grade
- **Thomas:** 3rd grade
- **Narrator:** 4th grade
- **Thundercloud:** 2nd grade
- **Jane:** 3rd grade
- **Elizabeth:** 4th grade

Meeting the Fluency Objective
1. The fluency objective for this script focuses on reading passages fluently and delivering oral presentations using proper expression, pacing, and intonation. Review the following definitions with the class:
   - **Intonation (tone):** The varying sounds of your voice when reading. Are you reading with a high- or low-pitched voice? Does your voice sound childish like a baby, rough like an old man, or squeaky like a mouse?
   - **Expression:** Using your voice to show emotion. Can the listener tell if you are happy, sad, scared, excited, etc.? It is important to remind students to use punctuation as a guide for proper expression.
   - **Pacing:** Using appropriate speed when reading. Read at a rate that is comfortable for the listener, not too fast and not too slow. It is important not to spend time sounding out words during a performance.
2. Play the professional recording of the script. Remind students to pay close attention to how each character delivers his or her lines. After listening to the recording, ask students to discuss what they heard. Could they tell more about the characters by the expression used by the readers? Was it comfortable and enjoyable to listen to?
3. Write the following lines from the script on the board, or have them written down ahead of time on a blank overhead transparency:
   - **Johnny Appleseed:** I’m just thinking, Elizabeth. Don’t you ever just like to sit and think about life?
   - **Thundercloud:** I saw you tame that rattlesnake! Why didn’t it kill you?
   - **Jane:** *Him?* What are you talking about? Why would I want to spare the life of a field mouse?
   - **Elizabeth:** Johnny, it’s so wonderful to have you back home! We have all missed you so. Please say you’ll stay a while.

Ask for volunteers to read the lines. Allow the rest of the class to constructively comment on each reading. Did the reader use proper intonation? Expression? Pacing? What did the reader do well? What could the reader do next time to improve his or her reading?
Content-Area Connection—Language Arts

Students will write a narrative and deliver an oral presentation to the class. The purpose of this lesson is to have students use their imaginations to create their own legends. Each student will need to write a narrative based on his or her legend and the character’s accomplishments and experiences.

1. Tell students that the Johnny Appleseed script is a narrative about the life of the legendary John Chapman. Explain that the author has a responsibility to provide certain information to readers. To model writing a narrative, write the 5 Ws and H questions on the board (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How) and answer the questions as a class.

2. Give students five to ten minutes to think of their own legend or tall tale character.

3. Have students complete the 5 Ws and H for their legend/tall tale. Encourage them to write at least a sentence or two for each question word. Remind students that by answering the questions above, they will be providing details about critical story elements, such as setting, plot, problem/conflict, and solution/resolution.

4. Using their answers to the 5 Ws and H questions, students should now write the narrative. Remind them to write their stories in a detailed, well-organized fashion. Events should be recorded in a logical, sequential order.

5. Depending on the unique abilities of the class, this assignment could be done independently with teacher monitoring, or with rotating small groups, guided by teacher instruction, feedback, and support.

6. Once the narratives are complete, each student will deliver an oral presentation to the class. The teacher decides how this will be done. Students may simply read their narratives to the class, they may act out the narratives, or let each student decide his or her own presentation style.

ELL Support

Complete the 5 Ws and H questions with English language learners. Encourage them to draw pictures, and write words, simple phrases, or sentences. Each student can create a legend/tall tale, or you can pick one to complete together and the entire group can give the oral presentation.
Fine Arts Connection

1. The script contains a song and a poem: “John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt” and “Old Johnny Appleseed.” The song and poem are directly related to the Johnny Appleseed script, but they are not limited to use only with this script.

2. Students will create posters that illustrate the life cycle of an apple tree. Students will divide a large piece of poster board (or a piece of construction paper) into fourths. Each section will represent a season. Starting clockwise from the first section, the sections should be labeled winter, spring, summer, and fall. Using paint, construction paper, tissue paper, or any other material you prefer, have students illustrate how an apple tree looks during each season. This can be done individually, with a partner, or in groups of four. Provide some reference books that show the life cycle of an apple tree. Or, show students pictures from the Internet or other sources. Post the finished posters around the room.

3. Using a large piece of butcher paper, have students create a map detailing Johnny Appleseed’s journey across the Western frontier. The map can be as simple as drawing a picture for each location Johnny visited and connecting them with a line. The order in which Johnny stopped at each location should be clear when looking at the map. Students should also note where Johnny planted his apple seeds.

4. Have students bring in items from home to use as props for the characters and setting of the script, along with anything else they can think of to help bring the script to life. Or, provide a variety of materials for the class to make its own props.

Performance

Students may perform their renditions of the script for the class or for a larger audience. If desired, allow the audience to share in the reader’s theater experience by reciting the poem and singing the song at the appropriate places. Display the song and poem for the audience to follow, using the provided overhead transparencies.

The performers may also wish to prepare masks for their parts, which are included within this lesson. Allow the students to color their masks. Cut out the eyeholes, punch holes at the Xs, and attach string to tie the masks to the performers’ faces.
Johnny Appleseed
Thundercloud