

TEACHING STRATEGIES

for
READ-ALONG RADIO DRAMAS
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Why Use Read-Along?

The importance of literature study for *all* students—the advantaged and disadvantaged alike—has long been recognized by leaders in the field of language education. It is common knowledge that many students are limited by below-average reading skills, and that fluency in English and interest in literature and reading are important factors determining student success. Heterogeneous grouping of advantaged and disadvantaged students places weighty demands on the classroom teacher. Bringing disadvantaged students into contact with literature without isolating them is the guiding purpose in the development of *Read-Along Radio Dramas*. The program's wide range of teaching ideas and activities are designed to both challenge advanced students and inspire disadvantaged students.

Probably the strongest reason for using read-along with language students is to promote and develop the connectedness of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the related skill of visualizing. Students need to develop an intuitive understanding of the interrelatedness of these skills. Listening and visualizing, the skills essential to mastery of the other three, are also the most neglected in classroom practice. Read-along can help students connect these skills.

Listening

Our most frequently used language skill is listening. We listen for information, understanding, and enjoyment. Our existence teems with ideas that positively or negatively affects us, depending upon how we perceive them. With good listening skills, we are better able to make good decisions about the advertised products as well as the political and social issues that we come across in our daily lives.

Listening is the first language skill learned. As young children, we learn to listen, speak, read, and (finally) write. If we are deficient in listening, our speaking, reading, and writing skills are usually deficient as well. And the more deficient we are in language skills, the more hindered we are in learning and communicating. Nevertheless, regardless of its pivotal position in language development, too little emphasis is placed on teaching listening.

Two Kinds of Listening

1. The first kind is *listening for pleasure*—music, drama, movies, television, etc. This kind of listening is the “laid back” kind. *Listening for pleasure* may be “involved listening”; it may be purposeful. The purpose, however, is not “our” purpose; it is the purpose of the performer, the musician, the director, the dramatist. Most of us apply *listening for pleasure* skills to all of our listening, and it is here that we get into trouble. There are many listening situations where “we” need to be in control.
2. The second kind of listening is *active listening*. It is *active listening* that schools should teach. Students should be taught to plan their listening. They should be encouraged to formulate questions and helped to recognize the answers to those questions when they hear them.

The *Listening Skills Activity* contained in the student activity packet is designed to involve the students in *active listening*. It is, perhaps, best used with students who need the most basic help in listening. The students know in advance what they are listening for. Some items require little more than the act of attending, while other items require the students to make critical judgments and inferences based upon what they hear. Remember that for listening to become expert, as with any other skill, it must be successful. Success is the ultimate motivator. Students need success, and they need to practice *active listening*.

With more *advanced classes*, you may wish to combine active listening with the read-along session. You can do this by listening to the tape ahead of time and listing several questions about sounds or ideas that appear on the tape. Go over these questions with the students before the read-along session and ask them to make a mental note when they hear an answer. Tell the students that they will have a listening quiz on the questions.

Visualizing

Two Definitions: Visualizing is: (1) creating mental images of people/animals/objects, places, and actions that move from one to another, developing meaning from the printed language and insight into the feelings and motivations of characters; (2) mentally creating concrete examples that give meaning to abstract ideas.

Good readers visualize as they read. Readers who don't visualize find little enjoyment in reading, and most remedial readers don't enjoy reading. Not that remedial readers don't visualize, they do. When they listen to an interesting story, they can be the most attentive students in the class, and many will admit to having seen vivid images. An important reason why poor readers don't visualize from language in print is that they have not made the connection, in their minds, between visual images and reading. Another reason is that remedial readers are slow readers. Clear and complete images more often come from thought-groups of words, rather than single words. Students need to learn to create images in their minds as they read.

Good writers visualize as they write. Visualization is one of the most important (yet one of the least taught) language related skills. Visualization brings literature to life and is essential to all kinds of writing. When we help students learn to visualize, they become better readers and better writers.

Visualizing is a direct link between reading and writing. When students understand that what they read can be seen, they can more easily understand that the reverse is true—that images created in the mind may be written on paper. Good descriptions of actions, characters, and settings must be visualized before they can be put into words, and clear exposition requires that the writer visualize concrete examples and ideas.

Students need to see the imagery in what they are reading or writing, if they are to be successful in either. Readers need instruction and practice in visualizing what they read. Writers need to learn that visualizing the actions, characters, settings, emotions, concepts, and ideas, as well as the relationships between these elements, is an important part of every stage in the writing process—prewriting, writing, revising, editing, evaluating.

The best way to develop the visualization skill is to have the students experience the process.

1. Have students create images based upon easily visualized passages. The teacher can read these passages to the students and ask them to describe and discuss their images (written or oral). Differences and similarities between the students' images should be discussed.
2. Read a story or a poem straight through without discussing meanings, then select specific passages to go through, one at a time, asking students to see the places, people, and actions described.
3. For an excellent example of an activity to develop visualization for writing, get a copy of *The Where Exercise: Seeing in Writing*; Lawrence, Robert, 1981, EDRS # ED 237 997. This paper may be obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).

Teaching Literature

Literature is a social experience and is especially rewarding when shared with others. Literature gives students the opportunity to read for pleasure, and students will surely enjoy the story for its own sake. It is this enjoyment that makes literature study so valuable in an English class, for literature is the stuff upon which all language skills can be built. Using literature, teachers have the added benefit of capitalizing on the interest generated from the story to teach not only about reading and language arts, but about history, social issues, and human behavior. These issues are natural adjuncts to many stories, and as students read the stories and discuss the issues raised, they will begin to understand the connections between various subject areas/disciplines.

Reading Along

For students who are poor readers, reading along has many advantages. The students can learn to skip over words that may be difficult or unknown without losing meaning, visualize the images on the printed page, develop a reading rate conducive to good comprehension, combine words into thought-groups, hear and enjoy expertly spoken English, learn to read smoothly without interruption of meaning, attune their eyes to the rhythmical patterns of the language on the printed page, develop listening skills, and learn the inherent relationships between written and spoken language.

Reading along does *not* mean looking at the words one at a time; this can develop a poor reading habit. It *does* mean looking at meaningful word groups so that the eye can become attuned to the rate and rhythm of the actors' voices. The reader's eyes should see thought-groups rather than single words.

One way to help students develop the habit of reading thought-groups is to select a passage and help the class mark the thought-groups, then read the passage with the class. This kind of activity should be a regular part of the program if read-along is to be most beneficial to poor readers. Before asking the students to perform, however, the teacher should mark a sample passage appropriately for most of the class, hand out copies to the students, and read the passage aloud, emphasizing the grouping. This is valuable, even with average readers, and encourages them to expand their thought groups.

“They limp painfully \ down the bank. \ The foremost \ of the two men \ staggers \ among the rough-strewn rocks. \ They're tired and weak. \ Their faces \ have the drawn expression \ of patience \ which comes of hardship \ long endured. \ They're heavily burdened \ with blanket packs \ strapped to their shoulders. \ Head straps, \ passing across the forehead, \ help support these packs. \ Each man \ carries a rifle. \ They walk stooped, \ the shoulders well forward, \ the head still farther forward, \ the eyes bent \ upon the ground.” (from Jack London's “Love of Life”)

The number of words in these thought-groups should, of course, be longer for the more able reader and shorter for the less able reader. For good readers the thought-groups can contain many words, especially if the words are within the student's vocabulary. Some readers may not be able to group more than two or three words, but all readers should be encouraged to group what they can.

Read-Along's Advantages for the Teacher

- Each taped story unfolds its plot at the same pace for all students—all students read the assignment.
- The materials eliminate the time-consuming problem of dealing separately with readers of varying degrees of skill and/or preparedness.
- By encouraging classroom coalescence, the whole-class read-along approach to literature provides a common experience for students and generates active classroom discussions.

Preparing the Lesson

Read-Along Radio Dramas are effective with all teaching styles. You will probably adapt the materials to your own style of teaching literature or reading. Regardless of how you use *Read-Along Radio Dramas*, we recommend that you use a plan that includes INTO THE STORY, THROUGH THE STORY, and BEYOND THE STORY activities. (SEE *A SAMPLE LESSON PLAN* and *USING READ-ALONG RADIO DRAMAS*.)

Into the Story

1. Help the students relax. Begin the lesson with an activity that has a calming effect upon the class. A few minutes of silent-sustained reading is a good way to begin. Another way is to do guided imagery. For instance, you might guide the class to visualize something that relates to the story—the type of countryside, certain character types, buildings, scenes.
2. Connect with the story. Make a connection between the story and the students' interests or give them something specific to think about during the session. For instance, you could briefly discuss FORESHADOWING. Say that there are some examples of this in the play, and ask the students to look and listen for them. You could briefly discuss the background of the story they are about to read and tell them a little about the author and the setting. In this introduction, however, say nothing that might spoil the freshness of the read-along experience for the students. For example: *Do not reveal the direction or the outcome of the plot.*

3. Compare the original story. You may want some groups to compare the adapted audio version and the original short story. If the original story has had extensive adaptation, look for a section entitled Original Story in the story's *SPECIFIC TEACHING SUGGESTIONS*.

Through the Story

1. Hand out one copy of the script to each student. Have students briefly look the script over. Read the "Cast" list with them and, if appropriate, point out the relationships between the different characters. Review the meaning of "Prologue," "Narrator," and "Scene." Discuss the format of the script. The script is printed so that all words not heard on the tape are printed in UPPERCASE letters, and information such as important actions and sound effects are [BRACKETED]. Students should understand the significance of [BRACKETED] information. Be sure to show the students that the words in these [BRACKETED] sections help them understand and visualize the actions and sounds they will hear on the tape. You might relate this to a moving picture. With radio drama, however, the images are not on a screen; they need to appear in the mind, instead.
2. Listen to the tape. As a class, students should listen to the tape while they read along with their scripts. Some students will want to draw or do homework while the tape is playing. Don't allow this. Insist that they read along. If at any point students have trouble following the tape, stop the tape, help them find their place in the script, and restart the tape.
3. Do follow-up activities. Of course, the activities you choose will depend upon the abilities of the students. Only you, the teacher, can decide which will be most effective.
 - a. If the students in the class are slow readers, the activities should stress discussion. Writing activities should be simple and, especially in the early sessions, guided. An example of a guided writing activity is: (1) Summarize the story with the whole class. (2) Have the class, as a group, decide plot steps and their sequence. (3) Instruct each student to write these steps on his/her own paper. This assisted exercise makes the activity as easy and interesting as possible, yet doesn't diminish the importance or the enjoyment of the read-along session itself.
 - b. If the class is made up of more advanced reading students, the follow-up activities should be much more in the nature of a literature class. The Discussion/Writing Activity poses a variety of provocative questions raising interesting issues from the stories. These may be completed orally or in writing.

Beyond the Story

Extend the lesson. Extending the lesson beyond the story has at least two advantages. It offers opportunities to delve into subjects that may be of special interest and/or importance to the students, *and* it allows the teacher to extend the positive attitude generated by the story into other areas of study. Some examples are:

1. Research for a report about a subject suggested by the play. The report might be presented orally, or in writing.
2. Adapt a favorite story as a stage play, audio play, or as a dramatic reading. (1) As a class, select a story. (A story with much dialogue and only a few characters is advisable.) (2) Read and study the story. (3) Decide upon any changes to be made, setting (time and place), characters, etc. (4) Divide the story into sections. (5) Divide the class into groups equal to the number of sections. (6) Let each group adapt a section of the story into script form. (7) Use the read-along format as a model. (8) More advanced classes might be divided into groups and given the assignment for each group to adapt and present a story to the class.
3. Write an original script for an audio play.
4. Read a story of similar type and compare and contrast: CHARACTER, CONFLICT, solution to the CONFLICT, PLOT, SETTING, etc.

Using *Read-Along Radio Dramas*

The activities you select for your class should be determined by your students' reading and maturity levels. **YOU** are the best judge of which activities will be effective with **YOUR** students. The following suggestions should be adapted to fit **YOUR** particular situation.

1. Students with limited language skills:
 - a. Begin at a more basic level and proceed at a slower pace.
 - b. Stress listening and visualization.
 - c. Let the students experience a full range of activities (Vocabulary, Cloze, Sequence, etc.)
 - d. See the detailed lesson plan on the opposite side of this sheet.
2. Students with average language skills:
 - a. Follow the read-along session with the Cloze and/or the Sequence activities.
 - b. Help students focus on the story as a whole.
 - c. Form your class into small groups, assign each group a different discussion question (or two) and give them a few minutes to agree upon a complete answer. Students can then be asked to share their answers with the rest of the class. Allow the class to respond orally to group answers.
3. Students with more advanced language skills:
 - a. Do an in-depth analysis of the story and include a comparison with the original story.
 - b. Use fewer prepared worksheets.
 - c. Stress discussion, writing, and extended activities. Use *Read-Along Radio Dramas* to begin a wider exploration of literature. Follow-up activities should lead to reading other stories.

Some Other Suggestions

1. Magazine storage boxes make ideal storage containers for *Read-Along Radio Dramas*, so that duplicated read-along scripts and the cassette tape may be kept in one place until needed again.
2. Magnetic recordings may be erased or damaged when they come in contact with magnets. (Audio speakers and electric motors contain magnets.)
3. Keep your tapes cool. The life of the recording tape itself may be shortened when stored under conditions of high temperatures.
4. We have found that the best way to staple scripts is with one staple in the upper left-hand corner, using a triangular tab. You may wish to have your students help you with making scripts—the activity can be a worthwhile lesson in following written directions. Write the following instructions on the board (or an overhead projector), give each student an unstapled script, a paper triangle, and have them follow the instructions. (Triangles should have two sides of 2 inches joined at right angles.)

Instructions for students:

1. Check to be sure that you have all pages of the script and that they are in the correct sequence.
2. Make the sides of all pages perfectly square and even with each other.
3. Staple the script in the upper left-hand corner approximately 1/2 inch from the corner.
4. Lay the script flat and face up.
5. Place the paper triangle over the stapled corner of the script, with the exact center of the base of the triangle (the longest side) touching the tip of the stapled corner of the script. The peak of the triangle should now be pointing toward the bottom right corner of the script.
6. Fold the two resulting flaps of the triangle, around the corner of the script, overlapping at the back (a little glue or paste will help hold the folded triangle in place).
7. Staple the reinforced corner of the script approximately 1/2 inch down from the corner.
8. Using scissors, trim the excess.

Note: Several advanced skills are involved in performing this activity, visualizing from written language is one of the most difficult. If students need help with visualizing, don't be too quick to help. Let them try to solve the problem for themselves. Before frustration becomes extreme, however, draw a picture or show a model.

A Sample Lesson Plan

for Students With Limited Language Skills

1. Make copies of the *Listening Activity* and the *Cloze Activity*. Look over the other student activity sheets and decide if there are any others that you wish your students to complete. Make copies of these also.
2. Give the students some information about the story.
 - a. Referring to the author information in the *Specific Teaching Suggestions*, tell the students some interesting highlights about the author.
 - b. If the story is an adaptation and important changes have been made in the original, discuss those changes. (See *Specific Teaching Suggestions*.)
3. Tell the students that this is a reading activity and stress the importance of reading along on the script as they listen to the play.
4. Hand out the scripts and play the tape. As the students read along, if you think they are confused about something, or you want to emphasize a point, stop the tape and hold a brief discussion. It isn't a good idea to stop too often, however, because stopping the tape interrupts the flow of the story. It may be preferable to have the students read-along twice, discussing, answering questions, and pointing out important ideas after the first time through.
5. Summarize the story with the entire class.
 - a. Ask the students to name the first incident in the story. Write the incident on the board.
 - b. Go through the entire play this way, asking the students to name the incidents in the order that they occurred. As they mention the incidents, write them on the board.
 - c. When they have completed the story summary, ask them to make sure that the incidents are listed in the sequence that they happened in the play. Go back over their list with them and let them decide if they have missed any incidents. Help the students to understand the difference between an important plot step and a minor detail. In "The Perfect Touch", leaving out the boy's trip back to town would leave a large hole in the plot. Leaving out a minor detail—the squeaking door, for instance—would not effect the completeness of the story.
 - d. Have the students copy the summary onto their own paper.
6. Hand a copy of the *Listening Activity* to each student.
 - a. Tell the students that they are going to listen to the tape a second time and that this time they are to listen for specific details on the tape.
 - b. Read both the activity sheet directions and the items to the students.
 - c. Remind students that they are not to fill in the blanks until they hear the answer on the tape.
 - d. Play the tape for the students.
 - e. Correct the answers. (Refer to the key in the *Specific Teaching Suggestions* section.)
7. Hand out a copy of the *Cloze Activity* to each student.
 - a. Go over the instructions with the students.
 - b. You may wish to write the answer choices on the board. Or you may wish to write the exact answers on the board (out of sequence, or course).
 - c. Have students complete the activity.
 - d. Correct the answers.
8. Depending on the skill level of your students, you may have selected additional activities for your students. Perhaps a writing assignment would be appropriate at this time.
9. Some students may wish to do a follow-up project. Help them decide on a good project and let them proceed with your help and encouragement. Refer to *Teaching Strategies* section for some suggestions.