



Reader's Theater Exercise 9: Eliminating Poor Speaking Habits

This month our Reader's Theater exercise focuses on how to improve students' natural speech, getting rid of bad habits. Learning to communicate ideas clearly and effectively is an important life skill that will help young students succeed in the future. Many kids develop speaking habits that are detrimental to the way others perceive them. Some common problems are summarized below.

- * using uh, um, like, and, so to fill spaces in their speech
- * repeating words
- * casual language such as "you know"
- * mumbling
- * looking down without eye contact
- * making statements that sound like questions

Many adults and children use **filled pauses** such as saying "uh," "um," or other meaningless sounds in their every day speaking patterns. Inappropriate and excessive use of the word, "like" for emphasis or to fill empty space is also in this category, especially for children.

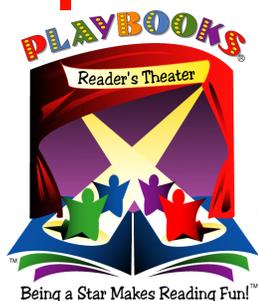
Sentences often sound like the following: "I got, like, an A on my, um, math test that we, like, got back today, and um, like we don't have any homework, um, this week."

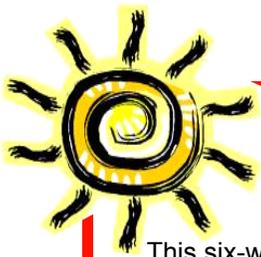
When a speaker needs to gather his or her thoughts, it is much more effective to simply pause a moment or two, even though the silence may be very uncomfortable for the speaker. Using pauses instead of saying "um" will keep the listeners focused on the content of what someone is saying. It can be helpful to remind children to breathe in instead of out when they feel the urge to use a filler word. Sometimes "and" or "so" are used as bridge words, when the speaker does not yet know what he or she will say next; these words should be limited.

Another common issue is making statements that sound like questions by bringing up the vocal pitch at the end of the sentence. This gives the impression of being unsure of oneself and needing affirmation from the people with whom you are speaking. Children should practice ending sentences with both lower and higher voices and learn when each is appropriate. **Other problems with effectively expressing oneself include repeating words, using casual language such as "you know" or "so anyways," mumbling, and looking down instead of making eye contact.**

These types of poor speaking habits are disastrous, and it's important that children break these habits when they are as young as possible! Highly focused speaking exercises over a short period of time can help students break these habits. This month's exercise is ideal for 4-6 week summer school programs as well as regular year curriculum. It provides a structured plan that teaches kids about common habits, along with read aloud exercise scenes that students respond to by explaining verbally their comprehension of what happened in the scene in their own words. This exercise then prompts them to answer a question about the scene, all while being mindful to not speak with poor speaking habits. **The chart included in this exercise allows teachers to record how many times the students uses bad speaking habit from the list above, and tracks their progress with a positive six-week classroom challenge. Have fun with this exercise!**

(continued on next page)





Summer School Classroom Challenge!

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This six-week exercise is great for summer school, or any time, and will help your students learn to speak and express themselves clearly without using common poor speaking habits. On the following pages are **12 scenes from some of our Playbook® stories, a question for students to answer about each scene, as well as a chart for recording students' performance.**

Plan to set aside ten minutes per day for this worthwhile activity. Each day, have two or three students read aloud a scene from the list. (2 students for a six-week program and 3 students for a four-week program) Assign each student a different scene in order to avoid the students copying each other's verbiage and answers. Pass out the correct scene sheet, and after the students read the scenes, have each explain what occurred in their scene in their own words. Also ask them to answer the question printed under the scene. **Review the list of poor speaking habits below, and instruct the students to try not to use them as they recount their scenes.**

- **Saying "uh" or "um"**
- **Using "like" inappropriately**
- **Using "and" or "so" excessively**
- **Repeating words**
- **Making statements that sound like questions, with the vocal tone brought up at the end**
- **Mumbling**

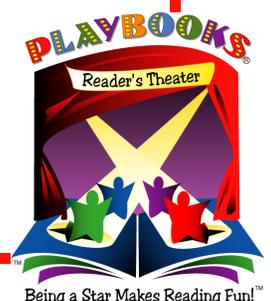
Each time you notice the student using one of the bad habits, make a tally mark in the correct column of each student's performance chart. **In the case of "and" or "so," which can be used legitimately, only count the times the student says the words more than twice.** The rest of the class should listen to the students whose turn it is to speak; this will help them become more aware of their own speech patterns and learn to correct their own common mistakes. Students will have fun laughing at their own slip-ups and encouraging their classmates!

Over the course of a week, each student should get a turn to recount a scene and take the challenge of speaking fluently and effectively with few or no bad habits. Each week, cycle through the twelve scenes so that no scenes are performed twice too closely together, and students perform a different scene during each of their turns over the six weeks. **Remember to focus on the positive, praising students for few errors and weekly improvement rather than emphasizing the negative when students make many errors.** (See "Positive Points" Tracking System)

"Positive Points" Tracking System: Although we are keeping track on negative elements it is important to report it in a positive manner. This is achieved by having every student start with a total score of 100. Total up the number of tally marks for each student each week. To calculate each student's score after the first week, subtract the number of tally marks recorded from 100. For subsequent weeks, subtract tally marks from the previous week's score so you can keep a cumulative score week by week. **When a student shows improvement from one week to the next, add two bonus points to the student's score!** In the chart, place a check mark on the "Bonus Points to be Added?" line to remind yourself to add the points to the student's weekly score. The students' goal is to have the highest points possible.

To add to the fun, offer a prize to the student with the highest score at the end of the six week challenge! You may wish to make a poster representing a race track to be displayed in the classroom. The poster can be marked with numbers of points at different points on the track. You or the students can make "competitor" pieces out of tag board which you can move around the race track as needed, pinning them up with tacks. **Students will be motivated to make progress and earn those bonus points to move ahead!**

(scenes and score chart on following pages)





The Coopersville Capers

Narrator: Quickly, Tommy dumped the worms from his pocket onto Stephanie's plate of spaghetti ... or at least he thought it was Stephanie's plate of spaghetti! It was the moment of truth. Simultaneously, Miss Plum and Stephanie took bites of their spaghetti. Stephanie's smile continued while Miss Plum's faded into a scowl!

Miss Plum: Oh, I deeeclare! This is awful ... dreeead-fully awful!

Stephanie: What is it, Miss Plum?

Miss Plum: WOOORMS! I can't bahlieve I see woorms in my spaghetti!

Why do you think the boys try to put worms in Stephanie's spaghetti?

Rapunzel

Prince: Mirror, mirror, on the wall ... who is the handsomest one of all?

Rapunzel: (timidly) I hope you don't mind me asking, but aren't you in the *wrong* fairy tale?

Prince: What? Oh, sorry. Wrong *mirror*. It is only the one at *home* that does that. Oooh! I just noticed ... you are the most beautiful person I have ever seen—except for *me*, of course. Will you marry me?

Rapunzel: Well, the witch said I'm not allowed to date until I'm thirty-five, and even then I won't be allowed to leave the tower.

Witch: (suddenly) Rapunzel! Rapunzel! Let down your hair!

How does this passage sound similar and different from a different version of the Rapunzel story you may have heard?

Princess and the Pea

Queen: Do you remember when we went to Arbes in the South Seas to meet Princess Endoo?

King: It was sooo windy there. I had three crowns blown right off my head, and I never found *any* of them. My hair stood straight up for a week.

Prince Borso: I liked it, Father. I love to sing and play music.

Grasak (servant): (talking to himself) Right! People ran for miles when you showed up with your ukulele!

Prince Borso: Did you say something, Grasak? I am sure I heard something this time.

Grasak (servant): (coughing) No, no! I was recalling Princess Endoo.

Past Princess Endoo: (yawning) Oooh! I just love to relax. (slowly) I want to sit here for the rest of the day, and not lift a finger.

Why do you think Grasak mumbles under his breath?

Ick! I'm Sick!

Germ Chorus: Sneeze and cough, blow your snot! Don't just say it, go and spray it!

Narrator: Now all the kids in the school were trying to get rid of the cold. There was so much sneezing and coughing that the teachers couldn't teach. They started sending kids to the nurse.

Nurse: (amazed) I have never seen so many kids with a cold all at once!

Jessica: Yes, we are all sick. We feel very tired.

Cody: We want to get rid of the cold! We are trying very hard to give it away!

Nurse: (shocked) What do you mean give it away? You can't get rid of it by giving it away! That is how people get sick in the first place!

Do you think the nurse can hear the germs chanting, too?

The Ice Cream Dream

Narrator: He soon found out that the electricity was off, and that the ice cream in all of his eighty freezers was melting. As the day got warmer, the ice cream started to melt faster, and soon it was running out of the freezers!

Chocolate Ice Cream: It's running down the stairs! It's running out the door! It's running down the street!

Narrator: There was a terrible mess all over the place. What little furniture he had left and all the freezers floated out of the house, too. They were all swirling around in the street in the melted ice cream. Mr. MacRicee fell down and was swept away in the melted ice cream.

Store Clerk: Do not worry, Mr. MacRicee! I will save you!

Narrator: It was the man from the grocery store. He was rowing a small boat toward Mr. MacRicee. Mr. MacRicee was so fat that as soon as he climbed into the boat, it tipped over. When he came up for air, he hit his head on the boat.

What do you think is going to happen next?

The Great Rhyme Travel Machine

Narrator: Melinda and Marcus were working after school to finish their Invention Fair project. Suddenly, the main lights in the classroom flickered off. Oddly, the string of old lights on the Rhyme Travel Machine flashed to life, glowing in the darkness. The classroom desks rattled along with the machine.

All Readers: (louder and louder) Beep, Bop, BING, BANG ... BOOM!

Narrator: The earthquake continued as the students stood in shock. After a few moments the familiar sounds of the school building returned and the classroom lights came back on. Then Melinda and Marcus heard a beeping sound again. It sounded far away and close at the same time.

Marcus: What's that?

Melinda: (in disbelief) I think it's coming from our Invention Fair project!

What do you think the Great Rhyme Travel Machine is supposed to do?



Reader's Theater Exercise 9 (continued): Scenes (page 2)



Mini, the Super Watermelon

Narrator: Mini bounced into the bin and got in for a better view of the people at the farmer's market. Suddenly it was the people that had a better view of her!

Old Woman: Farmer, sir, I wish to purchase that miniature watermelon. Please hand it to me.

Young Woman: No wait, I saw it first. It's the only one. It's mine.

Man: Here, I'll solve the problem. I'll pay more for it.

Mini: (talking to herself) Wow, everyone thinks I'm special. Just like my parents always say.

Old Woman: I simply must have that watermelon, sir. It is packed with vitamins A, B6, and C, which are good for me and my family.

Young Woman: Hands off! It's my watermelon. It has potassium, which is something I need. And, it's small and portable and I can take it to work in my bag.

Man: But it's the perfect size for me and my wife. And watermelon has lycopene, which is an anti-oxidant. That makes it a super food.

Watermelon is healthy for you even though it is sweet! Why do you think watermelon good for you, but chocolate cake is not?

Sundance and the Bully

Narrator: One day, Sundance the kitten spied a frog and wandered off a bit from the protection of the older cats who shared his house.

Bully Cat: (teasing) Hey, baby chimp! Where did you come from? The zoo? Ha, ha, ha! The zoo!

Sundance: Why no, I live wight over....

Bully Cat: Well, Monkey Boy! Where'd you leave the rest of your monkey friends? Playing in their cages?

Sundance: I'm not a monkey. I'm a cat! You are weally big.

Bully Cat: (laughing) You can't even talk right, zoo boy. And you don't look like a cat either. Only monkeys have tails that long. Your tail is funny looking. I should take you back to the zoo! Your monkey mom might miss you....

Jordache: Beat it, Bully Cat! You're not wanted around here.

Why do you think the Bully Cat was teasing Sundance?

The String Thing

Narrator: Neville quietly watched the trio. Lord Pomp broke off a lengthy branch from the nearby willow tree. Assisted by the Countess and the Duchess, he lowered the supple limb into the cavernous hole.

Lord Pomp: (echoing) Hello—hello—hello in there ... this is as far as I can lower this branch. Can you grasp it? Hello?

Countess Blueblood: (shouting into the hole) If you can reach up—just grab onto the branch and shake it. Then we'll know you're there!

Duchess Bravado: Yes! If you shake it, then we'll pull you up, and we'll....

Lord Pomp: (annoyed) I hear absolutely nothing! See? I was right. It's just some small, unfortunate animal. There's nothing for us to do here. We should give up on this silly charade.

Narrator: Lord Pomp was silent as he waited for a response from within the black depths. When none was received, he loosened his grip on the branch and carelessly let go.

Why do you think Lord Pomp concluded that there is no one in the hole?

A Snail's Pace Race

Mayor Chatterley: (breaking in quickly) I just want to add "good luck" to all those entered in today's race here in our beautiful city of Shellton. Isn't it something to be able to see this! I also just want to say....

Robin Bailey: Excuse me, Mayor Chatterley, I hate to interrupt you, but the race is just about to start now.

Mayor Chatterley: But before it starts, I just want to say....

Robin Bailey: Sorry, Mayor Chatterley, but right now we have a word from our sponsor ... the world-famous sports drink—Croc-Ade.

Sponsor: Does your energy poop out on you halfway through the race? Do you get thirsty even after trying other "so-called" sports drinks? Do you want to improve your energy? Do you want to win? Then drink Croc-Ade! Stay tuned as we return you to ABZ's "Huge World of Sports" coverage of The Great Race.

Why do you think Robin Bailey, the sports reporter, interrupts Mayor Chatterley?

The Fairy and the Frog

Narrator: Curiosity had gotten the best of Pixie Lou. She decided she simply had to know the reason for all the fuss. She needed to find out what was so bad about the frog kingdom. The two fat frogs certainly didn't look mean, and since her mother wouldn't tell her what was going on, she was determined to do some investigating on her own. The next day Pixie was up early. She quickly found all the tools she needed to turn herself into a beautiful dragonfly.

Pixie Lou: (thoughtfully) I'll just need to get these leaves to stay around my legs ... I need to use these seeds to make my head look bigger ... I wonder if I should use rocks instead ... and, let's see, what else?

Narrator: Pixie worked quickly and, with a little magical fairy dust, she soon had her disguise. She peered into the rushing water of the river where she could see a blurry reflection of herself.

Pixie Lou: I don't look too bad! Okay, here goes nothing. I'll just go over for a minute and check out those so-called "dangerous" frogs.

Why do you think Pixie Lou needs to sneak off in disguise if she wants to talk to the frogs? Why do you think they are considered dangerous?

The Baseball Equation

Tyler's Mom: How was P.E. class today, Tyler?

Tyler: Not so good, as usual. We played baseball again. Every time I tried to hit the ball, I missed, tripped, or fell down.

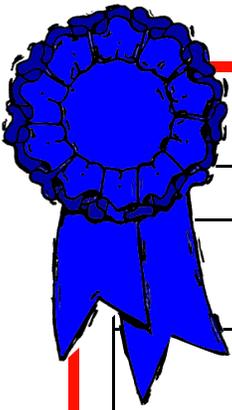
Tyler's Mom: Oh, sweetie. You'll do great things if you never give up. I know your dad would have been proud of you for sticking with it. He loved the sport so much. How was math?

Tyler: It was pretty good. I learned a lot of equations today, and I got an "A+" on my math test.

Tyler's Mom: Of course you did. You're the straight "A" guy.

Tyler is much better at math than baseball. What are you best at?





Student's Name: _____

	Times "Bad Habit" Heard						
	"Uh" or "Um"	"Like"	"And" or "So"	Repeated Words	Sounded Like a Question	Mumbling	Total
Week 1							
Week 2							2 Bonus Points to be Added? _____
Week 3							2 Bonus Points to be Added? _____
Week 4							2 Bonus Points to be Added? _____
Week 5							2 Bonus Points to be Added? _____
Week 6							2 Bonus Points to be Added? _____

Positive Point Tracking: Although you are tracking a negative habit, starting with 100 points reverses the tracking to a positive goal. Deduct the totals above for each week and keep a cumulative score below, week by week. You may wish to reward the students with the highest points at the end of six weeks.

Start With: 100 Points

Points After Week 1: _____

Points After Week 4: _____

Points After Week 2: _____

Points After Week 5: _____

Points After Week 3: _____

Points After Week 6: _____

