

## **Narrative Support for including Reader's Theater in Grant Application for 21st CCLC Funding**

This document is structured with relative and pertinent narrative support that fairly parallels the structure and requirements of the application for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants. It is designed to allow you to pull out and copy verbiage and research references and paste them into the narrative sections of your application as you see fit and as you customize your application to fit your own particular program.

### **Identifying the Need**

**Reading fluency is of paramount importance to learning.** According to The National Institute for Literacy, a federal agency, "Fluency is vital to comprehension, which is the main goal of reading." The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) has stated that fluency is one of five major components of reading that teachers must include in their instruction. There have been many studies demonstrating the strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension (examples include: Allington, 1983; NAEP 1995; Johns, 1993; Samuels, 1988; Schreiber, 1980; Stanovich, 1991). However, according to a comprehensive study by NAEP, 44% of the nation's fourth graders were low in fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000) even though "reading is fundamental to progress and success in all other school subjects" (Irwin, 1967). If students cannot comprehend what they are reading, they will not be able to learn effectively.

**Fluency** is the ability to read "quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression" (*Rasinski, 2003*). Fluency includes three main components:

- Word recognition is identifying words accurately and quickly.
- Decoding is the ability to figure out unknown words.
- Prosody is often referred to as "reading with expression" and is the use of stress or emphasis, pitch or intonation, tempo or rate, the rhythmic or regularly reoccurring patterns of language, and appropriate phrasing (*Kuhn, 2003*).

**Fluency is also necessary for comprehension.** *Laberge and Samuels* find in their article, "Toward a Theory of Automatic Information Processing in Reading," that if a reader is spending too much energy and thought simply trying to decipher words, there will be little brain power left over for comprehension. The reader can easily become frustrated and begin to dislike and avoid reading altogether. One of the best ways to improve fluency and, therefore, comprehension is through **oral practice**. By reading a text several times, students are able to better improve their fluency, but their interest must be piqued for them to want to repeat what they have already read.

21<sup>st</sup> Century CCLC program requirements suggest that after-school academic reading programs should NOT mirror the school day's curriculum, but instead complement it. There is also a **specific requirement/need for reading activities to be fun and engaging** while reinforcing learning. These activities must also **stimulate children mentally and physically** and **allow ALL students to participate** regardless of age or skill level. There is also a **requirement/need for Drama and Theater Arts activities** that are practical for implementation in after-school programs as well as opportunities for **Character Education**. It's also important that these programs cater to at-risk students with high academic, social, or behavioral needs and be measurable allowing for periodic assessment.

### **Addressing the Need**

Research has shown that "**Repeated Guided Oral Reading**" is the **most effective** method for improving reading fluency (especially when it includes higher level role models). **The National Reading panel conducted an extensive study of the efficacy of repeated oral reading by examining 16 previously conducted studies that met with their research methodology criteria of which they performed a meta-analysis.** After completing a detailed analysis the panel found that "guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels. (*also see "Putting Reading First" <http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/PFRbooklet.pdf>*)

**Reader's Theater is an approved method of repeated guided oral reading for building reading fluency.** (*See references at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/read/read/rb/edlite-slide019.html> and at <http://readtoachieve.org/readerstheaterresearchreferences.htm>*) **Reader's Theater** is a fun, engaging and entertaining method of reading aloud that captivates students' interest, and gives them a legitimate reason and desire to re-read the same text. According to *The Importance of Automaticity and Fluency for Efficient Reading Comprehension* (2002), a study by Hooks and Jones, improvement of fluency and comprehension is also eased by having students read words that

are grouped into sentences and sound like natural speech. Reader's Theater, with its complete character dialogue, is a clear method of incorporating this into teaching.

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, one of the key elements of a successful after-school program is exposure to visual and performing arts activities. According to the National Endowment of the Arts (<http://www.nea.gov>), after-school programs that include the arts add a special dimension, and students involved in sustained theater arts (scene study, acting techniques, dramatic or musical theater productions) often show improvement not only in reading proficiency, but also in self-control and motivation and in empathy and tolerance for others. Learning in and through the arts can even help students overcome the obstacles of disadvantaged backgrounds.

According to read-aloud expert, Jim Trelease, modeling is a key component to building fluency, so the best way to increase children's reading ability is through listening to more advanced text than they can read on their own. This is because children have higher "listening comprehension" than "reading comprehension." Therefore, in order to increase their reading ability and fluency, they should be "listening" to richer vocabulary and more advanced text than they are able to read independently.

### **21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Application Narrative Component for Design Requirement A**

One of the best ways to improve fluency and, therefore, comprehension is through "Repeated Guided Oral Reading". The National Reading Panel research found that "guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels. But how is repeated, guided oral reading done in a non-threatening environment? Though the arts and Reader's Theater!

Reader's Theater provides an easy-to-implement, fun, and engaging reading enrichment activity in the form of dramatic texts (scripts/plays/stories) that do not require memorization, props or a stage. Scripts are written like plays with character dialogue, but also include narration (like stories) to explain to readers/listeners what's happening in the story that the readers can't hear or see. This narration is what eliminates the needs for props, stage, or sound effects. Children/youth read aloud together in small groups with each assuming a different character role and bringing it to life with verbal and physical expression.

Learning in and through the arts can even help students overcome the obstacles of disadvantaged backgrounds. Reader's Theater gives ALL students the opportunity to be creative which keeps them engaged for the entire reading activity. Putting on a theatrical play can be a tremendous amount of work and preparation for instructors and students and typically only provides a spotlight for a handful of kids (usually those who already have the confidence or talent to read or perform in front of large groups). Conversely, Reader's Theater provides a balanced platform for ALL students to shine with mostly balanced roles being read in small non-threatening groups.

In fact, struggling readers tend to be the best Reader's Theater performers (when given a role they can read with accuracy and confidence) as they seem to have a better aptitude for creative and dramatic expression. Consequently, they typically end up being the biggest stars in this type of activity. Imagine now that you are a student that once was filled with anxiety at the thought of reading out loud and now you associate your reading with pride and confidence. Reader's Theater offers a life-changing opportunity for many struggling students in a way that captivates students' interest and gives them a legitimate reason and desire to re-read the same text.

Quality scripts, primarily scripts in which character roles have been written at easier and harder levels within the same story/script can be an expensive purchase for afterschool programs with limited budgets. However, quality scripts are critical, as they provide struggling readers with opportunities to practice reading their own level of text while being exposed to the modeling of higher level reading.

Afterschool program providers can privately assign roles according to the reader's age and ability and put younger or low level readers with older or high level readers for the group activity. This allows all students to read together, each at their own level, with confidence and enthusiasm while building fluency.

Certain Reader's Theater scripts are available with color-coded dialogue text which helps students quickly identify their roles and size up the amount they are to read on each and every page. This gives them a sense of security knowing when and how much they will be responsible for reading aloud, and it also gives them a sense of ownership and importance in their role.

Reader's Theater complements the typical regular daytime academic program by giving students opportunities to read aloud. A large portion of reading done in the classroom is comprised of silent reading or listening to a teacher or other student read aloud. There is typically not enough instructional time in most reading blocks to allow every student ample opportunity to read aloud. Furthermore, at-risk students are also typically lacking in opportunities for reading aloud with a parent or family member at home. Since speaking in front of an audience is the number one fear of many adults, it's important that children have opportunities while they are young to overcome this potential fear with experience and practice.

Lesson Plans provided with Reader's Theater materials outline how it can be implemented as an ongoing daily or weekly activity. Depending upon the needs and structure of an after-school program, it can be implemented as an 8-12 week program (or longer), but can also be done as a short 4-week program. Typically students read one story/play per week, including 1-3 repeat readings, while also doing assessment and supplemental activities that reinforce concepts from the story and go beyond the story into the content areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Art, Health, etc., as well as Character Education.

With respect to "student-to-staff ratio," **Reader's Theater typically only takes one instructor for a large group of students** of all ages to first explain the format of reading, and then to read with a rotating group of 6 students. For example, the instructor would explain Reader's Theater, role assignments, expressive reading, grouping, etc. to ALL students at once and then call up the first group of students to read a story in a small group. Other students could be engaged in a completely different activity or also grouped by 6 to read a play in their own small groups. (Ideal is for each group of 6 students to be reading a different play.)

When reading for the first time, the instructor can take a role in the first small group and read with students while also coaching and/or modeling how to read with expression and following along and being ready when their parts come up. Once the reading is finished, that first group of students could move to another table to do a supplemental activity or worksheet relative to the story (certain publishers provides these activity supplements with Reader's Theater books) while the instructor reads the same or a different story with the next group of 6 students. Once the instructor has read at least once with each group, the groups could then do the second to fourth repetitions of the reading throughout the week on their own without the instructor. Each week, students can simply be given a new story to read in their small groups, repeating the reading 1-3 times and working in groups through the assessment and supplemental activities. The amount of time spent on the reading activity can range between 30-90 minutes depending upon age group (and resulting story length) and supplemental activities. The time can be reduced by having several story sets that do not have to be shared or rotated amongst groups so all student groups can be reading the same or a different story at the same time.

Because groups are typically made up of older and younger students, the older students become the group leaders/moderators and therefore a large group of staff is not needed for implementation. **Students are offered a variety of interesting content and roles through several different stories suited for their grade level spans.** Most Reader's Theater stories are appealing to a range of 2-3 grade levels that can read together. At the end of a several week program, instructors and students can pick their favorite play and perform it for all students, families or other audience. Typically students identified as the "best performers" are selected from groups to make up one final performing group for the performance in front of an audience.

Staff Development/Training can be helpful for after-school staff when implementing reading activities. Although **Reader's Theater is very easy to implement** and usually only requires a review of material instructions typically provided by publishers, certain publishers offer training workshops with professional trainers or provide a step-by-step staff training session outline for program directors to implement themselves.

### **Evaluation/Assessment**

Evaluation can be achieved in several ways, but the most common for measuring reading improvement is through a reading level assessment. Known and accepted Reading Level measurement scales include Fountas & Pinnell/ Guided Reading, Reading Recovery, DRA and Lexile. Most teachers are familiar with how to assess students under these scales. However, for after-school providers, instructors may not be familiar or adept at this type of measurement. Luckily, certain publishers of Reader's Theater materials provide reading level tests that can be implemented easily by after-school providers. The test is given before and after the multi-week Reader's Theater program and once or twice during the program (depending upon program length, typically every 4 weeks). This information can be tracked on a simple chart highlighting improvement.

It is also important to evaluate changes and improvement in student behavior which can be achieved through a Subjective Behavioral Survey with questions to be answered by both the instructor and student. Questions relate to determining improved levels of shyness, ability to interact with others, self-control, motivation, empathy, patience, confidence in own ability (especially reading confidence), creativity, attention span, and enthusiasm, attitude and desire to learn and read. Certain publishers of Reader's Theater materials provide these types of surveys for instructors to use.

### **Budget Narrative**

Reader's Theater scripts that come in complete sets with a copy for each reader **eliminate the need to reproduce scripts. Reproducing scripts can be costly in time and materials and don't hold up well under student use**, resulting in the need to reproduce them again and again. They also don't present the quality image to students that the materials are important and valuable. Therefore, stapled black and white scripts do not get the respect and reverence from students that colorized and bound materials get.

Certain publishers that specialize in Reader's Theater provide full sets of scripts/books that include supplemental activity worksheets, mini costumes, and game accessories along with staff training. All these features comprise a site staff-executable complete program at a low cost.

### **Additional Design Requirements that can be met with Reader's Theater include:**

- **(C) Recreational Activities** – Reader's Theater is a recreational activity that can be done inside **during inclement weather**. Furthermore, as a **Physical Education** activity, Reader's Theater plays with **“healthy themes”** such as **nutrition, sports, or exercise** can be very engaging and informative and are available from certain publishers.
- **(F) Dropout Prevention** – Reader's Theater supports Dropout Prevention by offering students **exposure to performing arts** in a format that is appealing to all students, not just those with the confidence to perform in front of an audience.
- **(H) Character Education** – Reader's Theater helps students build character by giving them **opportunities to role-play** in a variety of scenarios and situations presented in certain plays. Certain publishers focus on including **redeeming story characters that “do the right thing” in specific social, ethical and emotional situations**, along with discussion/writing prompts (through supplemental activity sheets or game cards) that give students **opportunities to explore their own behavior**.
- **Optional Activities** include Arts and Music Education and must also align to one of the A-H Design Requirements – **Reader's Theater** is a **Theater Arts** activity that aligns with Design Requirement A by **also providing reading enrichment at the same time**.

### **Notes to Grant Application Writer Regarding Certain Publishers**

Most all references above to “certain publishers” are intended to refer to **Playbooks® Reader's Theater** which is the **only publisher that specializes in Reader's Theater** and provides all-inclusive sets with a color book copy for each reader, supplemental cross-curricular activities and game sets, mini costumes, and staff development/training. Playbooks® Reader's Theater is also the only publisher that presents its plays/scripts with color-coded character roles (wherein the actual dialogue text is printed in a different color for each character) along with each role targeting a specific reading level. Playbooks, Inc. owns several patents for this colorized and multi-level format, and therefore other publishers are prohibited by law to copy this format directly. Information about Playbooks® Reader's Theater can be found at <http://playbooks.com>. Playbooks, Inc. is a sole-source vendor, therefore competitive bids are not necessary. Playbooks, Inc. Tax ID# is 33-0959303 and a W-9 and Sole Source letter can be found at <http://playbooks.com/vendorapproval.shtml>.

### **Additional References**

Additional information regarding the current knowledge from research or best practices can be found at: <http://readtoachieveinc.org/readerstheaterresearch.htm>.

