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Building Fluency through Reader's Theater: American Tall Tales and Legends

This sample includes the following:

Teacher's Guide Cover (1 page)

Table of Contents (1 page)

What's Included in Each Lesson (7 pages)

Lesson Plan (6 pages)

Script (14 pages)

To Create a World ⁱⁿ which
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The background of the cover is a theater stage with red curtains. A spotlight from the top right corner illuminates a white sign with a red border and yellow lights. The sign contains the text 'Building Fluency through Reader's Theater'. Below the sign, the title 'American Tall Tales and Legends' is written in large white letters. A director's chair is visible in the lower left, and the text 'Teacher's Guide' is in the lower right. A red banner at the bottom says 'Teacher Created Materials'.

Building Fluency
through
**Reader's
Theater**

**American
Tall Tales
and Legends**

Teacher's Guide

Teacher Created Materials

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What's Included in Each Lesson

Objectives

The objectives state the purpose of each lesson and communicate the desired outcome of the lesson related to fluency and the content area. The objectives are taken from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) compilation of content standards for K–12 curriculum. As stated on the McREL website (<http://www.mcrel.org>), the purpose of the standards compilation is “to address the major issues surrounding content standards, provide a model for their identification, and apply this model in order to identify standards and benchmarks in the subject areas.”

Summary

Within each lesson there is a summary section that describes the script and provides information to share with students to prepare them for the reader's theater performance. To decide which scripts to complete with students, read the summaries to determine how each fits in with your teaching plans. As a convenience, the summaries for the scripts are also provided below.

Johnny Appleseed—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.

Pecos Bill and Slue-Foot Sue—Bronco busting, catfish riding, tornado catching, bouncing between the Earth and the moon on an untamed horse, and being raised by coyotes are just a few of the crazy adventures shared by two of the wildest people in the West: Pecos Bill and Slue-Foot Sue. Get ready to read the larger-than-life tale of a true match made in heaven.

John Henry—John Henry was a good man, a strong man. However, there was more to John than meets the eye. His life began in slavery and ended in freedom. The thing about John, though, is that he worked just as hard shackled in the chains of slavery as he did when he became a free man. He is responsible for laying many of the tracks of the famous C&O Railroad. He built strong friendships with those with whom he worked, and he offered his wife and mother a life of love and security. Read the story to learn more about this amazing man and the history of slavery.

Molly Pitcher—The story of Molly Pitcher is one of great strength, courage, and selflessness. She was quick to solve problems and protect those around her. She was ready for any challenge and never afraid to fight for what she believed in. During her life, she was appreciated and admired by many. Now, she is an American hero whose story continues to inspire patriotism in all who are lucky enough to hear it.

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Summary *(cont.)*

Paul Bunyan—Paul Bunyan was a huge man, described as a giant by most. He befriended a blue ox and named him Babe. According to the legend, these two larger-than-life companions created many of the landmarks we know and love today. Paul, a larger-than-life lumberjack, was known for overcoming any obstacle in his way. He symbolizes determination and hard work.

Sal Fink—Sal Fink is her name, but most refer to her as the “Mississippi Screamer” because when she got good and mad she would let out a scream loud enough for everyone and anyone to hear. It’s no wonder she was as wild and as strong as she was, for she IS the daughter of Mike Fink, the “King of the Keelboaters.” She adopted bear cubs and kept them as pets, rode an alligator down the river, and killed a bear with her bare hands—but it was her battle with a band of pirates that earned her the most fame! Read on to learn more about this tough gal.

Davy Crockett—From the day he was born on the top of a Tennessee mountain, Davy Crockett never ceased to amaze anyone or anything. He whipped comets by their tails, hugged a bear until the bear could no longer fight back, wrestled a panther, and wore a talking coonskin cap—just to name a few of his noteworthy feats. But perhaps the most awe-inspiring was when he saved the day. You see, it was very cold—so cold, in fact, that the Earth was frozen and the sun was stuck in the ice. Davy just came and set the sun free. Wow-wee! Read the story to find out more about just how resourceful he really was.

Annie Oakley—Phoebe Ann Mosey, or Annie Oakley as we know her, was born in 1860. Every day her family struggled to put food on the table. Her circumstances forced her to grow up fast. Cooking and sewing were among her many talents, but her claim to fame was her unique ability to shoot a rifle. She showcased this talent around the world. Annie’s success came at a challenging time for women. Her life and accomplishments were an inspiration to women everywhere.

Materials

All of the materials needed to complete a lesson are listed in this section to assist you in preparing for each lesson. In addition to these materials, each lesson has the following components:

- *PowerPoint*[®] slide show (Teacher Resource CD)
- overhead transparencies of the poem and song (Teacher Resource CD)
- Practice and Performance Tips (Performance CD [audio] and Teacher Resource CD [text])

Introduce the Literature

Several scripts in this kit are based on a piece of children’s literature. You are encouraged to read the book to your students or have your students read the book during language arts time. If the book is not available, this section provides a summary of the literature so you can share it with your students. For scripts that do not contain a piece of children’s literature, there are other tools and/or activities that are suggested to build on students’ background knowledge.

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

ELL Support

Reader's theater can be used effectively in classrooms with English language learners to enhance students' proficiency in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, the program can be adapted to scaffold and model language usage to meet students' needs at multiple levels. Through this program's ELL support activities and other various components of the lesson plans, students will become actively engaged in authentic language development activities. As a result, students' motivation to utilize the English language will increase.

The drama component of reader's theater helps students feel less inhibited in both speaking and reading the English language, and thus fluency in both areas will increase. In *Stage by Stage: A Handbook for Using Drama in the Second Language Classroom* (2002), authors Ann F. Burke and Julie C. O'Sullivan state that "Drama is simply a good way to get students' whole selves involved with language and it is fun" (xiii). The authors also emphasize that once students feel less inhibited, their fluency will increase, because within the context of reader's theater there is an inherent opportunity to do repeated readings and practice skills, such as pronunciation, in an authentic context.

Jennifer Catney McMaster (1998), in her review of research studies involving literacy and drama in the classroom, emphasizes the benefits of drama for emergent readers. Drama provides prior knowledge and rich literary experiences that emerging readers need, as well as a scaffold for literacy instruction. It helps students develop symbolic representation, new vocabulary, knowledge of word order, phrasing, and metacognition, and introduces them to various forms of discourse, all of which contribute to the construction of meaning from text.

Each script in this kit is accompanied by a musical piece and a corresponding poem. Both of these components have also been shown to facilitate students' language acquisition. Educator Tim Murphey (1992) analyzed the lyrics of pop songs and found several common language characteristics that would benefit language learners: the language is conversational; the lyrics are often sung at a slower rate than dialogue; and there is a repetition of vocabulary and structures. Moriya (1988) found that music provided Asian learners a forum to practice pronunciation and learn the phonemic differences between Asian languages and English. Speakers of various languages can benefit from the language experience that the music selections will provide.

The poetry component to the program can be used in many creative ways to enhance students' language acquisition in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Gasparro and Falletta (1994) assert that using poetry in an ELL classroom provides students with the opportunity to explore both the linguistic and conceptual facets of text without focusing on the mechanics of language. Choral reading of the poem builds fluency and provides practice in pronunciation. Some of the vocabulary words used in the script are reinforced through the poem, providing the opportunity to see the words used in multiple contexts.

What's Included in Each Lesson (cont.)

ELL Support (cont.)

The accompanying poems can also serve as a model for students to write their own poems. Depending on students' levels, a framework or template can be developed for each poem to structure the writing process and provide students another opportunity to use the vocabulary and word order they have learned from the script and the poem. Additionally, the poem can also serve as a medium for discussion of the themes and concepts presented in each script. Moreover, students and teachers can create action sequences to facilitate visualization and comprehension of the text. Gasparro and Falletta (1994) emphasize that dramatizing poetry enables the learner to become intellectually, emotionally, and physically engaged in the target language; therefore, language is internalized and remembered.

Students' listening comprehension will also develop as a result of using reader's theater. According to Brown (2001), some characteristics of speech make listening difficult, such as clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, intonation, and interaction. Brown proposes methods for helping second-language learners overcome these challenges. Reader's theater utilizes authentic language and contexts, is intrinsically motivating, and supports both bottom-up and top-down listening techniques. Illustrations in the scripts, along with the possible inclusion of realia and gestures, will assist students in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary and idiomatic phrases.

In addition, the professional recording of the scripts on the Performance CD will provide another opportunity for students to enhance listening comprehension and reading ability. The voices on the CD are articulate and expressive, and they serve as models for accurate pronunciation and fluent reading. By listening to the CD, students will be able to practice visualizing text and speech. One best practice suggested by second-language teacher-training programs is for the students to hear an oral reading of the piece of literature prior to reading it aloud themselves. The CD can be used for this practice as well.

Reader's theater provides a medium for English language learners to interact with other students in the classroom and will facilitate the development of a strong community of language learners. The experience will increase students' motivation and diminish their inhibitions to learn the new language. The components of the program will provide the necessary support and scaffolding that teachers need in order to provide effective instruction to English language learners in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The program will engage students and serve as a model for fluency, pronunciation, and overall language usage.

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Involving All Students

Even though each script has only six roles, all students can be involved in each reader's theater performance in a variety of ways. This section of each lesson suggests ways to include all students.

Reading the Script

This section of each lesson explains how to introduce the reader's theater script to students and offers suggestions for introducing unfamiliar vocabulary and understanding the characters. As you read each script with students, you may try to use the following performance tips.

Performance Tips

Reader's theater performance can be a frightening experience for some students. Assist them by reviewing the following suggestions:

- Relax! Breathe deeply and speak slowly to avoid a quivering or breathless voice.
- Stand with one foot in front of the other and with your weight balanced to avoid that feeling of shaking and trembling.
- Do not rush through your lines or speak too rapidly. Take your time and say each word distinctly.
- Movement is good for emphasis or to help you look relaxed, but do not move back and forth or develop nervous mannerisms. Avoid wringing hands, tugging at clothing, or twisting hair.
- Mistakes are a normal part of any learning experience. If you make one, correct it and go on.

Getting to know your character will make your performance more believable. Use these questions to get in character as you rehearse.

- How old do you think the character is?
- What kind of voice do you think the character should have? Is the voice soft, loud, high pitched, or low pitched?
- How does the character stand or use his or her hands when speaking?
- Does the character seem happy, proud, or excitable?
- Do you think this character is serious or silly?
- Is the character kind?
- Do you think people would like this character?
- What can you do to communicate this character's personality to others?

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Assigning Roles

Each script contains six character roles. Each of the roles is written for a different reading level. The chart below lists the reading levels for all the characters in the eight scripts.

Script Title	Second Grade 2.0–2.9	Third Grade 3.0–3.9	Fourth Grade 4.0–4.9
<i>Johnny Appleseed</i>	Johnny Appleseed Thundercloud	Thomas Jane	Narrator Elizabeth
<i>Pecos Bill and Slue-Foot Sue</i>	Pecos Bill Widowmaker	Slue-Foot Sue Gunn Smith	Chuck Grammy
<i>John Henry</i>	John Henry Ma	Polly Ann Boss	Worker 1 Worker 2
<i>Molly Pitcher</i>	Molly Pitcher William Hays	Private General Lee	Narrator George Washington
<i>Paul Bunyan</i>	Babe Axe	Paul Bunyan Lumberjack 3	Lumberjack 1 Lumberjack 2
<i>Sal Fink</i>	Sal Fink Pirate 2	Pirate 1 Pirate 3	Mike Fink Ma Fink
<i>Davy Crockett</i>	Bear Panther	Davy Crockett Coonskin Cap	Narrator 1 Narrator 2
<i>Annie Oakley</i>	Annie Oakley Chief Sitting Bull	Susan Mosey Buffalo Bill Cody	Narrator Frank Butler

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Assigning Roles *(cont.)*

Reading Levels Correlation Chart

Grade Level Range	Guided Reading	Early Intervention	DRA
2.0–2.9	I–M	17–20	18–28
3.0–3.9	M–Q	21–23	30–38
4.0–4.9	Q–S	24–26	40–44

Meeting the Fluency Objective

Each lesson focuses on a specific fluency objective, such as reading with accuracy or reading with expression. This section provides procedures for teaching the fluency objective related to the featured script.

Content-Area Connection

Each reader's theater script focuses on a specific content area: language arts, history/ social science, mathematics, or science. This section of each lesson explains the content and provides suggestions for introducing this content to your students. The content in the scripts can be quite sophisticated and warrants specific instruction to help students understand it.

Fine Arts Connection

Each script has a song and a poem to accompany it. Students will perform the song and poem at designated places within the reader's theater performances. The kit includes a Performance CD containing all of the songs and poems related to the eight scripts. This section of each lesson offers suggestions for using this CD to learn the songs and poems.

Performance

The reader's theater performance may be as simple or as complex as desired. This section in each lesson provides basic information for the actual performances, including the use of the provided masks.

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:

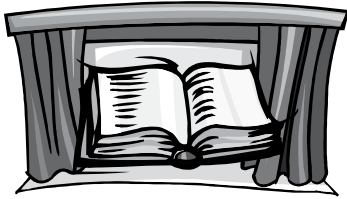
Johnny Appleseed: I'm just thinking, Elizabeth. Don't you ever just like to sit and think about life?

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.

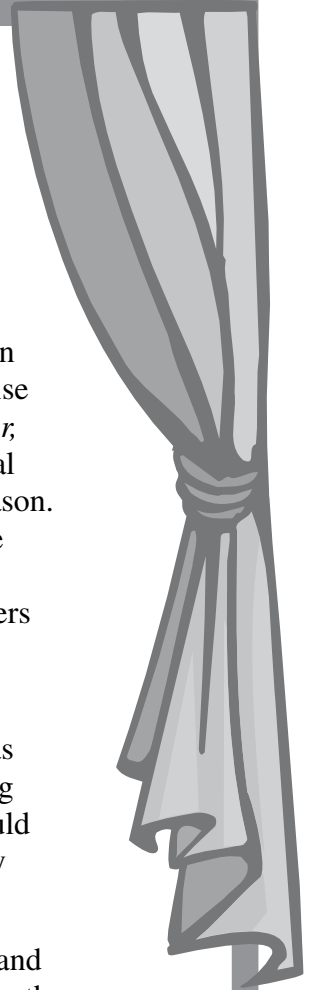
Fine Arts Connection

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.



Performance CD

Description	Track
Characters, Setting, and Script Reading, pages 6–9	Volume I, Track 03
Song: “John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt”	Volume I, Track 04
Script Reading (<i>cont.</i>), pages 10–21	Volume I, Track 05
Poem: “Old Johnny Appleseed”	Volume I, Track 06

Teacher Resource CD

Description	Filename
<i>Johnny Appleseed</i> Character Masks	masks_JohnnyAppleseed.pdf
Take-Home Script: <i>Johnny Appleseed</i>	THS_JohnnyAppleseed.pdf
PowerPoint: <i>Johnny Appleseed</i>	PP_JohnnyAppleseed.ppt
Poem Transparency: “Old Johnny Appleseed”	poem_JohnnyAppleseed.pdf
Song Transparency: “John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt”	song_JohnnyAppleseed.pdf

Building Fluency through Reader's Theater

Johnny Appleseed



Lisa Greathouse

Johnny Appleseed



Lisa Greathouse

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Johnny Appleseed

Story Summary

Even as a young boy in the late 1700s, John Chapman loved nature. When he was old enough, Johnny set out to explore the Western frontier. He planted apple seeds everywhere he went. He shared apple seeds with settlers so that they would plant them, too. He dreamed of a land where apple trees blossomed everywhere and no one was hungry.

Johnny had a simple life. He slept outdoors and walked barefoot around the country. He loved animals and was respected by both settlers and American Indian tribes. As time went on, they told stories of his courage and great journeys planting apple seeds. He became known as Johnny Appleseed. And that is how we remember him today.

Teacher Created Materials
5301 Oceanus Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92649
<http://www.tcmpub.com>
ISBN 978-1-4333-0990-8
©2010 Teacher Created Materials, Inc.
Reprinted 2013

Tips for **Performing** Reader's Theater

Adapted from Aaron Shepard

- Don't let your script hide your face. If you can't see the audience, your script is too high.
- Look up often when you speak. Don't just look at your script.
- Talk slowly so the audience knows what you are saying.
- Talk loudly so everyone can hear you.
- Talk with feelings. If the character is sad, let your voice be sad. If the character is surprised, let your voice be surprised.
- Stand up straight. Keep your hands and feet still.
- Remember that even when you are not talking, you are still your character.
- Narrator, be sure to give the characters enough time for their lines.

Tips for **Performing** Reader's Theater (*cont.*)

- If the audience laughs, wait for them to stop before you speak again.
- If someone in the audience talks, don't pay attention.
- If someone walks into the room, don't pay attention.
- If you make a mistake, pretend it was right.
- If you drop something, try to leave it where it is until the audience is looking somewhere else.
- If a reader forgets to read his or her part, see if you can read the part instead, make something up, or just skip over it. Don't whisper to the reader!
- If a reader falls down during the performance, pretend it didn't happen.



Johnny Appleseed

Characters

Narrator

Johnny Appleseed

Elizabeth

Thomas

Jane

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.



Elizabeth: That's crazy, Johnny. How would you take care of yourself out there alone? Where would you live? Wouldn't you be scared to be on your own?

Johnny: I don't think so. I think I'd do just fine. I'm comfortable when I go out into the wilderness. I enjoy being around animals and nature. In fact, that's where I am most at home.

Elizabeth: Really?

Johnny: Yes. Nature is just about perfect. Look at this here apple, would you? What could be more perfect than that?

Narrator: Johnny really does love nature. In the years to come, he learns everything he can about plants. He studies how trees grow. And, just for fun, he plants apple orchards all over his hometown. Everyone tells Johnny that his trees grow the best apples they have ever tasted. Johnny realizes what he has to do.

Johnny: Elizabeth, I've finally decided to leave home. I'm ready to explore the Western frontier.



Elizabeth: Oh, Johnny, you've been talking about being a pioneer on the frontier for years now. But all you ever do is wander around here barefoot, talking to critters and tending to those apple trees of yours. If you leave home, whatever will you do?

Johnny: I'm not sure yet, Elizabeth, but I know I'll make something of my life.

Act 2

Narrator: The next morning, Johnny sets out on his own. He travels by canoe sometimes. Other times, he travels by foot—always barefoot! His clothes are made from flour sacks. His hat is a tin pot that he uses to cook his meals. He carries no weapons. All he takes with him is a bag filled with apple seeds from the cider mill. They are from those great apple trees back home. When he gets to Ohio, he scatters some seeds in a clearing. He is so happy that, while he plants the seeds, he sings a joyful song.

Song: John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt



Thomas: Pardon me, young man! What is it that you are putting on my land?

Johnny: I mean no harm, sir. I was just planting some apple seeds in the ground. I did not know this was your land.

Thomas: My wife and I have claimed this land for our own. But we would be most grateful to have apple trees growing here. May I pay you for your seeds and your labor?

Johnny: Thank you, sir, but that is not necessary. It's thanks enough just to see apple trees grow in this new territory.

Thomas: Well, I'd like for you to join my wife and me for supper tonight. You look like you could use a hearty meal, and she is preparing stew and some of her delicious cornbread. That's the least we can do to thank you for your kindness and hard work.

Johnny: I would appreciate that. I will join you after I finish my planting.



Narrator: While on his knees planting seeds, Johnny comes face to face with a rattlesnake. The snake hisses. Fangs bared, the snake sinks its razor-sharp teeth into Johnny's foot! But Johnny's feet are so calloused from walking barefoot that his skin is too thick for the snake. The snake backs off and starts to slither away. But Johnny isn't scared. Instead, he picks up the snake and speaks gently to it, and it seems to listen! Then he sets it down a few yards away, and the snake slithers off. A young American Indian from a nearby tribe watches Johnny and the snake through the brush.

Thundercloud: How did you do that? You must have special powers!

Johnny: Do what?

Thundercloud: I saw you tame that rattlesnake! Why didn't it kill you?

Johnny: It was nothing. He was just scared that I was the enemy. I explained to him that I am a gentle soul and meant him no harm. And I would tell you the same thing. My name is Johnny.



Thundercloud: And I mean you no harm, either. My name is Thundercloud. These settlers have come here to take the land from my people. We wish they would go and leave us in peace. But you—you are different.

Johnny: I'm not really that different. These people are here to start a new life. That's what I'm trying to do, too, although I don't stay in one place very long.

Thundercloud: I hope you stay long enough to meet my tribe members. Any man with powers like yours is very special.

Johnny: I'd be happy to meet your tribe members. But my powers aren't so special, really. I just have a respect for every creature on Earth. If you show respect for them, then I believe they will do the same for you. At least, that's how it has always worked for me!

Thundercloud: What brings you out this way?

Johnny: I like to think of myself as a pioneer. I came west to explore and to plant apple seeds across the land.



Thundercloud: Apple seeds? Why do you do this?

Johnny: Growing apple trees seems to be my specialty. I dream of a day when apple trees cover this beautiful land and bear fruit so that people won't go hungry.

Thundercloud: Then that is a gift to our land and our people, too. We are getting tired of eating maize with every meal! I will call you Apple Tree Man! You are most welcome at our home any time. And we will also help you carry out your mission of planting apple trees.

Johnny: Thank you, Thundercloud!

Thundercloud: You have a gift, too, with the animals of our land. You seem to be able to speak the language of even wild animals. I don't know how you do this, but we are glad you are here to share these gifts with us. Maybe you will also be able to show us how to get along with our new neighbors.

Johnny: I will do my best!



Act 3

- Narrator:** That night, Johnny goes to the home of Thomas and Jane Jackson for supper. They live in a small cabin, and some other settlers are building homes nearby. When Johnny arrives, the aroma of fresh cornbread fills the air.
- Johnny:** Mmm . . . something smells good in here.
- Jane:** Thomas, our guest has arrived!
- Thomas:** I'll be there in a moment!
- Johnny:** How do you do, ma'am? It was awfully kind of you and your husband to invite me to supper.
- Jane:** It is our pleasure, Mr., um . . . I apologize, but my husband never told me your last name.
- Johnny:** That's quite all right, ma'am. Last names don't mean much to me. Please just call me Johnny.
- Jane:** That's fine, Johnny. And you may call me Jane. I hear you travel the land, spreading seeds for apple trees. That is quite an unusual profession!



- Johnny:** That's what I do, Jane. I suppose I have a knack for planting apple trees. Of course, you must start with good seeds. You must choose the right place and clear the land of all brush and weeds. It's best to plant your seeds in straight rows. And you must put up a barrier to keep small animals away so that the saplings can grow. You must tend to the young trees and prune them so that they grow strong and healthy. It's my dream to see apple trees all over our great country.
- Jane:** It would be delightful to have an apple tree outside our little cabin and an orchard nearby. At harvest time, I would make apple pies, apple butter, and applesauce! There's nothing like a sweet, juicy, red apple—but I suppose you already know that, don't you, Johnny?
- Narrator:** Just then, a mouse jumps out of Johnny's pocket and scurries across the wood floor.
- Jane:** Oh, my word! A mouse!
- Johnny:** Oh, please don't hurt him, Jane!
- Jane:** *Him?* What are you talking about? Why would I want to spare the life of a field mouse?



Johnny: Because he is my friend. He has kept me company for the past several days. As I kneeled down to plant some seeds, he slipped into my pocket. He's a gentle creature and means no harm to you.

Jane: Gracious! I've never heard anything so absurd!

Thomas: What on earth is going on here?

Jane: Thomas, this man you invited to supper thinks this ordinary field mouse is his friend!

Johnny: I know it sounds peculiar. But animals and I have a special connection. Just the other night, I slept in a hollow log with a bear and her cubs.

Thomas: What? That is incredible! A bear protecting her cubs would have ripped you to shreds!

Johnny: That's what most people would think. And when I crawled into the fallen tree and saw her, she did let out quite a ferocious growl. But I explained that I was just looking for some shelter for the night and meant her no harm. We slept peacefully all night just a few feet apart. In the morning, I thanked her and left.



Thomas: That's some tale, Johnny! So you really believe that animals understand when you speak to them?

Johnny: I know it sounds strange, Thomas, but yes, I do. Here, I'll show you.

Narrator: At that moment, Johnny kneels down and holds out his hand and calls for the mouse. This is incredible but true: the mouse runs toward Johnny and scurries into his hand. Thomas and Jane gasp.

Jane: I've never seen anything like it in my life! Johnny, you really do have a special way with animals. Some days, Thomas can't even get our horse to settle down long enough for him to climb on!

Johnny: Well, I would be happy to have a chat with him. Ha ha!

Thomas: We've never had the pleasure of meeting anyone quite like you, Johnny. I wish you would consider settling down here and making this your permanent home. We could use someone with your talents and skills, and perhaps you could help us learn to get along with our Indian neighbors. At least spend the night here with us.



Johnny: Thank you, Thomas. I'll be on my way tomorrow. I have a lot of work to do and thousands of seeds still to plant. I'll return one day, though. I always return to the orchards I plant to care for them and prune the trees.

Jane: I'll have to tell our neighbors about you, Johnny. I know! I'll call you Johnny Appleseed! I hope you don't mind.

Johnny: Not at all, Jane. Not at all. I'd be honored.

Narrator: Just then, Johnny looks out the window and sees Thundercloud. He opens the door and motions for him to come over. Thundercloud approaches slowly, his hand on his bow and arrow. Before long, Johnny has Thundercloud and the Jacksons sitting down over a meal, talking and laughing. Their meal together helps pave the way for Thundercloud's tribe and the new settlers to live together in peace.



Act 4

Narrator: The following year, Johnny returns home to gather more seeds from the cider mill for his apple trees. He visits his family, telling them of his adventures. At first, they don't even recognize him! He has grown his hair long and has a long, shaggy beard.

Elizabeth: Johnny, it's so wonderful to have you back home! We have all missed you so. Please say you'll stay a while.

Johnny: I'm sorry, Elizabeth. But I've discovered my purpose in life. I'm satisfied with my life and happy in my travels. I have found that I can survive on my own quite well. And I enjoy meeting new people along the way.

Elizabeth: The apple trees you planted and cared for all those years ago are now bearing enough fruit to feed our entire town!

Johnny: I hope you've been coming up with plenty of new dishes to cook with those apples!



Elizabeth: Johnny, we've heard people talk about an unusual man they met during their travels in the Northwest Territory. They say he goes from place to place, planting apple trees and speaking to animals. They say he is one of the kindest men they have ever known and that he's helped them make peace with the Indians. They call him Johnny Appleseed. Johnny, are they talking about you? Are you really Johnny Appleseed?

Johnny: Yep, that's me.

Elizabeth: Johnny, you're a hero to these people! But how do you make a living?

Johnny: I don't know if I'm a hero, Elizabeth, but thank you just the same. I don't need to make much of a living to get by and have a good life. I charge a few pennies for my trees, but if people don't have the money to pay, that's all right. They pay me in clothes to wear or with a meal or a place to sleep that night. It's worth it to me just to know I can give the gift of fresh apples to everyone.

Elizabeth: I'll miss you, Johnny. But I'm so very proud of you.



Narrator: Johnny Appleseed is a true American legend. Over the next 50 years, he traveled across the Midwest and the Great Lakes states. He planted trees in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois. It has been said that he planted over 100,000 acres of trees. And after 200 years, some of those trees still bear apples! Johnny never had a wife or children, but people say he had more friends than he could count. When he died at age 70, it was said to be the only time in his life he had ever been sick. Maybe it really is true: An apple a day keeps the doctor away!

Poem: Old Johnny Appleseed



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 . . .

(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 . . .

(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!



Glossary

absurd—strange; ridiculous

acre—land that measures 43,560 square feet (4,047 square meters)

bear—to produce

calloused—tough, hardened skin

commotion—noisy disturbance

maize—Indian corn

orchards—large gardens or areas in which fruit or nut trees are planted and grown

pioneer—person who is among the first to see or settle in a region

profession—career or job

prune—to cut off unwanted growth from trees or plants

saplings—young trees

scurries—moves quickly

settlers—people who are among the first to live in a region

siblings—brothers and sisters

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