

READERS THEATER



This activity kit was written by Echo Rue, a 2021 Junior Fellow at the Library of Congress and graduate of the Master of Library and Information Studies program at the University of South Florida. She enjoyed blending her experiences with teaching, theater and librarianship to create this piece.

This activity is based on a practice of dramatizing text using voice expression. It doesn't require the readers, children or adults, to memorize any lines. As the script is practiced, repeated reading builds fluency and deepens comprehension, often opening up discussion points about the content and intention of word choice. Scripts are a genre we do not often read because they are meant to be shared experiences, so reading them aloud with others provides a social connection while broadening reading selections. Radio scripts lend themselves well to such activities, providing opportunities to incorporate multiple voices and sound effects and to have fun together! Perhaps these will remind you of current podcasts or audio books that you listen to with your family or friends.

This can be an engaging shared activity for all ages, to mark a special event or to connect in a new, creative way when reaching out to distant family members over video conferencing platforms. Consider recording one and presenting it to another family member to mark a birthday or anniversary.

GET INSPIRED

Listen to these examples to hear how radio plays were once performed with voice expression and sound effects:



[A study in mimicry: vaudeville sketch](#)

Hear the incredible ability of this person to imitate sounds with his own voice!



[The Arkansas traveler descriptive scene; Flanagan's troubles in a restaurant: vaudeville specialty](#)

Listen to examples of radio scripts being acted out with voices and sound effects to tell stories.



[A Christmas Carol: A Radio Play](#)

Complete with sound effects, full radio performance from A Christmas Carol: The Radio Play. Boston, MA: Cincinnati Public Radio, The Walter J. Brown Media Archives & Peabody Awards Collection at the University of Georgia, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (GBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC.



GET READY

Select a script from the options below, or create your own.

Families can read the scripts together to determine which to pick and how to assign reading and sound effect roles.

Aesop's Fables, adapted from the Aesop for Children, an interactive version of the classic Aesop fables, featuring illustrations of artist Milo Winter.



[The Lion & the Mouse](#)

Listen to a [sample family recording](#) of this script.



[The North Wind & the Sun](#)



Mouse



Lion



Narrator

Hidden History, adapted from scripts written for the [Hidden History](#) radio series. Originally broadcast as fifteen-minute programs in 1941, they are part of the [Radio Research Project manuscript collection](#).



[John Doe Remembers: The Reporter Who Covered Gettysburg](#)

Original Manuscript: [John Doe Remembers: The Reporter Who Covered Gettysburg](#)

Sample of the original recording



[Introduction to The Story of the Bell Witch](#)

This program is based on what once was a widespread legend from Tennessee and Mississippi, about a spirit that haunted the Bell family, following them from one home to another.

Original Manuscript: [The Story of the Bell Witch](#)

Sample of the original recording

Cast the parts.

You can select one reader for each speaking role or multiple roles for one reader, and challenge kids to create a voice for each character.

Plan the sound effects.

In the past, radio and live theater productions had special sound effects machines or equipment to make sounds happen during a production. However, many were also made from common household items. A long metal sheet was shaken to make a roll of thunder. An old, heavy book was wrapped in tape to make a thud for sounds of falling items! Your own mouth can make lots of great sound effects too, such as blowing across the top of a bottle with or without water inside. With these in mind, consider your own sound effects. You can find out more about historical radio sound effect creation from the [Kennedy Center](#).



Make a list of the sounds needed in the script (you can be creative and see if there are some that aren't in the script but that would make sense to add) and think about what you might need to make those sounds



Consider how you can make sounds using your voice or things around your house and pull them together. Think about what you might need to make the sound of wind? Rain? Footsteps? Thunder?



Collect items to test out some sounds with your family members to see if you all think it sounds like the effect you are hoping to recreate



Consider your audience and the final format to determine what other items you may need to prepare.

- 🎙️ Will this be an audio recording?
- 🎙️ Will you be doing this in person with others?
- 🎙️ Will you do this as part of a virtual meeting with other readers?
- 🎙️ Will it be live or recorded?
- 🎙️ What sound effects can you create?
- 🎙️ Will you be visible to your audience? If so, perhaps you will want one or two costume pieces or props to enhance your storytelling.

CREATE

- 🎙️ Record your script using your voices to express the emotion, suspense or gravity as you see fit for your story.
- 🎙️ Add your sound effects in during the recording for the live radio script feeling, or you can go back and add them in after for a more modern take on the process.
- 🎙️ Share the performance with friends and family and **have fun!**

EXPLORE MORE

Create a poster or graphic to advertise your program. Check out some of these for inspiration:

- 🎙️ [The Federal Theater Div. of W.P.A. presents “It can’t happen here” Sinclair Lewis](#)
- 🎙️ [“Hansel and Gretel,” the gingerbread children by Humperdinck](#)
- 🎙️ Search for more at ideas [here](#).



Read more on the topics mentioned in this activity kit, including:

- 🎙️ **Children’s Theater:** Find images and links to [resources](#) from this unit of Federal Theater Project, part of the New Deal, dedicated specifically to children’s theater.
- 🎙️ **Gettysburg Address:** In addition to the two drafts referenced in the script, this [online exhibition of the Gettysburg Address](#) hosts a multitude of resources to support work with this script or further exploration.
- 🎙️ **Ghost Stories:** The blog post [Ghost Stories in Song](#) provides links to audio recordings and images of classic ghost stories and legends.
- 🎙️ **Podcasts:** Check out the variety and range of [podcasts](#) available through the Library of Congress website.
- 🎙️ **Radio Research Project:** Explore fan mail for the Hidden History radio series including [this request](#) for copies of a script.