

Spotlight on Saints!



Written by
Diana R. Jenkins

Illustrated by
Virginia Helen
Richards, FSP

A Year of Funny Readers Theater for Today's Catholic Kids

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Mother Mary

Paul

Gianna Molla

John Bosco

Martin de Porres

Kateri Tekakwitha

Bakhita

Juan Diego

Clare

Andrew Kim Daegeon

Thérèse of Lisieux

Bernardine of Siena



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Introduction

When I was a kid, I loved books about the saints, and I read every single one in our school library—over and over! I was so inspired by these special people who focused their lives on God. Their stories made me want to be a martyr—or at least a better person! To this day, I still find inspiration in the lives of the saints.

Today's kids can learn from the saints, too, and this book helps them do that in a fun way. *Spotlight on Saints! A Year of Funny Readers Theater for Today's Catholic Kids* is a collection of humorous plays about contemporary kids. In each play, a regular kid who is faced with a realistic (but funny) problem learns about a saint and gets inspired to do the right thing. Information about a real saint is spotlighted in each play, but these scripts also emphasize the idea that we are all called to be saints, encouraging children to strive for that goal.

This book is arranged to provide a play for each month of the year. The featured saint in each play has a feast day in the given month. However, many of the plays would be appropriate for other times, too, so you can use them whenever you like. Read on for some suggestions on how to successfully incorporate these plays into your classroom or program.

WHAT IS READERS THEATER ANYWAY?

Readers theater is easier theater! Actors don't memorize their lines—they simply read from their scripts. Because memorization isn't an issue, more students are able to handle large roles. Also, extensive rehearsal isn't necessary. And, unlike "regular" theater, a readers theater production isn't thrown into a tailspin by memory lapses or absences.

Other aspects of readers theater are easy, too. Sets, costumes, props, and even movement are not needed, as the plays are written to work without them. The extras can be included if desired, but readers theater works even if the actors just sit there and read.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Before you use a readers theater play, read it yourself and make sure that the content, theme, and vocabulary are appropriate for your students. Decide whether you need to preview any concepts or vocabulary. If you are thinking about staging the play for an audience, consider which students might fit which roles, but don't set your cast just yet.

Once you decide on a play, make as many copies of the script as there are parts, plus one for yourself. Highlight one character's lines in each copy (except yours) to make it easier for kids to read. Covering or binding the scripts will help them last through multiple readings.

After giving students time to read through their scripts silently, have them read the play aloud from their desks. You can change roles with each scene to involve more students. (This also allows you to see how different kids handle different roles. If you decide later to stage the play, you can choose your cast according to who fits which character instead of who can memorize the most lines.) This kind of read-through makes a good one-time supplemental activity in your classroom, but you can do much more with readers theater. For example, you could have students read a particular script multiple times on different days. The repetition gives you several opportunities to teach comprehension skills like character traits, motivation, story structure, theme, and cause and effect. And rereading allows children to relax about the reading itself and develop a deeper understanding of the characters and the theme of the play.

Multiple readings also improve fluency and expression. You can help with these skills by sharing the presentation suggestions included in each play's introductory material and by asking questions about the characters' feelings and motivation. If a student has difficulty with expression, "echo reading" can help. You model the lines with good expression and have the student copy you. It doesn't usually take much of this practice to get a young actor on the right track. Allowing students to record themselves as they read their lines and listen afterward also develops better expression.

After several readings, you might want to move students from their desks to a traditional readers theater setup at the front of the room. The actors in readers theater usually sit on stools or chairs throughout the play, holding and reading their scripts. Sometimes the actors sit with their backs to the audience, "entering" by facing front and reading their lines and "exiting" by turning around again. The narrator might stand to one side or read from a lectern. Getting away from their desks can make readers theater more fun for your students and motivate them to further improve their performances.

WHAT ABOUT PERFORMING FOR AN AUDIENCE?

You may decide to use readers theater only as a supplemental activity in your classroom. However, you could be tempted—or persuaded!—to stage a performance for a real, live audience. How do you make the transition?

First, rehearse enough that actors can read with good expression and look up from their scripts occasionally. (But don't over-rehearse! This is easier theater, remember?) Be sure to go through the whole play at least once without stopping. Set up your first performance with an audience that's not too threatening; a group of younger children works well. Later, you can try performing for scarier audiences such as peers or adults.

After some successful performances, your kids may naturally move toward something more like "regular" theater. They might make more facial expressions, gesture, or ask to act things out. At this point, you could abandon the traditional setup and allow students to enter and exit and to move around the stage, holding their scripts. The plays in this book include some directions for movement in case you decide to do this.

Eventually, you may discover that your kids are memorizing some lines on their own. They might even ask to drop the scripts and do a "real" play. Or maybe you'll decide to encourage that yourself and move completely into "regular" theater. That's a great experience for your class, but remember that you don't have to put together a big production. Feel free to stick to the simple, traditional readers theater format.

The closer you get to a regular theater performance, the more likely it is that your students will ask for sets, props, and costumes. This book includes suggestions about these extras in case you want to include them, but the scripts are written to make them unnecessary. If you decide to use these items, hold off on rehearsing with them right away as they distract kids from developing their characters and improving their performances.

To involve more students, you can link several plays together into a longer program. While you work with one group, other casts could be reading through their scripts together or making invitations, programs, sets, props, or costumes. While an absence isn't a catastrophe in readers theater, it doesn't hurt to have one cast watch another cast's rehearsal or read another group's play just in case.

IS IT REALLY WORTH IT?

Every child can benefit from theater experiences. Of course, plays about a particular subject matter (such as the saints) motivate kids to learn important information, but theater develops other academic skills, too. Performing a play—even just from their desks—helps students develop language arts skills such as listening, reading, and speaking. You can also use theater to improve writing skills by asking students to rewrite their lines, add new lines, or write the endings to interrupted lines. (The last one is really a must! Nothing is more awkward than an actor pausing before the character is actually interrupted by another. If the rest of the line is written out, the reader can keep going until the next person breaks in or until the end of the line if necessary.) Kids can also write alternate endings to plays or make up their own scripts.

Theater yields nonacademic benefits, too. The hope is that reading the plays in this book will inspire kids to follow in the footsteps of the saints and make positive changes in their own lives. Staging a play from this book—or any other script—builds

character in other ways, too. Putting on a performance takes skills like working hard, setting goals, meeting challenges, staying patient, and cooperating with others. (And that's not just for the teacher!) Children experience a real sense of accomplishment from their individual successes as well as the group's achievements. And the self-esteem they develop in theater carries over into the rest of their lives!

JANUARY



Connor Says

SUMMARY

Connor believes he has what it takes to be a great leader. But when he's put in charge of the youth group fundraiser, he finds that nobody appreciates his vision or respects his orders. The great leaders of history never had this much trouble!

COSTUMES/SETS/PROPS

All characters can wear contemporary clothing. Connor might get some humor out of wearing a jacket and posing with his hand inside like Napoleon. The little kid in Scene Four could wear oversized clothes and carry a big stuffed toy.

A few chairs can be used during the youth group meetings. A table to one side can serve as the bake sale table.

Connor needs a book about Saint John Bosco for Scene Nine, or his script could be covered to suggest such a book. He could use a clipboard and pen during the scenes at church, perhaps clipping his script onto the clipboard. Other props can be mimed, but, if desired, containers of baked goods and a cash box could be used.

PRESENTATION

Connor becomes more and more domineering and impatient as the play goes on.

James tries to be understanding, but eventually he can't take Connor's attitude any more.

Mrs. Esposito should show that she's sometimes having trouble keeping her patience.

The extra youth group kids should react to what happens even when they have no lines.

CAST

Narrator

Connor

Mrs. Esposito, the youth group sponsor

Youth group: Andy, Francesca, James, Brittany, extra kids (as desired)

Little kid



ABOUT SAINT JOHN BOSCO

John Bosco was born in Italy in 1815. As a child, he had a great desire to learn, but his family's poverty often kept him from his studies. When he finally became a priest, he saw firsthand the poor treatment that needy children received. He gathered these children to him with fun activities and then led them gently to God. Using kindness instead of the usual harsh discipline of his day, he encouraged piety and good character in his charges. Despite many difficulties, he established homes, schools, and job-training programs to help needy children live better lives. John Bosco died in 1888, but his influence continues today in the work of the Salesians, the religious order he formed to serve the young and poor with charitable works. Saint John Bosco's feast day is January 31. He is the patron saint of youth and of editors.