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Readers' Theatre: Communication Aiding Learning in the Elementary School

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READERS' THEATRE: COMMUNICATION AIDING LEARNING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

BY

MARY FRANCES BAKER
B.A., Florida Technological University, 1971

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication in the Graduate Studies Program of Florida Technological University, 1972

Orlando, Florida
To
Loren,
Whose Love and Understanding
Will Endure
Until the 12th of Never.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Readers' theatre, also known as group interpretation of literature, is a relatively new medium under investigation. In fact, very little empirical research has been done in this area, especially the study of its impact on the elementary school child. A similar medium, known as choral speaking, has functioned to a limited degree in elementary schools and has been used especially as a "motivating device to interest children in poetry." Although many theorists have demonstrated through empirical and descriptive research the positive effects of such activities on the participant, they neglected its effect on the listener, except for the listener's aesthetic response to the literature. First, this study attempted to determine the impact of readers' theatre on the child's comprehension and retention of literature. Secondly, it studied the effect of readers' theatre on the introverted child's participation in group discussion. This second part of the study evolved as a result of personal observations of reticent students. After exposure to readers' theatre, the seemingly shy, reticent students appeared to become bold and more willing to discuss the story they heard.

This investigation may prove valuable to those interested in the impact of readers' theatre on the listener. The concept of the listener is important in this medium because it represents one-third of what is

involved: the reader, the listener, and the audience.

History and Development of Readers' Theatre

Readers' theatre can be traced as far back as fifth century Greece, B.C. Eugene Bahn notes that at this time a recitative art was carried on by wandering minstrels; and when poems had more than one character with one individual reciting each part, the art of interpretation was developed. Readers' theatre began when two characters were read by two different individuals. Medieval times saw the uniting of interpretation and drama in church liturgy which "was amplified by the addition of mimetic action, symbolic costume, and the suggestion of dialogue through antiphonal chant." This medium was dormant in the years thereafter except for its limited revival in the form of choral reading, as suggested by Mary Armstrong: "Choral speech has met with nation-wide favor in the United States, especially in the schools, where it was found to possess a psychological as well as artistic value."4

More recently, however, readers' theatre has been performed professionally in what may be considered a revival of this art. In 1951, Don Juan in Hell was presented by Charles Boyer, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Charles Laughton, and Agnes Moorehead. Little movement was used in this production. The readers sat on stools and the action was confined to

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their gestures and facial expressions. This readers' theatre production was the first to receive nationwide exposure.\(^5\)

In 1952, Laughton directed the popular *John Brown's Body*. Again, well known actors appeared in the readers' theatre adaptation, including Raymond Massey, Judith Anderson, and Tyrone Power. Considerably more vocal variety and movement were used in this production than in *Don Juan in Hell*. For example, each actor read many different parts and a chorus chanted, hummed, and produced other vocal sound effects while accompanied by music, which helped carry the dramatic action forward as the chorus did in Greek drama. The readers sat on and leaned against a railing, and Miss Anderson moved about as if she were dancing in the ballroom scene. Lighting was used to enhance the mood. After many appearances in this adaptation, Raymond Massey commented on the ways readers' theatre elicited audience response:

The quiet of our audience is an awesome thing. But the audience is not just sitting there, allowing itself to be entertained. We seem to have brought to them the key to that too-long-locked room where they had put away their ability to imagine, to see, to do, to share.\(^6\)

More recent professional productions include the presentation of three volumes from Sean O'Casey's autobiography which include *Pictures in the Hallway, I Knock at the Door*, and *Drums Under the Windows*; to


New York production of Brecht on Brecht; John DosPassos' U.S.A.; Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood; the adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's letters to Mrs. Patrick Campbell into a script entitled Dear Liar; a program of Carl Sandburg's prose and poetry called The World of Carl Sandburg; Spoon River Anthology, which not only has been performed on stage but also on television; and The Investigation, the court record of the men tried for the atrocities against the Jews at Auschwitz.  

Readers' theatre has also emerged in the educational field. For example, in 1960, Southwest Missouri State College presented Dandelion Wine at the Speech Association of America's Convention; the University of Kansas presented an original script entitled Ebony Ghetto containing the poems of Langston Hughes and Fenton Johnson interspersed with folk ballads. Other productions by colleges include The Battle of the Sexes; Camus' The Stranger; Fielding's The Tragedy of Tragedies; and Readers' Theatre for Children, an original script prepared and presented by Southwest Missouri State College.

Besides readers' theatre performances at the college level, high schools and even junior high schools have been involved with the medium of readers' theatre in forensic competitions, civic club presentations, church performances, and school programs. At a meeting of the Florida Forensics' Executive Board, held in March, 1972, at the University of South Florida, it was resolved that high school forensic competitions

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7 Coger and White, Readers' Theatre, pp. 13-14.
8 Ibid., p. 16.
shall include the area of readers' theatre.\textsuperscript{9}

Thus, we can conclude from this brief overview that experimentation and creativity are expanding in the professional and educational areas in an effort to enhance the relationship between the audience and the readers.

The Problem

Statement of the problem

The purpose of this investigation is to determine (1) if readers' theatre as a form of oral communication causes students to comprehend more of the presented material than those students exposed to the material by silent reading or oral interpretation; (2) if exposure to readers' theatre increases the students' retention of the content of the material presented; and (3) if those introverted students exposed to readers' theatre will actively participate in a group discussion of the material presented more often than those introverted students exposed to the material by oral interpretation and silent reading.

Hypotheses

1. Readers' theatre is significantly more effective than oral interpretation and silent reading in increasing the comprehension of the content presented.

2. Readers' theatre is significantly more effective than oral interpretation and silent reading in increasing the retention of the content presented.

\textsuperscript{9}Florida Forensics. Resolution Passed at the University of South Florida (Tampa, Florida, March, 1972).
3. Readers' theatre is significantly more effective than oral interpretation and silent reading in prompting introverted students to participate actively in group discussion.

Definition of Terms

Readers' Theatre. For the purpose of this study readers' theatre will be defined as two or more oral interpreters who through their oral reading cause an audience to experience literature.\textsuperscript{10} This medium is a distinct form of dramatic presentation of varied types of literature in which the major emphasis is upon aural appeal with the audience attention concentrated on the literature. An extension of this definition, as it applies to this investigation, can be found in Appendix A.

Oral Interpretation. For the purpose of this study oral interpretation will be defined as one interpreter who through his oral reading causes an audience to experience literature. Oral interpretation is concerned with an individual reader's perception and communication to an audience of the intellectual, emotional, artistic, and stylistic qualities of a piece of literary material. In oral interpretation the response which is sought is determined by the author's intention, and it is therefore the task of the oral interpreter to evoke or re-create the desired response in his audience by means of a well trained voice and body.\textsuperscript{11}


Silent Reading. For the purpose of this study silent reading is defined as a solitary person translating unpronounced words of written material visually as opposed to repeating them aloud. Silent reading was described as a method which permits repetition of preceding material as well as simultaneous contemplation of the material. Distractions encountered in the presence of an audience are not faced by the silent reader.  

Reticence. For the purpose of this study reticence is defined as any individual who withdraws from the speaking situation due to some anxiety producing function. Larry Steward in his doctoral dissertation describes the reticent individual as "...one who consistently exhibits anxiety in communicative situations because of the way in which he perceives and evaluates his actual or projected performances which in turn results in the selection of inappropriate behavior." This study assumes that the reticent child is also the introverted child and, therefore, concerns itself with the listener's personality traits in the area of introvert-extrovert.


Background and Related Research

The following is a review of experimental research that has been done regarding the listener. The results presented in the forthcoming studies can be applied directly or indirectly to readers' theatre because they deal with the effects of communication on the listener's comprehension of, retention of, and response to literature or speeches as perceived through different modes of communication.

According to Wayne N. Thompson, the earliest quantitative research concerned with audience retention of content was conducted by Charles Woolbert. Woolbert's study, although not statistically analyzed, clearly identified the dependent and independent variables under investigation. The dependent variable was comprehension of the content presented; the independent variable was the mode of delivery, of which there were eleven. Woolbert computed the means but not the standard deviations. He did not apply tests for the significance of differences between the means, but stated that the differences were very large. Woolbert concluded that listeners will retain the content when it is presented with large variations of rate, force, pitch, and quality. Therefore, on the basis of the Woolbert study, this investigation used a story that lent itself to vocal variety.

The listener's reactions to the reader's delivery has been studied by many experimentalists. Kenneth A. Harwood found no


significant differences in listenability for stories tape-recorded at
125, 150, 175, and 200 words per minute.17 Another experimentalist,
Martin Cobin, found audience preference for a reader's maintenance of
good eye-contact in a face-to-face situation.18 However, Cobin reported
no statistically significant findings in his study.

In a 1949 experimental study, Paul W. Beardsley, of the
University of Oklahoma, compared the effects of listening to literature
with listening while reading along with the reader. His conclusions are
as follows: (1) there is a gain in appreciation in listening and
reading over listening based on factual recall and relationships,
(2) the statement, "I am attracted by the choice of words in the poem,"
showed a gain in appreciation in listening and reading over listening,
(3) the statement, "I am attracted by the rhythms in the poem," showed
a gain in appreciation in listening and reading over listening, (4) the
statement, "I think the poem contains beauty," showed almost no gain in
appreciation in listening and reading over listening, (5) in none of the
criteria does listening show a statistically significant gain over
listening and reading in appreciation, and (6) listening to a recording
of a poem and reading the poem from the printed page at the same time
does not detract from appreciation.19 Based upon Beardsley's findings,

17 Kenneth A. Harwood, "Listenability and Rate of Presentation,"
18 Martin Cobin, "Response to Eye-Contact," Quarterly Journal of
19 Paul W. Beardsley, "Listening Versus Listening and Reading:
A Study in the Appreciation of Poetry" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation,
University of Oklahoma, 1949).
we may conclude that listening and reading is superior to listening when appreciation of the literature is a factor.

Bernard J. Goldstein wrote a doctoral dissertation entitled "The Comprehension of Poetry from Recordings." The purpose of the study was to measure the comprehension of poetry under various conditions of presentation. He concluded that there was no difference in comprehending poetry when read by its author or another reader. However, he did agree with Beardsley that comprehension improves when students look at the text of the poetry while hearing it read. Goldstein further discovered that comprehension of the poems was dependent upon their difficulty as determined by their readability indices measured by the Lorge Formula.\textsuperscript{20}

James D. Young investigated the effects of oral reading, silent reading, and listening on vocabulary growth. Young concluded that the oral reading group showed a significantly higher gain in vocabulary scores over the group of listeners and a gain, though not significant, over the silent reading group.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, it would seem that silent reading and oral reading are superior to listening in terms of vocabulary growth; and also that reading aloud is superior to silent reading.

Raymond E. Collins' study entitled "An Experimental Investigation of the Comprehension of Prose Materials when Read Silently and when Read Aloud," experimentally investigated the comprehension of prose literature by audiences responding through silent and oral reading. Collins


reported that the over-all effect of the oral reading presentation on the listener was significantly greater than that of the silent reading. Here, too, it seems that oral reading may be superior to silent reading.

At Ohio State University, Keith Brooks and Sr. I. Marie Wulftange completed an experimental study entitled "Audience Response to the Oral Interpretation of Literature as Perceived Through Different Media." They investigated possible differences in audience response to the oral interpretation of three selected short stories when the performances were perceived by three methods: face-to-face, television, and audio tape. The experimenters designed and validated six tests for measuring listener response to the following four factors: (1) aesthetic response, (2) degree of interest, (3) judgment of quality of technique, and (4) comprehension of content. The study was designed to indicate differences between the methods of presentation and between the stories in the four dimensions. Findings to the study pertinent to the one at hand are: (1) the content value of the story significantly affects at least some of the dimensions of listener response, (2) the face-to-face method is significantly superior to the audio method as a means of eliciting aesthetic response. Thus, the experimenters conclude that face-to-face oral reading presentation appears superior in eliciting aesthetic response to literature, and the content of the material presented is an important factor to consider when evaluating listener's response.


Daniel M. Witt conducted an experimental study entitled "A Comparative Analysis of Audience Response to Realistic and Anti-Realistic Drama when Perceived through Acting, Readers Theatre, and Silent Reading." A semantic differential scale developed by Raymond G. Smith was used to measure the subjects' responses. Witt found no significant interaction effect upon audience response to a particular form or style of play which related directly to the method of presentation and perception, but he did conclude that readers' theatre was preferred over silent reading and that acting was preferred over both the other means of presentation. Witt indicated the need for further research in determining the effect of readers' theatre and other modes of presentation on the listener.

Judy Lee Svore's thesis, "An Investigation of Audience Response to Prose Literature When Perceived Through Silent Reading, Oral Interpretation, and Readers' Theatre," measured subjects' responses on a Likert type scale on two criteria: ethical and aesthetic. She concluded that there was no significant difference in response to the various means of presenting the literature. However, there was some significant difference in the effects of methods of presentation in terms of subjects' perception of the material as more serious or less serious as indicated on the seven point scale used. She further concluded:


that readers' theatre presentations appear to evoke a more serious response from the audience.\textsuperscript{26}

Keith Brooks has suggested that additional investigation be undertaken relative to the effects of personality, the effect of content of material being perceived, and the effect of various methods of presentation. He again stressed this point along with Eugene Bahn and LaMont Okey in their book entitled, "The Communicative Act of Oral Interpretation."\textsuperscript{27} These authors indicate that considerable investigation needs to be done in the aforementioned areas including the number and type of reading experiences provided, the effects of personality traits of readers, and the effect of the oral approach versus the traditional literary approach. Of course, some investigation has been done in these areas, as demonstrated in the previously mentioned studies; but much more research is needed.

This study will attempt to determine the effects of three methods of presentation on the listener as measured by the listener's comprehension and retention of content, and it will investigate the effects of three methods of presentation in prompting the introverted student to participate actively in small group discussion.

\textsuperscript{26}Svore, "Investigation of Audience Response."

CHAPTER II

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The experimental procedure of this study was developed in eight main stages: (1) the execution of a pilot study; (2) the selection and assignment of the subjects for the experiment; (3) the selection of an instrument for measuring introversion-extroversion; (4) the selection and preparation of the story for the silent reading, oral interpretation, and readers' theatre presentation; (5) the selection and rehearsal of readers for the oral interpretation and readers' theatre performances; (6) the development of the comprehension and retention tests; (7) the development of discussion questions; and (8) the selection of a discussion leader.

These eight stages overlap in some respects, but considering them independently facilitates a clearer view of the relationship between the various parts of the investigation.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted ten weeks prior to this experiment in an attempt to determine if the method and procedure used in its administration were operable. As a result of the pilot study, the following considerations and alterations were incorporated in this investigation: (1) see that there are proportionate numbers of introverted and extroverted subjects in each treatment group; (2) see that each student placed
his name on the answer sheet; (3) the retention test should contain the same questions used for the comprehension test with the same ten-minute time limit; (4) the experimenter should read the comprehension and retention test-questions aloud so that all students, even the poor readers, can understand them; (5) the students should spell their answers as best they can, but if they cannot spell a word at all, they may ask for help from the experimenter. The child may whisper the answer he is not able to spell, and the experimenter will spell the word for him, whether it is the correct answer or not. Generally, the pilot study demonstrated the importance of conducting this investigation as uniformly as possible in each treatment group. This includes verbal instructions as well as procedural steps. These considerations and alterations insured the subjects and material for later statistical analysis.

The pilot further demonstrated that the short story used had dramatic appeal, which sustained the interest of the silent reading group, as well as enhanced audience participation in both the oral interpretation and readers' theatre groups. The level of language used in the story seemed to present no undue difficulty.

Selection of Subjects

The subjects used in this study consisted of ten fourth and fifth grade classes located in Central Florida. The classes were composed of slow, average, and advanced level students. In total, 319 subjects took part in the experiment, which resulted in unequal N's across method of presentation treatments with 112 subjects in the silent reading group, ninety-two subjects in the oral interpretation group, and 115 subjects in
the readers' theatre group. The majority of subjects used were nine and
ten years of age and, in most instances, had no previous experience in
speech activities on the elementary level. In this study no effort was
made to correlate subjects according to sex, background, or race.
However, the students' levels of ability were considered as well as the
students' personality traits in the area of introversion-extroversion.

Selection of an Instrument for Measuring
Introversion-Extroversion

The IPAT Children's Personality Questionnaire\(^1\) was chosen to
measure the students' personality traits of introversion-extroversion
because:

1. the test is designed for children between eight and twelve
years of age;
2. the test is non-projective and, therefore, may be administered
to a large group;
3. the test may be read aloud so that even the poor reader will
be able to understand and answer the questions;
4. the dimension of introversion and extroversion may be
extracted from the questionnaire so only those questions applying to
that area will be asked, thus saving time for administration, answering,
and interpretation.

Thirty questions were extracted from the questionnaire that
applied to the personality traits of introversion and extroversion.

\(^1\)Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, Children's
The parts extracted were A, F, and H. The following descriptions summarize much of the interpretation currently applied to these areas.

Factor A is concerned specifically with the reserved versus the outgoing individual. The high scorer is generally characterized as a warm and sociable individual, the low scorer, as more cool and aloof. At the childhood level, the difference between the high and low scorers is particularly evident in the extent to which the child responds favorably to teachers and to the school situation generally.²

Factor F is concerned specifically with the sober versus the happy-go-lucky individual. The high scorer is rather enthusiastic, optimistic, and self-confident. The low scorer is serious and self-deprecating. Research evidence indicates that the high F child is likely to come from a relatively secure and affectionate family milieu, while the low-scoring child's home life is likely to be characterized by deprivation of affection.³

Factor H is concerned specifically with the shy versus the venturesome individual. Like factor A, factor H expresses varying degrees of sociability. While the high A individual is sociable in the sense that he shows a positive emotional response to people, the high H individual is sociable in the sense that he interacts freely and boldly with people. The low H child is more sensitive and more easily intimidated and seeks to avoid social threat and overstimulation through withdrawal.⁴

² Ibid., p. 3.
³ Ibid., p. 4.
⁴ Ibid., p. 4.
Since there were thirty questions given that measured introvert-extrovert, the introverted student was identified by his low score of fifteen or less on the personality test, and the extroverted student was identified by his high score of sixteen or more on the personality test. This was done because, as stated in factors A, H, and F, a low score was indicative of the introverted child whereas the high score was indicative of the extroverted child. The students were told that this was not a test but a means for the experimenter to get to know them. They were then asked to express their opinions on certain matters by selecting one of two choices given them. See Appendix B for the questions, answer sheet, and frequency distribution of results.

**Selection and Preparation of the Story for the Presentations**

The story chosen for this investigation was from *Widdershins and Other Stories*, a Pacesetters in Personal Reading series book published by Lyons and Carnahan, Inc. This book was chosen because the reading levels of the stories therein range from grades 2.8 to 6.2. The title of the story used in this study was *Widdershins*. In the original, the story numbers only seventeen pages which facilitated a meaningful cutting without undue immolation of the author's style and artistic unity in organization. The four major characters in the story and the addition of a narrator provided parts for five readers in the readers' theatre presentation of the material. However, only three readers were used,

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two men and one woman, with the men playing two parts each. This number proved to be efficient in terms of workability and rehearsal procedure. The words used in the story were typical of the current spoken language and were thought likely to be within the standard vocabulary of the average fourth through sixth grade student. The relatively simple structure of the sentences and overall clarity of the author's style of writing would seem to place the story within the elementary school students' scope of understanding.

Cutting procedures

For the purpose of this study a cutting taken from the story Widdershins served as the test material. In using a cutting rather than the original selection, the underlying consideration was that the particular effect of either a silent reading, oral interpretation, or readers' theatre presentation would, in part, be reflected through the specific form of the written material generally accorded each. Since the emphasis of the investigation was the effect of methods of presentation on the listener, the cutting was made on the basis of adapting the original material to a form which would readily lend itself to oral interpretation and readers' theatre presentations without undue alteration of the design or artistic qualities in the story also necessary for the silent reading presentation. This involved the deletion of some words and passages according to a pattern which placed the narrative focus on the major characters. Although this in turn resulted in some condensation of the original development, it at the same time enabled the material in the readers' theatre script to be projected by means of "characterized
readings." In this same regard, the silent reading manuscripts were reproduced in the form of the original short story and cut only in the instances necessary to maintain uniformity in content with the material used in the other two presentation conditions. The actual material in the form of the short story manuscript and readers' theatre script have been reproduced in Appendix C.

Selection and Rehearsal of Readers

The readers selected for this study had previous training in readers' theatre under Mrs. Frances Johnson, speech and theatre instructor at Florida Technological University. Since the students selected had previous experience and training in speech and drama, they could be assumed capable of presenting an artistic and effective children's readers' theatre performance. The students selected were two males and one female. The two males read two parts each and the female read only one part. In addition, the female participant read the story in the oral interpretation condition. The experimenter rehearsed the three readers for a period of ten hours. The main objective of the rehearsal sessions was to direct the readers toward a unified production and presentation of the literature. Diction, interpretation of the material, communication of the author's meaning, and movement were the major areas of emphasis throughout the course of rehearsal. In addition to participating in the group rehearsals for the readers' theatre presentation, the female reader rehearsed the oral interpretation

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6 Statement by Mrs. Frances L. Johnson, Speech and Theatre Instructor at Florida Technological University, Orlando, Florida, personal interview, March, 1972.
presentation. The same objectives underlying the group rehearsals were stressed except for movement. The major emphasis was placed on understanding and interpreting the material with the goal of effective communication of author's intent.

**Development of Comprehension and Retention Tests**

Since the experimenter was interested in the listeners' comprehension and retention of the content presented, short answer questions relating to the material presented were developed. The comprehension test was administered immediately after the presentations; the retention test was administered two weeks later.

The comprehension test was composed of ten short answer questions in an attempt to evaluate the recall, but not the recognition abilities of the subjects. A ten-minute time limit was set for this test. A copy of the comprehension and retention tests can be found in Appendix D.

**Development of Discussion Questions**

The questions used in the discussion were taken from the teacher's edition of *Widdershins and Other Stories* in a section called "Critical Thinking and Interpretation." This section contained questions designed for small group discussions during which children may interact and exchange ideas. Of course, the questions used related to the ideas presented in the story, *Widdershins*. A copy of the discussion questions can be found in Appendix E.

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Selection of Discussion Leader

A fifteen-minute discussion was held immediately after the comprehension test was completed. The discussion was led by a male graduate student enrolled at Florida Technological University. Since the graduate student held a major in communication, with extensive coursework in group discussion, the experimenter felt him qualified to handle the discussion. The discussion leader presented the students with a concept or idea and asked them to comment on it. The only restriction he placed on them was not to talk while someone else was talking. This system seemed to facilitate the opportunity for all students to take part in the discussion.

Recording the discussion

The experimenter recorded the number of times each student participated in the discussion. The participation was only recorded when it applied to the questions asked. The main concern here was the frequency of relevant utterances in an attempt to ascertain what effect, if any, the methods of presentation have on the introverted child.

Summary

Three groups of subjects composed of a total of 319 elementary school students participated in the experiment. Each group of subjects was first given a personality test measuring their traits of introvert-extrovert. Secondly, they experienced one of three experimental conditions: (1) silent reading, (2) oral interpretation, and (3) readers' theatre presentations of prose literature. Thirdly, the subjects were administered a comprehension test in the content presented. Fourthly,
a discussion was held relating to the story presented. Finally, two weeks later, the subjects were given a retention test on the story.

Analysis of the data attempted to determine whether or not there were significant differences between listeners' comprehension and retention scores in the three conditions, and the personality scores were correlated with the students' frequency of utterance during the discussion.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

As stated in the preceding chapter, all 319 subjects selected for this investigation were administered a personality test measuring their introvert-extrovert traits. Then they were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. In Experimental Condition A, subjects experienced a silent reading presentation of the prose literature selection. In Experimental Condition B, subjects experienced an oral interpretation presentation of the same prose literature selection; and in Experimental Condition C, subjects experienced a Readers' Theatre presentation of the same prose literature selection. Following each presentation, a comprehension test was administered across experimental treatments to all subjects. Then a small group discussion of the story was conducted. Two weeks later, a retention test was administered.

Elimination of Subjects

Of the original 333 subjects who took part in the investigation, three were called out of the room during the experiment and eleven were absent when the retention test was administered. Because of incomplete data, these subjects were eliminated. Therefore, in total, data were obtained from the remaining 319 subjects. One hundred and twelve of these subjects were in Experimental Condition A (silent reading), with ninety-two in Experimental Condition B (oral interpretation), and 115
in Experimental Condition C (readers' theatre).

**Type of Data and Method of Analysis**

An analysis of variance, F-test, was administered on the comprehension test scores of the advanced, average, and slow groups to see if the groups were significantly different in regard to the content presented in the three conditions. Significance was found among the three conditions in the slow group scores ($F=72.85$, $df=2/121$, $p<.01$) and in the average group scores ($F=11.24$, $df=2/86$, $p<.01$). No significance was found among the three conditions in the advanced group scores ($F=0.47$, $df=2/103$, n.s.).

An F-test was also administered on the retention test scores of the advanced, average, and slow groups to see if the groups were significantly different in regard to the content previously presented in the three conditions. Significance was found among the three conditions in the slow group scores ($F=54.63$, $df=2/121$, $p<.01$), the average group scores ($F=10.87$, $df=2/86$, $p<.01$), and in the advanced group scores ($F=3.48$, $df=2/103$, $p<.05$). A t-test was run on both the comprehension and retention scores to find where the differences occurred.

The scores on the IPAT Children's Personality Questionnaire in the area of introvert-extrovert were correlated with the students' frequency of utterance during the group discussion in an effort to see if the introverted student participated in group discussion as a result of any one of the three methods of presentation. An F-test was administered but yielded no significance among the three conditions in prompting the introverts to participate in the group discussion.
A t-test was also administered in an effort to determine between what conditions the difference was greatest.

Results of the t-tests on the comprehension scores are shown in Tables I and II. They indicate that hypothesis one: readers' theatre is significantly more effective than oral interpretation and silent reading in increasing comprehension of the content presented, was supported at the .01 level for the average and slow students when the scores of those receiving the readers' theatre treatment were compared with the scores of those receiving the silent reading treatment. The hypothesis was further supported at the .01 level for the slow students when the scores of those receiving the readers' theatre treatment were compared with the scores of those receiving the oral interpretation treatment. No significance was found in the scores of the advanced students exposed to readers' theatre when compared with the scores of those receiving both the silent reading and oral interpretation treatments.

Table I
Comparison of Comprehension Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readers' Theatre</th>
<th>Silent Reading</th>
<th>$X_1 - X_2$</th>
<th>$t^*$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Group Comprehension</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Group Comprehension</td>
<td>17.19</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow Group Comprehension</td>
<td>49.88</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One-tailed test.
Table II
Comparison of Comprehension Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>readers' theatre₁</th>
<th>oral interpretation₂</th>
<th>X₁ - X₂</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>t*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advanced group comprehension</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average group comprehension</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slow group comprehension</td>
<td>14.92</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One-tailed test.

The t-tests applied to the retention scores show that hypothesis two: readers' theatre is significantly more effective than oral interpretation and silent reading in increasing the retention of the content presented, was supported at the .01 level for the slow and average learner when readers' theatre scores were compared with silent reading scores; and it was supported at the .05 level for the advanced students when readers' theatre scores were compared with silent reading scores. The hypothesis is further supported at the .05 level for the slow and advanced students when readers' theatre scores were compared with oral interpretation scores. The average students' scores, when exposed to readers' theatre, were not significantly greater than the scores of those exposed to oral interpretation. The results are presented in Tables III and IV.
Table III
Comparison of Retention Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readers' Theatre</th>
<th>Silent Reading</th>
<th>$X_1 - X_2$</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>t*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Group Retention</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Group Retention</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Slow Group Retention</td>
<td>47.83</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10.94</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One-tailed test.

Table IV
Comparison of Retention Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readers' Theatre</th>
<th>Oral Interpretation</th>
<th>$X_1 - X_2$</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>t*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Group Retention</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Group Retention</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow Group Retention</td>
<td>12.35</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One-tailed test.

The t-tests administered to the introverts' responses revealed that hypothesis three: readers' theatre is significantly more effective than oral interpretation and silent reading in prompting introverted students to participate actively in group discussion, was not supported.
but approached significance when the responses of those introverts exposed to readers' theatre were compared with the responses of those introverts exposed to silent reading. The following tables, V and VI, indicate the aforementioned results.

**Table V**

Comparison of the Frequency of Utterances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readers' Theatre _1</th>
<th>Silent Reading _2</th>
<th>( \bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2 )</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>t*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introverts' Responses</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One-tailed test. The t required for significance at the five per cent level is 1.67.

**Table VI**

Comparison of the Frequency of Utterances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readers' Theatre _1</th>
<th>Oral Interpretation _2</th>
<th>( \bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2 )</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>t*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introverts' Responses</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One-tailed test.

In summary, the results of this investigation revealed the following: (1) that the method of presentation of prose literature significantly affected the slow and average learners' comprehension of the content presented; (2) that the method of presentation of prose
literature does not significantly influence the advanced learner's comprehension of the content presented; (3) that the method of presentation of prose literature significantly affected the slow, average, and advanced learners' retention of the content presented; and (4) although not statistically significant, the method of presentation of content approached significance in prompting introverted students to participate actively in group discussion.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this investigation was first, to examine the effects of three methods of presentation—silent reading, oral interpretation, and readers' theatre—on listeners' comprehension and retention; and secondly, to determine if readers' theatre is effective in prompting introverted students to participate actively in group discussion.

Limitations of the Findings

In general, the experimental design of this study proved workable. The method appears to be a sound approach to comparative small group research as well as research in the area of readers' theatre.

This investigation used a selective cutting of an original prose selection and it may have had an effect on audience response inasmuch as something of the artistic composition of the literary work may have been lost. However, precaution was taken to preserve all but a few of the less substantive words of the original and in light of the very limited amount actually subtracted, the possibility that this factor may have influenced listener response does not appear very great, but still must be considered when evaluating the study.
The possibility that the "Hawthorne effect\(^1\) was operating may be a problem in this experiment. Although all groups studied received a readers' theatre presentation, only one group was tested on the material presented. The other groups, in addition to a readers' theatre presentation of another story, were presented Widdershins in the oral interpretation and silent reading conditions. We may conclude that "special attention" was given the experimental group receiving the readers' theatre treatment and created the problem of the Hawthorne effect which may have influenced the results. However, the possibility of this actually occurring in this investigation is slight because precaution was taken to use the same readers to present a story in readers' theatre form to all the groups involved in the experiment. This was done in an effort to reduce the special treatment variable by affording all the subjects exposure to a readers' theatre condition. The three readers were present in each treatment group during the entire experiment.

In addition, there was some question of whether or not a prescribed time limit in the silent reading group would influence results. It was decided that "ample" time would be provided for a careful reading of the material with no set limit. At the conclusion of all treatments, the silent reading presentation had taken seventeen minutes, the oral interpretation presentation, eight minutes, the readers' theatre presentation, ten minutes. The question of time limitation appears to have no observable influence on the outcome of results.

\(^1\)F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, Management and the Worker (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939).
Implications

The research results appear to have implications which could be of value within, as well as beyond, the immediate concern of this study. In regard to the significant results obtained in this investigation, the most important implication of the findings is in the relationship of silent reading and readers' theatre. The traditional notion that silent reading is equally effective as oral interpretation and readers' theatre in presenting prose literature to elementary school children in terms of listener response may be rejected because of the significant differences in readers' theatre treatment scores over silent reading treatment scores. The overall conclusion based upon the results of this investigation is that readers' theatre is significantly more effective than silent reading and oral interpretation in presenting prose literature to the slow and average elementary school student.

On the basis of the statistically significant results obtained in this study, one may conclude that readers' theatre is a valuable method of presentation which would appear to be advantageous to elementary teachers in presenting some literary content to the slow and average learner.

In addition to the implications derived from the statistically significant results of this study, there are further implications based solely on inspection of the observed data which are of apparent value. It is noteworthy that the observed mean comprehension scores of the average and advanced readers' theatre groups were slightly higher than the observed mean scores of the oral interpretation group; and the
mean retention scores of the average readers' theatre group were slightly higher than the mean scores of the oral interpretation group. In regard to this observed tendency, the following implications are to be interpreted with care.

The lack of significant differences on levels of ability between readers' theatre and oral interpretation presentations suggests that in terms of listener comprehension of prose literature, the two methods are equally effective; but in terms of listener retention of prose literature, readers' theatre seems more effective. However, further research is apparently needed in the area of retention of content. Another consideration in evaluating the results of readers' theatre and oral interpretation comparisons is that there are elements which are similar in both readers' theatre and oral interpretation, and these elements may predominate to the extent that there will be no significant differences in the comprehension and retention of the content presented. This is not necessarily the case in the presentation of other forms of literature. For example, the Witt research in the area of dramatic literature revealed a significant difference for some dimensions of response recorded on a seven point Likert scale in the effect of readers' theatre and oral interpretation presentations. The general conclusion would be that the dissimilar aspects of the two forms of presentation are more likely to be operative when dramatic literature is presented than when prose literature is presented.

In pursuing the implications among all three methods of

presentation, it would appear that the idea of prose literature being a form of written material created solely for silent reading is not supported. The significant differences obtained on the comprehension and retention test scores indicate that silent reading may be inferior to the more active methods of presenting prose literature to slow and average elementary school students. This statement is in direct opposition to the conclusion of the Svore study. However, Witt's study suggested that "dramatic literature needs visual and aural stimulation to achieve its full effect." The combined implications of results obtained from the present study and the Witt and Svore studies remain speculative until future research in the area of literary genre can afford more definitive conclusions and statements.

As for the implications in regard to the introverted child, readers' theatre was not statistically significant in prompting the reticent child to take an active part in group discussion. However, the t-test results indicate a trend favoring readers' theatre in prompting introverted students to respond during group discussion. This trend demonstrated the need for some refinements in procedure. First, the discussion could have been recorded in an effort to see that all relevant responses were recorded. Secondly, instead of recording frequency of relevant utterances, the Flander's system of interaction analysis could have been employed in an attempt to record responses every three seconds and categorize these responses. Thirdly, relevant

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3 Svore, "Investigation of Audience Response," p. 73.
responses may have been unavoidably excluded by the experimenter because of the time involved in locating the individual's name on the class seating chart and recording his response. It must be realized that the results in this area, although not significant, suggest that readers' theatre may be an effective way in prompting the reticent child to actively participate in small group discussion.

_Suggestions for Future Research_

Implications of this study and the Witt and Svore studies indicate a relationship between form of literature and method of presentation. Only through further research in the area of methods of presenting various literary genre will we realize superior ways of experiencing and understanding various forms of literary material. This would contribute meaningfully to the little known about the effects of different literary genre on the listener.

This study showed significant effects of readers' theatre on the comprehension and retention scores of the slow and average students. Since these subjects had diversified backgrounds, the questions of what ethnic backgrounds were involved in this study and what effect they may have had on the results were raised. A seemingly worthwhile area of research may be centered around the effect of readers' theatre on various ethnic backgrounds. Such research might afford the classroom teacher ways of presenting content to the culturally deprived as well as the culturally rich.

The three college students who presented the story _Widdershins_ in readers' theatre form observed their audiences' desire to use this
medium themselves. Since this investigation indicated that readers' theatre is an effective method of presenting certain types of literature, the readers, as well as the listeners, must be considered. Therefore, elementary teachers may want to use their students to present as well as listen to the literature. This possibility suggests the need for further investigation into the effects of readers' theatre on elementary students who present the literature. Research of this type may afford valuable information to the study of this medium's impact on the students' reading ability, group participation and cooperation, comprehension of various literary works, and knowledge of authors' styles.

During the readers' theatre presentation at one of the schools involved in this study, five educable mentally retarded children observed and listened to the presentation. Although they were not involved in the testing, they responded to the questions presented during the discussion. On the basis of their apparent interest, future research is warranted on the effect of readers' theatre on educable mentally retarded children. If proven successful, this medium may afford these children a means of self-expression as well as offering them a valuable therapy technique.

Approximately seven students in this research had observable speech problems when responding to the discussion questions. This led to the conclusion that further research in the area of readers' theatre is needed in an effort to determine its effect as a therapy technique for speech handicapped.

In general, the application of this study's findings to the elementary school teacher is apparent. It appears that readers' theatre
is effective in presenting prose literature to the slow and average elementary school student. The nonsignificant results of the third hypothesis does not negate readers' theatres' implied potential in prompting the introverted child to actively participate in small group discussion, but suggests the desirability and need for further experimentation of personality traits and readers' theatre.
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APPENDIX A

EXTENDED DEFINITION OF READERS' THEATRE

For this investigation, readers' theatre was defined as a medium in which three oral interpreters, through their oral reading, caused an audience to experience literature. The considerations for the main aspects of the presentation were as follows:

(1) Material: The readers' theatre treatments made use of a cutting from a prose selection entitled Widdershins. The cutting was made on the basis of adapting the original material to a form which would readily lend itself to oral interpretation and readers' theatre presentations without undue alteration of the design or artistic qualities in the story. This involved the deletion of some words and passages according to a pattern which placed the narrative focus on the major characters. This selection was considered suitable for readers' theatre because it emphasized the idea of magic, going back in time, and characters who were faced with conflicts throughout the story.

(2) Scripts: The story was typed and placed in folders of the same size and color which the readers used and referred to so that the literature did not appear memorized. However, eye contact with the audience was used, and facial expressions among the readers occurred when directed by the literature. The material specified four characters, and those parts were divided among the three readers. In addition, a narrator was used to tie segments together, to verbally set scenes, and to

Lumley, Widdershins, pp. 95-111.
comment upon and interpret action. The narrator spoke directly to the audience and established the basic situation through transitional material.

(3) Movement: The readers eliminated movement and gestures that might have disrupted the audience's mental participation because, according to Coger and White, the majority of action does not occur onstage with the interpreters, but in the minds of the audience.\(^2\) The readers used their voices, gestures, facial expressions, and limited movement essential to the literature.

(4) Aides: Basically, readers' theatre is a medium which focuses on the written word; therefore, props, special lighting effects, sound effects, costuming, and make-up were not used.

(5) Readers: The readers selected for this study, two males and one female, had previous experience and training in speech and drama. The two males read two parts each, and the female read only one part. The readers had five rehearsals for a total period of ten hours. The main objective was to direct the readers to a unified presentation of the literature. Diction, interpretation of the literature, communication of author's intent, and movement were emphasized throughout the rehearsal sessions. The readers' theatre was presented four different times in four different elementary classroom settings.

\(^2\)Coger and White, Readers Theatre, p. 54.
APPENDIX B

CHILDREN'S PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. When visiting a new building do you like to have someone show you around or do you like to find your own way?

2. When a child laughs at you do you feel badly or do you laugh too?

3. Does your mother think you are too lively and restless or quiet and calm?

4. Do you work slowly or quickly?

5. Do you have many friends or just a few good friends?

6. When your friends argue, do you join the argument or keep quiet till they finish?

7. Do you go to buy your own toys or does mother do it?

8. If two children were fighting on the playground, would you let them fight or go and tell the teacher?

9. Would you rather work with books in a library or be a General in the Army?

10. Would you rather be a tap dancer or a soldier?

11. Are you doing as well as you should in your work or could you do better?

12. Are your feelings easily hurt or not easily hurt?

13. Do new teachers frighten you or do you usually like them?

14. Are most children kind to you or are they sometimes unkind?

15. Are your parents always ready to hear you talk or are they sometimes too busy?

16. Do you finish your school work quickly or does it take you too long?

17. When losing a game, do you sometimes give up and save your energy or always play harder?

18. If the teacher lets another child do a job you want to do, do you feel badly or soon forget about it?
19. Do you find other children take advantage of you or are they kind to you?
20. Do people like your ideas or do they not like them?
21. Can you work where people laugh and talk or would you rather they keep still?
22. Do you think you could learn to fly an airplane or would it be too difficult?
23. Are you good at walking a fence or a log or are others better?
24. Would you rather own a small, friendly dog or a big, powerful dog?
25. Would you rather be the captain of a peaceful ocean liner or captain of a sub in war?
26. Do you forget your troubles quickly or do you pout for a long time?
27. Do you have a hard time deciding which games to play or do you make up your mind quickly?
28. Do you feel afraid of things that might happen to you or are you satisfied with things as they are?
29. Does your father do things with you or do you not like to bother him when he is busy?
30. If people ask you to do too many things, do you find a way to do them or do you get all mixed up?
Children's Personality Questionnaire

Answer Sheet

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Name ________________________________
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</table>
We all look forward to our summer vacations. No school and lots of time for fun and games. But, sometimes there is nothing to do. That is where this story begins. Jan and Jody are sister and brother, ages nine and ten. They are spending their summer vacation with their grandparents and are they bored:

"Nothing ever happens around here," said Jody. "I used to like visiting Grandma in the summer, but I think I'm getting too old for it."

"Me too," said Jan.

They were at the railroad tracks now. Suddenly they heard a whistle, and a few moments later a passenger train tore past. The engineer waved at them and they waved back.

"Nothing ever happens here," said Jody.

"A train just went past," said Jan. "And we're going to Mrs. Pelican's Store."

"Big deal," said Jody. "I don't want to go to Mrs. Pelican's Store."

"Now, cut that out," said Jan. "We have to go and get some molasses for Grandma, and I'm not going by myself."

"There is something funny about Mrs. Pelican," said Jody. "I heard Grandpa say so."
"And I heard Grandma telling him to hush, that there was nothing to it. Now come on, Jody."

Now they were right in front of Mrs. Pelican's little store. It stood all by itself, on the edge of a big woods. The store was just a little wooden building that sat in a clearing beside the road. Jody and Jan stepped inside. The room seemed bigger than they had expected, and it was dark. Blinds shut out most of the bright sunlight. They looked around, trying to see Mrs. Pelican.

"Can I help you, my dears?" asked Mrs. Pelican. "Ah, dearies--did I startle you? I'm so sorry. I was just feeding my cat."

"Grandma would like a gallon of molasses, please," said Jan.

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Pelican. "You're Mrs. Bellamy's grandchildren, aren't you? Kind of dull around here this time of year, isn't it?"

"Deadest place I ever saw," said Jody.

"That's too bad," said Mrs. Pelican. "Maybe we could stir things up a little."

"What do you mean?" asked Jan.

"I'll have to think about it. Now, why don't you run around the back and get that molasses for your Grandma? It's in a keg back there. Just open the spout at the bottom, but be sure you hold your pail under it first. Use the front door. And be sure to go around the house WIDDERSHINS."

"What do you mean?" asked Jan.

"Turn left and go around the house in that direction," said Mrs. Pelican.
Jan and Jody did as she told them. Walking, they turned left and found themselves behind the house. Mrs. Pelican's Store seemed older and grayer. The woods behind the house seemed to have shrunk away to make room for a cornfield. Then they saw soldiers moving down the rows of corn toward them. They were odd-looking soldiers with strange blue and gray uniforms and funny looking guns. Suddenly, the soldiers in gray began to blast away at the ones in blue, and those in blue shot right back at them.

"Where are we? What's happening?" asked Jan.

"That store must be around here somewhere. Come on," said Jody. "Let's get out of here!"

But the minute they stepped around the back of the house, everything was changed again. There was a long, sloping green lawn with big shade trees. In the distance they could see a barn and stables. They also caught a glimpse of a big, white house with tall pillars. Right in the middle of the lawn was a big round summer house, with a crowd of boys and girls having a picnic inside. Jody started toward them. Suddenly, one little boy saw him and darted out. His clothes were strange. He wore short purple pants, and his shirt had ruffles at the collar and wrists, too. Before he had a chance to speak, a tall woman came across the lawn. She was dressed oddly, too. She turned to Jan and Jody and chased them away.

"Now what?" asked Jan.

"Maybe if we just keep going around the house," said Jody.

"But what if we come out on that woman's lawn again?" asked Jan.
"Oh, I don't think she will be there," replied Jody.

So for the third time, they went around Mrs. Pelican's Store. Sure enough when they stepped behind it, everything was changed again. The building was made of logs now. Everything was quiet. Then Jan caught a movement out of the corner of her eye. An Indian was leaning against the trunk of a tree. He had a bow and arrow and was aiming straight at them. Jan and Jody ran back around the corner the way they had come. When they did that, everything changed. Mrs. Pelican's Store was just Mrs. Pelican's Store.

"Did you fill your pail to the top so that your grandma had a full gallon?" asked Mrs. Pelican.

"We didn't find the molasses," said Jan.

"You didn't? Well, come. I'll show you."

Mrs. Pelican took the tin pail and stepped outside. Jan and Jody followed her. The back of Mrs. Pelican's Store looked just the way they had expected it to. There was a little garage that Mrs. Pelican used as a storeroom. Against one side of it stood a keg of molasses. Mrs. Pelican opened the spout and let the molasses glug into the tin pail. A few minutes later, Jan and Jody were walking down the hot dusty road toward home. They were not feeling bored now. Instead, they were trying to figure out what had happened.

"Every time we went around the house, time turned back," said Jody. "That first trip was the Civil War!"

"The second trip was in the days of the big plantation houses," said Jan.
"And the last trip was in the days of Indians," said Jody. "We had a narrow escape that time!"

"But what made us come back to today?" asked Jan. "We kept going round and round and each time it was different."

"Until we went back the other way. That's it, Jan!"

"Maybe, but I wish I knew what WIDDESHINS means. That might help us. Let's ask Grandpa after we get home."

"They found their Grandpa dozing on the front porch. They waited a bit, then woke him up.

"You two been up to something?" asked Grandpa.

Jan said NO at the same time Jody said YES.

"Well, make up your minds," said Grandpa. "Which is it, yes or no?"

"We just want to ask you a question," said Jan.

"All right. Fire away."

Together, Jan and Jody asked, "What does WIDDESHINS mean?"

"Well," said Grandpa. "It's an old word and not much used nowadays."

"But what does it mean, Grandpa?" asked Jody.

"It means counter-clockwise, to the left that is. People used to think there was magic going around a church WIDDESHINS."

"So that's it," said Jan. "As long as we went to the left, we kept going back in time. When we went to the right, the spell was broken."

Suddenly, Jan and Jody smiled and wondered how soon Grandma would need some more molasses from Mrs. Pelican's Store.
Readers' Theatre Script for
the Readers' Theatre Presentation

Narrator: We all look forward to our summer vacations. No school and lots of time for fun and games. But, sometimes there's nothing to do. That's where this story begins. Jan and Jody are sister and brother, ages nine and ten. They are spending their summer vacation with their grandparents and are they bored!

Jody: Nothing ever happens around here. I used to like visiting Grandma in the summer, but I think I'm getting too old for it.

Jan: Me too!

Narrator: They were at the railroad tracks now. Suddenly they heard a whistle, and a few moments later a passenger train tore past. The engineer waved at them and they waved back.

Jody: Nothing ever happens here.

Jan: A train just went past.

Jody: Big deal!

Jan: And we're going to Mr. Pelican's Store.

Jody: I don't want to go to Mr. Pelican's Store.

Jan: Now, cut that out! We have to go and get some molasses for Grandma, and I'm not going by myself.

Jody: There's something funny about Mr. Pelican. I heard Grandpa say so.

Jan: And I heard Grandma telling him to hush, that there was nothing to it. Now come on, Jody.

Narrator: Now they were right in front of Mr. Pelican's little store. It stood all by itself, on the edge of a big woods. The store
was just a little wooden building that sat in a clearing beside the road. Jody and Jan stepped inside. The room seemed bigger than they had expected, and it was dark. Blinds shut out most of the bright sunlight. They looked around, trying to see Mr. Pelican.

Mr. Pelican: Can I help you, my dears? Ah, dearies--did I startle you? I'm so sorry. I was just feeding my cat.

Jan: Grandma would like a gallon of molasses, please.

Mr. Pelican: Ah, yes. You're Mrs. Bellamy's grandchildren, aren't you? Kind of dull around here this time of year, isn't it?

Jody: Deadest place I ever saw.

Mr. Pelican: That's too bad. Maybe we could stir things up a little.

Jan: What do you mean?

Mr. Pelican: I'll have to think about it. Now, why don't you run around the back and get that molasses for your Grandma? It's in a keg back there. Just open the spout at the bottom--but be sure you hold your pail under it first. Use the front door. And be sure to go around the house WIDDERSHINS.

Jan: What do you mean?

Mr. Pelican: Turn left and go around the house, that direction.

Narrator: Jan and Jody did as he told them. Walking, they turned left and found themselves behind the house. Mr. Pelican's Store seemed older and grayer. The woods behind the house seemed to have shrunk away to make room for a cornfield. Then they saw soldiers moving down the rows of corn toward them. They were odd-looking soldiers with strange blue and gray uniforms and
funny looking guns. Suddenly, the soldiers in gray began to blast away at the ones in blue, and those in blue shot right back at them.

Jan: Where are we? What's happening?

Jody: That store must be around here somewhere. Come on! Let's get out of here!

Narrator: But the minute they stepped around the back of the house, everything was changed again. There was a long, sloping green lawn with big shade trees. In the distance they could see a barn and stables. They also caught a glimpse of a big, white house with tall pillars. Right in the middle of the lawn was a big round summer house, with a crowd of boys and girls having a picnic inside. Jody started toward them. Suddenly, one little boy saw him and darted out. His clothes were strange. He wore short purple pants, and his shirt had ruffles at the collar and wrists, too. Before he had a chance to speak, a tall woman came across the lawn. She was dressed oddly, too. She turned to Jan and Jody and chased them away.

Jan: Now what?

Jody: Maybe if we just keep going around.

Jan: What if we come out on that woman's lawn again?

Jody: I don't think she'll be there.

Narrator: So for the third time, they went around Mr. Pelican's Store. Sure enough when they stepped behind it, everything was changed again. The building was made of logs now. Everything was quiet. Then Jan caught a movement out of the corner of her eye.
An Indian was leaning against the trunk of a tree. He had a bow and arrow and was aiming straight at them. Jan and Jody ran back around the corner the way they had come. When they did that, everything changed. Mr. Pelican's Store was just Mr. Pelican's Store.

Mr. Pelican: Did you fill your pail to the top so that your grandma had a full gallon?

Jan: We didn't find the molasses.

Mr. Pelican: You didn't? Well, come. I'll show you.

Narrator: Mr. Pelican took the tin pail and stepped outside. Jan and Jody followed him. The back of Mr. Pelican's Store looked just the way they had expected it to. There was a little garage that Mr. Pelican used as a storeroom. Against one side of it stood a keg of molasses. Mr. Pelican opened the spout and let the molasses glug into the tin pail. A few minutes later, Jan and Jody were walking down the hot dusty road toward home. They weren't feeling bored now. Instead, they were trying to figure out what had happened.

Jody: Every time we went around the house, time turned back. That first trip was the Civil War.

Jan: The second trip was in the days of the big plantation houses.

Jody: And the last trip was in the days of Indians. We had a narrow escape that time!

Jan: But what made us come back to today? We kept going round and round and each time it was different.

Jody: Until we went back the other way. That's it, Jan!
Jan: Maybe, but I wish I knew what WIDDERSHINS means. That might help us. Let's ask Grandpa after we get home.

Narrator: They found Grandpa dozing on the front porch. They waited a bit, then woke him up.

Grandpa: You two been up to something?
Jan: No, Grandpa. Well, yes, Grandpa.

Grandpa: Well, make up your minds. Which is it?
Jan: We just want to ask you a question.

Grandpa: All right. Fire away.

Jan: What does WIDDERSHINS mean?

Grandpa: Well, it's an old word and not much used nowadays.

Jan: But what does it mean, Grandpa?

Grandpa: It means counter-clockwise--to the left, that is. People used to think there was magic going around a church WIDDERSHINS.

Jan: So that's it. As long as we went to the left, we kept going back in time. When we went to the right, the spell was broken. I wonder how soon Grandma will need some more molasses from Mr. Pelican's Store.
APPENDIX D

COMPREHENSION AND RETENTION TEST

NAME ________________________________

1. How did Jody say he felt when the story began?

2. Why did Jan and Jody go to the store?

3. What was the storekeeper's name?

4. What did Jan and Jody see the first time they walked around the store?

5. What did Jan and Jody see the second time they went around?

6. What did Jan and Jody see the third time they went around?

7. How did Jan and Jody break the spell?

8. From whom did Jan and Jody learn the meaning of "widdershins"?
9. What does the word "widdershins" mean?


10. What is the one main subject of this story?
APPENDIX E

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Like Jan and Jody, do you ever feel bored during summer vacations?

2. Have you ever seen a store like Mr(s). Pelican's?

3. Has anyone seen movies or television programs that show people going backward or forward in time?

4. What changes would you see if you looked back a hundred years?

5. What changes would you see if you looked forward a hundred years?