

JUST DEAL WITH IT!

*Funny Readers Theatre for Life's
Not-So-Funny Moments*



Diana R. Jenkins

TEACHER IDEAS PRESS
Portsmouth, NH

Teacher Ideas Press

A division of Reed Elsevier Inc.
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
www.teacherideaspress.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

© 2004 by Diana R. Jenkins

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. An exception is made for individual librarians and educators who may make copies of portions of the scripts for classroom use. Reproducible pages may be copied for classroom and educational programs only. Performances may be videotaped for school or library purposes.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jenkins, Diana R.

Just deal with it! : funny readers theatre for life's not-so-funny moments / by

Diana R. Jenkins.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-59158-043-9 (acid-free paper)

1. Children's plays, American. 2. School children—Juvenile drama.
3. Schools—Juvenile drama. I. Title.

PS3610.E54Ju7 2004

812'.6—dc22

2003019954

Editor: Suzanne Barchers

Production Coordinator: Angela Laughlin

Typesetter: Westchester Book Services

Cover design: Susan Geer

Manufacturing: Steve Bernier

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

08 07 06 05 04 ML 1 2 3 4 5

Contents

Introduction	ix
1. Alcatraz Junior High	1
2. And Then There’s Muriel	11
3. Boss of the World	24
4. Call Me Mr. Euclid	39
5. Dr. Evil Will See You Now!	53
6. I’ll Give You a Nickel	63
7. I’m Not Funny!	76
8. The Magic Touch	86
9. Mandi-for-a-Day	101
10. My Friend, Mr. Inventor	111
11. My Roommate—Grandpa!	124
12. The Nose Uses His Head.	136
13. Not for Weak Stomachs.	149
14. Revenge Served Cold	165
15. Scavenger Hunt	180
16. Sherman and the Snakes	194
17. The Sick Soda Contest	205
18. Survival	214
19. Would I Lie to You?.	226
Index	241
About the Author	243

Introduction

“Mama! Mama!”

Okay, so I only had one line. And my paper bonnet wouldn't stay on my head. Still, my dramatic debut as a living doll made first grade memorable—and inspired a lifelong love of the theatre.

It's been many years since my last performance. (Unless you count my experience as a teacher. There wasn't a dry eye in the room when I did my imaginary deathbed scene. My “last” words: “Spell the best you can . . . Hack! Cough! Gurgle!”) However, I'm still enjoying the benefits of having read, watched, and performed in plays throughout my school years.

Being involved in theatre is a valuable experience for any child. It improves language skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and even writing if children get involved in creating their own plays. Theatre also encourages appreciation of storytelling and literature and develops understanding of concepts like plot, character development, and story line. Most importantly, theatre builds self-esteem and character.

Using theatre in your classroom can be complicated, time-consuming, and labor-intensive. Fortunately, there's an easy way to get the benefits of “regular” theatre without all the complications—readers theatre!

What Is Readers Theatre?

In readers theatre, actors read their lines instead of memorizing them. Other aspects of staging are kept simple, too. While costumes, props, sets, or movement can be part of a readers theatre performance, they are not necessary. In other words, a readers theatre production doesn't have to be a big production, so to speak. Programs can be pulled together fairly easily, and students can feel relatively comfortable and unstressed as they perform. (So can their teachers!)

Preparing for Readers Theatre

You have to decide what works best for your students, but here are a few suggestions to get you going:

Always read a play yourself before you use it. This will allow you to determine if it's appropriate for your particular group. (It's a good idea to do this with the supplemental reading, too.) Think about which students can handle the more difficult roles and which ones need less challenging parts. Note any vocabulary your students might find difficult so you can go over the words before having students read the play.

Make copies of the script you want to use. You'll need as many copies as there are parts, plus an extra copy for you. (You might want to go ahead and run off a few extras just in case. Kids have been known to lose things!) In each copy, except your own, highlight one character's lines to make it easier

for the actor to follow along. Since scripts will see a lot of use, it's worthwhile to put them in binders or folders so they'll last. (Students can help with these tasks.)

Getting Started on Readers Theatre

Reading cold can be a terrifying experience, so give students time to preview the script, too. Then let them read the play aloud from the safety of their desks. To involve more students, you can change casts for each scene. This also gives you a chance to see who might best fit each role if you are planning to perform the play for a live audience.

Don't hesitate to have students read the same play several times (on different days). As students become more and more familiar with a play, you can work with them on fluency and expression. Suggestions for delivery are included in the introductory material to each play. Discuss these suggestions, and encourage students to think about how to incorporate them into their performances.

Many students tend to read in a stiff, robotic manner even after reading through a script several times. For students who have particular trouble with poor expression, try echo reading. You read a line with good expression and ask the student to repeat it exactly as you said it. Usually it takes several tries before the student can let go of his robot voice and speak the line naturally. Echo read a few lines until the student has the idea. (You'll know he has it when his face lights up with pride at how good he sounds!) Then let him develop his own style for the rest of his part.

After the initial reading, move students from their desks to the front of the classroom. Traditionally, readers theatre is performed on a bare-bones set. Actors usually sit on stools in a semicircle or other simple arrangement throughout the play. The narrator is often placed to one side with his script on a lectern or other stand. In some performances, actors sit with their backs to the audience, then face front when participating in a scene. You'll probably want to start your students out with basic staging like this. Later, you can allow students to gesture, stand, move around, and enter and exit if you wish, but remember that movement is not usually necessary.

Performing Readers Theatre

Readers theatre can be an enjoyable and educational addition to your classroom, but performing in front of an audience is what theatre is all about. Nothing is more frightening, exhilarating, rewarding, and fun! To prepare for a live performance, rehearse the play until students feel comfortable enough to take their noses out of their scripts, look up once in a while, turn to other characters, and read their lines fluently.

Costumes and props can be used if you wish, but like movement, they are not essential. You may find, however, that students ask for them, especially for "real" plays. If you decide to use costumes and props, don't introduce them too early in the rehearsal process as they tend to distract students from improving their performances.

A class of younger students makes an appreciative—and not-too-threatening—first audience. When your group feels comfortable, try more challenging audiences like students of the same age, parents and grandparents, or even other adult audiences at places like nursing homes or club meetings.

You may want to work up several of the plays in this book so that you can involve more students and present a longer program. While you rehearse with the cast of one play, other groups can work on their plays. They might sit together informally in the back of the room and read through their scripts together. Or they could work on making props, costumes, or backdrops, if you are including these extras in your performance. Once they have some experience with theatre, students could work on writing their own scripts for later programs.

Because actors read their lines instead of memorizing them, you'll find that student absences aren't as devastating in readers theatre as they can be in "regular" performances. However, it's a good idea to choose understudies for major roles and have them rehearse with their group a time or two. If you are putting together several plays, you can have the cast of one play understudy another, watching and even participating in rehearsals.

Readers Theatre and Writing

Even if you're just getting started, you can use readers theatre to improve your students' writing skills. Encourage students to rewrite lines or add new ones to the script. When lines are interrupted, have students write out what the character would have said if he were allowed to finish speaking. (This is a good way to avoid those obvious pauses where a character stops talking before he's actually interrupted. The actor can continue on with the line he's written until the next speaker butts in.) Ask students to write alternate endings to the plays and share them with the class.

Creating their own readers theatre scripts is a great writing activity for students. To start out, have students write scripts based on familiar stories like folk tales, fairy tales, and myths. Pose questions that push students to add new twists to these old stories. (Whatever became of the cow that Jack sold for three beans? What if Beauty turned into a beast? What would happen if the Three Pigs took the Big, Bad Wolf to court?) Students might also enjoy writing plays based on favorite television shows or movies.

After students have written several derivative scripts, encourage them to come up with fresh ideas and original characters. They might find it easiest to do this by brainstorming in small groups. After an idea session together, students can then leave the group and write their plays independently. Or the group can stay together, collaborating on a play as someone serves as the secretary, writing by hand or typing on a computer.

The Benefits

Make readers theatre a regular activity in your classroom, and you'll be amazed at the results. Students won't just improve their academic skills—they'll grow as people. A good performance takes hard work, so students learn how to meet a challenge and work toward a goal. They also gain social skills like cooperation, teamwork, and appreciation of others as they work together to put on a good show. And they get a real sense of accomplishment from their personal achievements as well as the group's success. This *genuine* self-esteem—the kind that comes from really accomplishing something—can have a powerful impact on every aspect of a child's life!

1

Alcatraz Junior High

Summary

Jason feels that his school is like a prison. The teachers are guards, the principal is the warden, and his best friend, Wink, is his cellmate. It's like Alcatraz Junior High—and Jason can't take it any more!

Costumes/Props/Sets

All characters can wear contemporary clothing. Striped shirts for the “prisoners” would add some humor.

Actors can be seated on stools onstage. If desired, the performance area could be decorated in a prison theme, with crepe paper bars on a window, pictures of Alcatraz, and the like.

Except for a note in the last scene, props are not essential. Students and Mrs. Keaton could carry textbooks if desired.

Presentation

The play can be performed with actors seated throughout or they could enter and exit as needed. In the locker-room scene, actors could mime the fight and Coach Parker arriving and taking Roger out.

Supplemental Reading

George, Linda. *Alcatraz*. New York: Children's Press, 1998.

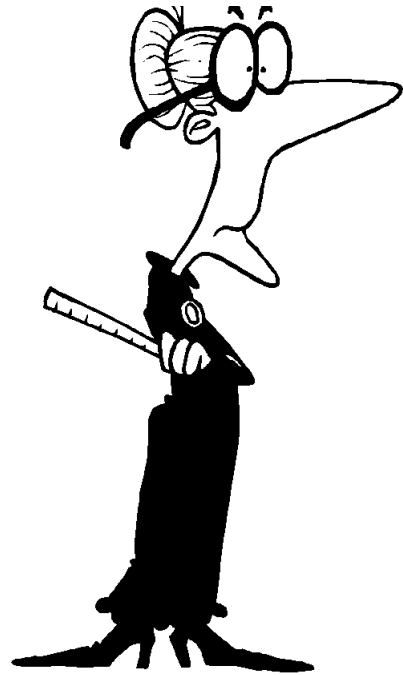
Oliver, Marilyn Tower. *Alcatraz Prison in American History*. Springfield, New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, 1998.

Cast of Characters

Narrator

Jason

Wink, his cellmate and friend



Mrs. Keaton, English teacher

Cafeteria Lady

Aimee

Chris

Roger

Principal Stevens

Teacher One

Teacher Two

Coach Parker

Alcatraz Junior High

Scene One

Narrator: (*to audience*) Out in San Francisco Bay, a mile from the nearest land, there's an island made of solid rock. And on that island there's a prison called "Alcatraz." Maybe you've heard of it.

Jason: Of course, we've heard of it. It's supposed to be the toughest prison in the world, home to the most dangerous criminals known to man, yadda yadda yadda.

Narrator: Actually, Jason, the prison has been closed since 1963. Now it's just a tourist attraction.

Wink: I wonder if they have a gift shop.

Jason: Who cares?

Wink: Well, I was just wondering what they'd sell in a gift shop there. Tin cups? Cakes with files baked in them? Pajamas striped like—

Jason: Whatever!

Narrator: (*to audience*) For years, Alcatraz Prison was called "The Rock." It was known the world over as the worst, the meanest, the roughest—

Jason: Yeah, yeah, yeah! Everybody thinks that there's no place as tough as Alcatraz Island, but it's not true. I know because I'm a prisoner in the worst penitentiary on earth!

Wink: What are you talking about?

Jason: I'm talking about Central Junior High, of course.

Wink: Here? Our school?

Jason: Yes, our school. They treat us like prisoners, Wink.

Wink: Oh, come on, Jason. It's not that bad.

Jason: Oh yeah? Have you forgotten what happened to us this morning?

Wink: When?

Jason: When we took those books to the office for Señora Delgado.

Wink: I remember the books

Jason: Okay, let me refresh your memory. We dropped off the books—

Narrator: Hey, wait a minute. That's my job.

Jason: Go ahead then.

Narrator: (*to audience*) Jason and Wink dropped off the books and headed back to their

classroom. They were just walking down the hall, minding their own business, when Mrs. Keaton, the English teacher, came along.

Jason: Mrs. Keaton . . . also known as . . . the Queen of Grammar.

Mrs. Keaton: Why aren't you boys in class?

Jason: We just did an errand for Señora Delgado.

Mrs. Keaton: Oh, really?

Wink: Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Keaton: Where's your pass?

Jason: Well, uh, let me see . . . here it is!

Mrs. Keaton: This doesn't look like Mrs. Delgado's signature.

Wink: It is, Mrs. Keaton. Really!

Jason: You can ask her yourself.

Mrs. Keaton: Hmph! I'll be sure to do that. Now you boys stop loitering about the halls, wasting time, and get back to your class.

Jason: We weren't loitering! You stopped *us*, Mrs. Queen . . . I mean, Mrs. Keaton.

Mrs. Keaton: You weren't counting on that, were you? You thought you'd just slip right by me, didn't you? Well, I'm not easily fooled.

Wink: No, ma'am.

Jason: Can we get back to class now?

Mrs. Keaton: Right away!

Narrator: Mrs. Keaton watched as the guys continued down the hall and around the corner.

Jason: Like she thought we might try to escape.

Wink: She was just doing her job, I guess.

Jason: Well, I hate it! I hate the way they treat us around here. We have to do what they tell us and go where they want us and—

Wink: That's what they're supposed to do, Jason.

Jason: We're not little kids. We don't need to be guarded, do we?

Wink: (*sighs*) I don't know. Anyway, it's not as bad as you say.

Jason: It is too! Wake up and smell the coffee, Wink. We are prisoners in Alcatraz Junior High!

Scene Two

Narrator: Jason and Wink had exactly the same schedule.

Jason: Yeah, we're like cellmates here at the Rock.

Narrator: They were best friends, too, so Jason felt that he had to make Wink understand the reality of their situation. Whenever he got the chance, Jason pointed out the prison-ish . . . prison-like . . . prisony . . . he made sure that Wink noticed how their school was like a prison. Like when they lined up for lunch

Jason: If we had some tin cups, this would be just like a prison chow line.

Wink: What do you mean?

Jason: Well, we're standing in a ridiculously long line with these stupid trays that they're going to fill up with inedible slop that we'll only get three minutes to—

Roger: Move it!

Jason: Hey!

Narrator: Every day Roger cut in the lunch line. Since he was twice the size of Frankenstein's monster, everybody was afraid to do anything about it.

Roger: You have something to say to me, shrimp?

Jason: No, sir. I mean, of course not. You go right ahead.

Narrator: After Roger got his food and moved out of earshot, Jason turned to Wink.

Jason: See? This place really is a prison! And Roger is the top dog. You know, the biggest, meanest inmate who bosses around all the other prisoners.

Wink: Roger's just a big bully who picks on people who are smaller than he is.

Jason: Isn't that what I just said?

Wink: Not really.

Cafeteria Lady: Hold out your tray please. (*disgusting plop as food hits tray*)

Jason: Man! When are we going to get some decent grub around here?

Cafeteria Lady: I beg your pardon?

Jason: Uh . . . never mind. Mm-mmm, this gruel looks yummy!

Scene Three

Narrator: Later, Jason got another chance to make his point when the guys were rushing to the Band room.

Wink: (*panting*) How are we supposed to get all the way from one end of the building to the other in three minutes?

Jason: (*panting*) It's just part of their plan to break us, Wink. They make it impossible for us to get to Band on time, and then we get punished for being tardy. It's a power trip, Wink, a mind game they use to control the prisoners.

Wink: Hey, look! Mr. Day isn't waiting outside the door to catch us.

Narrator: That *was* pretty amazing. Mr. Day was always right there, standing guard with a big pad of tardy slips.

Jason: He must be inside, ready to pounce.

Narrator: Jason and Wink dashed into the room and found that Mr. Day wasn't inside either. They got their instruments, took their seats, and waited with the other kids.

Aimee: Where is he?

Chris: He's never late.

Roger: And he's never absent.

Narrator: For a while, everyone just sat around and talked. Some people even practiced a bit.

Jason: See, Wink? Everything is going just fine. We're doing great without a guard.

Wink: I guess.

Narrator: But things gradually got a little louder. And wilder. Roger started "accidentally" hitting people with his trombone slide.

Roger: So sorry! Sorry again! Did I hit you? Sorry!

Narrator: Two guys played keep-away with Aimee's flute.

Aimee: Give it back! Give me my flute! Hey, give it!

Narrator: A tuba rolled down the risers and crashed onto the floor with this huge trainwreck noise.

Chris: Oops!

Aimee: Give me my flute right now!

Roger: Oh, man! Did I hit you? I'm ever so sorry!

Narrator: Flutes flew. People shouted. Windows rattled. Furniture tipped over. Finally, a person of authority appeared at the door.

Aimee: The principal!

Jason: You mean: the warden!

Principal Stevens: Everybody settle down right now!

Narrator: Things got deadly quiet.

Jason: Of course! The warden likes to punish infractions with long bouts in solitary.

Wink: You mean detention?

Jason: Whatever.

Principal Stevens: Mr. Day is ill. Since we couldn't get a sub for this period, I will be supervising you. This will be a study hall for today. Put away your instruments, clean up this mess, and get to work. Now.

Narrator: Everyone did as the warden . . . I mean, principal, ordered.

Wink: See, Jason? We *did* need somebody to take charge.

Jason: It's not like anything really happened. We were just having fun.

Wink: Oh, sure.

Scene Four

Narrator: After Band, Jason and Wink had to hurry to make it to Math, all the way back at the other end of the building.

Teacher One: Boys! Slow down!

Jason: Why is that teacher yelling at us? She (he) doesn't even know us.

Wink: I guess we are going kind of fast.

Jason: We have to go fast or we'll be late. Come on. Hurry it up!

Aimee: Hey, run me down, why don't you?

Wink: Sorry, Aimee!

Teacher Two: You boys! No running in the halls!

Jason: You're not the boss of me, buddy (lady)! And furthermore, I'm tired of all the ridiculous rules around this place. I'm not going to take it anymore.

Narrator: Yeah, sure. Like you really said that.

Jason: Well, I wanted to say something like that. I just didn't have time to stop and talk.

Chris: You guys are going to be late again!

Jason: No, we're not! Move it, Wink!

Narrator: At that moment, Jason turned to look at Wink. Just for a second! Unfortunately, that was the second that Mrs. Keaton stepped out into the hall. Jason ran smack-dab into her, knocking her books to the floor.

Mrs. Keaton: What in the—

Jason: Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Queen . . . Mrs. Grammar . . . Mrs. Keaton . . . Let me pick those up for you.

Mrs. Keaton: This is why we ask you not to run in the halls.

Jason: I wasn't running.

Mrs. Keaton: Don't talk back to me!

Jason: I'm not. It's just that I wasn't really running. Not very fast, anyway. I mean, we don't have much time to get to class and . . . uh . . . I'm sorry, Mrs. Keaton.

Mrs. Keaton: Be more careful in the future, young man. I could have been seriously injured by your rash actions. You wouldn't want that, would you?

Jason: Yes, ma'am. I mean, no, ma'am. I mean, yes, I'll be careful because, no, I wouldn't want anyone to get hurt.

Mrs. Keaton: Very well. Quit loitering about and get to your class.

Jason: But we weren't—

Wink: Yes, ma'am! We're on our way right now.

(Bell rings.)

Jason: Rats! We're tardy again. It's all Mrs. Keaton's fault!

Wink: No, it's not. We should have listened to the teachers who told us to slow down.

Jason: Hey, suck up to the guards if you want to, but I'm keeping my spirit alive, man!

Wink: Whatever.

Scene Five

Narrator: As that day wore on, Jason's hatred for Alcatraz Junior High grew until it ate away at his guts like acid.

Wink: That is disgusting.

Jason: I can't take this place, Wink! The rules! The constant supervision! The orders! The total lack of freedom! How will I ever survive my whole two-year sentence?

Wink: Oh, come on, Jason!

Jason: It's terrible here.

Wink: Brother!

Jason: It is! In Math, Mr. Bacon got on my case when he saw I was doodling instead of starting the assignment. Like I was going to get anything done in the last ten minutes of class.

Wink: I got half the homework finished.

Jason: So?

Wink: I'm just saying—

Jason: And in Study Hall—the real Study Hall—Ms. Presley was mad when she checked our assignment books and found out that I wasn't using mine. What does it matter if I use the stupid assignment book as long as I get my assignments in?

Wink: Actually, haven't you forgotten to do some assignments?

Jason: Maybe a few.

Wink: A few!

Jason: And in English, the Queen of Grammar patrolled the aisles while we took our test. It was like she was scared that somebody might cheat. Who could with her breathing down our necks?

Wink: Isn't that the—

Jason: Don't you get tired of it all, Wink? All the rules? And people watching your every move and ordering you around?

Wink: Yeah, sometimes. But you have to have rules, Jason. And people to make sure everybody follows the rules.

Jason: You just don't get it.

Wink: We'd better get to P.E. class.

Jason: Gee, I hope they let us walk around the exercise yard for a few minutes.

Wink: Huh?

Jason: Like in prison. It's a joke.

Wink: Oh. I think we're playing basketball today. Or maybe alley soccer.

Jason: The point is, we're playing whatever we're told to play. Because we have no rights here at The Rock.

Wink: Give me a break!

Narrator: Jason and Wink reached the locker room and started to change for class. Jason kept trying to make Wink understand that he was a number, not a name, at Alcatraz Junior High.

Jason: Just look at how they make us wear these P.E. uniforms, Wink. We all look alike in these things. It's like we're not even individual people.

Wink: I like the uniforms.

Jason: Oh, man! You're totally brainwashed!

Narrator: The guys were all dressed and ready to head to the gym, when Roger took a step backwards and ran right into Jason.

Roger: Hey, watch it, you idiot!

Jason: You backed into me.

Roger: Don't get smart with me, little guy.

Narrator: Before Jason knew what was happening, Roger slammed him up against a locker and started punching him. It was all Jason could do to keep his arms up to protect himself.

Wink: Don't worry, Jason. I'll save you!

Jason: Hey, where are you going?

Narrator: Wink ran out of the locker room, while everyone else just stood around and watched Roger pound on Jason. Luckily, Wink found Coach Parker who got Roger off of Jason and hauled him to the office.

Wink: Are you okay?

Jason: Yeah, I think so. Thanks, Wink!

Wink: Sure. Isn't that what cellmates do for each other?

Jason: Funny.

Scene Six

Narrator: Later, Coach Parker stopped the guys in the hall and told them that Roger was suspended.

Coach Parker: And, Jason, I'm really sorry you had that trouble. I got all involved in changing the basketball net at the far end of the gym where I couldn't hear anything. I should have been in the locker room.

Jason: That's okay, Coach.

Coach Parker: No, it's not. It's my job to watch out for you guys. Believe me, I'll be on guard in the future.

Jason: Uh . . . thanks!

Coach Parker: See you tomorrow!

Wink: Gee, Prisoner 2738904531479, why didn't you tell him that you don't need a guard?

Jason: (*mumbles*)

Wink: What was that? I couldn't hear you.

Jason: Maybe I changed my mind, okay? Maybe we do need some people in charge. Maybe. Sometimes. Now and then. Maybe.

Wink: (*laughing*) Right.

Narrator: The guys went into Social Studies class and took their seats. A few minutes into the period, the teacher turned to write something on the board. That was when Wink tossed Jason a note. Jason opened it up and read:

Wink: Tunnel finished. Breaking out tonight. Are you with me?

Narrator: Ha! Good one!

Jason: Yeah.

Wink: I thought so.

Narrator: Things aren't so bad here at Alcatraz Junior High. Are they?

Jason: No, I guess not. Not with a cellmate like Wink!