

The ant and the grasshopper

One hot summer day, a lazy grasshopper was taking it easy in the cool shade, while a hard-working ant was working in the sun building a nest and gathering food.

"Hey, Mister Ant," the grasshopper said, giving the ant some advice. "Why don't you take it easy like me?"

The ant answered, "I'm getting ready for the cold winter ahead. It's summer now, but when the winter comes, there won't be much food and it will be very cold."

The grasshopper laughed at the ant and said, "You worry too much! Take my advice and enjoy yourself."

The ant shook its head. "First I'll get ready for winter. Then, I'll enjoy myself."

The grasshopper replied, "I'd rather enjoy myself."

Then the ant gave the grasshopper some advice, "It's okay to enjoy yourself, but you should also get ready for the winter."

Three or four months later, winter came and it was very cold. While the ant was warm in its nest, the grasshopper was very cold and quite hungry — and unhappy that he hadn't taken the ant's advice.

Readers' theater

Most teachers are familiar with activities that precede the students' actual reading — pre-reading activities of various sorts to get them ready to read, and activities that follow the actual reading — post-reading activities of different kinds that are found in all reading books.

But what else can we do with the reading passage itself? Certainly the more work the students do with the text, the more they learn from it.

Readers' theater is an effective and interesting way to introduce a new text to a class that can be used easily for intermediate and advanced readers.

But, before we discuss readers' theater, we need to mention pre-reading activities. Certainly, pre-reading work is important, particularly for less proficient readers who are likely to have some trouble with the story. For this story, there are three kinds of pre-reading activities that might be used before the students actually read the story.

First, it is important that the students know the words *ant* and *grasshopper* — a picture of an ant and a grasshopper would be nice, but it is probably enough to translate these words. It would also probably be interesting (and useful) to point out that the word *grasshopper* has three parts: *grass*, *hop*, and *-er* (suffix, meaning one who...), making the whole word mean roughly 'the one who hops over grass'.

Next, there are also some useful phrases in the story: *Why don't you...* (used to give advice), *take it easy*, *get ready for...*, *I'd rather...* (to show a preference), *enjoy oneself*, *take ... advice*, *give ... advice*. Check for other words that your students might not know.

Finally, make sure that, before the students begin to read the story, they know that in a cold climate food is grown and gathered in the hot summer and stored to eat during the cold winter. Perhaps it might be helpful to put the words *summer* and *winter* on the board and point this out.

Now, back to readers' theater. Notice if we examine the story of "The Ant and the Grasshopper," there is a natural division into three speaking roles: the storyteller, the grasshopper, and the ant.

If you are going to divide the story up by yourself, mark the various parts on the story before

you make copies for the whole class. If the students are going to divide up the story into the three parts, make sure that they know exactly what the storyteller says, exactly what the ant says, and exactly what the grasshopper says.

Divide the class into "threes" by counting off, one, two, three. The storyteller's part is the most difficult, the ant's part is intermediate in difficulty, and the grasshopper's is the easiest. Of course, instead you might assign the harder roles to the stronger readers and the easier roles to the weaker readers. And then, you might let them decide for themselves in their groups.

Have the students practice dramatically reading the passage within their own groups. Then, select several groups of volunteers to give a dramatic reading of the story for the whole class.

Readers' theater can be used for all sorts of reading passages, since any passage can be divided up into different sections to be read. However, it is particularly suitable for passages like the "The Ant and the Grasshopper" where there are distinct roles to play.