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# Readers' Theater Notes

Readers' Theater is drama without costumes, props, stage, or memorization. It can be done in the classroom by groups of students who become the cast of the dramatic reading.

## Staging

Place four stools, chairs, or desks in a semicircle at the front of the classroom or in a separate stage area. Generally no costumes are used in this type of dramatization, but students dressed in similar clothing or colors can add a nice effect. Simple props can be used but are not required.

## Script

Each member of the group should have a clearly marked script. Performers should practice several times before presenting the play to the class.

## Performing

Performers should enter the classroom quietly and seriously. They should sit silently without moving and wait with heads lowered. The first reader should begin, and the other readers should focus on whoever is reading, except when they are performing.

## Assignment

Read the Readers' Theater Script (pages 57 and 58) about the Starving Time in Jamestown. Work within the group to prepare for the performance.

## Extension

Write your own Readers' Theater script based on one of the events listed below or another topic related to the colonial period. Practice your script with a group of classmates, and then perform it for the rest of the class.

- A slave makes the Middle Passage across the Atlantic.
- Roger Williams flees to Rhode Island.
- A witch is tried at the Salem witch trials.
- King Philip decides to attack Massachusetts settlers.
- Anne Hutchinson is banished from Massachusetts.
- The first slaves arrive in Jamestown.
- An English fleet captures New Amsterdam.
- The first Thanksgiving is held in Plymouth.
- William Penn establishes Philadelphia.

**Readers' Theater: The Starving Time**

The following script is a fictional account of a meeting at the end of the terrible winter of 1609-1610 when the settlement of Jamestown nearly died.

**Narrator:** The time is May 1610 in Jamestown, Virginia, after a terrible winter which fewer than 60 settlers out of 500 have survived. The settlement had been on the edge of survival since it was founded in the spring of 1607. Most of the settlers were spoiled gentlemen adventurers who were not prepared by personality or training for a life of extreme physical labor and hardship. Only a few working farmers, some servants, and an occasional craftsman were scattered among the gentlemen. Sir Thomas Gates, the new governor, has just arrived in the settlement, which is in ruins. He joins three men who are sitting in the ruins of a house. Captain George Percy is the acting governor. Reverend White and John Layton, a carpenter, are the other two.

**Sir Thomas Gates:** We have just arrived from England. Our ship was wrecked in a hurricane near Bermuda, and we had to spend several months there building two small vessels to get to here. This is not the settlement I expected. We heard that Jamestown was becoming prosperous. What has happened?

**Reverend White:** This has been a winter of terror and terrible sadness. I feel at times that we have been abandoned by God. We spend most of our time burying our dead. We are almost too weak to do a decent Christian job of it. We barely get them beneath the earth and say a few prayers.

**John Layton:** At least they are mostly buried. One poor man slew his own wife when she was near death and started eating her. He is not the only one here to go wrong, mad either. We are grateful to see you, Governor, but we have nothing to offer you. I hope you brought food. Our people are starving to death.

**Captain Percy:** We have had a terrible time. The winter has been bitter cold. So many men were ill that many of the houses and parts of the fortification have been used for firewood. This has been especially troublesome because the savage Indians have determined to destroy us. We cannot go outside the settlement without being attacked by a swarm of arrows fired from a dozen different hiding places.

**John Layton:** Jamestown was a terrible place for a settlement in the first place. It is not easy to defend, and the chief of the local Indian tribe has committed to destroy us. When Captain Smith was here, we often were able to trade with the Indians for corn and other food but no longer.

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# Colonial Games and Sports

Choose one of the games or sports listed below to play during your next physical education or recess period.

## Rolling Hoops

Round metal hoops used to surround wooden barrels, and the rims of wagon wheels were often used for races. You can use hula-hoops for the same purpose. Choose a starting line, and race a friend while rolling your hoop. These can be one-on-one races or races with many contestants.

## Quoits

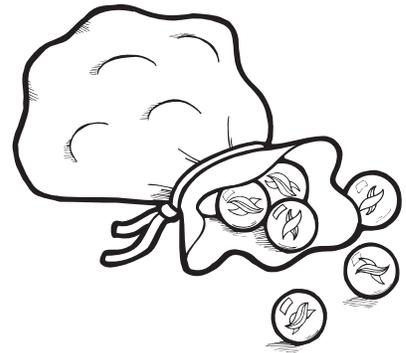
All you need are some rings about the diameter of a plate and some stakes. You can use croquet stakes, pieces of doweling, or even paper towel tubes stuck in the ground for the stakes. The rings could be cutout paper plates, bands of tagboard made into a circle and stapled, or similar objects. The object of the game is to successfully throw a ring over the stake. Start at a distance of four feet from the stake and keep lengthening the distance to see how well you can do. This game works well with two to four players.

## Walking on Stilts

Walking on stilts was popular in colonial times and in most periods until recent times. Colonial children used whatever pieces of wood they could find. You can make a modified pair of stilts by using large soup or fruit drink cans or even full toilet paper rolls. Use masking tape or duct tape to attach the stilts to your shoes. Use two, long, sturdy poles to help you keep your balance.

## Marbles

Marbles have been popular since colonial times. Draw a circle in the dirt or on the pavement about the size of a hula-hoop. Place one marble inside the circle. Take turns trying to hit that marble by rolling a marble from outside the circle. If you miss, your marble stays in the circle. The person who hits the center marble wins all the marbles left in the circle.



## Familiar Games

Hopscotch was called “Scotch-hoppers” in colonial times, but the rules were about the same as they are today. Back then children would have marked their playing area in the dirt. Children played both chess and checkers. They also played with tops, whistles, kites, dollhouses, and snow sleds. Tag, foot races, sack races, and Blind Man’s Bluff were popular, too.