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How to Use This Book

Reader's Theater for Real-Life Mysteries offers eight engaging scripts designed to be used with small groups of six students. Each play is divided into three higher-level reading parts and three lower-level reading parts. (This information is provided on the *Characters* page for each unit.) The roles in each script are listed from highest-reading level (high 3rd grade) to lowest (high 1st grade). Note that the *Characters* page is provided as a teacher-only page so that you can distribute the roles according to students' reading abilities. Although the roles are differentiated, students will not know which parts are harder than others. This gives everyone an equal chance to shine! If you have fewer than six students, you can offer a strong reader the chance to play two different roles at once. You can also consider performing the script more than once and having students play different roles each time!

Each lesson includes a short background description of the real-life mystery and some potential theories offered over time. Review this information before distributing the play and discuss the background information with students. Each play is a fictional retelling of a real-life event. While dialogue and creative liberties were taken in writing the play, most of the characters are based on real people, and—more importantly—the events actually did happen. All eight of the mysteries are still considered unsolved as of this writing.

Key vocabulary words are provided on the lesson plan pages. Consider frontloading the words with students before practicing the scripts to ensure they understand these higher-level content words.

The best part about reader's theater is the simplicity! No stage, props, or costumes are required. However, if students are passionate about providing these elements, feel free to let them run with it.

Badges that students can decorate are provided for each character. There are various ways to use these badges:

· Make headbands out of construction paper and staple the badges to the headbands for students to wear.

· Pin the badges to students' shirts.

· Tape the badges to rulers, and have students hold them up while reading.

· Tie the badges to yarn, and have students wear them as necklaces.

· If students will be sitting in chairs, tape the badges to the wall above their heads.
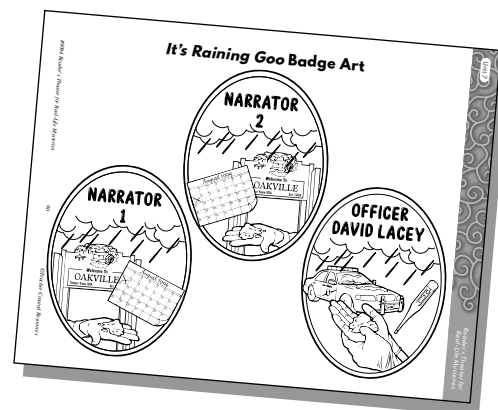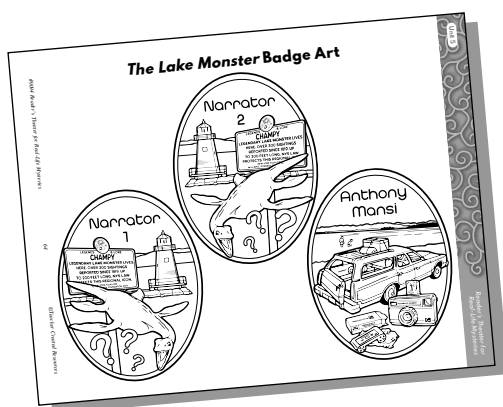
How to Use This Book *(cont.)*

Provide each student with at least one copy of the script. (**Note:** If preferred, an additional copy of the script can be given to each student so they can practice reading at home.) Tell students to highlight their parts of the script so they do not miss their lines. Then practice, practice, practice! Give students silent-reading time so they feel comfortable with their own parts before arranging them in small groups for oral-reading practice.

While an actual performance is not required, the culminating performance day is something that students may look forward to the most. Consider having small groups perform for the whole class, or invite other classes to watch. A performance day where parents are invited to be the audience may be fun for students and a great way to connect home and school learning. Be sure to record the performance and share the video with parents. Another option is to do the whole performance as a livestream online.

Once students have mastered their parts with fluency, you can assess their reading comprehension. The activity sheet offers comprehension questions and provides students with a self-assessment rubric. Review the self-assessment rubric so that students understand how they will be scoring their performance. Students will benefit if they have the chance to listen to their own performance.

After students have practiced and performed the reader's theater, you can conclude the unit with a writing activity. The final journal page provides students with the opportunity to express their own ideas and theories about what really happened during these mysterious moments in history!

Note: *The reader's theater plays in this book are fictional retellings of real-life events. They were drawn from published materials and interviews. For narrative purposes, the stories contain fictionalized scenes and dialogue. The views, opinions, and dialogue belong to the characters only and may not be true representations of the views, opinions, and dialogue held or spoken by the real-life individuals.*
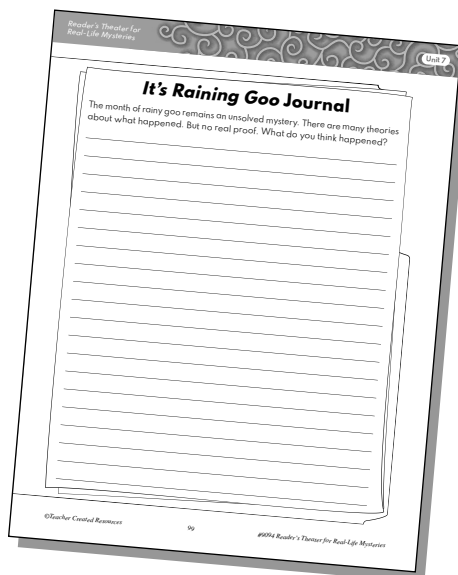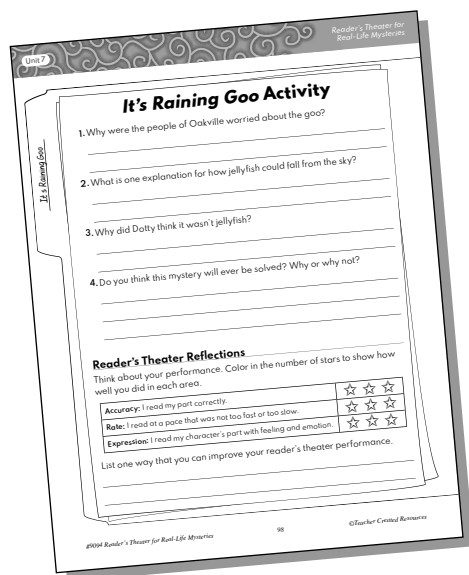
The Ghost Ship Lesson Plan

Content Objectives

- Read grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
- Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
- Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

Materials

- student copies of *The Ghost Ship* Badge Art (pages 51–52)
- student copies of *The Ghost Ship* Script (pages 53–58)
- student copies of *The Ghost Ship* Activity (page 59)
- student copies of *The Ghost Ship* Journal (page 60)
- highlighters, crayons, markers
- notecards for vocabulary game

Before Reading

1. Begin by assessing students' prior knowledge (if any) of the mystery of the *Mary Celeste.* Tell students that in 1872, a ship called the *Dei Gratia* was sailing through the Atlantic Ocean, 1,000 miles west of Portugal. The crew of sailors was led by Captain David Morehouse and First Mate Oliver Deveau. They were surprised to see an abandoned ship sailing along the ocean. When they got close enough to the ship, Captain David recognized that it was his friend's ship, the *Mary Celeste.* They anchored close to it, and Oliver boarded the ship with a few crew members. He stumbled upon an unsolved mystery! The *Mary Celeste* had a crew of ten people that included the captain's wife and young daughter. But the crew had vanished. All of their things were left behind. The ship still had supplies, food, and clothing. The bottom cabins of the ship were flooded with less than four feet of water, but this wasn't enough to sink the ship. They found a pump that had been taken apart. This might be a clue that the pumps on the ship were not working correctly. The lifeboat was gone. There was no sign of any disaster, and everything on the ship was neat and in order. No captain would abandon a seaworthy ship. What happened remains a mystery!

2. Tell students that they will be performing a reader's theater play about the unsolved mystery of the ghost ship *Mary Celeste.* Distribute copies of the script. Assign students their roles based on reading proficiencies. See page 50 for a list of the reading levels for each role in *The Ghost Ship* script.

The Ghost Ship **Lesson Plan** *(cont.)*

Rehearsal

1. Once students have been assigned their parts, tell them to go through the entire script and highlight their parts. Then, give students time to silently read either the entire script or just their highlighted sections. Ask them to use a pencil and underline any words that they do not know or do not know how to pronounce. Go over these words together to ensure understanding.

2. This script has key vocabulary that students may not know. Consider playing a vocabulary memory game. Write the following words from the play on separate notecards: *navigation, spyglass, cursed, abandoned, mutiny, investigate, vanished, lifeboat, galley, logbook, rigging, documentaries, salvage reward, oceanographer*. Then, write the definition of each word on separate notecards. Place all the cards facedown. Have students take turns flipping two cards over. If they match a word with the definition, they get to keep the cards. Play until all of the cards have been matched.

3. Give students time to practice their reader's theater. Remind them to speak with fluency, rate, expression, and tone. They need to play the role of the character using just their voices! Demonstrate reading a few lines in a dull, monotonous tone. Then, read the same lines with expression and ask students to explain the difference. Do the same thing with reading pace (read lines too quickly or too slowly) and then demonstrate a proper pace. Lastly, whisper lines softly. Then, read them again with a proper volume. Ask students if they understand the differences.

Performance

1. There are a variety of ways for your students to perform *The Ghost Ship* reader's theater. See pages 5–8 for performance ideas.

2. Distribute copies of the badges (pages 51–52). Give students time to decorate their character's badge using crayons or markers.

3. Remind students to speak loudly and clearly and with confidence! Encourage them to show emotion and feeling with their voices. Even the narrators can show emotion by reading their parts with an authoritative and confident tone! If stage fright or public speaking is an issue for some students, remind them to focus on their lines instead of worrying about the audience. And lastly, remind students to take a deep breath, smile, and have fun with this!

Assessment

1. Distribute student copies of *The Ghost Ship* Activity (page 59). Go over the activity sheet together and then have students complete it independently.

2. Distribute student copies of *The Ghost Ship* Journal (page 60). Remind students that the missing crew on the *Mary Celeste* is still an unsolved mystery. Discuss the possible theories presented in the script, along with any of your own. Then, give students time to journal their theories.

The Ghost Ship Characters

Assigning Characters

The roles in this reader's theater have been leveled to fit the individual needs of your students. When students feel confident in their reading fluency, they will engage with the character and feel comfortable performing in front of others. Remind students that they are performing a play using only their voices. The way they speak each word matters! Demonstrate the difference between monotone reading and reading with fluency and expression so students can understand the expectations.

You might also consider assigning nonspeaking roles to students who are reluctant to read aloud. These students could act as directors or coaches. Remind them that their role is very important. They will have to know the script extremely well and will be in charge of prompting students when it is their turn to read.

The Ghost Ship has six roles. They are listed here in order of highest reading-level proficiency to lowest.

Grade 3 Reading Levels:

Narrator 2   Played by: _____

Anne MacGregor   Played by: _____

Phil Richardson   Played by: _____

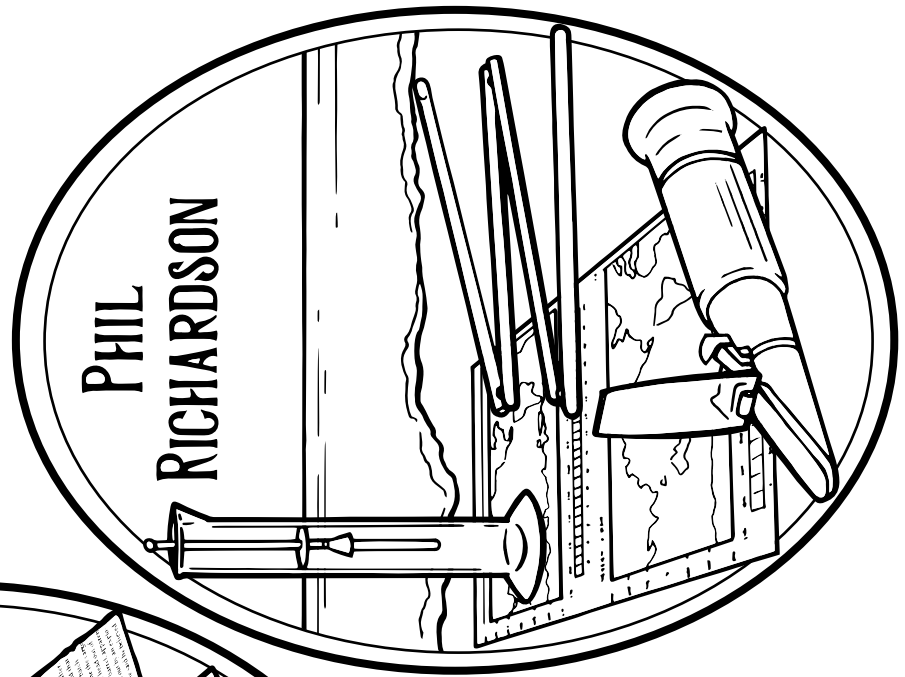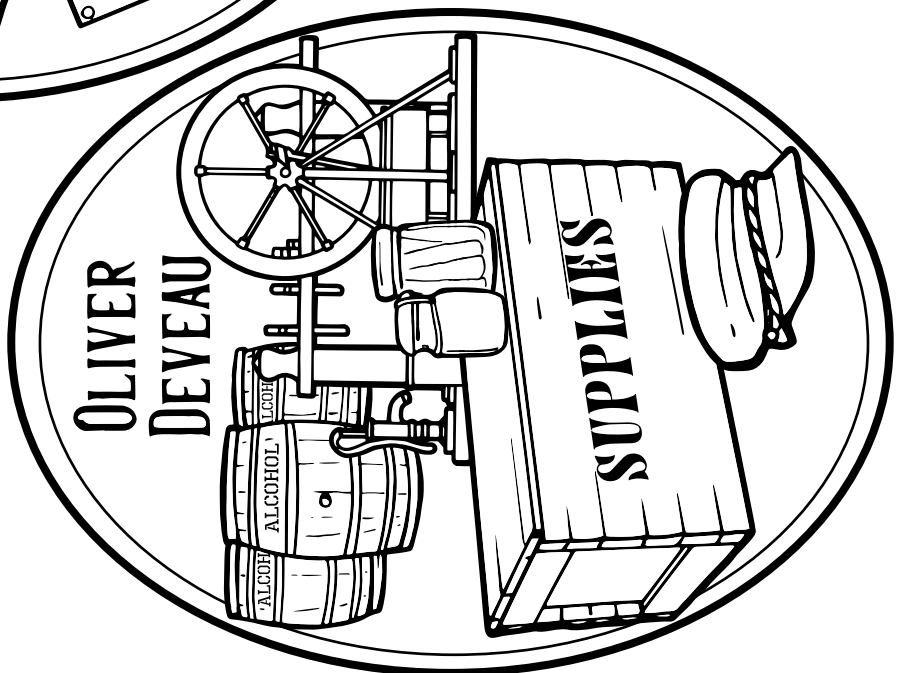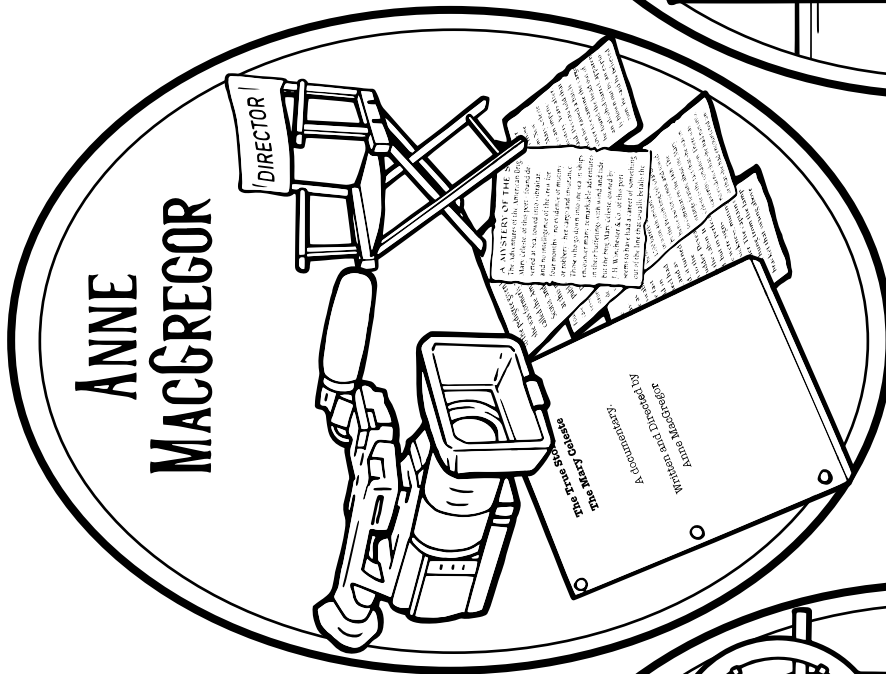### Grade 2/High Grade 1 Reading Levels:

Narrator 1   Played by: _____

Captain David Morehouse Played by: _____

Oliver Deveau   Played by: _____

The Ghost Ship Badge Art *(cont.)*

PHIL RICHARDSON

ANNE MacGREGOR

DIRECTOR

The True Story of
The Mary Celeste

A Documentary by
Written and Directed by
Anne MacGregor

OLIVER DEVEAU

SUPPLIES

ALCOHOL

The Ghost Ship Script

Characters
- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Captain David Morehouse
- Oliver Deveau
- Anne MacGregor
- Phil Richardson

Setting

Act 1 takes place on a ship off the coast of Portugal. Act 2 takes place in an oceanography lab.

Act 1

Captain David: It can't be ... [*gasps*]. Oliver, do you see what I see?

Oliver: Yes, Captain. It seems to be a ship.

Narrator 1: Captain David is sailing with his crew. They are in the Atlantic Ocean.

Narrator 2: The captain sees something unusual through his spyglass. A spyglass is a tool that sailors use to see far away.

Captain David: That's not just any ship. It looks like the *Mary Celeste.*

Narrator 2: The *Mary Celeste* was thought to be cursed. Over time, it had many captains. Some captains ended up sick. One captain crashed the ship into another ship! That ship sank. Another captain had the ship driven ashore during a storm. It was damaged. Then, while the ship was being fixed, it caught on fire!

Narrator 1: In 1872, a new captain took command. His name was Benjamin Briggs. He was a good sailor. He was known for being fair and kind. His crew liked him.

Oliver: The *Mary Celeste*! Isn't that Captain Briggs' ship?

Captain David: Yes, it is. But I just spoke to Briggs. I had dinner with his family in New York. He set sail a week before we did. Why would his ship be here? He was headed for Italy.

Oliver: Well, Captain, it doesn't look like they made it that far. The ship looks abandoned. The sails are torn. I don't think anyone is steering. What do you want to do?