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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 higher-level reading parts and 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 fifth grade) to lowest (high third 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, the 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!

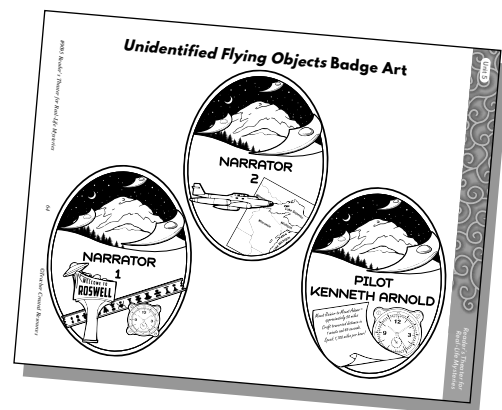
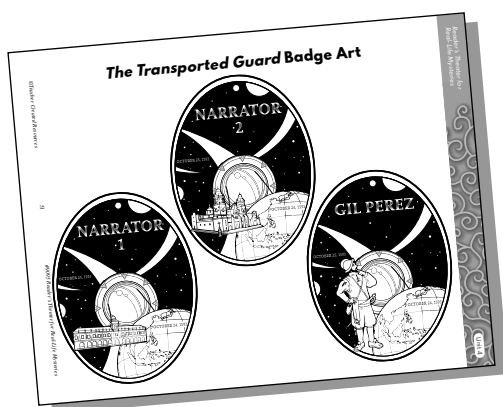
Each lesson includes a short background description of the real-life mystery and some potential theories offered over time. Review this information before distributing the script, and discuss the background information with students. Each play is a fictional retelling of a real-life event. While dialogue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

Key vocabulary words are provided on the lesson plan pages. Consider frontloading the words with students before practicing the scripts to ensure that 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 them 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.)*

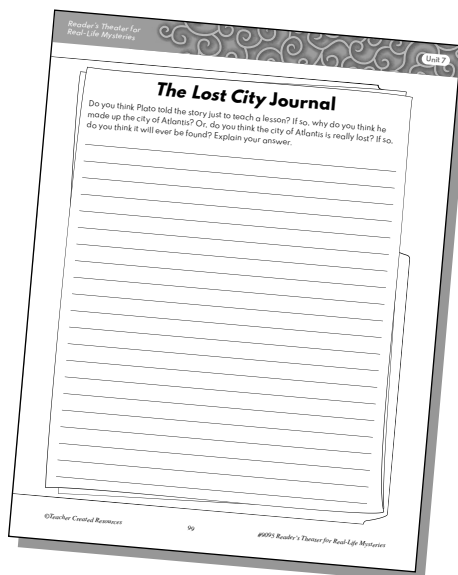
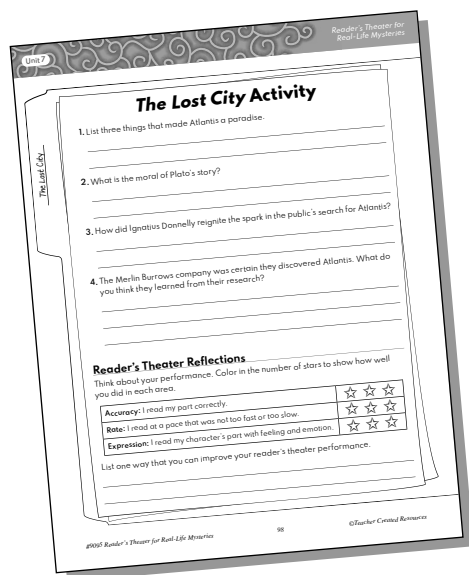
Provide each student with at least one copy of the script. (**Note:** If preferred, an additional copy of the script can be given to each student so they can practice reading at home.) Tell students to highlight their parts of the script so they do not miss their lines. Then practice, practice, practice! Give students silent-reading time so that 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. See page 8 for more information on online performances.

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 students understand how they will be scoring their performance. Students will benefit if they have the chance to listen to their own performance. See pages 7–8 for more information on recording performances.

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.*



El Chupacabra Lesson Plan

Content Objectives

- Read grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
- Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- 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 *El Chupacabra* Badge Art (pages 25–26)
- student copies of *El Chupacabra* Script (pages 27–32)
- student copies of *El Chupacabra* Activity (page 33)
- student copies of *El Chupacabra* Journal (page 34)
- highlighters, crayons, markers
- notecards and dice for vocabulary game

Before Reading

1. Begin by assessing students' prior knowledge (if any) of the mysterious chupacabra. They may have heard the name from folklore, books, or movies. The legend began in Puerto Rico when eight sheep were found with puncture marks in their bodies. They appeared to be drained of their blood. People thought it must be vampires. But then a woman claimed she saw a creature that looked like a dog but had no fur and hopped like a kangaroo. The town called the creature *el chupacabra*, which means "the goat sucker." The tales of the chupacabra spread across the world, and despite many attempts to solve the mystery, it remains mostly an enigma to this day.
2. Tell students that they will be performing a reader's theater play about the unsolved mystery of the chupacabra. Distribute copies of the script. Assign students their roles based on reading proficiencies. See page 24 for a list of the reading levels for each role in the *El Chupacabra* script.

***El Chupacabra* 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 game. Have students sit with partners. Write the following words from the play on note cards: *plaguing, putrid, quills, lurking, prowling, documentaries, compiling, figment, shapeshifter, arachnids*. Each student will take turns reading a word on a notecard. Then, they will give the definition. If they do not know, they can look it up. Then, they will roll the dice and write down the number they scored. Partners go back and forth until all ten words are defined. Then, they total their scores to see who wins!
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. Finally, 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 *El Chupacabra* reader's theater. See pages 5–8 for performance ideas.
2. Distribute copies of the badges (pages 25–26). 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 narrator can show emotion by reading their part 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 finally, remind students to take deep breaths, smile, and have fun!

Assessment

1. Distribute student copies of the *El Chupacabra* Activity (page 33). Go over the activity sheet together, and then have students complete it independently.
2. Distribute student copies of the *El Chupacabra* Journal (page 34). Remind students that the existence of the chupacabra 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.

***El Chupacabra* 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. The goal is to have a successful performance that allows each student a chance to shine.

El Chupacabra has six roles. Each role has been designed to meet the needs of a variety of reading-level proficiencies. The characters are listed here in order of highest reading-level proficiency to lowest.

Remember that even high-level readers may struggle with giving a fluent performance. 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.

Grade 5 Reading Levels:

Narrator 1 Played by: _____

Author Benjamin Radford Played by: _____

Professor Barry O'Connor Played by: _____

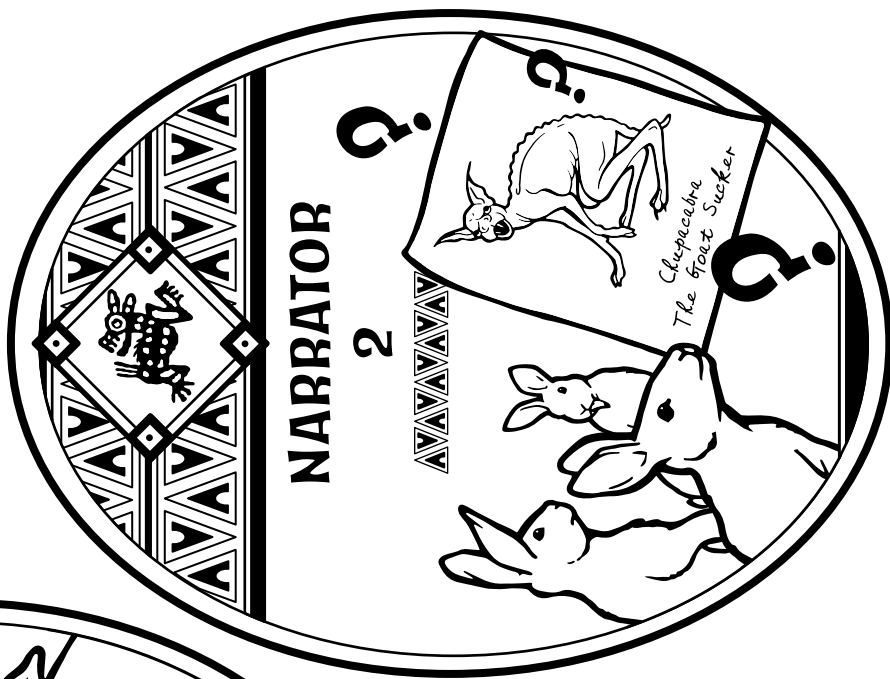
Grade 4/High Grade 3 Reading Levels:

Eyewitness Madelyne Tolentino Played by: _____

Eyewitness Phylis Canion Played by: _____

Narrator 2 Played by: _____

El Chupacabra Badge Art (cont.)



El Chupacabra Script

Setting

Act 1 takes place in Puerto Rico in 1995. Act 2 takes place in Texas in 2007. Act 3 takes place in a university library in 2010.

Act 1

Narrator 1: In 1995, farmers in Puerto Rico discovered something terrifying. Eight sheep were found dead.

Narrator 2: But the sheep didn't die of a disease or an illness. The farmers found three small holes in the bodies of the sheep. The holes made the shape of a triangle. But the strangest part of all? There was no blood!

Narrator 1: Not just no blood. *Missing* blood. Something drained the blood from the sheep.

Narrator 2: Something or someone?

Narrator 1: A few days later, goats, chickens, sheep, rabbits, cats, and dogs were turning up injured or dead.

Narrator 2: Was it vampires? Werewolves? Monsters? Bats? Who were these bloodthirsty creatures of the night?

Narrator 1: The town of Canóvanas in Puerto Rico reported 150 animals being drained of their blood.

Narrator 2: How could these animals die without anyone seeing the cause? It was a mystery! Was it a hoax? Or was it a strange new virus plaguing the animals?

Narrator 1: People were unsure what was happening until Madelyne Tolentino became the first eyewitness.

Madelyne: It started as an ordinary summer night in August. I had cooked dinner and was cleaning up my kitchen. The sun was setting and the air was cooling down, so I decided to open my window. As I looked out onto the field outside, I saw some movement behind the bushes. I peered out the window to see if I could figure out what was moving. But the smell! The cool night air came in through the open window and the smell was putrid! It was like rotten eggs. As I began to close my window, a figure came out from the shadows.

Characters

- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Eyewitness Madelyne Tolentino
- Eyewitness Phylis Canion
- Author Benjamin Radford
- Professor Barry O'Connor