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= total number of parts



Fluency instruction provides a bridge between being able to “read” a text and being able to understand it. Readers who decode word by word sound plodding and choppy. They are too busy figuring out the words to think about what they are reading. Fluent readers are accurate, quick, and able to read with expression. They make the reading sound interesting. Beyond the experience of the listener, fluent readers are also demonstrating skills that are crucial to their understanding of what they read. Fluent readers recognize words at a glance, group words into meaningful phrases, and move beyond the struggle to decode individual words. They are able to focus on making sense of what they read.

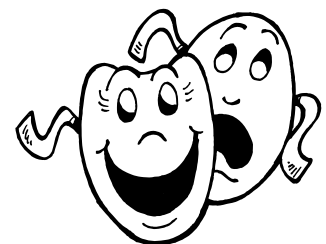
Reader’s Theater is an exciting way to help students improve reading fluency without being too time intensive for the teacher. It requires no props and no additional teaching skills on your part, and it is not difficult to manage. Reader’s Theater promotes better reading comprehension because students who have learned to read a passage expressively also come to better understand its meaning. In addition, research says that these gains transfer well to new text. Reader’s Theater also addresses standards in listening while providing a fun environment for everyone involved. When students practice their lines, they read and reread the same passages. Under your direction, they gradually add more expression, read more smoothly, and find any subtle meanings in the passages.

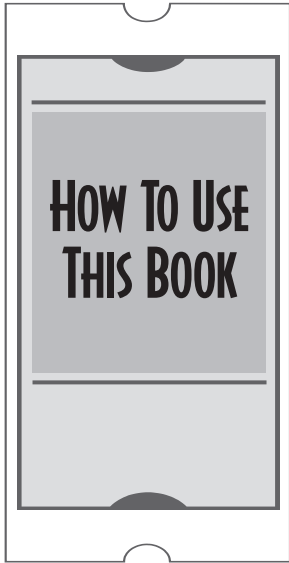
The scripts in *Ancient Civilizations Reader’s Theater* are intended to be read in large groups of 6 to 13 students. Each script is prefaced by an activity that focuses on vocabulary from the script, the factual and fictional background of the piece, fluency instruction specific to that script, and comprehension questions that span the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Each script is followed by one or two whole-class activities related to the content of the script.

These scripts are designed for fluency instruction. While they are based on factual information about the time period or characters, many of the characters and scenes are entirely fictional. The overall purpose is to provide students with text at their reading level that is fun to read. The background section that precedes each script provides additional information about the characters or the period around which the script is built. All the scripts provide the following hallmarks of a good Reader’s Theater text:

- fast-moving dialogue
- action
- humor
- narrative parts

Ancient Civilizations Reader’s Theater provides hours of fluency practice that is grounded in the familiar format of ancient history. The large-group format gives students an opportunity to work together to craft an entertaining reading for a peer or adult audience.





Each Reader's Theater script should be covered over the course of five practice days (although those days do not need to be consecutive). The first day should include some or all of the elements of the suggested reading instruction. It should also include an expressive reading by you of the script as students read along silently. On each of the following days, give students an opportunity to practice their reading. On the final day, have each group read its script for the class.

Five sections that support reading instruction precede each script. You will find **vocabulary, background information** for the script, **a brief description of each character,** specific **coaching for fluency instruction,** and **comprehension questions** that progress from the simplest level of understanding to the most complex.

On the first day of instruction, briefly discuss with students the vocabulary. Each vocabulary list includes a short activity to help students understand the meaning of each vocabulary word. For example, the vocabulary activity for *The Aztecs* (page 7) asks students to pantomime the words.

Next, use the background and information about each character to tell students what the script will be about and describe the characters.

Read aloud the script, modeling clear enunciation and a storyteller's voice. Do not be afraid to exaggerate your expression—it will hold the attention of your audience and stick more firmly in their minds when they attempt to mimic you later. Model the pacing you expect from them as they read.

Finish the reading instruction by discussing the fluency tips with students and having them answer the questions in the comprehension section.

Now it is time to give students a copy of the script! Use the following schedule of student practice for a five-day instruction period.

Day 1	After following the steps outlined on page 4, give each student a personal copy of the script. Pair students and have Partner A read all the parts on the first page, Partner B read all the parts on the second page, and so on.
Days 2 and 3	Assign students to a group. Give each group a script for each student, and have each student highlight a different part. Have students gather to read aloud the script as many times as time permits. Have them change roles with each reading by exchanging the highlighted scripts. Move from group to group, providing feedback and additional modeling as needed. At the <i>end</i> of day 3, assign roles or have students agree on a role to own.

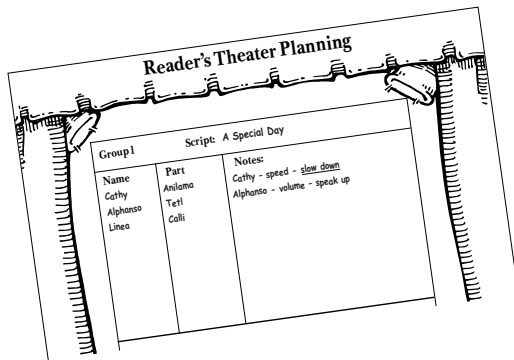
Day 4	Have each group read aloud the script. Move from group to group and provide feedback. Have students discuss their favorite lines at the end of each reading and why the manner in which they are read works well. Repeat.
Day 5	Have each group perform its script for the rest of the class (or other audience members provided by buddy classes and/or school personnel).

Throughout the week, or as time permits, provide students with the activity or activities that follow each script. These are optional and do not have to be completed to provide fluency instruction; however,

many provide students with additional background information that may help them better understand the characters or setting of the script.

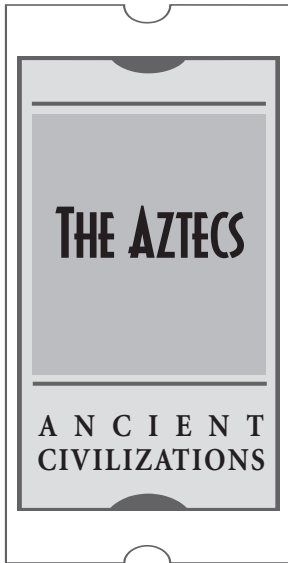
Additional Tips

- Use the Reader's Theater Planning reproducible (page 6) to track the assigned roles for each group and to jot down any informal observations you make for assessment. Use these observations to drive future fluency instruction.
 - Notice that there are no staging directions in the scripts. These plays are written to be read expressively in a storyteller's voice. If the focus is placed on *acting out* the script, students will shift their focus from the reading to the movement. If students become enchanted with a script and want to act it out, invite them to do so after they have mastered the reading. Then, have the group go through the script and brainstorm their own staging directions to jot in the margins.
 - To fit fluency instruction into an already full day of instruction, it will work best to have all groups work on the same script. This will permit you to complete the first day's activities as a whole class. Students will enjoy hearing how another child reads the same lines, and some mild competition to read expressively will only foster additional effort.
- If you have too many roles for the number of students in a group, assign one child more than one part.
 - If you have too many students for parts, divide up the narrator parts. As a rule, these parts tend to have longer lines.
 - The roles with the greatest and least number of words to read are noted in the teacher pages. The 🏠 and 🏡 indicate a higher or lower *word count*. They are not a reflection of reading level. The narrator parts usually reflect the highest reading level. However, less fluent readers may benefit from having fewer words to master. More advanced readers may benefit from the challenge of the greater word count.



Reader's Theater Planning

Group 1		
Script: _____		
Name	Part	Notes:
Group 2		
Script: _____		
Name	Part	Notes:
Group 3		
Script: _____		
Name	Part	Notes:



VOCABULARY

Discuss each of the following words with students. Then, have volunteers pantomime the words, and invite the rest of the class to identify the word.

amaranth: a plant with dark green or reddish clusters of tiny flowers used in cooking

cacao: a tropical tree whose seeds are used in making chocolate, cocoa, and cocoa butter

glyphs: symbols used for writing

labret: a piece of wood, shell, or stone worn in a perforation of the lip or cheek

macaw: a kind of parrot found in Central and South America that has a long tail, a curved, powerful bill, and usually brilliant feathers

quetzal: a Central American bird that has brightly colored bronze-green and red feathers

ulama: an Aztec ball game played with two teams that was similar to soccer and basketball

BACKGROUND

The Aztecs came to present-day Mexico and Latin America from the north about A.D. 1300. Their empire included as many as 15 million people living in 500 towns and cities. Huey Tlatoani was an Aztec leader, the Great Speaker; but his family and preparations for his naming day celebration were invented for this play. In A.D. 1519, the Spaniards conquered the Aztec people, their land, and the last Aztec emperor, Montezuma II, through warfare and diseases. Nahuatl, the oral language used by the Aztecs, is still spoken in some remote areas of Mexico.

In this play, Tetl and Calli's city is based on Tenochtitlan, the government center of the Aztecs. Three times a week, market-day vendors spread their wares on reed mats in the market square. There were over 400 more permanent shops in the streets around the market. A trip to the market was time-consuming yet productive in locating needed goods and news. For food the Aztecs raised dogs and turkeys, and they hunted for rabbits, waterfowl, fish, deer, and armadillos. They ate maize, beans, squash, grasshoppers, locusts, insect eggs, cactus worms, chili peppers, tomatoes, and amaranth porridge.

There were several kinds of Aztec scribes who recorded different events. In this play, Father is a general scribe, who makes books out of strips of deer skin, uses pictograms and glyphs, and folds the strips like an accordion. Only a few of these books, called codices, survived Spanish destruction.

Because about half of their children died by the age of 5, the Aztecs developed customs to ensure babies had the best advantages to survive. Readings of sacred calendars by astrologers for "lucky" names and days for naming celebrations and special gifts were ways a family could prepare a healthy life for an infant. Even though illness was thought to be caused by evil spirits, the Aztecs could set broken bones, suture cuts, and prescribe healing herbs, seeds, roots, leaves, minerals, and nuts to cure illness or to relieve symptoms.




PARTS

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Anilama (honored elder): Calli's and Tetl's grandmother

Tetl (stone): 9-year-old brother of Calli

 Calli (house): 10-year-old sister of Tetl

Father: chief scribe of the city and father of Calli and Tetl

Papalotl (butterfly): nicknamed "Pap," a helpful 9-year-old girl

Astrologer: Papalotl's father

Nezahual Coyotl (hungry coyote): nicknamed "Nezzie," an 11-year-old girl

Chapultepec (grasshopper hill): nicknamed "Chap," a 10-year-old boy

Cautla (forest): a 12-year-old boy

 Feathermaker

FLUENCY INSTRUCTION

Have students discuss the ages of the characters to help them reflect the maturity level in their reading. When you read aloud the script for students, have them listen for the following:

- The pace of the reading helps show the level of the speaker's excitement. Read aloud the lines **Anilama**: *Wake up, Tetl and Calli! It is a beautiful, wonderful day! A special day!* and **Tetl**: *[yawning] Grandmother, it is still dark out!* Have students notice that Anilama's lines are read at a slightly faster pace. She already knows there is exciting news of a new birth. Tetl has just woken from a deep sleep and does not know there is anything to be excited about yet.
- Calli and Tetl's father is older than the children in the play, but his age is not given. Have students estimate the age of the father and demonstrate how his voice would be different than the voice of 9-year-old Tetl.
- Commas signal a pause. Reread the line **Anilama**: *By yourselves. When you return, I'll decide if I should have trusted you.* Have students read this line in two ways: pausing at the comma and without pausing. Ask them to explain how the comma helps communicate the meaning of the sentence.

COMPREHENSION

After you read aloud the script, ask students these questions:

1. What is the good news that Anilama shares with Calli and Tetl?
2. How did Calli and Tetl feel when Anilama told them they would go to the marketplace alone? How would you feel?
3. What part did each of the following people play in the Aztec culture: chief scribe, astrologer, healer, and feathermaker? Identify three important people/jobs in your culture.
4. Do you think that Tetl and Calli selected a good gift for Tepito? Explain why or why not.
5. Think about a special occasion that you celebrate with your family. Tell how your family prepares for the celebration.



A SPECIAL DAY



Narrator 1: Before the dawn of a new day greets the Aztec city, Anilama wakes Tetl and Calli with good news and a list of tasks for the day.

Anilama: Wake up, Tetl and Calli! It is a beautiful, wonderful day! A special day!

Tetl: [yawning] Grandmother, it is still dark out!

Calli: Beautiful? Wonderful? Special? What are you trying to tell us, Grandmother?

Father: Anilama is telling you that your new baby brother was born during the night!

Calli: Why didn't you say so? What's his name? Can we see him and Mother?

Father: You will see them later. We must make plans for his naming day.

Anilama: We shall call him Tepito, Little One, until we have his naming celebration.

Tetl: I will teach him to play ulama! That will build strong muscles!

Father: Tetl, you'll be a big help—someday! But no ball games yet!

Calli: How can we help, Grandmother?

Anilama: Today you'll go to the marketplace and shops to buy what we need for Tepito's naming celebration.

Calli and Tetl: By ourselves? You trust us?

Anilama: By yourselves. When you return, I'll decide if I should have trusted you.

Calli: Ummm. What happens if you think that you should not have trusted us?

Father: Your names say it all.

PARTS



Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Anilama (honored elder): Calli's and Tetl's grandmother

Tetl (stone): 9-year-old brother of Calli

Calli (house): 10-year-old sister of Tetl

Father: chief scribe of the city and father of Calli and Tetl

Papalotl (butterfly): nicknamed "Pap," a helpful 9-year-old girl

Astrologer: Papalotl's father

Nezahual Coyotl (hungry coyote): nicknamed "Nezzie," an 11-year-old girl

Chapultepec (grasshopper hill):

nicknamed "Chap," a 10-year-old boy

Cautla (forest): a 12-year-old boy

Feathermaker



A SPECIAL DAY

- Tetl:** Our names? Mine means “stone” and Calli’s means “house.”
- Calli:** Are you saying that Tetl will be turned to stone and I will stay in the house?
- Anilama:** We’ll see.
- Tetl:** We have never been to the marketplace and shops alone!
- Anilama:** You must learn sometime. At 9 and 10 years old, the time is now!
- Calli:** Oh, dear. What do we do?
- Father:** The detailed glyphs, next to each item, will help.
- Tetl:** With over 400 shops in our city center, this list will take us all day!
- Anilama:** We agree, Tetl! All day! Now come to the fireplace for a bowl of amaranth, which will fill you until our evening meal.
- Calli:** How will we pay the shopkeepers?
- Anilama:** I have packed the woven market bag with my colorful weavings. You’ll have no trouble exchanging my items for the shopkeepers’ goods.
- Narrator 2:** Calli puts Anilama’s woven bag over her shoulder. They step outside into the first streaks of daylight. The air is cool, but not for long.
- Father:** On your way to the market, please stop at the astrologer’s shop. Ask him to come after he checks the calendars and decides on Tepito’s name and day for naming. That is one way we can help Tepito grow well and strong.
- Calli:** Yes, Father. Will you be in your shop making a book for Tepito?
- Father:** Yes. I will see you later.
- Narrator 1:** Calli and Tetl walk toward the marketplace while reading Anilama’s list. They greet their friend Papalotl, who is helping her father, the astrologer.
- Astrologer:** Welcome Calli and Tetl. How can I help you this morning?
- Calli:** Our new baby brother, Tepito, arrived. Father asked if you could visit.
- Astrologer:** Of course! The calendars will decide on the best name and naming day for your brother. I will check the placement of the sun, stars, and planets.
- Tetl:** Thank you. We are off now. Anilama trusts us to shop for her.
- Calli:** Tetl and I must find a gift for Tepito as well.



A SPECIAL DAY

- Pap:** Father, could I help Tetl and Calli?
- Astrologer:** Go ahead. If you go near the healer's tent, buy a root of the Rabbit Fern for my stiff knees.
- Narrator 2:** The children walk into the exciting, lively marketplace, which is several blocks long. The sellers have set up their wares on large reed mats.
- Pap:** Your gift for Tepito is important for his future. What are your ideas?
- Tetl:** How about an ulama rubber ball?
- Calli:** No! No! No! Playing ulama is dangerous! Ummm. How about a digging stick for the garden? It loosens the earth and helps to harvest the foods.
- Tetl:** No! No! No! He would be outside every day in all kinds of weather.
- Pap:** Here we are at Vegetable Alley. And here's Nezzie coming from the fields.
- Pap, Tetl, and Calli:** Hi, Nezzie!
- Tetl and Calli:** We're here to buy food for our new brother's naming celebration!
- Tetl:** We need avocados, prickly pears, beans, chilies, and squash for a stew.
- Nezzie:** Special food for a special day. I'll carry the food home for you. We have something new, peanuts, brought back from the south by traders.
- Pap:** How do you use peanuts?
- Nezzie:** They're good cooked or uncooked. Try mother's peanut soup.
- Calli:** [sipping soup] Yummy! If your mother shares her recipe, we'll buy some peanuts.
- Tetl:** Nezzie, thanks for helping! Now we must find a new cooking pot!
- Narrator 1:** Nezzie loads a bag with fresh vegetables and fruit. Her mother is glad to share her recipe and to have a new piece of excellent weaving. The children turn into the potter's corner where there are pots of all shapes and sizes.
- Calli:** Wow! Tetl, maybe we'll find a gift here for Tepito.
- Tetl:** Remember my naming pot? I had it for 7 years. Seven years!
- Calli and Pap:** We remember! You scared us out of our skins!



A SPECIAL DAY

Tetl: You? What about me? When I reached into my pot and felt skin cool, smooth, but definitely alive, I didn't even think. I threw it . . . well, you know the rest.

Nezzie: Yes, "Crash!" That frightened king snake slithered quickly outside!

Pap: It wanted a dark place to sleep and to digest its lizard lunch. What a way to wake up!

Tetl: I won't be giving Tepito a clay pot! I don't want him to be in danger!

Calli: You weren't in danger, Tetl. You were more dangerous than the snake.

Nezzie: Here's Chap!

Everyone (except Chap): Hi, Chap! What's new?

Chap: Mother made a new cooking pot for several hundred grasshoppers. You add hoppers, water, and herbs. Place it on the fire. The hoppers are ready in an hour. Delicious! Do you want a hopper pot?

Tetl: We do need a new stew pot for our baby brother's naming day . . .

Nezzie: Special day, special food, special cooking pot.

Chap: We have all kinds. Here's a great grasshopper pot. It has sturdy handles. It's easier to lift out of the fire.

Calli: It's the right size. I think Anilama will like the handles.

Chap: I'll carry it home for you. What's next on your list?

Calli: The gold and silver shop for a gold charm for Tepito.

Narrator 2: As the children pass the healers' tent, Pap stops for a root for her father. Dried herbs, flowers, cacti, leaves, roots, nuts, seeds, and snake skins are hanging in jars and pouches.

Cautla: Welcome, friends. Something for fever or cough? Leeches to help blood circulation?

Pap and Calli: Ugh! Please, no!

Pap: I need Rabbit Fern root for my father's stiff knees. Do you have any?

Tetl: Hey, Calli, let's find a present for Tepito! Bat wings? A cactus top?

Calli: Stop right there, Tetl. Think of Tepito's future.



A SPECIAL DAY

- Cautla:** This Rabbit Fern root is very fresh. It will help your father, Pap. Calli, I'll come with you to give Anilama these fragrant herbs for the naming day tea!
- Pap:** Thanks, Cautla. Let's go! Calli and Tetl still have items on their list.
- Narrator 1:** As the friends make their way past the traders, the weavers, and spinners, Calli and Tetl continue to think about an appropriate gift for Tepito.
- Calli:** We need to find something beautiful, lasting, and powerful.
- Tetl:** A naming day gift will aid him in the future.
- Chap:** You will find the perfect gift in one of these many shops.
- Calli:** Here's the gold and silver shop where Anilama ordered a charm for Tepito.
- Pap:** She wants to make sure he is well protected.
- Nezzie:** A special day, special food, special pot, special tea, and special charm.
- Tetl:** We could get him a golden labret, Calli. A perfect gift.
- Calli:** A great idea, Tetl, but too expensive for us.
- Narrator 2:** In the shop, the jewelers are stringing long threads of gold for necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and labrets.
- Narrator 1:** After picking up Anilama's charm, the list is complete. Still they have not found a proper gift for Tepito.
- Narrator 2:** The children wander into another part of the city. Before them are hundreds of birds, all sizes and colors, cooing, cawing, squawking, and singing.
- Pap:** Where are we?
- Feathermaker:** You are in Feather Square.
- Calli:** What do you have?
- Feathermaker:** Feathers from ducks, turkeys, sharp-eyed birds like hawks and eagles, and shiny, iridescent feathers from birds like quetzals, macaws, and parrots.
- Chaps:** What do you make with all of those feathers?
- Feathermaker:** We make headdresses, necklaces, pillows, capes, fans, and many other helpful, beautiful things.



A SPECIAL DAY

Tetl: Would you have anything for a new baby brother?

Feathermaker: I made a fan from feathers that hung over a baby's bed. When the baby was cranky and cross, the family tickled him with the feathers.

Calli: Did it break? Wear out? Was it dangerous?

Feathermaker: No. No. And no! Years later, when the baby was a strong teenager, he returned to have his feathers woven into an elaborate, sacred headdress.

Tetl and Calli: A sacred headdress?

Feathermaker: Yes. He is now our Great Speaker.

Tetl and Calli: Wow! So feathers can help direct a baby on his future path?

Feathermaker: Absolutely.

Tetl: How do we choose the right feathers for our brother?

Feathermaker: I know the powers and secret ways of feathers and birds. I'll help.

Narrator 2: After Feathermaker makes a beautiful fan for Tepito, Tetl's and Calli's friends carry everything back to the chief scribe's house.

Father: Welcome to all. Tell us about your day.

Nezzie: Special day, special food, special pot, special tea, special charm, and special gift.

Calli: Nezzie has summed it up.

Tetl: We have everything on the list, and we have new things to share with you!

Nezzie: Like peanuts and a recipe for peanut soup.

Chaps: Like a grasshopper pot that cooks hundreds at once.

Cautla: Like new herbs for naming day tea.

Father: Like a new codex covered with soft deer hide.

Pap: And a perfect gift for Tepito.

Tetl: A feather fan! It will amuse him now and help him as he grows.

Calli: Now, Anilama, have you decided whether you *should* trust us?

Tetl: Or will I be turned to stone and Calli held prisoner in the house?



A SPECIAL DAY

- Anilama:** [laughing] I trusted you from the beginning. You are my trusted, honorable grandchildren. Now, would anyone like a cacao drink?
- Nezzie:** Special day, special food, special pot, special tea, special charm, special gift, and now—yummy—a special drink.
- Calli:** Don't forget: special friends.
- Everyone:** Special friends!
- Narrator:** The naming day celebration was a success with friends and family gathered to offer support and good wishes for a healthy and happy life. In years to follow, Tepito's official name, Huey Tlatoani, became known throughout the Aztec civilization as an honorable leader, the Great Speaker.