

Choral Reading Introduction and Guidelines

Now that we have finished the play and explored some of its central issues and conflicts, we will turn our focus to the sound of the playwright's language, as well as its drama. Your group will cut and perform a section of a scene (or lines from multiple scenes) in choral fashion and choose appropriate music to play as an introduction (and/or conclusion) to your reading, or as background for the entire reading. You should consider the visual impact of your performance (for example, you might decide to dress in a uniform manner), and you should work out some kind of formal choreography to enhance and accompany your reading.

The piece that you prepare for choral reading should be at least 50 lines. You are not looking to perform the first 50 lines of any given scene, rather to choose 50 lines that work together to illustrate a point and suggest a new and interesting interpretation of character and theme. Your reading can combine lines from a variety of characters, but should be rehearsed and read chorally, rather than performed as a dramatic scene. Some scenes may be read humorously, but make sure that the humor does not distract but rather fits the meaning of the reading.

Some guidelines for preparing your reading once you have composed your script:

- Divide your cutting into sections to emphasize lines, phrases, or words, and to build to dramatic climaxes.
- Assign each member of your group a number or a role.
- Decide which number/numbers (or role/roles) will read which lines, phrases, and individual words. Create "phonal" and "anti-phonal" effects by assigning lines to voices that come from different locations.
- Choreograph the arrangement of the readers throughout the reading. Your whole group should move at certain points during the performance (and individuals or smaller sub-groups may move at other points). Be creative and consider how geometric principles and patterns might add to the visual impact of your performance.
- Consider adding gestures to emphasize certain lines. (But be selective. Too many may be distracting. We should be able to clearly follow the words of the poem.)
- You might select a color scheme for your group. A uniform color scheme can help tie the group together visually to create the illusion of this being "one" reading made up of multiple voices. It can also be effective to use different colors to differentiate solo readers.
- Rehearse your passage extensively; readers should be synchronized and there should be no interruption or hesitation in the vocal unison. Although you will use a script, you should be thoroughly familiar with your lines and how they fit into the entire selection. Over-reliance on your script will mar the performance, as will hesitation or confusion. You want your reading to seize your audience's attention and hold it firmly until you're done.

Adapted, with permission, from work by Elizabeth Majerus