

# READER'S THEATER EXERCISE 11 A GREAT DEBATE



This activity incorporates a classroom debate into Reader's Theater! This year's presidential election is to be held November 4th, 2008, the 56th consecutive United States presidential election. This will be the first time that two current senators will run against each other for the presidency, and the first time an African American will be a major party nominee! The first months of school will be an excellent time to study the upcoming election and how the United States democracy functions. This activity can inspire and reinforce the value of debate in elections.

In *The Great Rhyme Travel Machine Presents: African American Heroes*, the Playbook® featured in this month's exercise, sixth grade student Kelly decides to run for class president, but she is discouraged when she learns there has never been a United States president with her skin color, or even one who was female! With some help from her friends and a couple of surprise time-travelers, Shirley Chisholm and George Washington Carver, Kelly finds the motivation to follow through with her campaign and strives to become a great leader for her school!

For this activity, first divide your class into groups and have the students read the shortened story passages provided. Alternatively, if you have already added *The Great Rhyme Travel Machine Presents: African American Heroes* to your Reader's Theater collection, read the full version instead. Use the attached Reader Assignment Guide to decide which part each student should read based on his or her reading ability level.

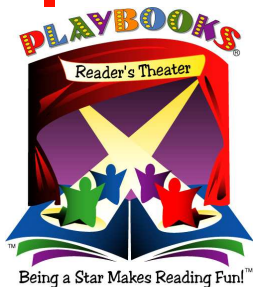
After your students have read the passages, have your class discuss the topics listed on the "Great Debate" student activity sheet (next page): cell phones at school, TV in kids' bedrooms, and spending allowance.

Use this easy format for an instant debate!

- A. State the first topic out loud. Then say, "All Affirmative on this topic may stand."
- B. Anyone who is standing may take a turn to speak or may remain silent. Call on students who wish to speak.
- C. Then say to the class, "All Negative on this topic may stand."
- D. Anyone who is standing may take a turn to speak or may remain silent. Again, call on students who wish to speak.
- E. After both sides have had a chance to speak, ask your class, "Are there any rebuttals from either side?" (Explain that this means, "Does anyone have something else to add to what they have heard?")
- F. Following any rebuttals, ask one person from each side of the issue to summarize the main statements of their viewpoint.
- G. The class should then go on to the next topic and follow the same routine. Everyone learns, so everyone is a winner!

### Extended activities:

1. Have your students write down three more topics that they would like to see the class discuss. They will discover a great debate!
2. As in real election debates a winner is eventually chosen, you may consider choosing two final debaters who volunteer to perform in an election type format. The entire class can then vote on a winner!



Provided by: Playbooks® Multi-Leveled & Colorized Reader's Theater. [www.playbooks.com](http://www.playbooks.com)  
For past exercises, visit: [www.playbooks.com/NewsArchive.shtml](http://www.playbooks.com/NewsArchive.shtml)

# READER'S THEATER EXERCISE 11: A GREAT DEBATE (CONTINUED)

In *The Great Rhyme Travel Machine Presents: African American Heroes*, Kelly runs for class president and learns a lot about national leaders in the process. During real presidential elections the candidates often take time to **debate** each other on important topics. A **debate** could be described as a very organized one-to-one (or team-to-team) discussion about an issue. Shirley Chisholm, a Congresswoman who ran for president, was an expert debater. She was known for being a good speaker and this skill helped her throughout her life.

There are two sides to any debate. One is the **Affirmative** ... the "yes, let's do that" side. The other is the **Negative** ... the "no, let's not do that" side. After a topic has been decided and stated out loud, then the debaters take turns talking about why they're affirmative or negative. They tell facts and use examples to get their points across. When both debaters have spoken and commented on each others points, each is allowed a final summary of their position. Being polite is a must...even when the topic is an emotional one! The group usually picks the winner by deciding which side spoke well, who was honest, and who was most convincing. Just like in sports, there could be a tie if all debaters made good presentations.

There are many types of debates. We're about to explore debating by using a simple format for groups of kids.

**Directions:** Even though Melinda and Marcus are twins, there are still things they just don't agree on. Here are a few of those topics:

1. Kids should have cell phones at school.  
(Melinda: **Affirmative**      Marcus: **Negative**)
2. Kids should be able to have TVs in their bedrooms.  
(Melinda: **Negative**      Marcus: **Affirmative**)
3. Kids should be allowed to spend their allowance on anything.  
(Melinda: **Negative**      Marcus: **Affirmative**)



Think about the statements above. How do they apply to your life?

On the lines below, write down whether you are *Negative* or *Affirmative* for each one of these topics.

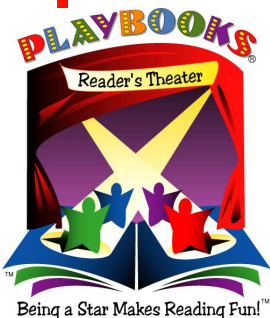
Topic One — Cell phones at school \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Two — TV in kids' bedroom \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Three — Spending allowance \_\_\_\_\_

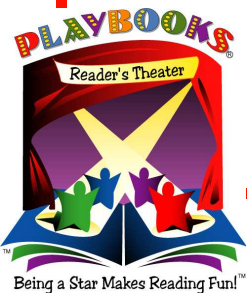
Pick **one** of the topics above and write down the reasons you are **Negative** or **Affirmative** on a separate sheet of paper. This might be a paragraph describing your feelings and why you feel this way. Remember to be honest and use your own experiences to help you write your position. Your teacher may ask you to present your viewpoints to the class.

(continued on next page)



# READER ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

| Reader No. | Story Character                                     | Group 1 Reader | Group 2 Reader | Group 3 Reader | Group 4 Reader | Group 5 Reader |
|------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1          | <b>Marcus / Boy</b><br>Stage 2<br>Beginning Reader  |                |                |                |                |                |
| 2          | <b>Melinda</b><br>Stage 3<br>Transitional Reader    |                |                |                |                |                |
| 3          | <b>Kelly</b><br>Stage 4<br>Intermediate Reader      |                |                |                |                |                |
| 4          | <b>Shirley</b><br>Stage 4<br>Intermediate Reader    |                |                |                |                |                |
| 5          | <b>Miss Chalk</b><br>Stage 4<br>Intermediate Reader |                |                |                |                |                |
| 6          | <b>Narrator</b><br>Stage 5<br>Advanced Reader       |                |                |                |                |                |





## READER'S THEATER EXERCISE 11: A GREAT DEBATE

**Directions:** Read the following story summary and then read the passages aloud in groups. Your teacher will assign your part.

In *The Great Rhyme Travel Machine Presents: African American Heroes*, students listen to their teacher, Miss Chalk, read from her long lost diary and they are deeply inspired. One page, describing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I Have A Dream" speech, leaves twelve-year-old Kelly simply spellbound. Motivated to do something important, she decides to run for Sixth Grade Class President! Unfortunately, her enthusiasm doesn't last

long. Realizing that there's never been a president with her skin color, or even one who was female for that matter, she feels defeated. Concerned, Melinda and Marcus try to reactivate *The Great Rhyme Travel Machine*, an amazing and magical invention which can transport famous people from the past to the present. But will the machine even work again? After all, they haven't heard one "beep" from it since their first adventure. It's just been a cool reading nook. Will Kelly end up dropping out of the election ... or will that shiny silver box inspire her with even more of its secrets than before?

### Passage 1:

**Kelly:** Is it too late to put my name in the pot for Sixth Grade Class President? I want to do something important!

**Miss Chalk:** I think that's a marvelous idea! But the election is next week.

**Narrator:** A boy in the back raised his hand. Miss Chalk called on him to speak.

**Boy:** I don't think Kelly should be our class president. Everybody knows she plays jokes on people. Plus, **most** leaders are boys.

**Narrator:** Kelly looked like she was about to get angry.

**Melinda:** (*upset*) Well, that makes no sense at all. Kelly is **more** than good enough to be our President. She's smart and she's a hard worker.

**Marcus:** She has my vote. I will help her win! Can we be your managers, Kelly?

**Miss Chalk:** Since the election is only a week away and you're getting a late start, she needs all the help she can get.

**Marcus:** So we will help her!

**Miss Chalk:** (*surprised*) Oh my! We're late for Art! Mrs. Green told me you were going to paint self portraits today.

**Kelly:** (*smiling*) I know who I'm going to paint ... the next Sixth Grade Class President!

**Narrator:** That afternoon, Kelly checked out a book on United States Presidents to take home.

**Kelly:** "President Kelly" sounds really cool!

**Narrator:** But the next day when she walked into the classroom, Melinda and Marcus could tell there was something wrong with Kelly.

**Melinda:** Why the long face? We've been working hard on your posters. Marcus even brought some little plants with your name on them to give away to kids.

**Kelly:** Thanks. I really appreciate everything you both are doing. But, I've discovered I don't really fit into the presidential mold.

**Marcus:** What do you mean? I think you are the best person for president!

**Kelly:** (*explaining*) Yes. I think I am. But the reality is ... I don't **look** like a president. I went through that entire history book last night. There's not a single United States president that had green eyes, brown skin and long pretty braids! Maybe that boy was right. No one will vote for a girl ... especially one who looks like me.

**Narrator:** Marcus and Melinda didn't know quite what to say.

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# READER'S THEATER EXERCISE 11 : A GREAT DEBATE (CONTINUED)

## Passage 2:

Melinda: I have an idea. What if we could get the *Great Rhyme Travel Machine* to work again? Maybe it could help Kelly learn more about being a leader.

Narrator: Kelly finally perked up. The kids took the thick rhyme travel book down from its special shelf. They opened the book, which began to glow brightly, and a rhyme appeared on its pages, which they began to read.

All Readers: A braver soul you will not find.  
This traveler always speaks her mind.  
With searching eyes and skin of brown,  
No one can keep her spirits down.  
A leader, you might not foresee,  
A president she dreams to be.

Narrator: The *Great Rhyme Machine* started to vibrate gently. This soon turned into a rumble.

All Readers: (All readers stomp their feet loudly for several seconds)

All Readers: (louder and louder) Beep, Bop, BING, BANG ... **BOOM!**

Narrator: They watched, unafraid. The Christmas lights on the top of the machine glowed softly ... even though they weren't plugged in! Unexpectedly, something different shot out of the machine. It was ... **a peanut butter sandwich!** It smacked Marcus right on the nose!

Marcus: Ow!

Narrator: Then a young girl in a yellow sundress twirled out of the machine! She wore old style glasses. A thick yellow beach bag hung over her shoulder. It broke her fall.

Shirley: (complaining) OH! I so dislike it when the subway stops like that! Where's my sandwich? I hope it's not smashed. (pausing to look around) Hey, this doesn't look like New York City!

## Passage 3:

Kelly: (joyous) Oh my goodness! You're SHRILEY CHISHOLM! You'll become the first African American woman to run for **President!** Congresswoman Chisholm ... why didn't we think of you sooner!

Melinda: I guess some of us were too busy thinking about ourselves.

Kelly: Shirley, I want to be a leader just like you.

Shirley: Well, actually, I want to be a teacher! But if you run for President ... then I will too! I guess I already have!

Kelly: What kind of leader do you think you will be?

Shirley: (boldly) A good leader has to ask questions and demand answers. People say *I* breathe fire when I talk! (pausing) Well, in this country *anybody* is supposed to be able to run for President. Someone has to do things first! It might as well be us.

Kelly: (very happy) You've got a deal!

