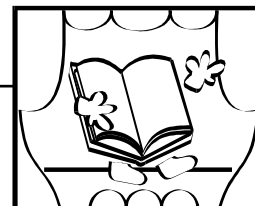


# Readers' Theater

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## *A Crooked Kind of Perfect*

by Linda Urban



(Arranged for Readers' Theater by CYRM Committee Members, for classroom use only.)

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Characters:	Zoe	Dad	Lester	Mr. Perfectone	Narrator 1
	Narrator 2	Narrator 3	Narrator 4	Narrator 5	Narrator 6

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Narrator 1: The first time I told my dad I was supposed to play the piano, he harrumphed. The second time, he rubbed his chin. The third time, he said,

Dad: That's a big commitment for a little person.

Narrator 2: My dad knows about big commitments. He has 26 framed diplomas from Living Room University.

Zoe: I'm destined to play Carnegie Hall.

Dad: Baby steps,

Narrator 3: He pulled a flyer from the stack of junk mail on the counter. It was from the Eastside Senior Center, and in it was an ad for More with Les, a revolutionary method for learning the piano.

Narrator 4: Six weeks of lessons with Lester Rennet, Award-Winning Music Teacher and Trained Motivational Speaker! Specializing in Children and Seniors! No Instrument Required!

Narrator 5: The senior center had one piano, and it was not grand. It was an almost-upright. It leaned to one side.

Narrator 6: I guessed it had been donated by a school because there were initials carved into its legs, and if you lifted the yellow scarf off the top, you could read all about a Mrs. Pushkin, who smelled like fish. The bench was bowed from years of supporting senior citizen backsides.

Narrator 1: The More with Les students sat at folding tables. There were nine of us. Me and eight seniors, including Mr. Faber, who was ninety-two years old and slept through most of our lessons. He was not motivated by the More with Les philosophy.

Lester: My philosophy is simple! My method revolutionary! This is your More with Les songbook.

Narrator 2: The cover featured an out-of-focus photo of Lester Rennet surrounded by kids who appeared to be holding up homemade accordions. SIMPLE! it said. REVOLUTIONARY!

Narrator 3: Mr. Rennet told us to turn to the back of the More with Les songbook. There we would find the revolution.

Narrator 4: What I found was a piece of perforated cardboard folded over on itself a couple of times. There was a piano key design printed along the bottom edge.

Lester: Voilà!

Narrator 5: Voilà?

Lester: The More with Les paper keyboard!

Narrator 6: Paper keyboard. The blurry kids on the songbook weren't holding up accordions at all.

Narrator 1: Lester Rennet pulled his own paper keyboard from his briefcase, unfolded it, and held it up to the tired piano at the front of the room.

Lester: As you can see, your More with Les paper keyboard is exactly to scale. It has black keys and white keys, just like a real piano – except, of course, that they make no sound when you touch them! The More with Les keyboard is the perfect practice instrument! No worrying about plunking out wrong notes in front of your friends! You can practice anywhere. At the kitchen table! At Bingo Night! You can even practice in the school lunchroom!

Narrator 2: Had Lester Rennet ever seen a school lunchroom? Did he understand that the lunchroom is a jungle where sixth-grade beasts stalk the weak and the dorky? Unfolding a revolutionary paper keyboard would be like picking a scab in a pool of sharks – the scent of blood would cause a frenzy.

Lester: Each week you will be assigned a piece from the songbook. I will play it for you here *à la piano* while you play along on your More with Les keyboard!

Narrator 3: Then we'd go home and practice – the More with Les recommendation was twenty minutes a day – and at the following week's class we would each take a turn in "performance" at the real piano, hearing for the first time the songs our fingers had trained for all week.

Lester: And now let us begin!

Narrator 4: And with that he tore out the magical paper keyboard that was supposed to be my ticket to Carnegie Hall. For the first and only time, the paper keyboard made a sound: *rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrip*.

Narrator 5: My dad was supposed to buy me a piano. But instead of going online or calling Rewind Used Music, he went to the mall and it was crowded and noisy and he was walking by the big fountain with the stone hippo in the middle and he heard this sound. This *boompa-chucka, boompa-chucka* sound.

Narrator 6: And his toes started tapping and his hips started wiggling. The man at the store that sells Perfectone D-60s saw my dancing dad and waved him over. Dad told me everything that happened after that. But he didn't need to. I could have figured it out for myself.

Mr. Perfectone: You look like a man who knows fine music. Do you play?

Narrator 1: My dad laughed. He was supposed to say,

Dad: My daughter is about to have a concert at Carnegie Hall. I just need to buy her a piano so she can start her lessons.

Narrator 2: But Dad was mesmerized by the boompa-chucka-boomp.

Mr. Perfectone: Go ahead. Press a key.

Narrator 3: Dad pressed a key. A Cuban nightclub act sprang out. That's what my dad said. A single key and he could hear bongos and trumpets and guitars. Mr. Perfectone flipped a switch. He whispered in Dad's ear,

Mr. Perfectone: Again.

Narrator 4: Dad was bold. He touched two keys. An entire orchestra tumbled out of the speakers.

Mr. Perfectone: Not bad, Mozart.

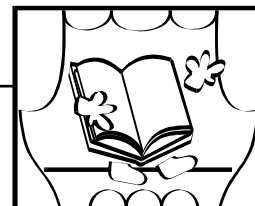
Narrator 5: Mr. Perfectone slid a sales slip and a pen from his sleeve.

Narrator 6: Two weeks later, instead of an elegant piano slick as black ice, two hairy guys dropped off a wood-grained behemoth. Now, the Perfectone D-60 is mine.



# Readers' Theater

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## ***A Friendship for Today***

by Patricia C. McKissack

(Arranged for Readers' Theater by CYRM Committee Members, for classroom use only.)

Characters:	Rosemary	Jane Hamilton	J.J.	Mama
	Stevie Hamilton	Marty Hamilton	Grace Hamilton	Narrator 1
	Narrator 2	Narrator 3	Narrator 4	Narrator 5

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Narrator 1: Friday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954.

Narrator 2: Dwight D. Eisenhower is the president of the United States.

Narrator 3: A first-class postage stamp costs three cents.

Narrator 4: A new Studebaker car costs \$1,700.

Narrator 5: A gallon of gas is twenty-two cents.

Narrator 1: A box of grits costs eight cents.

Narrator 2: A loaf of bread is seventeen cents at Mr. Bob's Grocery Store.

Narrator 3: And today is the last day forever at Attucks Elementary.

Narrator 4: The Kirkland Board of Education announced the other day that the colored school will be closed and the students will be sent to John Adams Elementary and T. Thomas Robertson Elementary, all because the Supreme Court says there can't be any more segregation.

Narrator 5: I'm remembering that morning in May – a month ago – when I came down to breakfast. It was like any other day. I put butter and sugar on my grits. The newspaper rustled when Mama turned the page. She took a sip of coffee and her face lit up like a Christmas tree.

Mama: At last! No more separate and totally unequal! No more overcrowded classrooms, outdated books, or not enough books. Oh, praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Narrator 1: Daddy was just as happy. My folks had been attending meetings for over two years, trying to get Kirkland schools to integrate. Now they'd won. But I was all the time thinking,

Rosemary: If white people want to go to school with us so much, seems to me all they needed to do was ask. We'd make room for a few white kids at Attucks Elementary next year. Why did it take the Supreme Court to figure that out?

Narrator 2: Mama stopped reading. At first she was quiet. Then she burst out laughing. In fact, she laughed so hard, her shoulders were shaking.

Mama: Rosemary, you are something else, girl!

Rosemary: Why do you say that, Mama?

Mama: Oh, just the way you think. It's different.

Rosemary: Do I think silly or something?

Mama: No, no. Being different isn't wrong. You're just fine. I know all of these changes must be terribly confusing. But next year when you are in a better school, you'll come to appreciate why this decision is so important.

Rosemary: I hope so.

Mama: Just keep marching to your own drum. I love that about you, child.

Narrator 3: Mama says things I don't always understand, like marching to my own drum. What drum?

Narrator 4: Beverly Enge and J.J. are waiting for me at the corner of Harrison and Rosebud streets, same as usual.

Narrator 5: J.J. is really my best friend, even though neither one of us will admit it. I can't remember a time when there wasn't a J.J. in my life. He's got two younger brothers – Bootsie, who is four, and Josh who is two. I don't have any siblings, so the Stenson brothers are like real kin.

Narrator 1: Suddenly J.J. nudges me, bringing me back to the present.

- J.J.: Here they come.
- Narrator 2: I know who he means instantly. And I brace for what I know is headed our way.
- Narrator 3: The five Hamilton kids. They taught the Wicked Witch of the East how to be mean and ornery to the Munchkins of Oz. Their family moved from Arkansas to Kirkland late last year, and they've made quite a name for themselves.
- Narrator 4: Grace, the youngest of the clan, makes eye contact with me. I hold her in my gaze until she looks away. First time I've gotten her to blink. Our backyards are joined, but we don't go to the same school. We don't play in the same places. We've not been to each other's houses, and I can't imagine the two of us ever sharing a secret.
- J.J.: I wish they'd stayed in Arkansas.
- Narrator 5: Their house is on Kaye Lane, but everybody calls it Dead End because of the big Dead End sign positioned at the entrance to their street. Most of the people who live on Dead End are decent, hardworking people, trying to raise their families, same as anybody else. They don't bother us, and we don't bother them.
- Narrator 1: But the Hamiltons came and now things are different. They pick fights and call us names all the time. They hate colored people and don't mind telling us.
- Jane Hamilton: I hear y'all are gonna be coming to *our* school next year.
- J.J.: I didn't know the Hamiltons owned a school.
- Grace Hamilton: You know what she means. They're closing the colored school, so y'all will be coming to our school.
- Rosemary: So what? Robertson is a brand-new school – belongs to you and belongs to us too. And J.J. and I, we're gonna show you a thing or two when we get there.
- Stevie Hamilton: There are more of us than there are of you. So don't nothing belong to you.

Rosemary: Public schools belong to all of us. There's no such thing as white or colored schools. Put that in your nose and smell it.

Marty Hamilton: Why don't you go back to Africa?

Narrator 2: Jane waves them off. Then they disappear around the side of the garage. Grace the Tasteless pokes out her tongue. Of all the Hamiltons, she's the one I dislike the most.

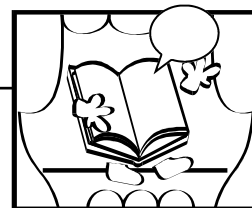
Narrator 3: They're gone. Good.





# Readers' Theater

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## *No Talking* by Andrew Clements

(Arranged for Readers' Theater by CYRM Committee Members, for classroom use only.)

Characters: Dave            Lynsey            Mrs. Overby            Narrator 1            Narrator 2  
                  Narrator 3            Narrator 4            Narrator 5            Narrator 6

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Narrator 1: Dave Packer was in the middle of his fourth hour of not talking. He was also in the middle of his social studies class on a Monday morning in the middle of November.

Narrator 2: There was a reason Dave was in the middle of his fourth hour of not talking –

Narrator 3: But this isn't the time to tell about that. This is the time to tell what he figured out in the middle of his social studies class.

Narrator 4: Dave figured out that not talking is *extra* hard at school. And the reason?

Narrator 5: Teachers.

Narrator 6: Because at 11:35 Mrs. Overby clapped her hands and said,

Mrs. Overby: Class – class! Quiet down!

Narrator 1: Then she looked at her list and said,

Mrs. Overby: Dave and Lynsey, you're next.

Narrator 2: So Dave nodded at Lynsey and stood up. It was time to present their report about India.

Narrator 3: But giving this report would ruin his experiment. Because Dave was trying to keep his mouth shut all day long. He wanted to keep his lips zipped right up to the very end of the day, to not say one single word until the last bell rang at ten after three. And the reason Dave had decided to clam up ...

- Narrator 4: But it still isn't the time to tell about that. This is the time to tell what he did about the report.
- Narrator 5: Dave and Lynsey walked to the front of the room. Dave was supposed to begin the presentation by telling about the history of India. He looked down at his index cards, looked up at Mrs. Overby, looked out at the class, and he opened his mouth. But he didn't talk.
- Narrator 6: He coughed. Dave coughed for about ten seconds. Then he wiped his mouth, looked at his index cards again, looked at Mrs. Overby again, looked at the class again, opened his mouth again, and ...
- Narrator 1: Coughed some more. He coughed and coughed and coughed until his face was bright red and he was all bent over.
- Narrator 2: Lynsey stood there, feeling helpless. Dave hadn't told her about his experiment, so all she could do was watch – and listen to his horrible coughing. Lynsey's opinion of Dave had never been high, and it sank lower by the second.
- Narrator 3: Mrs. Overby thought she knew what was happening with Dave. She had seen this before – kids who got so nervous that they made themselves sick rather than talk in front of the class
- Narrator 4: It surprised her, because Dave wasn't shy at all. Ever. In fact, *none* of this year's fifth graders were the least bit shy or nervous about talking. Ever. But the teacher took pity, and she said,
- Mrs. Overby: You'd better go get some water. You two can give your report later.
- Narrator 5: Lynsey gave Dave a disgusted look and went back to her desk.
- Narrator 6: Dave nodded at Mrs. Overby, coughed a few more times for good measure, and hurried out of the room.
- Narrator 1: Later in the cafeteria for lunch, Dave was listening to Lynsey talk to one of her friends. And even though she was sitting behind him at the next table, and even though the cafeteria was almost bursting with noise, Lynsey had a sharp voice, the kind that cuts like a hacksaw.

Lynsey: ... because once I tried wearing this sweater that was made of wool? And it made my neck itch *so* much, like, I couldn't even wear it for two minutes, but it was okay, because then my mom found this turtleneck, and then it was fine. Because last week in *Teen People*? Jenna was at this party, like in Hollywood or somewhere? And she had on a sweater that was almost like that wool one I have, and she was wearing these ...

Narrator 2: And that was the moment when Dave completely forgot about keeping silent, and he turned around and almost shouted,

Dave: If you had to shut up for five minutes, I bet the whole top of your head would explode!

Narrator 3: And Dave was glad he said it, even if it wasn't nice, and even though it ended his experiment. Because after he said it, Lynsey stopped talking. But the quiet only lasted about three seconds.

Lynsey: Is your *cough* all better? Because I thought I just heard a whiny little voice. Did you say something?

Dave: Yeah, I did. I *said*, I bet if you had to shut up for five minutes, the top of your head would explode. Like a volcano. From all the hot gas that usually comes out of your mouth. When you talk and talk and talk and never stop talking. Yeah. That's what I said to you.

Lynsey: Oh, like there's something *wrong* with talking? You never have any trouble with *yourself* blabbing and blabbing every day. We've all *heard* you.

Narrator 4: And the other girls nodded and made faces.

Dave: Well, talking's okay, when there's stuff worth saying.

Lynsey: *Ohhh* – so *boys* can say things like, 'Hey, did you hear this guy got traded to that team, and that guy got traded to this team, and, hey, he hit real good last year, and, ooh yeah, he can really catch!' Boys can talk and talk like that, but girls can't talk about clothes sometimes? Is *that* it?

Dave: No...but I don't talk the way you talk, like, for a million minutes in a row without stopping. And ... and ...

Narrator 5: Dave was hunting for something strong to say, a real punch line, something that would shut Lynsey up and end this conversation. So he said ...

Dave: ... and anyway, boys *never* talk as much as girls do, ever.

Narrator 6: Please take a careful listen at that last thing Dave just said. Because with this particular group of fifth graders, that was a dangerous thing to say.

