

# Readers' Theater

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## *Goal!*

by Mina Javaherbin  
illustrated by A.G. Ford

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

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Characters:	Ajani	Hassan	Tall Boy	Narrator 2
	Keto	Magubani	Other Bully	Narrator 3
	Jamal	Badu	Narrator 1	Narrator 4

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Ajani: I have to get water from the well before dark. But I have finished my homework. It is soccer time.

Narrator 1: The boy calls for his friends.

Ajani: Jamal, Hassan, Magubani, Keto, Badu!

Narrator 2: No one runs out to play. The streets are not always safe.

Narrator 3: Left is clear. Right is clear.

Ajani: I reach into my bucket and lift out my prize for being the best reader in the class. I am the proud owner of a new, federation-size football.

Narrator 4: Keto comes out of his house, and the boy kicks the ball to him.

Keto: Ajani!

Jamal: No more old plastic balls.

Narrator 1: He kicks his old ball to the side, sending a flip-flop into the air.

Narrator 2: Magubani, Hassan, and Badu come out.

Narrator 3: We pass the shiny leather ball in a circle. We are real champions, playing with a real ball.

Ajani: With my buckets, I set up the goal.

Narrator 4: Left is clear. Right is clear.

Narrator 1: The streets are not safe, but I have a plan.

Ajani: We'll take turns guarding for bullies. I pick Keto and Jamal for my team.

Hassan: I pick Magubani and Badu.

Narrator 2: We draw sticks. Badu gets the shortest one. He is the first to stand guard on the roof.

Ajani: I kick off to Jamal. Magubani, fast, steals the ball. Keto steals it back, fakes a kick to the left.

Narrator 3: When we play, we forget to worry.

Narrator 4: When we run, we are not afraid.

Narrator 1: Keto shoots to the right.

Jamal: Corner kick!

Narrator 2: When we play, we feel strong.

Magubani: No fair. Our teammate's on the roof.

Narrator 3: I secretly point to Jamal's flip-flops and whisper to them.

Ajani: Two against two. Fair.

Narrator 4: We kick. We dribble. We run after our brilliant ball.

Narrator 1: I follow the ball to the end of the alley; I follow the ball to the end of the world; I follow the black and white patches like a Bafana Bafana footballer.

Keto: Corner, corner!

Badu: It's not a corner.

Narrator 2: We disagree.

Ajani: I shoot for the goal and knock a bucket down.

Keto: Goal!

Narrator 3: Badu jumps down and shouts.

Badu: No way. No goal when the bucket falls.

Narrator 4: And suddenly we see them.

Narrator 1: We are trapped.

Ajani: Quickly I stand in front of the ball – give it a swift reverse kick into the bucket.

Narrator 2: Hassan tilts the bucket back down, hiding the ball.

Tall Boy: What do we have here?

Ajani: We're just playing football.

Tall Boy: Just football?

Ajani: I do not breathe and nod yes.

Tall Boy: Is this your ball?

Narrator: He pushes the boy aside and sets their old ball on top of the bucket.

Tall Boy: Say good-bye to your ball then.

Ajani: I panic. If he kicks the ball, the bucket will tip over and...

Narrator 3: Jamal covers his face with his hands.

Narrator 4: The tall guy snatches the ball. The bucket wobbles. Hearts sink. In slow motion, the bucket stops.

Narrator 1: The tall guy fastens the plastic ball onto his bicycle.

Narrator 2: Jamal pretends to cry. All the boys follow his lead.

Tall Boy: Crybabies! No playing soccer here or you'll be sorry.

Other Bully: Chickens!

Narrator 3: They laugh, get on their rickety bikes and leave. The boys wait for them to get far away.

Narrator 4: Jamal climbs to the rooftop.

Jamal: Do-over!

Narrator 1: He holds the federation-sized ball over his head like it's the World Cup that they've all won.

Narrator 2: Right is clear. Left is clear.

Narrator 3: Badu wants to guard again. He promises not to jump down this time.

Narrator 4: The boy kicks off to Keto.

Narrator 1: Magubani steals the ball. Keto steals it back, shoots.

Narrator 2: Hassan blocks with his chest, bumps the ball in the air.

Narrator 3: The boy gets in with a head to Keto. Keto shoots to Jamal.

Narrator 4: Magubani has the ball. He passes to Hassan. Hassan runs.

Ajani: I steal from Hassan and *whoosh* like the wind, glued to the ball, I dribble past him and ***Goooooal!***

Narrator 1: Left is clear. Right is clear.

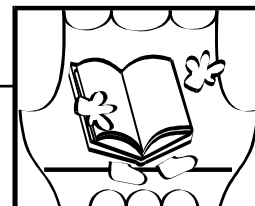
Narrator 2: Down the alley, as far as they can see is clear.

All: The streets are not safe here. But we have a plan.  
When we play, the sound of our kicks on the ball is music.  
When we play together, we are unbeatable.



# Readers' Theater

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## *Henry's Freedom Box*

by Ellen Levine

illustrated by Nadir Nelson

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

Characters:	Mother	James	Man 1	Narrator 2
	Master	Henry	Man 2	Narrator 3
	Boss	Children - 3	Man 3	Narrator 4
	Nancy	Dr. Smith	Narrator 1	

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Narrator 1: Henry Brown wasn't sure how old he was. Henry was a slave. And slaves weren't allowed to know their birthdays.

Narrator 2: Henry and his brothers and sisters worked in the big house where the master lived. Henry's master had been good to Henry and his family.

Narrator 3: But Henry's mother knew things could change.

Mother: Do you see those leaves blowing in the wind? They are torn from the trees like slave children are torn from their families.

Narrator 4: One morning the master called for Henry and his mother. They climbed the wide staircase. The master lay in bed with only his head above the quilt. He was very ill. He beckoned them to come closer.

Narrator 1: Some slaves were freed by their owners. Henry's heart beat fast. Maybe the master would set him free.

Master: You are a good worker, Henry. I am giving you to my son. You must obey him and never tell a lie.

Narrator 2: Henry nodded, but he didn't say thank you. That would have been a lie.

Narrator 3: Later that day Henry watched a bird soar high above the trees.

Henry: Free bird! Happy bird!

Narrator 4: Henry said good-bye to his family. He looked across the field. The leaves swirled in the wind.

Narrator 1: Henry worked in his new master's factory. He was good at his job.

Boss: Do not tear that tobacco leaf!

Narrator 2: He was yelling at the new boy. He poked the boy with a stick. If you made a mistake, the boss would beat you.

Narrator 3: Henry was lonely. One day he met Nancy, who was shopping for her mistress.

Narrator 4: They talked and talked and agreed to meet again.

Narrator 1: Henry felt like singing. But slaves didn't dare sing in the streets. Instead, he hummed all the way home.

Narrator 2: Months later, Henry asked Nancy to be his wife. When both their masters agreed, Henry and Nancy were married.

Narrator 3: Soon there was a little baby. Then another. And another.

Narrator 4: Henry knew they were very lucky. They lived together even though they had different masters.

Narrator 1: But Nancy was worried. Her master had lost a great deal of money.

Nancy: I'm afraid he will sell our children.

Narrator 2: Henry sat very still.

Narrator 3: Henry worked hard all morning. He tried to forget what Nancy had said.

Narrator 4: His friend, James, came into the factory.

James: Your wife and children were just sold at the slave market.

Henry: No!

Narrator 1: Henry couldn't move. He couldn't think. He couldn't work.

Boss: Twist that tobacco!

Narrator 2: The boss poked Henry. Henry twisted tobacco leaves. His heart twisted in his chest.

Narrator 3: At lunchtime, Henry rushed to the center of town. A large group of slaves were tied together. The owner shouted at them.

Narrator 4: Henry looked for his family.

Children: Father! Father!

Narrator 1: Henry watched his children disappear down the road.

Henry: Where is Nancy?

Narrator 2: He saw her the same moment she saw him.

Narrator 3: When he wiped away his tears, Nancy, too, was gone.

Narrator 4: Henry no longer sang. He couldn't hum.

Narrator 1: He went to work, and at night he ate supper and went to bed.

Narrator 2: Henry tried to think of happy times. But all he could see were the carts carrying away everyone he loved.

Henry: I know I will never see my family again.

Narrator 3: Many weeks passed. One morning, Henry heard singing. A little bird flew out of a tree into the open sky. And Henry thought about being free.

Narrator 4: But how? As he lifted a crate, he knew the answer.

Narrator 1: He asked James and Dr. Smith to help him. Dr. Smith was a white man who thought slavery was wrong.

Narrator 2: They met early the next day at an empty warehouse.

Narrator 3: Henry arrived early with a box.

Henry: I will mail myself to a place where there are no slaves!

James: What if you cough and someone hears you?

Henry: I will cover my mouth and hope.

Narrator 4: Dr. Smith wrote on the box:  
To: William H. Johnson  
Arch Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Narrator 1: Henry would be delivered to friends in Philadelphia.

Narrator 2: Then he printed on the crate in big letters:  
THIS SIDE UP WITH CARE

Narrator 3: Henry needed an excuse to stay home, or the work boss would think he had run off.

Narrator 4: James pointed at Henry's sore finger. But Henry knew it wasn't bad enough. He opened a bottle of oil of vitriol.

James: No!

Narrator 1: Henry poured it on his hand. It burned his skin to the bone.

Henry: Now the boss will have to let me stay home.

Dr. Smith: Let me bandage that hand. Now, meet me tomorrow morning at four o'clock.

Narrator 2: The sun was not yet up when Henry climbed into the box.

Henry: Ready!

Narrator 3: James nailed down the lid.

Narrator 4: Dr. Smith and James drove to the station. The railway clerk tipped the box over and nailed a paper to the bottom.



Dr. Smith: Please be careful with the box!

Narrator 1: No one listened. They threw the box into the baggage car.

Narrator 2: Hours passed. Henry was lifted up and thrown again.

Henry: Now, I'm upside down. There's splashing. This must be the steamboat headed for Washington, D.C.

Narrator 3: The ship rode smoothly, but Henry was still upside down. Blood rushed to his head. His face got hot. His eyes ached. He thought his head would burst.

Henry: I can't move; someone might hear me.

Man 1: I'm tired of standing.

Man 2: Why don't we move that box and sit on it?

Narrator 4: Henry held his breath. Could they be talking about his box?

Narrator 1: Henry was pushed. The box scraped the deck. Now he was on his right side! Now on his left! And, suddenly, right side up!

Man 1: What do you think is in here?

Man 2: Mail, I guess.

Henry: I am mail. But not the kind they imagine!

Narrator 2: Henry was carried off the steamboat and placed in a railroad car, this time head up. He fell asleep to the rattling song of the train wheels.

Narrator 3: He awoke to loud knocking.

Man 3: Henry, are you all right in there?

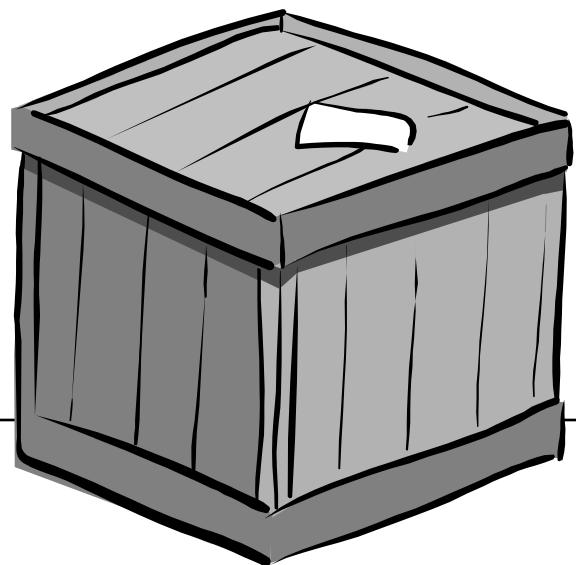
Henry: All right!

Narrator 4: The cover was pried open. Henry stretched and stood up.

Narrator 1: Four men smiled at him.

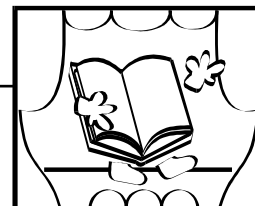
Man 3: Welcome to Philadelphia!

Henry: At last, I have a birthday – March 30, 1849. It is my first day of freedom. And, I also now have a middle name – Henry “BOX” Brown.



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## ***Wabi Sabi***

by Mark Reibstein

illustrated by Ed Young

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

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Characters:	Master	Wabi Sabi	Narrator 1
	Snowball	Bird	Narrator 2
	Rascal	Monkey	Narrator 3

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Narrator 1: Wabi Sabi was a cat who lived in Kyoto, Japan. One day, visitors from another country asked Wabi Sabi's master what her name meant.

Narrator 2: It had never occurred to her before that wabi sabi was anything more than her name.

Narrator 3: Wabi Sabi watched as her master drew breath through her teeth, shook her head, and said:

Master: That's hard to explain.

Narrator 1: The cat's tail twitching, she watches her master, still waiting in silence.

Narrator 2: Curious now, Wabi Sabi wondered if her friend Snowball could explain the meaning of her name to her.

Narrator 3: Snowball, who had been napping, stretched, yawned, and sighed.

Snowball: That's hard to explain. It's a kind of beauty.

Narrator 1: Snowball's eyes closed as though dreaming.

Snowball: An old straw mat, rough on cat's paws, pricks and tickles...hurts and feels good, too.

Narrator 2: Then Snowball went back to sleep. Wabi Sabi wasn't sure she understood, but she didn't want to bother Snowball anymore.

Narrator 3: So she asked Rascal, the dog, if he knew about wabi sabi. Rascal was smart, but kind of mean.

Rascal: That's too hard to explain to someone like you. Poor Wabi Sabi! As simple as a brown leaf. So ordinary!

Wabi Sabi: Now I'm even more confused. Am I beautiful or ordinary? Can anyone explain wabi sabi to me?

Narrator 1: A bird flying by thought the question was for her.

Bird: That's hard to explain. But there is someone who can help you. His name is Kosho, and he lives on Mount Hiei, to the east. A wise old monkey living among the pine trees knows wabi sabi.

Wabi Sabi: Thank you!

Narrator 2: Wabi Sabi went off to learn what her name meant. To get to Mount Hiei, she had to cross through the city.

Narrator 3: Dazzled by big buildings, shiny glass, and sleek cars, awed by the busy, sharply dressed people, she wondered if these pretty things could be wabi sabi.

Narrator 1: She decided that if her name was true to her, it must be softer, quieter, darker.

Narrator 2: Even in cities, before the shock of new light – the colors of dusk.

Narrator 3: A short time after Wabi Sabi entered the woods, she arrived at the foot of Mount Hiei.

Narrator 1: The woods were dark now, so, hoping to find Kosho in the morning, she curled up beneath an old pine tree and went to sleep.

Narrator 2: She awoke to the sounds of a stick stirring and tapping.

Narrator 3: A warm bowl of tea offered by a monkey. Please! Steam rising gently.

Narrator 1: Wabi Sabi was very glad to have the tea and company.

Wabi Sabi: Thank you. My name is Wabi Sabi.

Monkey: That's wonderful!

Wabi Sabi: Do you know what that means?

Monkey: Well, that's...

Wabi Sabi: I know, hard to explain.

Monkey: The pale moon resting on foggy water. Hear that? A frog's jumped in.

Wabi Sabi: That's wabi sabi? Is that all? I don't know if I can...

Monkey: It's more. Listen. Watch. Feel.

Narrator 2: He said no more, so she watched him make tea. He moved slowly but gracefully, as if he were dancing, and he handled his things as if they were gold, although they were wooden or clay.

Narrator 3: Wabi Sabi felt what was in her paws.

Narrator 1: A warm heavy bowl comfortable as an old friend – not fine, smooth china.

Narrator 2: She looked carefully at the woods surrounding them.

Narrator 3: There was so much life, as in the city, but here things were not clean, neat or sharp-edged. There were no straight lines, yet there were many designs – on trees, in clouds and dirty ponds.

Narrator 1: She saw that everything was alive and dying too, like the damp autumn leaves curled beneath their feet.

Monkey: Simple things are beautiful.

Narrator 2: He poured more tea for her. Looking down at the tea in her bowl, seeing herself plain and beautiful, she whispered

Wabi Sabi: Now I understand.

Narrator 3: After some time, Wabi Sabi thanked her new friend and started back for home. Because she did not hurry, she found a place called Ginkakuji, the “Silver Temple.”

Narrator 1: There was nothing silver there, but she found the place to be very beautiful – in a wabi sabi kind of way.

Narrator 2: Although the buildings and gardens were shaped by humans, they were neither fancy nor grand.

Narrator 3: Moved by the natural simplicity of the place, Wabi Sabi composed three short poems about what she saw.

Narrator 1: Yellow bamboo stalks bow by teahouse doors so low emperors must kneel.

Narrator 2: Dark buildings, floating sit on white sand seas. A stream sweeps small stones, chanting.

Wabi Sabi: The monk returns leaves to just-raked sand. This humble cat might understand.

Narrator 3: Tired but glad, Wabi Sabi returned at last to her house. She curled up on the straw mat in the kitchen, enjoying the warmth there.

Narrator 1: She could smell the wind in her fur and feel her long journey’s steps deep in her bones.

Narrator 2: The sun’s last rays stretch a silver brushstroke shivers on warm clouded glass.

Wabi Sabi: Now I think I know what to call this feeling. It’s a...

Master: Wabi Sabi! Where have you been?

Wabi Sabi: That’s hard to explain.

Narrator 3: She purred, feeling simply and beautifully at home.

