

Mona at a Crossroad

Being a mother isn't easy, but it's even harder to step back.

Mona: Readers Theater Script

READERS THEATER

In a Readers Theater production, the focus is on speaking with clarity and feeling. Actors choose roles and then practice saying their lines, but they don't have to memorize their parts or move around the stage. The real work is in thinking about how to create meaning with voice and body language.

PREPARATION

1. After you choose roles, highlight your lines so you know when it's your turn. Then talk about your character and their goals in each scene.
 - What does each person want? To change someone's mind? To be left alone? Or something else?
 - What are their feelings? You'll need to show their feelings with your voice. For example, are they angry? Disappointed? Enthusiastic? Patient? Or something else?
2. Rehearse with your scene partners. You'll need to use pauses, stress, and intonation to create meaning.

You can play a game. Partner A says one of the simple lines from the script with a specific emotion. (See below). Partner B tries to guess the emotion.

"Where's Rashid?"	happy
"You always say that."	angry
"I know what you're thinking."	disappointed
"Vincent is in love with Mona."	worried curious

Then work on feeling that emotion when you say your lines.

3. Underline the focus words. These are usually nouns, verbs, adjectives, and sometimes other words that the audience really needs to hear. You will say the vowel sound longer in these words. Here's an example.

SOMEtimes the **old** ways are **good** ways.

- Notice that when you take your time to say the vowel sound, the function words such as *the* and *are* naturally reduce. In this way, you have a rhythm that improves your ability to be understood.
- When a word has more than one syllable such as *sometimes*, elongate the stressed syllable. (You can find the stress in a dictionary if you aren't sure.)

4. Identify pauses. You will probably also notice that the focus words often appear in phrases or chunks with pauses between them.

SOMEtimes / the **old** ways / are **good** ways.

Tip: Don't worry about not getting it "right." As an actor, *you* get to decide how to use your voice.

5. Use non-verbal techniques such as body language and changing the pitch of your voice. Think about Sylvia teasing Vincent about his love life.

SILVIA Really? Adriana Bettencourt?

VINCENT Oh no, no, no, no, not her. Absolutely not!

Sylvia is curious and maybe smiling. Vincent, however, wants to set her straight. He responds with great force, and he's probably shaking his head, too.

6. Rehearse and perform. When you are comfortable with your lines, stand in a row facing the audience (your classmates, family, and/or friends). You can have your script in front of you.

More tips

- Speakers in a scene can step forward when it is their turn.
- You can have actors wear name tags.
- Listen to your scene partners and pretend you are hearing them for the first time. That way it will sound like a real conversation.
- Wear a costume that shows your character.
- Choose someone to be the narrator and say the scene numbers and locations when the scene changes. You can display posters with the location of each scene.
- Use sound effects such as a dog barking or a gate opening.
- Record or video your performance so you can share it and learn.

CAST

In order of appearance

Shini	<i>A restaurant owner and Rashid's boss</i>
Rashid	<i>A college-age immigrant from Syria</i>
Mona	<i>Rashid's mother, a widow from Syria</i>
Brita	<i>A U.S.-born mother and wife of Joe</i>
Joe	<i>A Syrian-born U.S. citizen, husband of Brita (Rashid is his nephew.)</i>
Sylvia	<i>A bank employee and Vincent's friend</i>
Vincent	<i>A bank employee and Sylvia's friend</i>

SCRIPT

(The monologues at the beginning of each scene are optional.)

Scene 1: The Kitchen, Shini's Café, late at night

RASHID *(To audience):* Hi everyone. My name is Rashid. People often ask me where I am from. When I say Syria, they look sad. I know it's because of the war, and I understand, but I'm not sad. I'm just trying to start a new life.

SHINI Rashid.

RASHID What?

SHINI You missed a spot.

RASHID Where?

SHINI Over there by the stove.

RASHID I don't see anything.

SHINI Over to the left. And I see dishes in the dining room.

RASHID What dishes?

SHINI Over there... on the table.

RASHID They're clean.

SHINI That was fast! Okay. You can go home now.

RASHID Um, Shini?

SHINI What?

RASHID Can I take some bread?

SHINI We've talked about that, Rashid.

RASHID It doesn't hurt to ask.

SHINI I'm not sure I agree, but lucky for you, I have no problem saying no.

RASHID What are you going to do with it?

SHINI Make bread pudding.

RASHID Ewww, what's that?

SHINI. A dessert, and don't make that face. It's good.

RASHID Can you show me?

SHINI It's just eggs, milk, vanilla, and a little sugar.

RASHID And bread.

SHINI Yes, it's a traditional recipe for using old bread.

RASHID It sounds terrible.

SHINI It's not. It's brilliant. Here, try some.

RASHID Oh wow! It's so good!

SHINI Don't sound surprised! Sometimes the old ways are good ways.

RASHID You sound like my mother.

SHINI Hmm. You like cooking, don't you?

RASHID I do.

SHINI You didn't do too badly with the onions the other day. I'll tell you what. I'll give you a chance to join the line. You can help with salads and other prep.

RASHID Prep?

SHINI Prep is Preparation. It's the only way we can produce 80 dinners a night.

RASHID We serve 80 dinners?

SHINI More. I think it was about 87 tonight.

RASHID Amazing!

SHINI Let's try it on Wednesday and see how it goes. You'll have to work fast. It can be stressful.

RASHID Not a problem. I like excitement.

SHINI You'll get plenty of that. But, no promises, okay?

RASHID Thank you! You won't be sorry.

Scene 2: The Yellow House, afternoon

JOE (To audience): *Hello, my name is Joe. I live in a small yellow house with my wife and two kids. My brother was killed in a war, and his wife and their son Rashid came to live with us. So far, it's going well, but I worry. There may be trouble ahead.*

JOE Hi, Mona. You're back from the store already? Have some tea.

MONA Where's Rashid?

JOE He stayed late at work last night. He's probably sleeping.

MONA But it's lunch time. I'm going to wake him up.

JOE Why? He doesn't have school today.

MONA I'm his mother. It's my job to make sure he studies.

JOE Okay.

MONA He needs to quit that job.

JOE But he loves Shini's.

MONA That's what I'm worried about.

JOE Mona. . .

MONA I'm going to go wake him up. Rashid?

BRITA Rashid's not here.

MONA Oh, hi, Brita. I didn't know you were home. Where is he?

BRITA At work.

MONA At work?

BRITA I saw him this morning. We left together.

MONA But he worked last night.
BRITA He said something about training.
MONA How much training does a person need to wash dishes?
BRITA Shini's teaching him to cook.
MONA Why does he want to do that?
BRITA He likes it.
MONA He needs to get serious about medical school.
JOE I think he is.
BRITA His grades are good.
MONA It's not his grades so much... It's . . .
JOE What?
MONA It's his priorities.

Scene 3: The Bank, the next morning

SYLVIA (To audience): My name is Sylvia. I work at a bank on 19th street, and I know everything about everybody. My project right now is to find my colleague Vincent a wife.

VINCENT Hi, Sylvia.
SILVIA Hello, Vincent. You're late.
VINCENT There was traffic. Anyway, it's not 9 o'clock yet.
SILVIA Well, be ready. Maybe the love of your life will walk through those doors today.
VINCENT You always say that.
SILVIA I have hope.
VINCENT Well, if you want to know the truth, she already has.
SILVIA What?
VINCENT But there's no happy ending.
SILVIA Who is it? Why didn't you tell me?
VINCENT There's no point. It's impossible.
SILVIA Oh no. You can't keep it a secret. You have to tell me now.
VINCENT It's a customer.
SILVIA Really? Adriana Bettencourt?
VINCENT Oh no, no, no, no, not her.
SILVIA Shini Lee? The one with the restaurant?
VINCENT Why would you even think that! She's too young, and she's already in a relationship.
SILVIA Then who?
VINCENT Someone way out of reach.
SILVIA Why? Is she married?
VINCENT No, her husband died.
SILVIA Then what's standing in your way? You're a nice, good-looking guy, Vincent.
VINCENT It's hopeless.
SILVIA At least tell me who it is. Do I know her?
VINCENT Maybe. Her name is Mona.
SILVIA Mona . . . Do I know her?

VINCENT She comes in the bank with Joe. You know Joe. He's the Syrian man with the shipping business. I think she's his sister or sister-in-law or something.

SILVIA Ohhh, I know who you mean. The woman with the scarf?

VINCENT Yes.

SILVIA Dark eyes?

VINCENT Yes.

SILVIA You're in love with her?

VINCENT I don't know. When she comes in the bank, I . . . my heart starts jumping.

SILVIA Have you talked to her?

VINCENT We spoke for a few minutes the other day. I walked by her house. She was working in the yard, and we talked about cats.

SILVIA Vincent, listen to me.

VINCENT What?

SILVIA It's not what I expected, but it's not hopeless!

Scene 4 The Yellow House, A stormy night.

BRITA (To audience): *Hello, my name is Brita. I don't mind living with Joe's relatives. They're great. Really. The boys look up to Rashid, and I really admire my sister-in-law, Mona, but sometimes she scares me.*

BRITA That was a delicious meal, Rashid.

RASHID Thank you. What did you think, Mama?

MONA It was okay if you like French food. It is French, isn't it?

RASHID I don't know. I'll ask Shini.

MONA You talk about Shini a lot.

RASHID She's amazing. She's teaching me so much.

MONA Well, that's nice. Cooking is a nice hobby.

RASHID Mama!

MONA What?

RASHID Cooking is more than a hobby. It's an art form.

MONA It's an awful job.

RASHID No, it's not.

MONA Yes, it is. You come home tired, your clothes are dirty, and you smell like onions.

RASHID I like feeding people. I want to open a restaurant.

MONA You might as well stick a knife in my heart right now, Rashid.

RASHID I knew you were going to say that.

JOE Your mother's right, Rashid. It's a hard life.

RASHID I don't want an easy life. I want an interesting life.

MONA And your life isn't interesting already? Surviving a war? Starting over in a new country?

RASHID Don't worry about me. I can manage my own life.

MONA I'm your mother. It's my job to worry about you.

RASHID No, it's not your job. I'm an adult now. Your job is to focus on *your* life.

MONA I don't want my own life. After your father died, I made a promise to make sure you followed in your father's footsteps.

RASHID And become a doctor.

MONA Yes!

RASHID I'm so tired of hearing that. What if I don't want to go to medical school?

MONA You don't know what you want.

RASHID Maybe I want to be a chef. Maybe I'd be good at it.

MONA: Don't say that!

RASHID Mama, listen.

MONA Rashid, sit down. Think about your future.

RASHID Nope, I'm done

MONA Where are you going?

RASHID I have to get out of here.

BRITA. But it's raining.

RASHID I don't care!

[Sounds of door opening, thunder and rain]

Scene 5

SHINI (To audience): *Hi. My name is Shini. I run a café on 19th Street. I try to help my workers when I can, even the dishwasher. In fact, Rashid reminds me of myself when I was young.*

SYLVIA Thanks for waiting, Shini. We don't have enough people at the bank this morning.

SHINI Oh?

SYLVIA Yes, Vincent is at the hospital with his mother.

SHINI I hope it's not serious.

SYLVIA She should be okay. Breathing problems.

SHINI I'm on my way to the hospital, too.

SYLVIA Really?

SHINI Yes, one of my workers is there. He got hit by a car last night.

SYLVIA Oh no! Who?

SHINI Rashid, Joe's nephew. Apparently, he went for a run in a storm.

SYLVIA Why would anyone do that?

SHINI. He got in an argument with his mother. Apparently, it was a doozy!

SYLVIA So, why is he in the hospital?

SHINI A car hit him. He went all the way over the top of the car.

SYLVIA Oh no! Is he going to be okay?

SHINI I think so. Mona's very worried, but she says he's awake, so I'm bringing soup.

SYLVIA Did you say Mona?

SHINI Yes, why?

SYLVIA I've been hearing that name a lot lately.

SHINI She's a very involved mother.

SYLVIA What do you mean?

SHINI She wants Rashid to go to medical school, but he's pushing back. That's why he ran out the door and got hit by a car.

SYLVIA He doesn't want to be a doctor?

SHINI He wants to be a chef. That's what the fight was about.

SYLVIA Sounds tough.

SHINI She means well, but they have kind of a stormy relationship.

SYLVIA Oh dear. I wonder if Vincent knows that.

SHINI Why do you say that?

SYLVIA Oh, no reason.

SHINI Really?

SYLVIA Well, if you really want to know. Vincent is in love with Mona.

Scene 6: The hospital late afternoon

MONA (To audience): *My name is Mona, and my life is going out of control. My son, Rashid, is in the hospital. The doctors say he's going to be okay, but he's different. He won't listen. He keeps telling me to focus on my own life, but I don't know how!*

JOE Do you see that?

BRITA See what?

JOE Mona. She's talking to Vincent.

BRITA And?

JOE I think there's something going on between them.

BRITA You must be joking.

JOE No, look. See how they are standing?

BRITA You're serious, aren't you?

JOE Am I being ridiculous?

BRITA They're just talking.

JOE She's smiling. She hasn't smiled since Rashid's accident.

BRITA Oh, you're right.

JOE See! I told you.

BRITA But don't look. We should leave them alone.

JOE I'm right though, aren't I?

BRITA Maybe . . . shhh, here she comes. Don't say anything.

MONA Hi.

BRITA Hi, Mona. Did you get your tea?

MONA Yes, I don't really like tea from a machine. It's cold.

JOE So . . . I saw you talking to Vincent.

MONA Oh, uh, yes. Do you know him?

JOE He helps me at the bank. Nice guy.

MONA Oh.

JOE Is he okay?

MONA Oh, yes. He's here with his mother.

MONA He's a good son.

BRITA Have a seat.

MONA I don't feel like sitting. I think I need to get out of this hospital and go for a walk.

BRITA That's not a bad idea. You've been sitting next to Rashid's bed for three days!

MONA Is that wrong?

BRITA Of course, it's not wrong.

MONA People keep telling me to leave him alone. His nurse, Shini, you!

JOE Us?

MONA I know what you're thinking.

BRITA We aren't thinking anything.

MONA But maybe you're right.

JOE What do you mean?

MONA I worry about Rashid, but I can't control him.

BRITA He's young. He wants to try different things. Right now he's excited about cooking, but tomorrow it could be something else.

MONA So you want me to give him some space. Isn't that what you say here in the U.S.?

BRITA Um, yes.

MONA But what if it doesn't feel right?

Scene 7: 19th Street, early evening afternoon

VINCENT (To audience): *My name is Vincent. I like my job at the bank, but lately, my life has felt boring. Then this dark-eyed woman walked into my bank, and everything changed.*

MONA Hi, Vincent.

VINCENT Hi, Mona.

MONA How is your mother?

VINCENT My mother? Oh, she's fine. She's home.

MONA Good.

VINCENT. How is your son?

MONA Very well, thank you. He's back at work.

VINCENT Good. Good. That's good.

MONA Where are you going?

VINCENT Shini's. I always go to Shini's on Thursdays. It's a habit.

MONA Do you have a lot of habits?

VINCENT I guess so.

MONA I lost all my habits in the war.

VINCENT Hmm. I never thought about it, but habits are nice.

MONA Reliable.

VINCENT Comforting.

MONA Yes. That's a good word. Comforting.

VINCENT It's funny you should say that. I'm looking for a little excitement.

MONA Really? What kind of excitement.

VINCENT Just something new. I need a change.

MONA And I need less change.

VINCENT Funny.

MONA Yes. You said that.

VINCENT Well, if you are looking for a habit, I really do recommend Thursday night soup at Shini's.

MONA Oh.

VINCENT I didn't mean...

MONA It sounds nice.

VINCENT Oh, well then . . . if you'd like to join me. I mean if you're hungry. You don't have to have soup. She has other things.

MONA I know. Rashid works there.

VINCENT Of course.

MONA I'd like to join you.

VINCENT You would?

MONA Yes. And who knows. Maybe it'll become a habit.

VINCENT And for me, it'll be a change.

MONA It's just a bowl of soup.

VINCENT Right.

MONA But you never know.

VINCENT It's a start.

MONA Actually, I'm hungry.

VINCENT Then what are we waiting for? Let's go.

The End