

Where's Tilly?

A neighbor's problem leads to an unlikely friendship.

The Yellow House on Summer Street: Readers Theater Script

READERS THEATER

In a Readers Theater production, the focus is on speaking lines 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 through 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.

"They have children."	happy
"I'm not busy."	angry
"I see her."	disappointed
"What's that?"	worried curious

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

It's **spring**, the **trees** are **green**, the **FLOWers** are **BLOOMing**.

- Notice that when you take your time to say the vowel sound, the function words such as *the* and *are* naturally reduced. In this way, you have a rhythm that improves your ability to be understood.
 - When a word has more than one syllable as in *Flowers* and *Blooming*, elongate the stressed syllable. (Check 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.

It's **spring**, / the **trees** / are **green**, / the **FLOWers** / are **BLOOMing**.

Don't worry about not getting it "right." As an actor, *you* get to decide how to use your voice to communicate your feelings and goals in a scene.

5. Use non-verbal techniques such as body language and the pitch of your voice. When Dolores talks about spring, she is delighted with the weather and probably smiling. Miss Polly feels very differently when she says the following line:

AWful. / They have **CHILdren!**

Most people like children, or at least they pretend to. Miss Polly thinks children are bad news, and she shows her feelings by frowning or using a grumpy voice.

6. Rehearse and perform. When you are comfortable with your lines, everyone stands 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 also 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 and learn.

CAST

In order of appearance

Miss Polly	<i>An older neighbor and owner of a dog named Tilly</i>
Dolores	<i>A wife to Paco and mother of Teddy</i>
Yusef/Joe	<i>Husband to Brita and father of Kyle</i>
Brita	<i>Wife to Joe and mother of Kyle</i>
Olivia	<i>A recent high school graduate</i>
Rashid	<i>A college-age new immigrant from Syria</i>
Kyle	<i>A five-year-old son of Brita and Joe</i>
Teddy	<i>A five-year-old son of Dolores and Paco</i>

SCRIPT

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

Scene 1: Summer Street

MISS POLLY *I'm Miss Polly. I live on Summer Street with my dog Tilly. I'm an old lady, and I don't like change. I just want to be left alone, but people keep talking to me!*

DOLORES Good morning, Miss Polly.

MISS POLLY Hello, Dolores

DOLORES And how are you this beautiful morning?

MISS POLLY Terrible.

DOLORES Terrible? What do you mean? It's spring, the trees are green, the flowers are blooming.

MISS POLLY A new family is moving in next door.

DOLORES Is that a bad thing?

MISS POLLY Awful.

DOLORES Awful?

MISS POLLY Awful. They have children!

DOLORES Ahhh...

MISS POLLY Children make noise.

DOLORES My Teddy doesn't make noise, and he's five.

MISS POLLY Teddy doesn't live under my window.

DOLORES So they're moving next door to you? That cute yellow house?

MISS POLLY That *old* yellow house... yes. And there are two of them.

DOLORES I see.

MISS POLLY And it gets worse.

DOLORES What do you mean?

MISS POLLY They're boys!

DOLORES Really? How old?

MISS POLLY Little, like Teddy. The kind that yell, and climb trees, and kick balls in their neighbors' yards. You're probably happy about this, but it's bad news for me.

DOLORES. It might be nice for Teddy to have a new friend.

MISS POLLY. I was walking Tilly this morning, and I could hear them. The father was speaking a foreign language.

DOLORES Really?

MISS POLLY Yes. He was. I'm sure of it.

DOLORES. And?

MISS POLLY. Well, don't you think . . . ?

DOLORES. I can't wait to meet them.

MISS POLLY. I thought you'd say that, but you'll see.

DOLORES. Yes, I guess we all will.

Scene 2: Outside the Yellow House

JOE: *Hello. My name is Joe. I'm from Syria, but I've been in the U.S. for a long time, and it's been good so far. My wife Brita and I just bought our first home, a small yellow house with a big yard for our two boys.*

JOE Brita?

BRITA Yes, Joe?

JOE Are you sure about this?

BRITA Of course, I'm sure, Joe. This is our new home, a real house at last.

JOE But . . . What if . . .

BRITA Joe! Look at those trees. They're beautiful. Look at the grass. This is the house where our children will grow up.

JOE I worry.

BRITA I know you do. You're thinking about Rashid, aren't you?

JOE He'll be here soon. I don't know what he'll be like after everything he's gone through.

BRITA But it doesn't help to worry.

JOE That's easy for you to say. You were born here.

BRITA I know, but it'll be fine. Look at Kyle. Do you see how he's putting toy fire trucks on the fence?

JOE Uh huh.

BRITA Other kids will see those fire trucks, and they'll know a boy lives here. He'll make friends.

JOE He will. And you'll make friends, too, but I can't help it. I worry that Rashid will mess up our plans. I know how much you are looking forward to the next few years.

BRITA We talked about this, Joe. We always have room for family.

JOE Rashid is not a normal kid. He went through a war.

BRITA It'll be fine.

JOE He lost his father.

BRITA We'll take care of him.

JOE Maybe you're right. But what about the neighbors?

BRITA I can handle the neighbors.

JOE That woman next door doesn't seem very friendly.

BRITA I know, but she has a dog.

JOE Yes. A little one. What does that have to do with anything?
BRITA A dog is a conversation starter. I'll ask her about the dog.
JOE So you have a plan.
BRITA Trust me. Dogs are a great way to make new friends.
JOE I just hope you're right!

Scene 3: The Hair Salon

OLIVIA *Hi, everyone. I'm Olivia. I've just graduated from high school, and I'm bored out of my mind. I don't know what to do with myself, so I'm working at a hair salon. At least I can make money.*

[A door opens]

DOLORES Hi, Olivia. Are you ready for me?
OLIVIA Yes, Miss Dolores. Have a seat here. So, what are we doing today?
DOLORES I like this cut. But maybe make it a little shorter for the summer.
OLIVIA Right. It gets so hot.
DOLORES So, are you done with school?
OLIVIA Yes. High school is over at last!
DOLORES Any plans?
OLIVIA Not really. Just working and saving money. I want to travel.
DOLORES Good idea! You're young.
OLIVIA And bored. Nothing ever happens around here. I need some excitement in my life.
(Door opens)
RASHID Hello?
OLIVIA Oh. . .
RASHID Um. . .
OLIVIA Hi. . .
RASHID Sorry to bother you.
OLIVIA Uh. . .
RASHID Do you do men's cuts?
OLIVIA Um
DOLORES Yes, she does. Olivia, talk to him!
RASHID I can come back later if you're busy.
OLIVIA I'm not busy.
RASHID I really need to do something about my hair.
OLIVIA I know you. You live in the yellow house.
RASHID Yes. My name is Rashid.
OLIVIA. I'm Olivia. I live across the street.
RASHID Oh, cool. You have cats.
OLIVIA. I do.
DOLORES I'm Dolores, I live down the street.
RASHID It's nice to meet you both.
DOLORES Are you Joe's nephew from Syria?

RASHID Yes, Yusef, um Joe, is my uncle. I'm staying with him and his wife, Brita.

OLIVIA How long?

RASHID I'm not sure.

OLIVIA I can help you. I mean... I can cut your hair. Do you want to come back in about an hour?

RASHID Okay. I'll see you later, Olivia.

OLIVIA. See you later, Rashid.

(Door closes)

DOLORES He seems like a nice kid.

OLIVIA Yes, he does. When is he coming back?

DOLORES You told him to come back in an hour. Don't you remember?

OLIVIA Oh, good. That's really good.

DOLORES Why?

OLIVIA I think my summer is about to get more interesting!

Scene 4: The front yard

KYLE *Hi. My name is Kyle, and I am almost six years old. My cousin Rashid is going to teach me to play soccer.*

KYLE Rashid?

RASHID What is it?

KYLE Can we get my ball?

RASHID Where is it?

KYLE In Miss Polly's yard.

RASHID. You don't want to go yourself?

KYLE No, it's better if you come.

RASHID Okay. Come on. Hey... look at that...

KYLE It's her dog! Look, she's running away!

RASHID The gate's open.

KYLE The door, too.

RASHID I wonder where Miss Polly is.

KYLE Let's go home.

RASHID No, we need to tell her.

(sound of knocking)

RASHID Miss Polly?

MISS POLLY Hey!

RASHID It's okay.

MISS POLLY What are you doing in my house? Get out!

RASHID Excuse me, but. . .

MISS POLLY Get out! I'm calling the police!

RASHID Okay, but you need to know something first.

MISS POLLY No, I know everything I need to know.

RASHID It's about your dog.

MISS POLLY My dog? What did you do to my dog?

RASHID Nothing! It ran away. You left your gate open!
MISS POLLY Oh, nooo. Tilly! Tilly! Tilly!

Scene 5: The Yellow House

BRITA. *Hi. I'm Brita, and I believe in being a good neighbor. It's not easy with some people, but I love a challenge.*

JOE (on his phone) Brita? Where are you? I came home and no one was here.

BRITA (on her phone) Hi, Joe. We're out looking for Miss Tilly's dog.

JOE Oh, do you need help?

BRITA. Yes, that would be great. We're on Spring Street, and the boys are on Winter Street. You can look on Summer Street.

JOE Okay, call me back if you find her.

BRITA Okay. Bye.

JOE Bye.

Scene 6: Winter Street

RASHID. *Hi. I'm Rashid. It's not easy being me. I'm always getting into trouble, but the good thing is, I'm also good at getting out of it!*

TEDDY I see her!

KYLE Where?

TEDDY Over there, through the fence.

KYLE There?

TEDDY Yes. That scary house.

KYLE It's falling down.

TEDDY It's empty. But there's Tilly. Do you see her?

RASHID Yes. Wait here.

KYLE Where are you going? The gate's locked.

RASHID I can get over it. Here. Take my phone. Call your mom. Tell her we found the dog.
(The sound of a dog barking)

TEDDY What's that?

RASHID Ouch!

KYLE What happened?

RASHID I cut myself. Tilly, hold still!

MISS POLLY Tilly!

TEDDY Hello, Miss Polly.

MISS POLLY Tilly! You bad dog!

RASHID I've got her. Here.

MISS POLLY Tilly! Don't ever do that to me again! I was so worried!

BRITA *(breathing hard)* Did you find Tilly?

DOLORES *(breathing hard)* We heard barking.

RASHID Yes, everything's fine. Tilly is safe.

MISS POLLY I'm sorry.

DOLORES For what?

MISS POLLY I yelled at them. These boys tried to tell me about Tilly, and I yelled at them.

DOLORES So, your new neighbors are not so bad after all, are they?

MISS POLLY I know. I said I was sorry!

JOE I heard a dog. Is everything okay?

BRITA Hi, Joe. It's all good. The dog is safe.

JOE Whew!

KYLE Dad, Rashid rescued Miss Polly's dog.

MISS POLLY He did. You're a hero.

RASHID I'm not sure about that.

MISS POLLY You didn't have to, and you did.

RASHID Aww, the truth is I just like excitement.

BRITA You're Miss Polly, aren't you?

MISS POLLY Yes. I live next door to you.

BRITA I know. I'm Brita, and this is my husband Joe, our nephew, Rashid, and the little guy, here, is Kyle.

MISS POLLY It's nice to meet you. Do you like dogs, Kyle?

KYLE Yes, I want a dog, but my mom says no.

BRITA Not yet.

JOE Maybe someday.

MISS POLLY Well, until then, maybe you can walk Tilly, for me sometimes.

KYLE Can I mom?

BRITA Sure, we always like to help the neighbors, don't we, Joe?

RASHID Speaking of neighbors, there's another person who needs help.

JOE. Who?

DOLORES I bet it's Olivia.

RASHID How did you know?

DOLORES Oh, I had a feeling.

RASHID Just got a text. Her cat is in a tree, and she's wondering if I can help.

MISS POLLY I know where she lives. I'll walk with you.

RASHID Okay.

DOLORES Now, isn't that a beautiful sight. They're going to be friends.

JOE You know, I think you're right. This neighborhood is going to work out very well for us.

DOLORES I'm happy to hear you say that. We are glad you are here.

The End