



Sample Pages from Letters

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LETTERS

A READER'S THEATRE SCRIPT BY
Mrs. Evelyn Merritt



Letters

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CHARACTERS

The characters are soldiers and those on the home front from numerous wars ranging from the American Civil War to the Iraq War.

Female

Sarah.....WWII, at home writing to her brother
 Darla.....Mother of a soldier in the Iraq War
 Katie.....WWII at home writing to her
 boyfriend
 Harriet.....Civil War Nurse
 Megan.....Writing to a soldier in the Iraq War
 Kristin.....Writing to a soldier in the Iraq War
 Iris.....Writing to a soldier in the Iraq War
 Janice.....Vietnam, writing to her boyfriend
 Shawna.....Vietnam, at home
 Tammy.....Vietnam, at home
 Marie.....Korea, writing to her fiancée
 Elsie.....WWI nurse

Male

John.....WWII soldier
 Robert.....WWI soldier
 Lewis.....Civil War soldier
 Billy.....WWII soldier
 Ben.....WWII soldier
 Caleb.....WWI soldier
 Richie.....Vietnam soldier
 Michael.....Korea soldier
 Jim.....Civil War soldier

WHAT IS READER'S THEATRE?

Reader's Theatre is a dramatic reading of a play. There is no movement, sets, or costumes. Actors hold their scripts, or have them on music stands. But it's still theatre – rehearse well and really get into the reading!

Reader's Theatre is an excellent choice for an assembly or concert as it requires a short rehearsal period, and can be set up anywhere. It can also be used to practise characterization, ensemble work, projection, diction, and to improve reading fluency and comprehension.

COSTUME

The easiest way to costume this play is to have everyone dressed similarly in neutral clothes. If you're more ambitious, dress each character in their respective period and style.

ALL stand in a line facing the audience.

CALEB: Hey Charlie, guess who's writing?

BEN: July 5, 1944.

ROBERT: Dear Jeannie.

CALEB: It's me! Caleb!

KATIE: Dear John.

BEN: Dear Fred.

RICHIE: Dear Janice.

JANICE: I got a letter!

SHAUNA: From Richie?

TAMMY: Stupid war.

BILLY: Dear Mom.

JIM: January 17, 1863.

HARRIET: It's absolute nonsense.

ELSIE: I can't help it. I'm excited. We sail tomorrow!

MEGAN & KRISTIN & IRIS: October 22, 2008.

DARLA: Dear Scott.

MARIE: Dear Adam.

MEGAN & KRISTIN & IRIS: Dear Private Martin.

LEWIS: Dear God.

SHAUNA: What'd he say?

ROBERT: It's so good to get your letter.

BEN: Sorry I haven't written so much.

JOHN: Dear Katie. I got your letter. I got all your letters.

MEGAN & KRISTIN & IRIS: We hope you like our letter.

SARAH: I've been waiting by the post box every day forever. And today, finally! Ta da! A letter from Milton! Ring the bells! Sound the horns!

MARIE: I have to something to tell you.

BEN: Sorry I haven't written so much. There's everything to say and nothing. I can't – I can't explain war, Fred. I know you want to know. You want to fight, and I get that, I used to be... I wanted to come too. I can't explain the fighting. I don't – I don't know what words to use 'cause... You won't believe it, you'll say I'm making stuff up, I know you. I can't explain what fighting does. I don't understand, a town is standing one day and a pile of dust the next. A guy is standing there one second and in pieces the next. I keep thinking about home and seeing nothing but a pile of dust. You and Mom and Dad and June in pieces. Fighting is the most horrible noise and the most horrible silence. When it's quiet, all you're doing is waiting for something to happen. Sometimes the waiting is worse than the fighting. We're all in the same boat here, waiting, fighting, on, off, bored, scared, but none of us can talk about it. You don't talk about it. Sometimes I wish I were dead and sometimes I come so close I know I don't want to die. I'll do anything not to die. I try to keep the reasons in my head, I keep trying to remember why I'm here, I know we need to be here. I'm not trying to scare you Fred, I know you think you don't scare. I don't even know if the censors will let this through – if there was a way I could get you not to enlist, if there was a way to keep you from coming over here, I'd do it.

MICHAEL: Danny!

BEN: Yours, Ben.

MICHAEL: We're off for good tomorrow. We're finally going.

KATIE: John, this is my fifth letter.

MICHAEL: I don't know when I'll be able to write again.

KATIE: Why won't you answer me?

MICHAEL: I'm so...

ELSIE: March, 1915. Oh Lizzie, off we go!

MICHAEL: I don't know what I am.

ELSIE: We arrived in England on Wednesday and now we're off to France.

MICHAEL: Nervous. Excited. Ready. Not ready.

ELSIE: You mustn't worry about me.

MICHAEL: Ha! That covers it.

ELSIE: I want to go, I'm ready to go.

MICHAEL: I can't wait to get over there. I know that.

ELSIE: Don't let Mother's hysterics bother you. She thinks hysterics will get me to change my mind and hop on a boat back home. 'War is no place for a woman.'

HARRIET: (*same time as ELSIE*) 'War is no place for a woman.' Fools. Absolute fools.

MICHAEL: Pop has so many stories from Normandy and D-Day. I want to tell my kids how we kicked butt in Korea! Whoo-Hoo! I'm gonna be just like my old man. I'm gonna fight like nobody's business.

ELSIE: Mother didn't believe I'd actually see this through when I got my nursing diploma. I suppose it's no surprise. I've not exactly been grounded, have I Lizzie? Mother wants me sitting in the parlour by sundown sipping on chamomile. It's not going to happen. I make this decision with a clear head and a sound mind.

SARAH: April 1, 1943.

ELSIE: So, don't let mother tell you I'm crazy, either.

SARAH: Finally, a letter brother dear! But now I've read your letter I feel worse than I did before. I thought I'd be happy to hear from you, but all it does is make me realize how awful far away you are. I miss you.

KATIE: (*same time as SARAH*) I miss you.

SARAH: It's dreadful here. If I was old enough at least I could go work in the factory. Then I'd be doing something! I want a purpose. Mother says our job is to knit scarves for the soldiers. That's our purpose.

ROBERT: I have such a sense of purpose Jeannie.

SARAH: That's all we do. Do you really need scarves from prairie girls in the middle of nowhere?

KATIE: I haven't heard from you in over six months. I'm scared for you. Is it bad there?

SARAH: I feel useless.

KATIE: Don't answer that.

SARAH: I want to be useful!

HARRIET: (*same time as above*) I want to be useful.

ELSIE: (*same time as above*) I want to be useful!

SARAH: I have this image of all these troops running across the French countryside, with woollen scarves trailing behind them. How did he die? Strangled by a scarf made by fair young ladies back home. How tragic.

ROBERT: Dear Jeannie.

SARAH: I'm babbling.

KATIE: I know you're in Italy.

ROBERT: I'm so glad to hear from you. I'm glad you and your parents are well.

SARAH: It's easier to think about scarves than other things. The Bannermans got the telegram yesterday. Eddie. We all came out to see the delivery boy go up to the house. Mrs. Bannerman cried. Right there on the front porch. And the rest of us were happy. It wasn't our house.

KATIE: I've always wanted to go. I hear Rome's nice. Is it?

ROBERT: It's the only shred of home I have.

KATIE: You should take pictures.

ROBERT: I've read your letters so many times they're falling apart. I carry them everywhere and every free second I have, I re-read every word. The other chaps razz me because I talk about you so much – 'Jeannie this and Jeannie that.' But I don't mind. Let them go on!

JIM: It's so cold here.

RICHIE: Vietnam is stinking hot.

MEGAN: Is it really hot in Iraq?

CALEB: I never did see such rain.

KATIE: It's very pleasant at home. The afternoons are warm and the evenings are cool.

CALEB: Some days I wonder if we're gonna float away.

BEN: When I look up and see blue sky and sunshine, how is that possible?

LEWIS: (*same time as BEN*) How is that possible?

BEN: How could it be the same sun? The same blue sky. Here?

JIM: I don't remember the last time I was warm.

HARRIET: How am I supposed to get these boys well in this weather? Absolutely ridiculous.

ROBERT: Let them go on. I know how important it is to keep you near and dear. They can say whatever they like. I love hearing about home. It reminds me of why I'm here. I'm proud to stand up and fight for my country. I'm fighting for you Jeannie. And knowing that you carry me in your heart gives me such purpose. I can wake up every morning and do what needs to be done. It's in your name.

JIM: January 17, 1863. Dear Father and Mother.

ROBERT: Soon enough we will be together.

LEWIS: Dear God.

BILLY: Mom. Thanks for the scarf.

ROBERT: Yours always, Robert.

BILLY: Please stop sending me scarves. I got no place to keep scarves.

JANICE: Shauna! Tammy!

RICHIE: June 12, 1967. Dear Janice.

JANICE: (*waving a piece of paper*) I got a letter from Richie!

SHAUNA and TAMMY draw in close.

TAMMY: How come the paper's all dirty?

JANICE: Don't know.

TAMMY: (*wrinkling her nose*) Gross.

SHAUNA: (*crowding close*) What does he say?

JANICE: He says Vietnam is stinking hot.

TAMMY: Who cares?

SHAUNA: Tammy!

JANICE: I care.

TAMMY: You can't trust anything he says.

SHAUNA: What are you trying –

JANICE: (*interrupting*) Richie tells me everything. Everything. We don't have any secrets.

TAMMY: Stupid war.

SHAUNA: Don't say that.

TAMMY: Why not?

JANICE: Richie tells me everything.

TAMMY: You don't know.

SHAUNA: Shut up!

TAMMY: Do you even know what we're doing over there?

JANICE: Why would we go if it wasn't necessary?

SHAUNA: Tammy, I can't believe you. After Tyler –

TAMMY: What about Tyler? Tyler's dead. Dead for nothing and no reason.

JANICE: Don't say that! He fought for us.

TAMMY: Is that what he did? Huh.

SHAUNA: You know he did.

TAMMY: All he did was write about the weather too. If all that's going over there is bad weather, how come guys keep ending up shot to pieces?

JANICE: I'm sorry about Tyler.

TAMMY: Why should you be? Richie's alive. You have someone. For now.

SHAUNA: You better leave. Ok? If you can't say anything nice, just go home.

TAMMY: Fine. (*turns away*)

SHAUNA: Don't pay any attention to her.

JANICE: Why would she say that?

SHAUNA: Forget it.

ROBERT: I love hearing about the weather back home.

SARAH: Mom's upset. She found out you were writing different stuff to Aaron. All the gory details.

BEN: I don't even know if the censors will let this through.

ROBERT: It reminds me what I'm fighting for.

JOHN: I can't read your letters anymore.

MARIE: You never wrote.

SHAUNA: What does Richie say?

JANICE: Ok. (*reading*) Dear Janice. How's it going? I'm sorry I haven't written more. There's never time to sit down and write a proper letter. Vietnam's stinking hot.

RICHIE: (*same time as JANICE*) Vietnam is stinking hot.

JANICE: He's never sweated so much in his whole life.

RICHIE: (*same time as JANICE*) I've never sweated so much in my whole life. It's either humid and dry or humid and wet. Nothing ever gets dry. It rained for five days straight this week. Twenty-four hours a day. I had to sleep in a puddle.

JANICE: And the smell is...

ALL GUYS: The smell of death.

RICHIE: (*he scratches his head*) I can't put that.

SHAUNA: The smell is what?

JANICE: He was gonna write something and he scratched it out.
(*reading*) The smell is pretty rank here, we don't get to shower much. I just had my first after three weeks.

SHAUNA: Eww!

RICHIE: Dear Doug, don't tell Janice any of this ok?

JANICE: He says it's just not home.

RICHIE: She keeps bugging me to write her and I don't know what to say. I can't tell her what's going on here. I can't. I can't tell her how many guys have died beside me. I've seen guys blown to pieces. I can't tell her how I can't sleep and I'm scared all the time.

BEN & MICHAEL: (*same as RICHIE*) I'm scared all the time.

RICHIE: I can't tell her I've killed. What'll she think of me? She'd never understand. After all I've seen, I don't know... I don't even know how I feel about God anymore. How could God be ok with this? How do I tell her that?

LEWIS: Dear God.

BILLY: Dear Mom. Thanks for the fruitcake.

JANICE: (*reading*) Say hi to the whole gang.

BILLY: Please stop sending me fruitcake. I got no room for fruitcake.

JANICE: Maybe you can send me a package, the food stinks here.

LEWIS: Dear God. I don't have anyone else to write to. So I figure I'll write to you. Although, I suppose it's a busy time.

SHAUNA: What else does he say?

JANICE: Not too much. He likes the guys in his platoon. (*she turns the page over looking for more*) Not too much. It's short.

RICHIE: I don't know what to say.

MARIE: I don't know how to tell you this.

HARRIET: Oh I know what to say. Those pompous ridiculous doctors who try to stand in my way. It's a ridiculous notion to keep women away from the wounded. That's what I tell them.

JIM: January 17, 1863.

HARRIET: March 30, 1865.

LEWIS: November 2, 1864.

HARRIET: Who is going care for these boys in this weather? The doctors? Ridiculous.

JIM: Dear Father and Mother. The weather is unbelievable. I've never been so cold. My fingers and my feet, they never seem to get warm. And we've got nothing proper to cover them with. The tents are covered with ice and it seems near impossible to keep warm and dry. I feel like I haven't been warm since I left home. A good many of the men are sick. It's impossible to keep up morale when we are so bound in by the weather. One of the soldiers received a pair of socks and there was almost a brawl to grab them from him. It's not something we approve of. But it keeps them warm. We've even had to cease the drills. We

must make it through this weather. We must. We must keep the purpose of this war at the forefront of our minds.

HARRIET: (*same time as above*) We must keep the purpose of this war at the forefront of our minds.

ROBERT: (*same time as above*) We must keep the purpose of this war at the forefront of our minds.

MICHAEL: (*same time as above*) We must keep the purpose of this war at the forefront of our minds.

DARLA: (*same time as above*) We must keep the purpose of this war at the forefront of our minds.

JIM: As you are well aware, we are here for such great purpose. (*he sighs*) But warmth and purpose seem to be constantly locked in battle. I'm not sure who's winning. It's not easy, but war never is. War is not supposed to be easy. I am well and in good health besides.

LEWIS: I got a lot of time to write. I'm not doing well, God.

JIM: Your son, Jim.

LEWIS: I'm laid up with gunshot all through me.

ELSIE: I'm at a Casualty Clearing Station.

RICHIE: My Sergeant lost both his legs.

LEWIS: I decided against counting the holes.

MICHAEL: I should have been the one caught by a bullet.

BEN: A guy is standing there one second and in pieces the next.

JOHN: I'm not the same person anymore.

LEWIS: The nurses keep looking at me and shaking their heads. Lots of time to think while I'm lying here.

HARRIET: Who will stand for the wounded?

LEWIS: There is the sight and sound and smell of death all around me.

ELSIE: (*same time as LEWIS*) There is the sight and sound and smell of death all around me.

HARRIET: For every unsure step in this war and there is so much I am unsure about, being here is not one of them. Who is going to care for these poor souls? Keep the women from the wounded. Ridiculous!

LEWIS: I smell death all the time.

RICHIE: (*same time as above*) I smell death all the time.

JOHN: (*same time as above*) I smell death all the time.

LEWIS: Occasionally it drifts across the room and I know someone has lost their fight.

HARRIET: Will the doctors change their bedding? Write their letters? Talk to them?

LEWIS: Occasionally the smell comes from me.

HARRIET: Who's going to pay attention to the deplorable conditions?

LEWIS: It's a smell that will never leave my skin for the rest of my life.

HARRIET: Who will comfort the dying? Who will absorb the groans and cries?

LEWIS: My, ah, long life.

HARRIET: The moaning hangs in the air like a cloud.

LEWIS: I have to believe I'm going to be around for a long time God. I have to believe I will live through this. I must have hope. I must believe that there was a means to this end.

HARRIET: Some feel it is improper for me to be here. To hell with them!

LEWIS: I don't suppose you'd give me a hint, God?

HARRIET: I apologize for the language, Eunice. I don't mean to upset you.

MICHAEL, JOHN & MARIE: I don't want to upset you.

HARRIET: But I feel very strongly about this. There is no other place I should be.

LEWIS: And yet, I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of dying. How is that possible? So many nights on the field shaking in my boots. God? Are you listening?

HARRIET: I will stand by my boys until there is not one of them left. Woe to the person who tempts to remove me from my post.

MEGAN, KRISTIN & IRIS: Dear Private Martin.

HARRIET: Yours, Harriet.

KRISTIN: What's Iraq like?

JOHN: Dear Katie. (*he clears his throat*) Katie.

MEGAN: Is it like they say on TV?

KRISTIN: Is it really hot?

JOHN: I got your letter. Your letters. All of them. I –

DARLA: February 20, 2005. Hi Scott. Your father and I were so glad to hear from you. We've been thinking about you so much. We're so worried, we watch the TV and every day there's more information.

JOHN: I can't write you anymore.

DARLA: Sometimes I wish I didn't know so much. I wish there was less information. Your father spends hours and hours on the Internet some nights. And then he doesn't sleep. It's hard to sleep for both of us. There are some things... sometimes I think it would be better not to know. I just don't want to know.

CALEB: Do you want to know what really scares me?

DARLA: I'm sorry. I shouldn't say that. I shouldn't think...

JANICE: Richie wouldn't lie to me, would he?

SHAUNA: Never.

DARLA: You got much more to worry about than we do. We know you believe in what you're doing. And we believe in you. And that's all there is to it, right? Know we're thinking of you and praying for you.

CALEB: It ain't the Germans. I never seen one, not up close anyway. Hard to get all bunched up over a guy I don't know. (*he goes wide-eyed*) Don't tell anyone I said that. I'm 'posed to hate the Germans. Shoot! I guess I do. I'm told they've done some really bad things. And I ain't really scared of getting shot. I figure it's gonna happen or it's not. If I do my job, I won't get shot. If some Kraut does his, maybe I *will* get shot. I'm not scared of being in the trenches even though lots 'a guys die in 'em. There's a lot of dead guys around, Charlie. I hate that they just leave 'em where they fall. They should be buried proper-like. I heard some guy died 'a drowning in the trenches! It rains a lot in France. I'm glad I don't live here all the time. All the guys are always griping about the mud. That it comes up to their knees! Ain't no different than trying to wrassle the pigs. The smell's a lot worse though, I guess. Do you want to know what really scares me? (*with wide eyes*) It's the rats. There's some mighty big rats in France, Charlie! They're all over the trenches. They run over your feet. They run up your legs, they run over your face if you're lying down. You think the ones in the barns are big? These French rats could eat our barn rats for breakfast. They could eat our rats with one paw tied behind their backs. They're huge and they eat everything in sight. Everything. I can't sleep when I'm on trench duty 'cause a them gosh darn rats. They'd eat a fellow's eyes out o' their head if a fellow wasn't using them. I need my eyes! I don't want to wake up with a rat on my face and missing my eyes. (*he shudders*) Rats!

HARRIET: Men. What fools.

JOHN: I can't pretend everything is all right, that everything is going to go back to normal when I come home. If I come home.

DARLA: We can't wait for you to come home.

JOHN: I can't read your letters about school, going to the movies and the weather anymore. All of it's nothing.

DARLA: We know you're coming home.

JOHN: I'm not the same person.

LEWIS: (*same time as above*) I'm not the same person.

MICHAEL: (*same time as above*) I'm not the same person.

HARRIET: (*same time as above*) I'm not the same person.

JIM: (*same time as above*) I'm not the same person.

JOHN: None of us. Not after what we've seen. What we've done.
There is no same anymore. There is no morning or night, no hour or second. Half the time I don't know where I am, what day it is, what time. I only know one thing and I only do one thing.

RICHIE: I can't tell Janice. What'll she think of me?

MARIE: July 1st, 1953. Dear Adam.

JOHN: I don't know what I'll be when this is all over.

MARIE: This is a letter you're not going to expect but I have to write. I have to tell you before your mom or your sister... Promise me you won't hate me? I know it's a silly thing to say. It's just, it's been so long, Adam. I know we made some promises when you left. You never wrote me Adam.

JOHN: But I do know I can't pretend anymore. With you. About us. I'm sorry but this will be my last letter. John.

MARIE: And, I wish I didn't have to do this in a letter, but you're not here. I guess that's the problem. You're not here. And you said you would write every day but you never have. I know I said I would wait. I said I would wait forever. But – I sound so awful. There's no other way to say it. (*she takes a deep breath*) I'm engaged. To Chris Owen.

MEGAN: Is it hot?

KRISTIN: Is it scary?

MARIE: I'm sorry Adam. I've enclosed the ring in this letter.

MEGAN: Do you have to eat weird food like the astronauts do?

KRISTIN: Do all the soldiers have to sleep in the same room?



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