

## Shared Stories of the Civil War: Tips for Writing A Reader's Theater Script

1. The most compelling scripts are story-based. This means the action is not necessarily chronological, but is episodic – similar to the structure of a good book or film. A significant event, or series of events, is easier to craft into a story than a general theme or “idea.”
2. This is a Shared Stories project, which means it is important to choose a topic that has impact or resonance in more than one Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area community. These are stories that bind the group together and help make sense of the complexity of the Border War and Civil War time periods.
3. Differences of opinion and perspective – handled diplomatically – are critical to a script's success for at least two reasons:
  - It more closely reflects the tension of the time period.
  - The story becomes more compelling for the audience.
4. Credible primary sources, like diaries, personal letters, or newspapers should be the core of the script. However, credible secondary sources are also acceptable.
5. The role of the narrator in the script is critical. This “voice” moves the story along, summarizes key points, and condenses complicated details. Unlike the actual quotes that voice opinion and perspective, the narrator remains neutral and is not editorial.
6. Reader's theater scripts are read out loud. Sometimes audience members will have copies of the scripts, sometimes not. Be sure that the quotes used are listener-friendly and that the length of the script is between 10 -12 pages long.
7. Creating a 1-2 page introductory essay that “sets the stage” will prepare both the participants and the readers for the script itself.
8. The humanities questions posed at the conclusion of the introductory essay help elevate the discussion beyond basic facts and into a conversation about why this matters.
9. The topics of the Shared Stories project can be controversial. This is why every historical quote used in the script *must* be:
  - Accessible to the general public either from a credible online source or easily located book or publication.
  - Listed on a separate citation page. The citation page is intended to be made available as a take home handout at all Shared Stories events so that participants can see for themselves where the reference came from.
10. Once something is in writing, it is assumed that the material is authentic, accurate, and fact-based. Asking at least one historian to review the reader's theater script before “going live” is strongly, *strongly* encouraged.