

# 12 Tips for Teachers Who Need Free Supplies

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Teachers LOVE Readers Theater. Students LOVE Readers Theater. But, oftentimes teachers stretch their budgets to provide enough Readers Theater scripts for their students. While some teachers have **Readers Theater "loaning libraries"** and others have **Readers Theater centers** that only require a few scripts, a few teachers have been asking recently for full-class Readers Theater scripts.

This school year (2013-2014) several teachers in our caring community have mentioned the challenge of getting enough copy paper to print the needed Readers Theater scripts. One teacher I talked with recently said she has six classes of 30 inner-city students each. And, her students want more Readers Theater opportunities. Wow! Now, I have a new writing challenge. But, our teachers have a printing challenge.

So, here are a dozen tips for teachers who need free supplies—including copy paper for printing Readers Theater scripts and optional script covers.

## 1. Free Cycle (non-profit)

Although I haven't used [FreeCycle.org](http://FreeCycle.org), it comes highly recommended locally as a source of free goodies. With over 7,174,407 members worldwide, here's your opportunity to GIVE as well as RECEIVE free stuff. Basically, people in a specific geographic area donate items in order to keep them out of the landfill. You may not find copy paper here, but you certainly may find other fun items for your class or drama club. Think about costumes, props, puppets, furniture, technology, notebooks, and more. Maybe you'll even find a treasure for your home?

## 2. Donors Choose (non-profit)

I first heard about [DonorsChoose.org](http://DonorsChoose.org) through Laura Candler's Teaching Resources Facebook page. (Laura is a wonderful and generous teacher who really cares about other teachers.) I was impressed that teachers could use this organization to receive funding for their "pet projects."

**One teacher wanted a listening center to use with her Readers Theater scripts.** She was thrilled when it was **fully funded** by donors "choosing" to fund her project.

I believe you have to "market" your project. Yet, since Donors Choose is a non-profit, you may have more credibility with people who do not know you or who do not live in your area. DonorsChoose.org rates well with the unbiased [Charity Navigator](http://Charity Navigator).

## 3. Box Tops for Education

"Since 1996, the [Box Tops for Education](http://BoxTopsforEducation) program has helped schools across America earn cash for the things they need." Apparently there are hundreds of products with little pink Box Top coupons on top of them. Each coupon is worth 10¢ for you school. Each "eligible school" participating in the program may earn up to \$20,000 cash per year from the Clip program (products list online). BONUS: Box Tops for Education has partnered with hundreds of **online retailers** (e.g., Walmart, Expedia, Lands' End...) so **schools can earn cash for online purchases with eBoxTops credits**. Plus, they offer periodic sweepstakes, give-aways, and opportunities to earn cash for the school.

Although this is a FREE program, I didn't see anything specifically for individual teachers and their classrooms. However, perhaps you could be a catalyst for your school to participate in the program? Then, your students should be able to benefit from the rewards, too.

Their current "Success Stories" list some teachers as Coordinators. One band teacher got his principal's approval and started the program to purchase new instruments. **He got the community involved—including the local newspaper.** He expects to raise enough money to buy new band instruments because of the community support.

It appears this program is sponsored by General Mills because of the General Mills name in the footer of the website. (That probably means the pink coupons are on General Mills products—which may NOT be the healthiest choices.) The eBoxTops program appears to have many sponsors who don't sell General Mills products.

Here are some "[Success Stories](http://Success Stories)" of schools helped by this program. You may find out more information on their [FAQs page](http://FAQs page). It may take a little time, but perhaps a parent or a team of teachers could coordinate the program so everyone wins?

## 4. Adopt-A-Classroom (non-profit)

[Adopt-A-Classroom](http://Adopt-A-Classroom) allows teachers to partner with donors to get classroom resources they need. Since **100% of donor contributions go directly to the classroom, donors may be more motivated to give.** Teachers register their classrooms online.

Adopt-A-Classroom says they work hard to try to find classroom donors, but the money comes in faster when teachers use resources to inform their communities. An individual, business, or organization may choose to support specific teachers and their classrooms. According to their website today they have 156,827 teachers registered and have raised over \$21 million dollars.

Once donors have contributed funds "the teacher uses the credit to shop online from a network of affiliate vendors...If the teacher is unable to meet classroom needs with the affiliate vendors, Adopt-A-Classroom will work with the teacher on a one-to-one basis."

Unfortunately, I could only find [one review of the program](#). However, they have appeared in numerous publications and are rated well on the unbiased [Charity Navigator](#). Since they have partnered with several corporate partners (e.g., OfficeMax, Office Depot, eBay, Google, Ford...), they appear very credible. Apparently they established an "after disaster program" to help schools after tornados, hurricanes, school fires and other disasters.

## 5. Office Depot's "A Day Made Better" Program (October)

OfficeMax has surprised thousands of teachers with their "A Day Made Better Program—Working to Erase Teacher-Funded Classrooms." They surprised 1,000 teachers in their classrooms with \$1,000 each worth of school supplies. Now, in 2015, it seems Office Depot has taken over the program.

According to the Office Depot Foundation website schools, libraries, government agencies, and non-profits can [apply online for grants from \\$50 to \\$3000](#) (rare). You may submit one application per calendar year. Applications accepted **October 1st**.

Think about all the Readers Theater scripts that could be printed and put in folders to reuse year after year! :) Or, get special journals for students to write their own Readers Theater! And, you could also get a camera to take photos of the students performing. (Other technology items for podcasting, creating video, etc. may also be available. See #8 below for ideas.)

In the old program OfficeMax partnered with Adopt-A-Classroom. That does not appear to be true now in 2015.

## 6. Kids in Need Foundation (non-profit) (July)

[The Kids in Need Foundation](#) used to partners with OfficeMax to provide free school supplies to students and teachers through their network. Now, in 2015, they appear to be partnering with Elmers and JoAnn's Fabric and Craft Stores. The [grant application process](#) starts **July 15th** in 2015 (ends September 30th).

In 2014 they appeared to have **Elmer's Teacher Toolkit grants** for more than 1200 projects listed on their website. The grants are based on financial need, description of the project, and the number of students who will benefit from the project. They give special consideration to first year teachers and to projects that include a community service component.

In 2014 I did a quick survey of their project titles for students grades K-8. In the Reading area they included the following options that could overlap Readers Theater:

- "Practice with Puppets Makes Proficient!" (grade 1—speaking skills in a target language) Page 2 of the PDF states that "students can use the puppets during class activities in a variety of ways, including short skits and presentations." Use Readers Theater scripts. Record the readings. Play the audio for a puppet theater. Or let one group of students read the script while another group acts out the script with puppets for a video. If you use paper puppets, you could video a "paper slide Readers Theater" on a table.
- "Keep a Poem in Your Pocket!" (grades 1-3) This is a year-long poetry project that includes reading poems aloud. Tah-dah! Readers Theater! Although the students may read an entire poem aloud—especially an original one—Poet Partners may take turn reading lines dramatically.
- "Children's Book Read Aloud" (grades 4-8) Students write, illustrate, publish, and read aloud an original children's book. Encourage them to use dialogue and you may have a Readers Theater script adaptation they can perform for a younger class. It's so much more fun and engaging!
- "Kids' Print Shop" (grade 5+) "Students print and publish books they have written for other students to borrow from the school library." (See idea above with the "Children's Book Read Aloud.") Another option is to have the book be in script form, creating a classroom library of original Readers Theater scripts.
- "Arts and Craft of Story Telling" (grades 6-8, adaptable for grades 3-5) Tall Tales form the basis of this project for ELL students. Why not use some Readers Theater tall tales? In fact, in the culminating activity for this project students create original tall tales that are recorded. Record them Readers Theater style and you could have Radio Theater. Record them Readers Theater style with paper slide illustrations and you have a special video to share with parents and friends.
- "Painting Poetry: Responding Visually to Adolescent Poetry and Publishing Our Own" (grade 7, but adaptable to grades 2-8) Students write and illustrate original poems. The

culminating activity is the "publication and oral reading of poems." Reading poems orally may be enhanced with Partner Poems read Readers Theater style.

- "Creating Books of Original Writing" (grade 6, adaptable to grades 1-8) "Students work on creative writing, expository poetry, and other original writings." The culminating activity could easily include original Readers Theater scripts performed for the parents. That would cover more skills and be more fun for everyone.
- "Reading Fluency" (grade 8, but adaptable to grades 2-8) Students read orally, recording a collection of audio books for younger readers. Record them Readers Theater style and you could have Radio Theater. Record them Readers Theater style with paper slide illustrations and you have a special video to share with parents and friends.
- "[Expression in Reading](#)" (grade 6, but adaptable to grades K-8) "Students enjoy reader's theater and are motivated to improve reading fluency and expression." Yahoo! Readers Theater wins again.

According to [Charity Navigator](#) Kids in Need Foundation rates 3 (out of 4) stars currently.

## 7. Digital Wish (non-profit)

"[Digital Wish](#) is on a Mission to Solve Technology Shortfalls in Classrooms!" Digital Wish helps teachers get new technology for their classrooms and enhance learning. Started in 2007 and gaining non-profit status in 2008, **Digital Wish receives grant money and donations to help teachers with technology wishes.** They have granted over 31,000 wishes, placing \$12 million dollars in technology for teachers—over 24,000 teachers and over 10,956 schools.

UPDATE 2015: The 31,000 number of wishes granted still looks the same; however, they have some 2015 updates listed (one in June includes Dell), so I assume they're still helping teachers.

Teachers who receive donations to their Digital Wish accounts purchase the technology items they need most for their students. The items are shipped to the school.

What does technology have to do with Readers Theater? That could be a full article! Here are a few ideas:

- Reading Readers Theater from a tablet or monitor screen
- Reading Readers Theater projected on a wall or screen
- Writing Readers Theater on a computer
- Creating videos of Readers Theater scripts (e.g., paper slides)
- Illustrating Readers Theater books
- Podcasting Readers Theater scripts (See their grants page linked below.)
- Presenting Readers Theater to another class in a different location via Skype.

In 2014 and 2015 several grants appear on their [grants page](#) (e.g., podcasting, vocabulary and humor...), with links to other grants in English/Language Arts, General Education, Foreign Language and more. **Someone deserves to win a grant. Why not you?**

(NOTE: [Charity Navigator](#) has not evaluated Digital Wish yet, but they are listed with information for 2008-2012 so far.)

## 8. School Supplies or Copy Paper Drive

Partner with a business for donations (e.g., grocery store, office supply store, local tutoring service, copy shops, Wal-Mart, Target) or your school PTA or PTO (parent-teacher organization).

One business owner in Pennsylvania organized a **school-supplies drive** locally. "She sent flyers and email to parents, and her daughter posted the event on Facebook." Pencils, notebooks, gloves, coats, and backpacks were all donated to local schools because one woman cared enough to get the community involved.

I assume there were donation boxes set up for this, but the article doesn't say. Perhaps you have an advocate in YOUR life who would be willing to organize a "copy-paper" drive? Use school letterhead to aid credibility. (Thanks to [Edutopia](#) for sharing this story.)

## 9. Sponsored Advertising

In this CNN article "[Cash-strapped teacher sells ads on tests](#)" a high school AP calculus teacher found he didn't have enough funds to pay for all the copy paper he needed for tests. So, he presented the idea to parents at **back-to-school night**. For checks made out to the math department they could insert **inspirational words, quotes, or a business advertisement** at the bottom of the first page of a test or quizz. Some buyers paid more than required and the teacher expected to exceed his goal. (NOTE: Some districts may

not allow businesses to advertise.)

## 10. Local Community Partners

Partner with **local clubs, churches, or other organizations** for donations. (Some people would prefer to donate items rather than money because they know they can get a good deal on a ream or case of paper and other supplies.)

The National Education Association's article "[Finding it for Free—Savvy educators' tips on scoring non-cost classroom resources](#)" tells a few encouraging stories of teachers getting free supplies (not counting recycling). Although not all the links and tips in the article work today, the stories are still valid. Here's one:

Fifth-grade teacher Patricia Shirley had her class field trips funded by a river education organization. Plus, they provided educational materials for her lesson plans. Churches and community groups also helped "purchase classroom supplies and donated backpacks for needy children."

Since Readers Theater fits in almost every subject area asking for copy paper for scripts is appropriate anytime. Shirley suggests, "**If they say 'no,' follow with the question, 'do you know anyone who could help with this?' You never know where your need will be met.**"

WARNING: If you read the whole article you'll read about a teacher who recycled old dryer sheets to use as white board erasers. Dryer sheets typically contain toxic chemicals and fragrances that neither you nor your students should be exposed to regularly. There may or may not be an acute reaction in your students (e.g., behavior, skin, breathing...). But, the long-term result puts another toxic load on a guinea pig generation. I know. Years ago dryer sheets sent me "overboard" into the nightmare of Environmental Illness. But, that's another story.

## 11. Rebates

Watch Staples and Office Depot (or other office stores near you) for easy rebates—especially during "Back to School" season. Just make sure you remember to send the rebate in so you get your money! :)

For example, "[We Are Teachers](#)" showcases a variety of information, resources, grants & contests—including "Daily Deals for Educators." In June of 2013 on their Deal Finder page I found "Free Ream of Copy Paper at Staples Stores."

We Are Teachers partners with major businesses including ING, Learning A-Z, McGraw-Hill, Disney Educational Productions, HP Academy, TIME for Kids, several universities and more to help and inspire teachers.

Consider signing up for [Daily Deals for Educators on their Deal Finder Blog](#). They do the work to share with you the best deals. But, recognize some of the deals may have nothing to do with your specific needs. You may want to check local or online office store ads. However, to save time, if all you want is copy paper for printing Readers Theater scripts, **talk to your local office store manager. You may get an immediate donation** because your students are important to your community!

**Rabbit Trail** = We Are Teacher's article: "[Teacher Helpline: How Can Teachers Make Extra Money?](#)" No one mentioned teaching "cottage courses" in a home (e.g., drama club, Readers Theater Club). Homeschoolers love these special groups and will often invite their friends for you. :) Make sure you have at least one performance. Let those students shine!

## 12. Student Family Donations

Ask students to donate a ream of paper at the beginning of the year, if they can. Oftentimes parents want to help. They just don't know how. Make it easy for them. Several Readers Theater performances will reward them! You may even share performance videos online (e.g., podcasting, Radio Theater, paper slide Readers Theater).

Readers Theater is worth the time and the energy to build leaders and creators in future generations. With over 52 benefits, Readers Theater integrates learning—perfect for teachers who struggle with the Common Core or other required standards of learning. And, [Readers Theater All Year\(TM\)](#) simplifies your success.

## 13. BONUS: Target Grants (especially field trips)

Target likes to give 5% of their profit to local communities. Although they say they have "education grants," they seem to focus on funding field trips. Here is Target's page on [Grants FAQs](#)

## 2014 WARNINGS & UPDATES:

1. Reviews of **ClassWish.org (non-profit)** indicate this organization MAY be "sketchy." They are not listed on Charity Navigator's site. Do your own research before signing up with them.

2. **ILoveSchools.com** and **SupplyOurSchools** do not seem to be currently available even though you will find them mentioned in online articles.

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### Related Articles:

[The Rooster and the Fox \(R=4.2\)](#)

[Come to My House \(R = K, 1\)](#)

[Nox and Fox \(R = K, 1\)](#)

[Pretend Play for Columbus Day \(R = 4.4\)](#)

[Friends at Bat \(R = 0.8\)](#)

[Pals at Bat \(R = 0.0\)](#)

[Leaf Maze \(1.5, 0.4\)](#)

[Amos Root's Eyewitness Account of the Wright Brothers' Flight \(R = 6.5\)](#)

[Fly a Bike? \(R = 3.4, 2.7\)](#)

[Back-to-School Team vs. Salamander Sly \(R = 2.3\)](#)

[Fuzzy, Pal, and Darrel \(Part II\) \(R = 2.8\)](#)

Readers Theater All Year™ LLC builds leaders and creators for positive influence through an inexpensive, easy, flexible system. Readers Theater All Year™ LLC curriculum services provides a caring community for using and creating Readers Theater scripts for families, classrooms, homeschools, camps, and drama clubs.

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