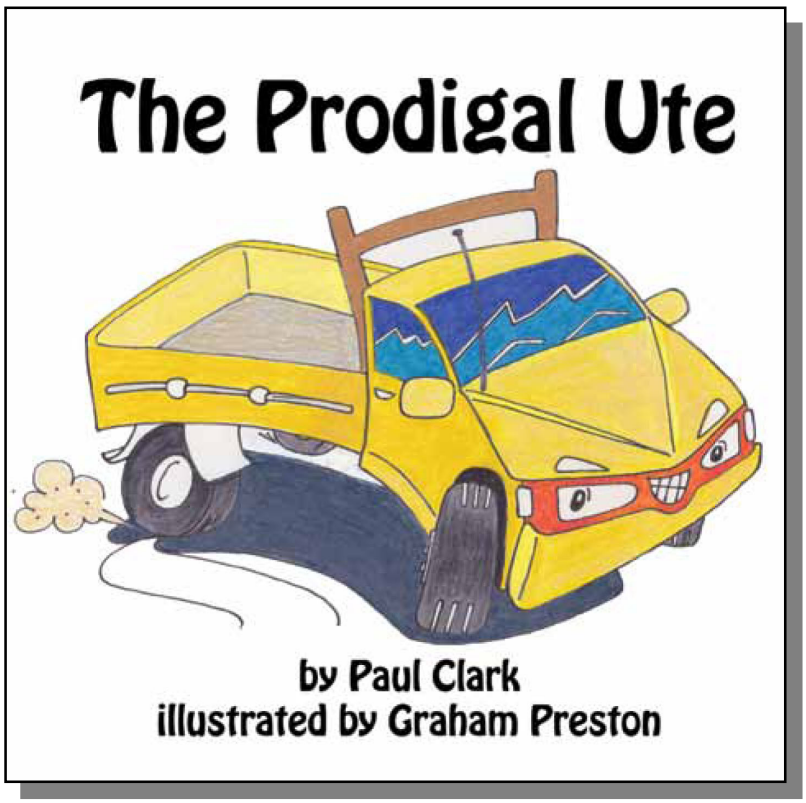
Car Park Parables®



The Prodigal Ute

Using *The Prodigal Ute* in English, Drama & Art to improve literacy.

By Paul Clark

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Why Reader's Theatre?

Numerous studies show the power of 'Reader's Theatre' [The practice of reading a text dramatically in a group setting] to improve children's literacy[1]. Despite the continual mountain of educational research lauding this practice, few teachers actively engage in the activity. Perhaps it is because it is fun, children enjoy it and anything students like is perceived as not being beneficial; only vegetables can be good for you. Plus such jovial classroom pursuits may harm a teacher's reputation as a serious educator.

But not only is Reader's Theatre fun, engaging for students and easy to prepare for teachers, it comes with a swag of educational benefits at is gives students a reason to read out loud and to practice with purpose.

Reader's Theatre allows a child to become familiar and confident with a text as it involves reading a text many times. This practice develops a child's comprehension as texts are read with great emphasis on the obvious and subtler emotions, feelings and meanings in the text. Reader's Theatre thus improves a student's oral reading ability, fluency, expression and their listening skills – often without them realising it. Students also love it, can learn from others and develop a shared sense of a text, encouraging and laughing with one another.

As one who runs a weekly drama group in my church, I have personally seen the benefits of reader's theatre for both struggling and confident readers. Struggling readers have a reason to read, and quickly learn to understand a text so they can put the right characterisation into their reading. Confident readers understand more and more of the nuances of a story as they work at developing their character. This builds comprehension skills at deeper and deeper levels.

You can even have mixed ability groups as advanced readers take major parts, and struggling readers more minor roles, yet each discover that the stars don't shine unless there is a competent 'chorus' behind them. This also means that struggling readers can see and learn from advanced readers and advanced readers learn to encourage the struggling. Once you add performance to the mix, the level of development of confidence for public speaking and leadership is unlimited.

The ***Car Park Parable*** books lend themselves to this form of literary education. They are short, witty stories, with many characters, yet with a depth of meaning that can be mined for many gems being based on the parables of Jesus. They are designed to be 'hammed' up as each character is an exaggeration, and they can be read at many different levels.

You can use the below for a few English lessons, or integrate it to incorporate drama elements and your Christian living content. I'm sure once you start you won't be able to get your students to stop – good thing there are a number of ***Car Park Parable*** stories available!

At ***Car Park Parables*** we are trying to build a resource where children can grow with characters that become mentors and companions on life's journey of faith. So, look out for more resource from ***Car Park Parables*** coming out all the time.

www.carparkparables.com

[1] Google 'the power of readers theatre'.

Outline of Activities

The below provides an outline of activities and advanced options for the classroom teacher to develop their own program from. For the development of the Christian Themes in this book, download the document 'Teaching Notes for The Prodigal Ute' from the **www.carparkparables.com** website. The book, 'The Prodigal Ute' can be sourced from good Christian bookstores or from the above website.

Activity 1.

Introduce the class to the story, 'The Prodigal Ute' by reading it to them in a relaxed setting. It is a good idea to practice beforehand, and to also decide if you will try voice characterisations during the story. While this can greatly enhance the children's enjoyment of the story, it is difficult to master as there are a number of characters in the story of both gender; it is easy to 'run out' of voices. You could concentrate on just the few main characters to try to voice and read the others with your 'normal' voice.

Take your time over the story and try to identify the cars in the pictures[2] to their names by pointing so the children can quickly visualise each car [this helps with characterisation.]

After you finish reading the story enter into a general discussion with the children about what they liked about the story. Tell them you will be concentrating on this story for a few lessons, and getting the kids to be the voices.

Give time for the kids to explore the book itself, hands on. [For class sets of the book, visit www.carparkparables.com and make enquiries.]

Options

- The DVD version of this story was released in 2009 [*Old Mr T and Friends*] and is available from the website. While the DVD uses different images than the book version, the text is basically the same. The advantage of the DVD version is that voice characterisations are done for you so you don't have to stress about trying to voice 8 different cars! It contains 5 stories that can be used elsewhere in your curriculum.
- You could make this a whole class activity, or consider having each reading group as a group that will do Readers Theatre on this book, OR give each reading group a different ***Car Park Parable*** story. That way each group can perform for the others. This will generate a sense of community within each group and healthy competition between groups. Outlines like this are available from the website for the other stories.
- If you are planning on performing the story as a drama at a later date [or in a technological way], talk about this to help get buy-in from the students.

[2] Power-point versions of the stories can be downloaded from the website for projection by smart-boards and the like for larger group presentations.

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Activity 2.

Now that the children are familiar with the story hand out the 'Characters in the story' sheet [next page]. Give them a moment to look through and explore this sheet. Read it through with them. Ask questions about which car they most like, or are most like? They could colour in the pictures taking their colour cues from the book.

Next hand out the text, which has been prepared as a drama [following pages]. There are two versions, one that assumes a large group, and the other that assumes a smaller group. Feel free to modify to best fit your group size.

Now give the students parts. Choose the more confident readers for the bigger parts [The 'Players' in the drama are listed from most lines to least]. Explain that we will be changing parts a few times over the course of this unit so they won't feel like they have missed out if they get a small part. This is actually a good thing to do to get the students exploring the story from different angles.

Once students have their part, get them to highlight their lines. This gives them a chance to become familiar with the text, and pre-read what they have to read aloud in a few minutes, helping to allay any fears they may have.

> *Some students may feel anxiety at the prospect of having to read aloud in class. This is no reason to allow them not to participate. Such students need to be encouraged to face such fears as communication is a vital part of our human existence. Ensure they have a small part, and this will allow them to grow in confidence. If a student exhibits an extreme aversion to public reading, more specialist help may be required.*

Read the script through, at least twice. The first time so the students can become familiar with the text, the second time so they can enjoy the story, as it will flow with more fluency upon each reading. You could make good on your promise and have students swap scripts [characters] for a third reading. Depending on your sense of momentum, continue to read the script through – each time encouraging the students to become more in tune with their character, trying to let their emotions be heard through their voices.

Options

- Depending on your reading group, the actual reading could be done in reading/small groups with little supervision. As a teacher you could sit in on each group as they read through and encourage them to become more dramatic in their reading.
- As an **Art** activity, after this lesson the students could make their own 'masks' for their character that turns them into a car. Students could make their car character from a cardboard box, or simply have a go at drawing their character of a scene from the story. Student's that are reading parts like the narrator can choose a car character fot this activity. Such masks could be used in a later performance.
- Some cars are not on the character sheet [those in the story told by Old Mr T]. As en extension students could add those cars to the character sheet, deducing their characteristics!

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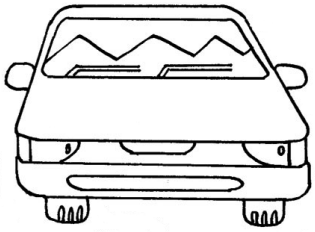
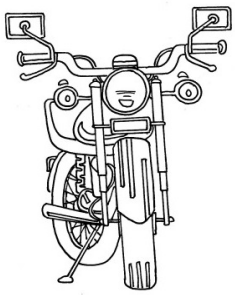
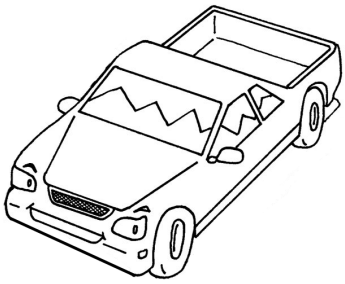
Introducing the Characters.



Frieda the Family Car
Friendly, loves family, children, safe, dependable, quiet.



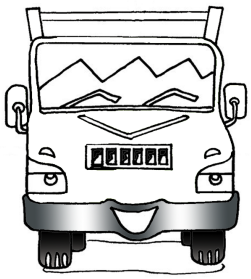
Muscles the Motorcycle
Inquisitive, thinking asks questions, intuition.



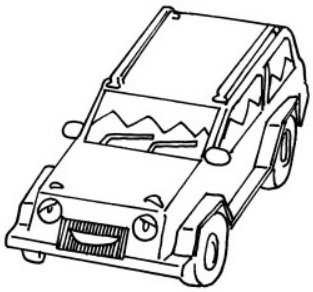
Hot Headed Harry
Fast, impulsive, likes to tease, red-blooded, real man!

Luxurious Lucy
Polite, posh, proper.
Always does what is right.

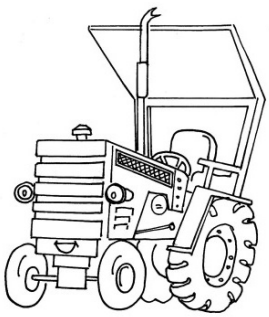
Old Mr T
Old, wise, thoughtful, patient, humble, cautious.



Trevor Truck
Class clown, hard working, simple, caring, happy!



Impossible Issi
Rebellious, rambunctious, sceptical, courageous.



Tony Tractor
Caring, insightful, thoughtful, gentle, bold, slow.

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THE PRODIGAL UTE

A ***Car Park Parable*** by Paul Clark – dramatised large group.

PLAYERS: Mr T Narrator Trevor Lucy Ute Owner Muscles Expensive Frieda

Narrator: Today the cars were earlier to that little church in West-Brooke than they had ever been before. Last week Old Mr T. had captured their imaginations; he had told them a story of Jesus, but with cars in it. They couldn't wait to hear this week's story. Well, that was until Trevor Truck parked next to Luxurious Lucy.

It wasn't that Lucy didn't like Trevor. It's just that being such a luxurious car she only likes certain things. The smell of pig-poo is not one of them! Lucy looked down her bonnet at Trevor.

Lucy: Oh dear, what is that smell?

Narrator: Trevor Truck, fresh from a visit to the sale yards, did not know what she meant.

Trevor: What smell?

Lucy: The pig-pong coming from your tray. It smells like you haven't washed for a week!

Trevor: I get a wash whenever I go out in the rain. Don't you like the smell of someone who works for a living?

Narrator: Lucy was always very politely rude…

Lucy: I must say, coming to worship God, one must be at one's best. I'm not sure even God is ready for such an, er, strong smell!

Trevor: Smell do I? At least I don't wear perfume to pretend to be perfect!

Narrator: Before Lucy could get another word in, Old Mr T. managed to change the subject,

Mr T: Are you all ready for today's story?

Narrator: Frieda the Family car was keen to hear the story, and stop the fighting,

Frieda: Tell us Mr T.

Narrator: Luxurious Lucy couldn't help but add one last insult,

Lucy: Yes, it might take my mind off the rather foul smell coming from a stinky truck parked in this car park!

Narrator: Trevor Truck just growled, and although he didn't show it, he began to wonder if he really was too dirty for God. Maybe God didn't want him to park there. Perhaps Lucy was right; God only liked clean cars.

That's when Old Mr T. began...

Mr T: Once there was a man who owned two cars. The first car, an expensive one, he drove to town and special events. The other car, a utility, he drove to work and play. The ute grew tired of only being driven to work,

Ute: My owner doesn't like me.

Mr T: He had heard about the big city, mud trials and street racing. He thought all that sounded much more exciting than life here on the farm. So one night, when a robber came by, he made sure that he was unlocked...

The robber drove him to the city, faster than the speed limit, and without a seat belt on! The ute was very excited. In the city he got to do all the things he had

ever dreamed of; drag racing, burn-outs and screechies. He was having so much fun!

Soon enough, the ute had forgotten all about his old owner - and the road rules! He went through red lights and bumped into another car and didn't stop. But suddenly he wasn't so new anymore. His tyres were bald and his paint job was fading.

He was left on the street to rust in the rain. He thought of his old owner and how he had looked after him. How he wished he could go home and say sorry. He would be happy as a simple farm ute for his owner now. How he missed those old days.

Then one dark day he was hooked up to a tow-truck and taken away. He realized that he was headed for the wrecking yard! He prayed for one last chance as tears formed on his headlights.

As he gave up hope, he suddenly realised he was being towed through his old home town. He felt sick in his sump.

You would have hardly believed it though; that day his owner was out looking down the highway on the impossible chance that his ute might happen to come by. He was so thrilled that he raced out into the middle of the street and stopped that tow-truck.

He paid the tow-truck driver twice what the ute was worth. He took him home and began to knock off all the dirt and straighten all the dents.

The ute nervously began to say sorry for all that he had done, but the owner wasn't listening, he was already ordering new parts! That day his owner was so happy that he drove the ute to town for a special car wash to celebrate!

When they got home the expensive car was furious!

Expensive: I can't believe this! I've been your faithful car for years and years. Always on time and ready to go, always looking and smelling my best! But this ute of yours - who was always moaning and groaning - returns dirty and dinted, soiled and smelly, and you drive him to town!

Owner: You have been my faithful runabout for many years, and you'll always be special to me. But this ute of ours was lost, and now he is found. He was broken, but we can fix him. We have to celebrate, we have to celebrate!

Narrator: There was a long time of silence after Old Mr T. had finished telling the story. All of the cars were moved by the love of the owner, but none more than Trevor Truck and Luxurious Lucy. Now Trevor knew that God didn't mind if he got to church dirty, as long as he got there. Lucy knew it too.

Lucy looked at Trevor and hesitated,

Lucy: I, I, I've got something to say to you Trevor, and that thing is... sorry.

Trevor: I'm sorry too Lucy.

Narrator: Muscles the Motorcycle had a great idea,

Muscles: I think we all need to celebrate!

Narrator: Everyone smiled. That was an excellent idea!

Wouldn't you know it, that day after worship they all went off to a church picnic, where a great time was had by all!

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THE PRODIGAL UTE [v2]

A ***Car Park Parable*** by Paul Clark – dramatised smaller group.

PLAYERS: Mr T Narrator Trevor Lucy Ute Owner Expensive Frieda

Narrator: Today the cars were earlier to that little church in West-Brooke than they had ever been before. Last week Old Mr T. had captured their imaginations; he had told them a story of Jesus, but with cars in it. They couldn't wait to hear this week's story. Well, that was until Trevor Truck parked next to Luxurious Lucy.

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Narrator: Everyone smiled. That was an excellent idea!

Wouldn't you know it, that day after worship they all went off to a church picnic, where a great time was had by all!

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Activity 3.

Turn students' attention back to the 'Characters in the story' sheet. This time have students look at their character and try to develop a voice for their car. Developing voices requires a student to let go of inhibitions and have fun. They also need to exaggerate the qualities they see in the car, perhaps find a 'catch phrase' that exemplifies the character that lends itself to a voice of accent. Let the kids go wild and have some fun. Remind them it's not about making the funniest voice, but the voice that best reflects their car's character – that will win them the best accolades.

Once the students have done this, have them read through the script, this time working on their vocalisation. Even a narrator has a certain type of voice. At first let them be a silly, and laugh with them; but slowly focus them back on matching the voice to the character.

Reread while they show enthusiasm, but finish before they begin to look tired of the task. This will ensure they come to the task with enthusiasm nest time [leave them wanting more!]

Provide feedback on how the students are progressing, with their reading [fluency], with their characterisation [tone, inflection, etc] and with their comprehension. There can be little insightful discussions if you name what you see students doing, and ask them why. "You became quieter on that line, why was that?" This can easily move into an informal 'Christian Living' lesson.

Options

- As a **Technology** extension have the class record their version of the story, and make a power-point with their own images of the story, or use the power-point available from the website of the real images.
- As a **Drama** exercise, the Children could each take it in turns to vocalise the characters, with each bringing their own nuance to the part. Voice characterisation is a skill that when developed leads to confidence in many other areas. Some students who may not read well may be very good at 'putting on voices' and this can be an encouragement to them.
- If the children are going to perform the story, you can begin to walk through the staging of such an event. It could be performed with movement, or as a radio play, where movement is not important but sound is. Such a performance could be at assembly, for parents, for a junior class, within class for each reading group, or even in a chapel service.

Activity 4.

The final activity is to do some type of final performance to round off the unit. It could be as simple as a final read through that is announced as such and has some other person present to perform to [the Chaplain or Principal or Librarian], or as complex as the examples listed in the options above. Reader's Theatre does not have to become a full-blown production every time it is undertaken [or it will quickly become no-longer taken]. Rather for best results, if it can become a seamless, informal activity that is regularly undertaken, with occasional flourishes of theatre, it will reap lasting benefits for your students for years to come.