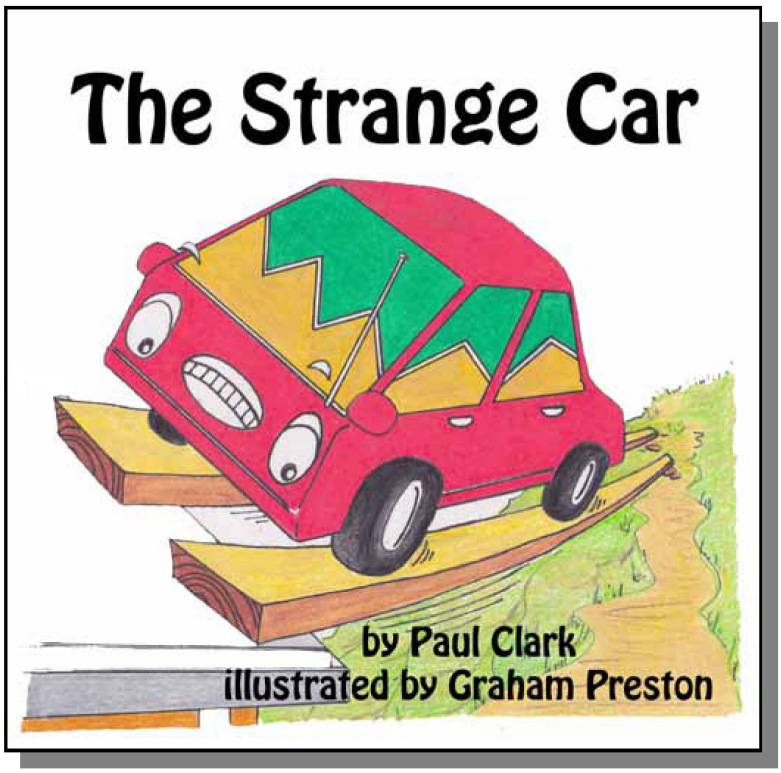
Car Park Parables®



The Strange Car

Using *The Strange Car* in English and Drama 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. 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 to 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 Strange Car" from the **www.carparkparables.com** website. The book, 'The Strange Car' can be sourced from good Christian bookstores or from the above website.

Activity 1.

Introduce the class to the story, 'The Strange Car' 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 is being released late in 2011. 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! Check the website for it's availability. It contains around 8 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 some 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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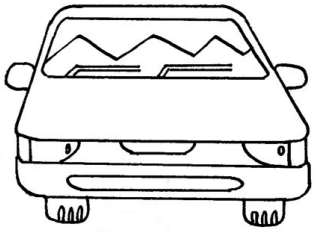
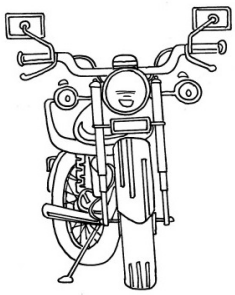
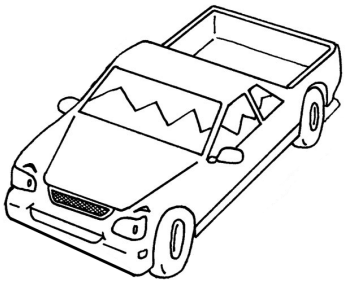
Introducing the Characters.



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



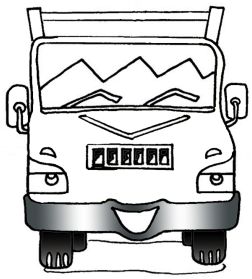
Muscles the Motorcycle
Inquisitive, thinking asks questions, intuition.



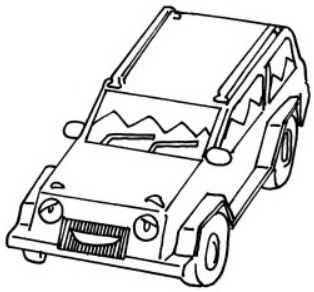
Hot Headed Harry
Fast, impulsive, likes to tease, red-blooded, real man!

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

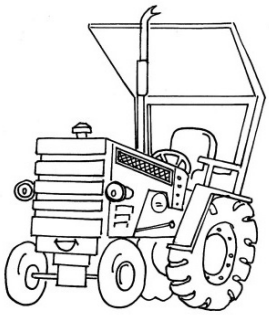
Old Mr T
Old, wise, thoughtful, patient, humble, cautious.



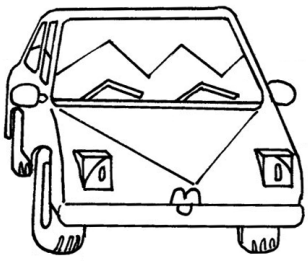
Trevor Truck
Class clown, hard working, simple, caring, happy!



Impossible Issi
Rebellious, rambunctious, sceptical, courageous.



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



Lin Su
Half electric, timid, shy innocent, full of wonder.

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THE STRANGE CAR

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

PLAYERS: Narrator Mr T Trevor Lin Su Lucy Zach Muscles
Frieda Jesus Tony Harry Issi

NARR: It was a cloudy morning at the little church in Westbrook. The smell of recent rain brightened up an otherwise dull day. As the cars gathered, they were all looking forward to the story that old Mr T might share this week. Luxurious Lucy said:

LUCY: I can't wait for today's story.

NARR: Tony Tractor felt the same

TONY: Neither can I!

NARR: From the corner of his headlight, Hot-headed Harry noticed a strange new car driving into the car park.

HARRY: What's she doing here? Isn't she one of those new electric cars?"

NARR: the other cars had heard about electric cars, but had never laid headlights on one. They were all worried that these modern cars might replace them. The mood immediately became very cold. Trevor Truck spoke up loud enough for the new car to hear him:

TREVOR: She's obviously in the wrong place. This is a petrol-car car-park."

NARR: Trevor had a joke and asked:

TREVOR: how do you make an electric car go faster? (pause) With a tow-truck!

NARR: No-one was laughing. Before things got worse, Old Mr T who is a little older and wiser, broke in saying:

MR T: Today's story is one of my favourites so I do hope you will all listen very carefully"

There was once a care called Zach who was different to all the other cars in his town. His engine was in the back, not in the front. He was a different shape to usual, but worst of all he was owned by a parking inspector.

NARR: That got Impossible Issi's motor running hot, and he roared.

ISSI : A parking inspector! No one would have liked that car.

MR T: You are right Issi. In fact no one was friendly to him at all because he was different. He became very mean and a bit of a cheat, but something was about to happen to Zach - Jesus was coming to town!

NARR: Then Muscles Motorcycle said:

MUSCLES: Cool; Jesus could take me for a spin any day

MR T: Indeed Muscles, each car would have loved for Jesus to take them for a drive.

So they all gathered by the roadside waiting for Jesus to arrive. But Zach couldn't squeeze in to see Jesus because the other cars wouldn't make space for him.

They told him not to bother and made it impossible for him to see.

NARR: Then Trevor Truck whispered to Frieda, making sure the new car could hear:

TREVOR: I wouldn't make space for a strange car like that either!"

NARR: The new car tried not to show that she was upset. Then Old Mr T continued with the story:

MR T: The strange new car thought to himself:

ZACH: What can I do? I want to see Jesus"

MR T: Then he noticed some old planks of wood resting against a small shed. Zach had a wild idea.

As Jesus came along the road the other cars smiled and beeped their horns wildly. Each one hoped Jesus would pick them for a drive. All of a sudden Jesus stopped and looked up. The other cars looked up as well. There was Zach parked on the roof of the shed!

FRIEDA: What a silly car! Cars don't go on roofs!"

MR T: Quite right Frieda. All the other cars laughed at Zach. Surely Jesus would send such a silly car away.

JESUS: Come down Zach. Today I want you to give me a tour of the town!

MR T: All the other cars were shocked! Why would Jesus choose Zach, the strange and different car?

Zach was so happy! He told Jesus all about the town, where to go for this and where to go for that. Then he said:

ZACH: Jesus I've got something to tell you. I'm a parking inspector's car. Sometimes I've overcharged people. I used to think if they were mean to me, then I'd be mean to them.

But you've shown me something different. You were kind to me. So now I'm going to be different. For anyone I've cheated I will pay back four times as much and today I'm going to give away half of my money to the poor.

MR T: Jesus glowed with joy.

JESUS: Today, this car has been restored. He's part of the family again. I came for this; to find those who were lost.

FRIEDA: What a strange story Mr T. (*Then turning to the strange new car Frieda says*.) Hello new car, my name is Frieda. I'm sorry we were all so rude before.

NARR: all the other cars slowly agreed, nodding their heads.

LIN SU: My name is Lin Su. My family moved here from the city

LUCY: You are most welcome here.

TREVOR: Yes, we are just getting used to being a friendly car park.

LIN SU: I must say, this church car park is very different to my old one. We never heard the stories from inside the church before. It's very exciting.

MUSCLES: You can thank Old Mr T for that. (pause) Uuummm, what's it like to be an electric car? Is it terrible? Do you ever feel normal?

LIN SU: I'm actually half electric and half petrol. It doesn't feel terrible at all. In fact, it feels quite normal to me.

NARR: The other cars were relieved. They talked for ages about petrol and batteries and Jesus before their owners came out and drove them to picnics, playgrounds and parties.

They all drove home happy that they had not missed the chance to welcome someone new to their little church car park.

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THE STRANGE CAR [v2]

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

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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.