

Reader's Theater for: *Will Rogers, Oklahoma's Favorite Son*
by Darleen Bailey Beard, author, 2016

Cast of Characters:

Narrator #1

Narrator #2

Will Rogers

Anderson Rogers—Will's childhood friend

Betty Blake—the girl Will wanted to marry

Will's mother

Will's teacher

Will's son

Will's daughter

Quote person #1, #2, #3, #4, #5 (you can add more or less quotes depending on # of students.)

Final Quote person #6

Props Needed:

stick horse or broom

rope or lariat

stuffed animals, including chickens and pigs

eyeglasses (can make out of pipe cleaners)

2 desks

pencil and paper

2 suitcases

large map of the world

fake money ie: Monopoly money

toilet plunger

cowboy boots and hat

Reader's Theater begins:

Narrator #1: Will Rogers, Oklahoma's Favorite Son, was a man like no other. Born on November 4, 1879, he was the youngest of seven children. Shy and humble, he grew up on a cattle ranch near Oologah, Oklahoma, where he learned to ride a horse at a very young age.

Will: "Look at me, Momma! Look at me! I can ride a horse, Momma!" (Will is riding a stick horse, if you have one. Otherwise a broom would work. He wears a cowboy hat and cowboy boots for all his parts.)

Will's Mother: "I see! Aren't you a big boy, Willie! Already at age four you're riding a horse! What will be next?"

Narrator #2: What was next for Will? Learning to throw a lariat by the age of five.

Will: “Look at me! Look at me, Momma! I can lasso tree stumps, chickens, and even pigs, Momma!” (Will is throwing a lariat at stuffed chickens & pigs)

Will's Mother: “What a big boy you are, Willie! Next thing we know, you’ll be big enough to start school!”

Narrator #1: When Will was seven, he started first grade because back in the 1880s, there was no such thing as kindergarten. There were no schools near where Will and his parents lived. So Will moved in with his older married sister who lived three miles away from a Cherokee school. Since Will and his family were all $\frac{1}{4}$ Cherokee, it was the perfect school for Will.

Narrator #2: So Will rode a little chestnut mare to school every single day, that is, when he didn’t ride off in the wrong direction and play hooky! (Will rides his stick horse or broom)

Will's teacher: “Will was unlike any student I’d ever had. Right from the start, I noticed he was so caring and gentle. He really cared about the kids in our class. When he noticed they didn’t have much food in their lunch boxes, he brought extra food to share with them. He didn’t mind sharing at all. When he noticed the girls in school wore dresses that were torn and patched, he didn’t just feel sorry for them—he did something about it!” (teacher is wearing glasses and sitting at a desk)

Will: (writing a letter at his desk)

“Dear Momma,

School is okay, I guess. My teacher is nice. The kids are nice, but I’d rather stay home and throw my lariat. Anyway, I noticed the girls in school wear dresses that are all torn and ripped and ugly-looking. Could you buy some calico fabric to send to school so that my teacher can sew them all new dresses? I think that would make all the girls feel really good to have nice, new dresses with no patches and that really fit well. Thanks, Momma. I appreciate it and I’ll let you go for now. Love Willie
PS: The best thing about school is I get to ride a horse to school every single day. She waits on me until school lets out and then I get to ride her home, too. PPS: I’m practicing with my lariat every day. You should see me. I’m getting really good at it.”

Narrator #1: Soon the fabric arrived and Will’s teacher got busy sewing, and sewing, and sewing! Next thing Will knew, all twelve girls in his school had brand new dresses that fit them perfectly. They must’ve been bursting with pride and little Willie must’ve felt wonderful knowing he’d made a difference in their lives.

Narrator #2: That may have been the first time Will showed such kindness to others, but it certainly wasn’t the last. When Will was fifteen years old, his childhood friend, Anderson, who was the son of a freed slave, got injured in a shooting accident. He lost

an arm and an eye because of it. When Will heard the news, he hopped on his horse and rode straight to Anderson's house.

Will: "Anderson! Anderson! I'm so sorry for what happened!"

Anderson: "Me, too. I can't believe you're here!"

Will: "Of course I'm here. And I want to tell you I'll be here for you. I'll help take care of you. I'll buy you a fake arm. And I'll even pay for you to go to trade school, so don't worry a bit. Okay? I've got you covered. You're going to be okay."

Anderson: "Aww, you don't have to do that. You got other friends. I'll get by."

Will: "Don't be ridiculous. I *want* to do this. That's what friends are for."

Narrator #1: And if *that* wasn't enough, Will rode to the grocery store and pharmacy telling both owners to give Anderson anything he wanted and promised to pay the bill. I'm telling you, this boy had a heart of gold—a heart—of—gold.

Narrator #2: In 1899, Will began an eight-year courtship with pretty Betty Blake of Rogers, Arkansas. He first met her at the post office and was so shy and thrilled, that he forgot what he went to the post office for—a mail-order banjo—and left without even saying a word. A few days later, they met at a party and found they both loved books and music and both played musical instruments. Soon Betty and Will began writing letters as Will traveled the globe performing his rope tricks. They visited each other as often as they could and Will fell madly, head-over-heels in love.

Will: "Please marry me, Betty. You know I love you." (Will has a suitcase nearby)

Betty: "No. I don't like how you live in and out of hotels, going here and there and everywhere. You need a *real* job and a *real* home. What kind of a life is that for a woman?"

Will: "A fun life! You'll get to see the world. Please, Betty. Marry me. Travel with me." (Will holds up a map) "See? You can go here and here with me." (he points to map)

Narrator #2: But every time Will asked Betty to marry him, she shook her head no.

Narrator #1: So one day, broken-hearted, 29 year-old Will showed up on Betty's porch steps. He couldn't live without her.

Will: "Look, Betty. You've already turned me down several times and my heart's broken. *Pleeeassee* marry me. I'm *begging* you—will you be my wife?" (Will gets down on one knee. Again his suitcase is close by and a map is hanging out of his pocket.)

Betty: “Okay, but only on *one* condition—you must give up show business after one year and get a *real* job—a practical, respectable job—like working at a bank or becoming a butcher. Or how about a plumber? You’d make a great plumber.” (she hands him a toilet plunger.)

Narrator #1: So Will reluctantly agreed, hoping that at the end of one year, Betty would change her mind. And that’s exactly what happened.

Betty: “I LOVE seeing the world! This is so exciting! I love traveling and living out of a suitcase. This is so fun I *never* want you to quit this job!” (Betty swings her own suitcase and throws the toilet plunger into the air.)

Will: “Aww, shucks, Betty.” (He gives her a kiss on the cheek.)

Narrator #2: So Will and Betty enjoyed their life together. As time went on, they bought a home in California and raised a family of four children, three boys and one girl. Sadly, though, one of their boys died when he was only two years old. But even through this difficult hardship, Will continued to do his rope tricks, travel from stage to stage all over the world, and say funny things as he was on stage. The things he said became quoted all over the world. And he continued living his life by helping others. He had a heart of gold and one of his most famous quotes, ‘*I never met a man I didn’t like*’, became the way in which he lived.

Narrator #1: As the years rolled by and their children grew up, Will became world recognized as a famous lariat artist, a newspaper columnist, an American humorist, a radio host, and he even found time to star in 71 movies. He was so funny and wise that the things he said made people stop and think. Many of the things he said became famous quotes around the entire world and even to this day, Will remains as the most quoted man who ever lived. He said such wise and funny quotes as:

Quote person #1: “My ancestors didn’t come over on the Mayflower, but they met the boat when it landed.”

Quote person #2: “You got to sorter give and take in this old world. We can get mighty rich, but if we haven’t got any friends we will find we are poorer than anybody.”

Quote person #3: “There are three kinds of men. The one that learns by reading. The few who learn by observation. The rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves.”

Quote person #4: “What constitutes a life well spent, anyway? Love and admiration from your fellow men is all that anyone can ask.”

Quote person #5: “Only a fool argues with a skunk, a mule or a cook.”

Narrator #2: Yes, Will became one of the most quoted men who ever lived. He chummed around with famous people like Walt Disney, Eleanor Roosevelt, and aviator Wiley Post. He was invited to the White House many times, and traveled around the entire world three times. He had more money than he ever dreamed of and he used his money to help others.

Will's wife: “When Gulf Oil Company offered Will \$50,000 to host seven radio shows, Will turned them down. He was too busy and didn’t need the money. But I told Will to go ahead and do the radio shows and donate the money to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army . . . so that’s what he did. He donated every single penny. Back then, the average man was lucky enough to earn \$1,500 a year, so \$50,000 was a *ton* of money and Will gave it all away. That’s how Will was. He had a heart of gold.” (His wife throws fake money into the air—ie: money from Monopoly)

Will's son: “When the Great Depression rolled around in the 1930s, my dad went on tour to 50 cities in only 18 days. He raised thousands and thousands of dollars and you know what he did with all the money he raised? He gave it to the Red Cross to help those who were affected by the Great Depression, which basically was almost everyone. Back then, men were lucky to earn \$1.00 per day on their job, if they even *had* a job.

Will's daughter: “Yeah, our dad was known for handing out dollars everywhere he went. When he met people on the street who were in need, he handed them a dollar. A dollar doesn’t sound like much today, but back in the 1930s, a dollar would buy a *lot* of groceries.” (Will’s daughter hands out fake dollars as she walks off stage.)

Narrator #1: And in times of world disasters, floods, fires, and earthquakes, Will was always there, helping out, giving money to help those in need. Yes sir, Will had a heart of gold. He was well loved all over the world. People who didn’t even know him, loved him dearly and claimed him for their friend. He lived his entire life helping, loving, and encouraging others. And when he died, guess which one of his quotes was put on his tombstone?

Everyone shouts: “I never met a man I didn’t like!”

Narrator #1: So live your life like Will—with a heart of gold, full of love toward people you’ve never even met—friendly, kind, caring—because that’s how life *should* be lived.

Final Quote person #6: “About once in every 50 years a personality is developed on the American scene whose qualities of mind and heart make such an impression upon us that most of our people in every walk of life generate an affection for him—such a man was Will Rogers.”

The End