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The Short Tree and the Bird Who Could Not Sing

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Foon, Dennis. *The Short Tree and the Bird Who Could Not Sing*. Blizzard Publishing, 1998. ISBN 0921368798. \$10.95. 64 pp.

Reviewer: Rebecca Hixson

Reading Level: Toddler; Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Plays; Humorous plays;

Subject: Friendship--Juvenile drama; Loneliness--Juvenile drama; Drama--Reviews;

Theme: Anyone can overcome loneliness; they only have to open themselves and reach out to others to find friendship.

Production Requirements: Optional use of puppets; requires many different areas of action on the stage.

Acts: Two

Run Time: 40 min.

Characters: 24 characters--a few people can play many different parts.

Cast: Various theatres have used puppets and live actors to portray the characters to young audiences.

Time Period: Contemporary

A short tree is left all alone when his only companions, the big trees, are cut down. The short tree wallows in his loneliness until he becomes aware there are many creatures around him who would make great companions. He realizes he is only alone because he chooses to lock out the world by clinging to loneliness. Through his experiences with the many different characters in the play, the short tree discovers this, and is finally able to open the door to the universe and invite friends in.

The plot seems quite logical in its context even though the world of the play is not realistic in its style. The play is believable because the characters' decisions involve relationships. Young audiences can relate to these integral choices and identify with fundamental rules of establishing a good relationship with someone. They learn that the key to having a successful relationship is finding the good in others.

Although the play has a simple plot, the staging is challenging. Many different areas of action prove difficult when creating sets. Also, many characters appear for only one line, causing problems with costume changes. It is suggested that puppets be used for minor characters to aid in these staging and costuming difficulties.

Foon uses witty language to draw in the audience's attention, as well as unique characters, who add to the dimensionality of the play. He takes many unusual ideas for characters and integrates them into the story quite well. For example, the short tree not only befriends average animals such as a bird and a squirrel, but also out-of-the-ordinary characters such as balloons, his own shadow, and the wind. Each character has various character traits that accentuate the diversity of the characters in the play. Young audiences gain important insights into the world around them because of this setup. The diversity in the story allows young audiences to recognize the diversity in the world and embrace it.