



2003

Androcles and the Lion

Jennifer Eskelsen

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Eskelsen, Jennifer (2003) "Androcles and the Lion," *Children's Book and Media Review*. Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol24/iss1/21>

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Harris, Aurand. *Androcles and the Lion*. Anchorage Press, Inc., 1964. \$25.00. 51 pp.

Reviewer: Jennifer Eskelsen

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate; Young adult;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Folklore; Plays; Fantasy plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Friendship--Juvenile drama; Love--Juvenile drama; Honesty--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Nobody deserves to be put into bondage.

Production Requirements: Simple props/costumes/sets.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 90 min

Characters: 1F, 5M

Cast: All adults

Time Period: Greek/Roman

The characters are individually introduced and then the story starts. Androcles, Pantalone's servant, is sent to collect the rent from various tenants, but on his way he is stopped by Isabella, Pantalone's niece. She wants him to give a letter to her lover, Lelio, who lives across the way. Lelio decides to marry Isabella and asks Pantalone for her hand in marriage. Pantalone refuses because he would have to give up Isabella's dowry. Pantalone places a captain to guard his niece so that she cannot elope. With the help of Androcles, the captain is tricked into letting her escape. Androcles chases after her to give her the dowry. Pantalone believes that Androcles has run away and he and the captain chase after him. Androcles goes into the forest to find Isabella and instead is confronted by a lion. They struggle, but lion gets a sliver in its paw. Feeling sorry for the lion, Androcles pulls out the sliver. Pantalone and the Captain find Androcles and trap him. He is taken to a pit in Rome to be eaten by lions. Isabella and Lelio go to Rome to try to set Androcles free. The Lion also goes after him, but is captured and put in the pit with Androcles. When the event starts, the Lion recognizes his friend and they call it a draw. Meanwhile, the emperor finds out about Pantalone's dishonesty in keeping the dowry and punishes him for it, and then sets Androcles free.

The characters in this play are lively and full of personality. They embrace the commedia dell'arte style and use it to play off of each other. Many commedia dell'arte plays don't have a captain character and he is portrayed as the misfit oddball. Typical of the commedia dell'arte style, this play is very presentational. For instance, in the beginning, the characters are all introduced to the audience, which is then shown that the characters have a script, placed in the audience's view, in case the actors get too carried away and forget where the story goes. This is used several times very comically. For example, when Isabella and Lelio are trying to hide in the forest, they don't know where to go, so they read the script that says "The Captain Enters," then realize that they need to run for it. The plot is perfect for an audience of all ages because it doesn't become very complicated or confusing, but there is enough drama to keep older audiences engaged and kids will enjoy the physical element of this play. The action moves the play along. In fact, the movement and physical comedy tell part of the story in and of themselves. The dialogue has a rhythm and rime to it that makes the story feel and look fun and exciting and boosts the fast-paced comedy. There is music available for parts of the play, although whether a producer would want to buy the actual scores of music or make up his or her own, it would work either way because of the genre of play. This play could easily be done very effectively on either a low or high budget.