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The Play of the Royal Astrologers

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Hall, Willis. *The Play of the Royal Astrologers*. Heinemann Educational Books, 1960. ISBN 0435210076. Contact publisher regarding price. 101 pp.

Reviewer: Jennifer Eskelsen

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate; Young adult;

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fairy tales; Plays; Humorous plays; Adventure plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Work--Juvenile drama; Honesty--Juvenile drama; Fairy tales--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Procrastination leads to more work overall.

Production Requirements: Moderate-elaborate costumes/sets, need of curtain.

Acts: 3

Run Time: 2 hours

Characters: 2F, 4M, 5-14 Universal

Cast: All adults

Time Period: Past - Medieval

The action starts off with the emperor's chancellor "opening" the play. However, he doesn't know where the emperor is and runs off to find him. Meanwhile, the audience is introduced to a father and a son who are supreme examples of laziness. To avoid being sent to work, they devise a plan to convince the town that the father is an astrologer. It works. In the meantime, the Emperor has discovered that four chests of his gold have been stolen. He calls for all astrologers to try to find it in return for a reward and his daughter's hand in marriage. If they fail, they suffer getting their heads cut off. The father (with his son as an assistant) is the last left to try. By chance, the four thieves are hiding in the father's garden and overhear him talking about the task. Out of fear they turn themselves in but confess that the chests were taken by pirates who are about to set sail. The father and son go after the pirates and hide aboard as stowaways, but the emperor believes them to be running away with the chests and sets off after them. Because they believe the father to be the Royal Admiral, the pirates surrender to him. The father gives the ship and crew, with the chests, to the Emperor, who makes him his Royal Astrologer and gives his daughter to the son.

Overall, the plot of this farce is very entertaining. All of the characters involved are larger than life. Father Mole Cricket rises to the occasion and becomes the leader over his son, although both would rather sleep than do anything, unless it means losing their heads. In contrast, the emperor is extremely demanding and short tempered; anyone who doesn't do exactly as he wishes has his or her head cut off. There's a large amount of wit and wordplay within the story, as well as each character having an individual voice, making for well-rounded dialogue. There is also a lot of physical comedy incorporated into both the action and the talking. This physical element serves to further the story because others have to compensate for the father and son being lazy. The play moves with an even tempo, with small intervals of high comedy. The theme is easily recognizable without being overbearing. To put on this play, you would need a curtain that can be opened and closed, but otherwise the sets can be as elaborate as you would like to make them. However, complicated sets aren't completely necessary. A few elements needed are things like a throne for the castle, some sort of a garden for the Father's home, and ropes for the pirate ship. This play is appropriate for most audiences. Children under the age of ten may not understand the witty humor, but would be entertained by the physical comedy.