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Paul Bunyan and the Hard Winter

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Denson, Will. *Paul Bunyan and the Hard Winter*. Pioneer Drama Service, 1980. \$25.00. 35 pp.

Reviewer: Jennifer Eskelsen

Reading Level: All;

Rating: Dependable;

Genre: Adventure plays; Folklore;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Work--Juvenile drama; Bunyan, Paul (Legendary character)--Juvenile drama;

Theme: There will always be a need for heroes.

Production Requirements: Simple props/costumes/sets. Need of projection to create a silhouette of Paul.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 90 min

Characters: 11M, 3F

Cast: All adults

Time Period: 1800's

The loggers are working in the forest. One of them, Sam is getting ready for a flapjack eating contest when he meets Nick Slicker. Nick Slicker is a city reporter who wants to meet the famous Paul Bunyan. Sam tells Nick that he can't meet Paul because a city boy isn't safe in the woods. Nick proves his manhood by winning the flapjack eating contest and is allowed to stay with the loggers in their camp. It is a hard winter and not just because of the weather, but because the Committee for Right and Proper Action comes to the camp to shut it down. The Committee feels that because the local town is growing, there needs to be civilization in the woods and that loggers aren't civilized because of their heroic tendencies. The head of the committee, a widow woman, allows the men to stay at the camp temporarily, to prove that they can be clean and proper. After two months, the widow decides that these men are too rough and she kicks them out of the camp. Before they leave, a forest fire breaks out. Paul puts it out in no time. The loggers use Paul's action of putting out the fire to prove that civilization does need heroes like them. The widow recognizes that they are good men and decides to let the camp stay open.

Every character in this play has their own sense of what should and shouldn't be in the world. Each logger reacts to the news that their camp was going to be closed down a little differently. No one wants to lose their job or their home, but some of them are more open to the idea than others. This shows that each character is different and has individual thoughts and opinions. Each of the men take on certain roles, for example when Paul isn't around, Sam takes charge of the loggers. Others, like Johnny Inkslinger, take to the committee's side and do whatever the committee wanted. This difference in attitudes makes a variation in how the story is told and makes for a deeper story. The transitions from one situation to the next are smooth and sensible. The play does drag sometimes when the characters are arguing and it doesn't seem like there is anyplace for the argument to go but are always rescued from the argument from an outside source. One of the problems with the production of this play is that Paul is never actually seen on stage. What the script suggests is that the person who plays Paul has his silhouette projected on the screen so that all of his movements can be seen as a massive shadow. Another way that this could be done is to use a gobo in one or more of your lights. The music that accompanies this play ties in very well and makes sense. The men sing while they work and the Committee has a certain song they sing whenever they come or go. This play is appropriate for all ages and can be put on by a high school, middle school or community theatre group.