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Play Reviews

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Ashby, Sylvia. **Professor Zuccini's Traveling Tales.** I.E. Clark, Inc. 1977.

This collection of three folk tales produced in Commedia style is a theatrical delight to read and imagine. The first story, "The Flower Sisters," tells of a washer woman and her three daughters, the youngest of which tricks the devil and frees her sisters. Tale two, "The Pasta Brothers" (Vermicelli and Rigatoni), finds a farm boy tricking the wicked countess to get his brother's money back. The third tale combines characters from the first two playlets with a rhyming, riddling Prince looking for a wife. He finds his match in the youngest Flower Sister, whom he marries. Dialogue is quick paced, action abounds and the piece should be fun for a cast to perform if they have a sense of timing and style.--Harold R. Oaks.


Eliot Traynor has a difficult time putting up with his busy body neighbor, Dixie Briggs, who pries into his private life. Because his attitude toward her is hostile and evasive, her imagination is activated by several suspicious things she observes (Eliot's wife is missing, there is a large hole out in his yard, and he tries to conceal a bloody crate). Dixie calls in the police and accuses Eliot of murdering his wife.

This is not a "whodunit"--it's a "did he or didn't he do it" mystery. The play lacks subtlety, but manages to keep a reader's attention for its twenty-two pages of snippy dialogue.

Although the play is short, it requires quite a few props and a realistic set. Three men and one woman make up the cast. There is little chance that Hole in the Ground would be confused with top quality theatre, but it might serve as a fast-moving piece for beginning junior high and high school drama students.--Janice Card.


This day in the life of seven elementary school kids is similar to *You're a good man, Charlie Brown*, the musical based on Charles Schultz' "Peanuts" characters. We are shown their wishes, dreams and disappointments in short vignettes and songs. Topics include adoption, death and shyness. Robinette's characters are interesting, but lack the insights of Schultz' characters. The original production was performed by adults, but young people could do it. The script demands creative staging, fast action and talented performers to succeed.--Harold R. Oaks.

Based on Stanley I. Kutler's book of the same title, this play examines in quick sketches the lives of Indians, Blacks, women, indentured slaves, and oppressed foreigners in America. It is a short history of the dark side of United States history. It is emotionally well built to help the reader or audience member examine motives and the more conventional history recorded in average history books. There is a clear plea for the ideals of a free nation where all are equal, but examples indicate we have not attained that ideal yet. This play might serve to stimulate class discussion and further research.—Harold R. Oaks.


This introduction to Shakespeare's plays is intended for middle and upper elementary, either as performers or audience members. Short scenes from *Macbeth*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry IV*, Part I, and *Taming of the Shrew* have been selected and minimally adapted for performance. The children who introduce and bridge the scenes are interesting and help the audience identify with the material. Enthusiastic teachers would help make the experience meaningful, otherwise the Shakespearean language could still cause problems for young audiences.—Harold R. Oaks.


This participation play, based on Hans Christian Andersen's story, draws the audience into the problems of the emperor who will not be satisfied. The ruler's obsession for better and better flowers and robes offends the gods, who send the nightingale to touch the emperor's heart. He appreciates her beautiful song, but takes away her freedom. Because of this she cannot sing her song and is banished. Death comes to take the cold-hearted emperor, but he is saved by the wishes of the audience (who represent the People of China), which bring back the nightingale to warm and change his heart.

This play requires strong performers who can control a large audience of children sitting in arena style around the acting area. It is a challenge with a promise of success.—Harold R. Oaks.


In Suzan Zeder's own words, this is a "new/old play...as a celebration of the power of the theatre to entertain, energize, and to hold a mirror up to our timeless selves."
This is a medieval mystery play. The action begins in a small village at a market place—its early June of 1491. Zeder's development of this play parallels the historical development of the pageant play.

The plot surrounding the pageant was improvisationally done by teenagers. Zeder says that the essence of the play is in what it says about the theatre as a community collaboration other than just an historical portrait.

The play is cleverly done (plot and characters). Most of the characters take shape immediately and grow with the plot into well-rounded individuals. Throughout the story there are many subclimaxes and mini-themes. For example, John, the director, gets so wrapped up in his desire to pull off a successful show that tension creeps into his personal life. He has run-ins with his wife and son. The cast is continuously bickering amongst themselves, but when the play draws to its end, problems are resolved and the cast becomes one through cooperation.—Renee Hieftje