Play Reviews

Janice Card
Christine Smith
Harold R. Oaks
Seventeen hundred showed up at Jason's funeral. Harry and Hortense cash their bonds to help Aunt Mo pay for it. He is buried in one of Harry's best suits, one he never wore anyway.

In looking for the boon or prize in a hero's quest, the reason a hero goes on an adventure, why it's all right even if he dies because he's brought something that makes the sacrifice worthwhile, Harry and Hortense decide, "We were all meant to be heroes and heroines, but nearly all have forgotten it." They decide they can be Jason's boon, "You with your writing. And me helping kids like Jason. If we will always remember what he was trying to show us . . ."

I think it's a good book. It's short, crazy, funny, sad--and worthwhile.--Elizabeth Wahlquist.

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Esmerelda (Essy) is a student witch who does not meet the standards of ugliness and cruelty required by the Witches Training School she attends. Everything she does turns out to be good rather than evil. She has flunked nearly all of her classes to the frustration of Her Wickedness, the headmistress. When a little boy from a nearby village wanders into the Witches' lair, Essy hides him from the mean witches and helps him to escape. Talking with the boy helps her to see that she will never succeed at becoming a witch, but she might be very successful at being a normal, pleasant girl.

This one-act is so brief that the characters are not highly developed--and it is difficult to recognize the theme--still, the audience will easily see the differences between Essy and the other witches. The story lends itself to humor, and action--important ingredients for an entertaining show. Costumes, lights and sound effects are needed to set the proper mood.

Older elementary aged students could prepare and perform this short play for the younger grades. This is not specifically a Halloween play, but it certainly could be done in October--or anytime.--Janice Card.

This collection of five Andersen tales relies on story theatre techniques. The cast plays several parts and is supported by a narrator and background music. Stories included are: "What the Old Man Does is Always Right," "The Princess and the Pea," "The Ugly Duckling," and "Numbskull Jack." Action flows from one tale to the next with smooth efficiency. These dramatized tales should hold attention if performers are capable.--Harold R. Oaks


Aurand Harris has transformed three of Kipling's Just So Stories into short plays. "The Cat Who Walked By Himself," "How the Camel Got His Hump," and "How the First Letter Was Written" are introduced and narrated by the Djinn, a Spirit of Magic.

The stories retain their original charm and style. Theatre offers an added dimension: human and animal characters ("from the time of the very beginning, when the world was very new") are brought to life on stage.

A simple flat is all that is required for the set. Props, costumes, sound and lights can be used effectively. The Djinn's magic serves to draw the audience members in. The stories will keep their attention because they are brief, clever, and humorous. Although children could prepare and present them, it would be best if high school students or adults perform the stories for audiences of all ages. Here is a perfect family entertainment!--Janice Card.


A one-act musical geared for junior high age audiences about being hurt by friends and an older sister. The idea is good, and there are some moments in the play where it works, but the overall effect fails to satisfy. There are too many scenes and loose ends. Young performers might enjoy staging this piece, especially if there is an aspiring magician available.--Harold R. Oaks.


Rejected by family and friends, Benjie, the giant boy, joins the circus where being different is normal. Even here, he is unhappy being an object of ridicule until he single-handedly saves a young patron from an ape. His ability to control the ape gives him a
reason to live and causes him to finally feel at home in the circus.

Joanna Kraus' theme that the only place a freak might be at home is in the circus offers a unique look at handicaps but the script is often wordy and focuses on replaying past painful experiences rather than showing any sense of growth or acceptance of self. The script was tedious to read and would need careful editing to be performable.

Requiring a variety of circus characters, costuming would be a necessary consideration for those with small budgets. Staging could be done through suggestion of the big top, wagons, and the boys' home. -- Christine Smith.


The skeletal frame of the Browning story poem is present in Michael Lancy's play, but the impact of the tale is lacking.

When the Pied Piper is introduced he promises to be a wonderfully mysterious fellow, but as the play progresses he becomes nothing more than a child psychologist or community recreation leader.

Lancy tried to make the children in the story more important characters, which is a good idea in children's theatre. He gave them names, lines, and actions, but he did not give them life.

The main character is Michael, the Mayor's lame son, who has a poor self image because of his "condition." He wants to prove to himself and his father that he is a person of worth. The Piper sees this need and assigns Michael to be his Captain and organize the children to help rid the town of rats. Michael's self respect surfaces with his new position.

At the end, Lancy deviates from the original story further by having Michael choose to remain with his miraculously-reformed father instead of going with the Piper. Touching, but not very believable.

The music and lyrics do little to enhance or strengthen the script. They serve merely as a vehicle for performers. Although Lancy's ideas have potential, they haven't lived up to it yet. The theme needs to be stronger and the characters more vibrant to make this a show worth staging. -- Janice Card.


If you are looking for a credible script of this Dicken's classic that won't cost you a mint in royalties, here is a version
of *Oliver Twist* which should work well for junior high and high school students to present. Community theatre groups may also wish to give it a try.

This version is enough different from the Broadway musical *OLIVER!* to provide some variety to a plot most people know. It is shorter so there is less time for character development. The lyrics do not measure up to those in *OLIVER!*, but if performed with enthusiasm they should fit well into the show.

Staging this play can be simply done with "suggestive sets and platforms." It is possible to double cast on several parts or to use a cast of twenty-four or more people. Lancy and Lakin have tried to maintain the flavor of the book, but it might be helpful to read the original novel when preparing the play for performance. -- Janice Card.