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Play Reviews

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The dinosaurs are back! Stomping and romping, pouring and roaring, and dinosauring down the streets of New York City. What fate will await these prehistoric immigrants of time if they do return to our strange new world?

Dinosaurs are popular with children, and any book that allows them to imagine that they are still around will be read and reread. —Vicky M. Turner


Is anyone really too old to sleep with a stuffed bear? Is anyone too old to hang onto a pleasant childhood dream that makes life happier? I don’t think Jan Wahl thinks so. His book, *Humphrey’s Bear*, gives children the message that even adults have good memories of childhood, and that they can understand a child’s dream.

The fantasyland brought out in this book of sailing away at night with a stuffed bear is full of adventure ("...a typhoon came up out of nowhere..."), beauty ("...porpoises sang sea songs..."), and comfort ("...warm moon outside and hot chocolate inside..."). These all appeal to a child’s sense of imagination and need for comfort at night. The illustrations, all drawn in shades of darkness, are somehow magical instead of gloomy. The night is full of stars and the bear is drawn with a happy, comforting look on his face always.

The crowning point of the story is where the father whispers “Here, son... I used to sail with him, too.” This book is exceptional in showing a child that adults can understand the imagination of a child and accept the fact that a child uses his imagination.

—Katherine Carlisle

**Play Reviews**


Jon, a boy from another dimension, accidentally falls to Earth, loses his memory, but retains his ability to communicate with animals and hear people’s thoughts. He is befriended by Mary and Thomas Bean, who are amazed when he learns English in one day and tames their wild mongrel, Rascal. Jon’s special powers get him into trouble when things start disappearing from Doc Holliday’s summer place and neighbors accuse this "wild boy" of being the thief. With the help of a kindly judge, Miss Josie, a court hearing proves his innocence, but unfortunately it also reveals his ability to hear people’s thoughts. Soon local, state and national news reporters pester the Beans for interviews, and the U.S. Government demands that Jon work for them in intelligence. Thomas and Mary help Jon, whose memory is gradually returning, escape back through the "door" — leaving behind puzzled Earth people and Thomas and Mary, who stay to try to change them.

Falls’s adaptation has retained much of the flavor of Key’s novel (though one who has read the book may take offense at the changed ending). By itself, the play works, however. Through Jon, the boy from another world, we realize how uncivilized our world
is and how uncivilized our behavior can be. It would be nice to escape to another dimension, but it would be even nicer, Falls evidently feels, to stay and change this one.

As many as twenty actors, or as few as seven, portray the characters and animals, with some props and set pieces. It can be staged elaborately or with simple props and added costumes. Lighting and sound, however, are vital elements. Skilled actors from ninth grade through adult should find this work a good challenge. —Dianne Breinholt


*The Fool of the World* is a delightful participatory play for pre-school through second-grade children. In this tale, a Russian peasant, Dmitri, makes a magic sailing ship, wins the love of a princess, and flies up to the sky to get the Czar the heart of a cloud. This is an optimistic story that shows how Dmitri gains confidence and is able to utilize that something special, or magic, that each person has within himself. At the beginning of the play, he is called a fool and by the end he has not only won the princess's hand in marriage, but her love as well.

The authors of this play have given instructions on how to make this a participatory play or how to utilize the actors in the play if audience participation is not required. This production would play best with an adult cast, rather than a children's cast.

—Gayanne Ramsden


*I Just Wanna Tell SOMEBODY* is a play about children and adolescents who are abused by their parents. The first act deals with the reality and fear of the abuse, both sexual and physical. The second act is a courtroom dream sequence, where abused children, both dead and alive, are called to the witness stand to testify against their abusers. This sequence allows audience members to see how abuse is perpetuated from parent to child, and how it truly is a sickness. The dream turns into a nightmare that nobody wakes up from.

This is a hard play. There is nothing nice about it, and there are no solutions offered except for the children to "tell somebody." The adults are either abusers who threaten to kill the abused if they tell, or teachers who are afraid to kick up any dust but feel a responsibility to their students. The children who are abused are genuine victims who fear for their lives and their sanity, but somehow, love their parents.

There is a large cast of children, adolescents, and adults that could be double-cast in some roles, but all the actors would need to be highly trained in order for the play not to become too trite or too melodramatic. I would not cast children under the age of twelve because of the intensity of the subject matter. I also would not perform this piece for children under the age of twelve. —Erin Caldwell


Ten-year-old Sara Crewe, who was born and raised in India, is left by her father at Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies in London, with the order that his "little missy" is to have anything she wants. He tells Miss Minchin that Sara is wise beyond her years and will only ask for what is necessary. Miss Minchin soon finds this to be true and...
takes an instant dislike to the girl, although she tries to cover it with a syrupy sweetness. Tragedy strikes after a few years, as Sara learns that her father has died believing that the money he invested in his friend’s diamond mine is gone. She then becomes, instead of a “parlor boarder,” a scullery maid. Sara continues to pretend that she is a princess and is still kind to everyone. Happiness enters her life again as her father’s friend moves in next to the seminary and her fortune is restored.

Koste has done a marvelous job of adapting Burnett’s book. The majority of the characters (such as the snotty Lavinia, the overweight and slow Ermengarde, the maid Becky, and a puppet-like monkey) are in this version. The message that acting like a princess will help you be as one comes through as Sara takes on the qualities of a good princess and puts the problems and needs of everyone else before her own.

Audiences from kindergarten through adult will enjoy this script. Although the production is designed for a stationary stage, with lights playing an important part, it can, with a few minor changes, be adapted for touring. Junior high students, as well as adults, should find this script fun and rewarding to perform. —Dianne Breinholt


Penny and the Magic Medallion is a lively musical about a king named Reginald the Righteous, who is afraid to admit he is wrong. In the king’s eyes, his herald, cook, and sentinel are incompetent. A magician named Bonibini enters the kingdom and offers to solve the king’s problem through the use of a gold medallion. The members of the king’s court become automated robots, and the king soon tires of their perfected behavior; but before he stops the magic, the queen and page are also turned into robots. In order to break the spells, the king must, with the help of the audience, unscramble a puzzle. Finally, the king discovers that admitting he is wrong isn’t so bad, after all.

The musical score adds vitality to the play. The sound effects are available on audio tapes from the publisher. This play could be performed by junior-high students as well as adult actors. Only a minimal set is required, and it could be good for touring. —Donna Williams