1988

Play Reviews

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Along Came a Blackbird is the story of a ten year-old's growing empathy and understanding of people’s lives who are different from her own. Elizabeth Wild has created a small country town in Maine where important things are happening to those who live there. It is a book well worth reading. — Lillian H. Heil


Boland is one of the many dinosaur children that enjoy romping in the swamp forest. Boland is also plagued with the attention of the world’s first bully, a Tyrannosaurus Rex named Tyrone. Tyrone enjoys teasing him, hitting him and eating his sandwiches. Boland tries to make friends, ignore, and even fights Tyrone, but nothing seems to work until Boland comes up with a pepper sandwich that sends Tyrone screaming in the opposite direction. Well illustrated, with a twist ending that will make it a favorite at story time.

— Vicky M. Turner


Nancy Willard has taken Robert Louis Stevenson’s voyage across the Atlantic (as described so vividly in his letters), and created a delightful poetic experience, a journey into images and word play. Similar in style to her earlier “Visit to William Blake’s Inn,” this slim book provides a light-hearted, non-threatening and rich contact with language as poetry.

This book is rewarding on several levels, not the least of which is the visual. Caldecott winners, Alice and Martin Provensen, achieve humor and a real sense of time and place in their detailed pictures. — Jean Marshall

Play Reviews

*Dee, Peter. . . and stuff . . .* Baker’s Plays, 1985. Royalties: $40.00 first performance, $30.00 each subsequent performance. 94 pp.

*Dee, Peter. . . and stuff . . .* is a series of vignettes about issues that are poignant to teenagers. The play uses a group of adolescent’s that move in and out of character, almost poetically, to create each scene. The play deals with just about everything from incest to parental trust, drugs to meditating, and gossip to suicide.

It is a tough-talk play, and leaves in all the words, thoughts, and actions that I remember from high school and hoped to get away from when I left. I felt honesty in some scene’s
and sensationalism in others, but I could see how this play would be well received by high school students because of this device. I think this play would be better received in an urban high school more than a rural high school — not because the issues are different, but because some issues are not as prominent, and the way the issues are handled in real life is different.

Sometimes these types of plays bother me, though. It seems that the playwrights, in an attempt to really communicate with the teenager, move to their level which is often down. So many of these “problem plays” are depressing and down-cast. They try to give us a “ray of hope,” but I’m too busy thinking “Does all of this really go on out there?” and I worry about the Sandy’s who are coping with incest, or the Lenny’s who are trying to resist peer pressure to resist drugs. I never leave these plays feeling like I’m better because I saw one or read one. I always feel like I was made aware of too much, and then left with the burden of everyone’s problems as well as my own. Maybe these plays are to show kids who have these types of troubles that they are not alone, and that they can survive, but at the same time, I would like to leave them with something more uplifting than everybody else’s uncertainties. The one monologue in this play that dealt with admiring one’s parents was refreshing, and honest, and I was glad to know that everyone’s “old man” wasn’t a drunk. I think troubled teenagers need to know that, too.

This play would tour very well, with a minimum set of maybe a couple of stools. Some of the scene’s can be omitted if they are too graphic for your area. It could be performed in an intimate setting, or a large auditorium. High school students could play the parts as well as young adults. — Erin Caldwell


If you have ever been a stranger in a foreign land where very few spoke your language, or have been in a situation where you did not feel accepted, you will identify with the play *New Canadian Kid*, or *New Kid*, by Dennis Foon of Green Thumb Theater, Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

To understand the plight of an immigrant to a new land, the writer has turned the tables with the foreigners (Homelanders) — Nick and his Mother — speaking English, and Mug and Mensh (the male and female Canadians) speaking gibberish. The gibberish adds to the play and is not too difficult to understand with the actions, props, and voice inflections.

Within the story, we learn of the trials Nick and his mother face — Nick at school and on the playground with Mug and Mensh. Nick tries to become friendly with them but faces a little opposition from Mug in particular. Mensh eventually does become friends with Nick leaving Mug on the outside. The mother has her trials in the community and in particular the grocery store.
The play, sensitively written with some very touching scenes, would be suitable for almost all children and adults alike. Very minimal props and sets are needed making the play easily transportable. The play could be played anywhere, lasting approximately 45 minutes.

The play, New Canadian Kid or New Kid, has played all over the world from Australia, to Europe and England, the U.S., and of course, Canada. The reviews have been excellent. A play of acceptance, understanding and love of different people. Well worth seeing or producing. — M. E. Perry


Huck Finn’s Story is a delightful adaptation of Mark Twain’s classic story. With Huck narrating the story, the audience meets the runaway slave Jim and the two scoundrels, King and Duke, who try to sell Jim for profit. As Huck recounts the story, he learns that it is more important to help a fellow human being than to live a life where self-preservation is the highest attainment.

Written for a small cast and to be performed with little or no set, the play would be excellent for a touring company or could easily be performed in a classroom. The characters are excellent, and youthful audiences will find the universal appeal of Huckleberry Finn that has captivated readers for over a hundred years. They will also see a way of looking at life that was more innocent and naïve than in our modern society.

While the play runs smoothly, the climax comes too quickly with Huck finding that Jim has been freed by his owner. The audience has felt empathy over Jim’s desire for freedom, wishes him to escape, and wonders if Huck will stand by him. Then, all of this is solved by Huck reading a letter that Jim is free. This simple solution does not heighten the action or culminate in a taut climax. The play also tends to oversimplify Jim’s character, and black audiences might be offended with his simple characterization.

This play would be most suitable for fifth through eighth grades, although it would also have an appeal for younger audiences. Huck Finn’s Story can be staged effectively with few props, costumes, and some sound cues. The play’s reliance on the interaction between actor and audience will make for an enjoyable theatrical experience for viewers who are more familiar with live theater, or for those who might be seeing a play for the first time.

— Gayanne Ramsden


This Volume contains 20 more of the best-loved plays for children. Ten of the plays are built for adult actors to perform for children, such as Charlotte’s Web, The Best Christmas
Pageant Ever, and The Wind in the Willows. The rest are designed for children to perform, including The Bremen Town Musicians, The Chinese Cinderella, and Pyramus and Thisbe (adapted from Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream). Royalty and performance information is included in the book to easily guide any interested party in obtaining permission to perform these pieces.

This is a marvelous way for anyone to become acquainted with a large number of excellent plays to be performed for and by children. The price (retail $19.95) is very reasonable, especially when compared to the minimum of $2.75 which would be charged per script if each play were ordered separately. You are also guaranteed to receive the finest plays available. Both Volume I and Volume II are a must for those involved with Theater for Young People, but should also be included in any library because of the value to teachers and the community. — Erin Caldwell


K-12 Royalty free. 283 pp.

This collection of royalty-free one-act plays contains six for the junior/senior high level, seven for the middle/lower grades, four adaptations from Christmas classics, and an improvised version of The Elves and the Shoemaker.

Middle/lower grade classroom teachers will benefit the most from this collection. There are several scripts for Christmas programs such as No Room at the Inn, Santa Claus for President, and The Santa Claus Twins. Also included are suggestions for improvised Christmas activities for the classroom. The junior/senior level of scripts could be used for classroom study or for church and community groups to perform. Although most of them are somewhat dated and have predictable endings, I found The Christmas Revel and Puppy Love warm and amusing. Adaptations of A Christmas Carol, The Bird's Christmas Carol, Christmas Everyday, and the Christmas scene from Little Women contains both humor and a Christmas message.

The scripts vary from fifteen to thirty-five minutes and can easily be adapted for touring. Production notes are included for each script. — Dianne Breinholt


I'll Be Cloned for Christmas is a very confusing, and ridiculous Christmas story about teenagers changing places with aliens who are looking for holidays to take back to their planet. The parents of the teenagers are “nerds” (and frankly, I’m tired of the portrayal of inept parents); the teenagers are annoyed with their embarrassing parents; the aliens are just plain silly; and there is even a capitalist grandmother who knowingly sends the family and their car over a cliff.
Okay, I can deal with just-for-the-sake-of-being-stupid senseless, teenage humor, but at the end of this play we are slapped with an incongruent Christmas message so heavy that it drips with Frankincense. I was fairly shocked with the abruptness and seriousness of the coming of the “Messiah” on the aliens’ planet that followed a ridiculous story line. The only good thing I can say about this play is that it has a large cast of thirty-one, and if a high school were really desperate for an assembly, they might think of this play. — Erin Caldwell


*Hotch Scotch Plays* is a collection of participation plays based on Bible stories. They are geared for adult/youth presentation to children ages 4 to 8. The Bible stories are presented in a fun, imaginative way which does not stick to a literal translation, yet keeps the message intact. The child audience is encouraged to actively participate, both verbally and physically. Included in this collection are the stories of Miriam, Esther, Ruth, and Deborah.

Staging is very easy with sets and lights at a bare minimum. Costumes and props are also simple, making these easy to “take on the road.” The pieces are written to be produced by church groups for children in the local community or congregation. Casting requires at least six actors who are sensitive and experiences enough to interact with the childrens’ input and incorporate it into the script. Improvisation skills are a must; however, the input from the audience must be handled in such a way as to be constructive to the message of the piece. Noise and free response must be expected and encouraged, but the actors should be able to check any disruptive behavior.

Songs, games, pantomime and magic tricks are incorporated within the scripts to add enjoyment and interest. These pieces are a fun way to introduce and involve children in Bible stories. — C. Bartlett