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Play Reviews

Gayanne Ramsden

Rosemarie Howard

Noreen Austin

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Play Reviews


This script follows, with some variations, the traditional tale of the girl who dresses up for a ball and finds her prince. The differences in the traditional plot include a prince who must marry before he is twenty-three, a stepmother who is an evil fairy who has captured Cinderella, and some magic clocks that lead the prince to Cinderella after the glass slipper is shattered.

There are however some problems with these additions. We are not told why the prince must marry by the age of twenty-three and who stipulated this. We also don’t know why the stepmother/evil fairy captured Cinderella or why Cinderella was kept a drudge for many years. It is also uncertain why the clocks are set to watch over and protect Cinderella. These loose ends detract from the script. It is also unfortunate that the kingdom is called Frankenstein as there are so many associations with that name. Finally the lyrics of this piece lack originality and they do not move the action forward or give us insight into character. On the whole, there are better adaptations of the Cinderella story.

—Gayanne Ramsden


This play is a clever vehicle for audience involvement and provides some clever and simple vehicles for imaginative mime and costuming. The story involves a dinosaur egg which is trying to hatch. Mammal protects the egg from the tyrannosaurs with the aid of Tank, a triceratops, and the participating audience. Mammal then persuades a brontosaurus to be the hatching egg’s mother and Tank to be the dad. The audience is involved in helping hatch the egg, in persuading the adult dinosaurs to raise the baby, in creating a dust storm to defeat the tyrannosaurs and in creating a swamp for the new family to call home. The premise is cute, as long as the audience is willing to suspend disbelief enough to think that warm mammals are needed to hatch
reptilian eggs, that mammals of their sort lived at the time that
dinosaurs lived, that a two parent family is necessary for the healthy
growth of the infant reptile, that a ten second dust storm will dry up a
swamp and kill a tyrannosaurs and that sort of thing. It is a clever short
play, however, and it does provide a good opportunity for participation.

The play would be well received by an elementary age audience,
probably K-3. It should be performed by mature high school
performers since the Mammal character must be able to direct and
control a crowd response and be mature enough to adapt to it. The play
could be staged with very few props and with very few costume pieces
and there are some good suggestions for inexpensive costume and
staging tips in the book.

—Noreen Austin

B-4
Leonard, Donald J., Jr. The Frog Prince. Music and lyrics by David
Reiser.

upon request.

This is a musical version of the Grimms’ fairytale of the prince who
is turned into a frog and can only be freed by being kissed by a
princess. In this story the princess has also been enchanted and she is
not able to speak intelligently. The evil witch who has cast these spells
is posing as the princesses aunt and hopes to take the place of the
princess and be crowned as queen of the realm. However, the frog
prince, with the help of some real frogs and a magic ball, is able to
break the spell.

The story takes an original twist with the princess being enchanted
and the witch trying to take over the kingdom. It is a cute story that
would appeal to younger children. It is a shame, however, that this
writer, like so many modern adapters of fairy tales, seems to ignore that
fairy tales are archetypal stories that deal with our deepest desires and
wishes and treats the tales in a trivial manner. Leonard puts on an
amusing show but ignores the mystery and beauty of the original tale.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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Samuel French, Ltd., 1989. 53 pp. 25-30 (up to 60) actors.

Seven golden dragons, young members of a losing football (soccer) team called the Golden Dragons, are magically transported to the land of the Eflings and Orcs via a magic ring. The peace-loving Eflings believe the seven boys have come to fulfill one of their ancient prophecies that says seven Golden Dragons will save them from being destroyed by the Orcs. The Orcs, led by the hateful Znakber, are determined to exterminate the Eflings unless the Eflings will give them a powerful magic ring. Because the Eflings will not cooperate, the Orcs promise to kill one of them each day until the ring is turned over to them. The seven golden dragons teach the Eflings to stand up for themselves and the Orcs are defeated.

If the playwright’s intent was to produce a rather wildly insane adventure story with a moral, starring obnoxious, silly and monstrous characters that would appeal to upper elementary age boys, he has succeeded. The play’s humor and use of language reflect the fact that it was written and produced in an English boy’s school. It would be useful mainly as a class drama project to help build confidence and self-esteem. Although the play is written for an all-male cast, the playwright suggests that girls might play some or all of the parts. This would change the entire character of the story and would demand major rewriting.

The play would best be produced by an upper elementary group of boys as a class project. It would probably be best enjoyed by an audience of the same age and gender.

—Rosemarie Howard


Neal Downer will inherit an estate if he stays in his diseased uncle’s old house over night. The only problem is, the house is haunted. With him are his fiance and friend and during the night two business men arrive, as well as a neighbor, a medium and a ghost. The ghost is tired of haunting the house but is part of a union and must do his job. The two business men turn out to be smugglers and they are also haunting the house in order to get Neal out of it. However, Neal stays the night and gets his inheritance.
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This play would be great fun for a high school as there is a ghost that glows in the dark, a table that floats and another ghost that flies through the air. The plot is well conceived and the story includes smugglers and the Coast Guard to the rescue. The only problem with the play is in characterization. Neal is supposed to have fallen in love with the neighbor but we see little motivation for this and there is no love resolution; they just walk off together. However for a light hearted evening this would do well for a high school play. The special effects are easy to achieve and there are simple directions on how to produce them. I think teenagers would enjoy being in this play as well as watching it.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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Morris, Vera. *Jack and the Magic Bean.*


This is the traditional tale of the boy Jack who sells a cow for some magic beans and climbs his way to the sky and combats a giant. However, there have been some new additions to the plot. The whole village is being terrorized by the giant who has just stolen their queen and is holding her for ransom. The queen's daughter, trying to raise the ransom, must evict all people who cannot pay taxes. Jack's family is too poor to pay the taxes and must sell their only possession, the cow Miss Priss, in order to keep their farm. Added to the story is a cast of villagers, a queen and princess, a troll, and a lady in waiting. All of the new characters have a function in the plot except for the lady-in-waiting, Lady Stumble-Mumble, and the Scarecrow Girl. Stumble-Mumble is supposed to be a comic character who stumbles and mumbles but she is not funny and serves no purpose in the story. Also the Scarecrow Girl does nothing to enhance the plot and is a rather insipid character.

The play gives excellent stage directions and all of the set pieces are simple and would be easy to construct. However, the play lacks originality and the humor is trite. While younger children would enjoy the play because it has animals and a scary giant, it is to be hoped that they should also be given a production piece that raises their taste and teaches them discrimination, neither of which this piece does. It is a slap-stick comedy that isn't funny. The play has neither charm nor wit.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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A Sergei, Christopher. *The Outsiders.*

*The Outsiders* is a powerful play about a young boy who learns that life is worth living. In this drama about gangs, a young teenager named Ponyboy looses two of his best friends who die because of gang related fights. Through it all he learns of the worth of each individual.

This is a well-written play based upon an excellent teen novel. In it we are introduced to some kids from the wrong side of the tracks who become real to us and for whom we learn to care. Ponyboy is the narrator as well as the star of the story. His monologues bridge scenes that would be difficult to stage. The play could be done on an empty stage and still be effective. This drama would tour well. I highly recommend it for junior and senior high school audiences.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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