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Play Reviews

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Children's Book Review 45

Play Reviews


B+ K-3

Reviewed by Dianne Breinholt

King Duldrum and Queen Flutterbye want their daughter, Princess Greta, to get married, but every time a suitor arrives, Greta insults them with a rhyme. After failing with knights, earls, dukes, and even a prince, Greta wonders what is wrong with herself and worries that she will never be cured. Finally a baker arrives and cures the princess by hurling insults right back at her. This builds to a climax as they go through the alphabet, volleying insults back and forth. The baker shows Greta that a person cannot be insulted by words if he likes himself. He also encourages her to use her rhyming talents to write poetry, which she does.

This short play can be used as an excellent springboard for a discussion on interpersonal relationships. Many writing and creative dramatic activities could result from the ABC volley. The characters are lively and funny, and the duel between a page and an unseen trumpet player can be hilarious if played right. I found myself laughing aloud as I read it.

This show is an ideal classroom project for upper elementary and high school students to perform for kindergarten through third grade students. The simple setting and flexible cast make it easy for touring.

★★★★


A- 7-12

Reviewed by Noreen Astin

This play is a modern story about young people who drink and drive. The names of the characters are clever and in keeping with the plot: Bud Wiser, Mickey Lobe, Margarita, Brandy, Jack Daniels, etc. The play is a much more human and interesting treatment of a frequently handled problem, and it succeeds better than most. The story begins as Mogen, a reserved character, feels increased pressure to drink with the others. Bud, a central character, has
some driving problems after a night of drinking. After seeing some slides of car accidents (the only heavily didactic touch in the play), Bud’s girlfriend Sassy Parilla convinces him to promise not to drink and then drive with her. Bud decides he can drink a little and then drive with a friend because they need his van for the after-prom celebrations. Bud ends up getting killed, and the young people are sobered. Unlike many plays that deal with social problems, this play does not give a lot of general information about the problem. It simply presents the problem and then shows the consequences. The story works because the young people speak in modern language and share their feelings so that the audience relates to them and feels the loss of their friend. The audience can feel the guilt of the character who urges Bud to drink, as well. There is a chance to change life patterns and habits if this play is sensitively done. In an alternate ending, the boy does not die, and the young people all learn and live happily ever after. If the death ending is too stark, the director may chose this alternative ending instead. The staging can be done flexibly and inexpensively, and some characters can be doubled, eliminated, or added to fit the available group. The play is a musical, and there are lyrics to many of the songs in the script, but I did not have the opportunity to hear the music. The lyrics give an upbeat and youthful feeling to the play—I assume that the music would do so as well. Many of the lines are clever, and the characters are enjoyable and have realistic feelings. Youth who are aware of the problems of drinking could be helped and entertained by this play.


Reviewed by Debra Peterson

The Beauty of Dreaming Wood is a two-act play based on the traditional fairy tale Sleeping Beauty. As in the traditional tales, at her christening Beauty is given four good gifts and the evil gift of death by a spindle from the uninvited, vengeful, evil fairy. However, in this play Beauty must choose to make the good magic work over the evil spell. She must choose to dream instead of die. She must call to the prince, Honore, and trust that he will wake her.

On her sixteenth birthday Beauty is frustrated because she wants to be grown up. She doesn’t understand why she is overprotected. She knows nothing of the evil fairy’s gift. Believing she will be able to be grown up, she accepts a spindle from the evil fairy. She experiences the pain of betrayal and must heal herself by facing her fears, trusting, and reaching out to those who are there to help her.
In her dreams, Beauty reaches to a salamander, which is a symbol of the evil fairy. As Beauty reaches to it, she makes it well again. She realizes that growing up is doing something important and not just what she wants. She calls to Honore in her sleep. He kills the evil fairy. The palace awakens to peace. The characters have depth and contrast with one another. The importance of Honore in Beauty's life is made more apparent by her actions toward him and toward two awkward, and ungraceful princes. The good fairy is absentminded and the evil fairy is witty. Beauty also shows contrast in her own character: four of her gifts were beauty, courage, a warm heart, and a bit of the opposite to keep her human.

This play is entertaining and dramatic. It may appeal to audiences of all ages. It casts about twenty-two characters and runs for about two hours.


A- K-Reviewed by Dianne Breinholt

It's the twelfth century in merry olde England. The evil Prince John has usurped the throne from his brother King Richard the Lion-Hearted and has heaped unnecessary taxes on the peasants of his kingdom. Robin Hood and his band of "Merry Persons" of Sherwood Forest are helping to relieve the tax burden by robbing the tax collectors and returning the money to the peasants. Robin and his band are becoming a nuisance, especially to the Sheriff of Nottingham, who is the chief collector for Prince John. While riding through Sherwood Forest with the beautiful Maid Marian and other courtiers, the sheriff is robbed; his hands are bound, and he is thrown over his horse and sent home. This humiliation, in addition to others, causes the sheriff to set a trap for Robin Hood. An archery contest is held, with the fair Maid Marian as the bait. Robin wins the contest but is captured and sentenced to be hanged. However, he escapes with the help of Little John and Marian, who joins his band.

This play is a fast-paced, rollicking romp with adult undertones. Pisarski has developed some delightfully human characters. For example, Maid Marian plays hard to get and seems to ignore Robin. Robin tries to be a minstrel for one of his many disguises, but he has a lousy singing voice. The cast can be as large as fourteen or as few as three women and four men. The action is enhanced by Alana Dale, a minstrel who sings about Robin's many escapades. One warning: careful attention must be played to the blocking of the fight scenes.
The scenery consists of stools or boxes and a ladder, so the show is ideal for touring. Reversible tunics and other additive pieces make the costuming simple. Ninth grade students on up to adults will find this script challenging and fun to perform for a kindergarten through an adult audience.


Reviewed by Kim Dudley

*Touchtone "M" For Murder* is a fun melodramatic mystery in two acts. The cartoonlike characters have witty lines, and fourth through sixth grade students may really enjoy them. Sam Slade, the hero and detective, is endearing. The play requires much interaction with the audience, as in any melodrama. For the play to be successful, an extremely talented actor must play Sam Slade: he must establish a good rapport with the audience and draw them into the production. Hence a more intimate audience ideal.

This production calls for a large cast—seventeen people. Also, the many sound cues, costumes, and props could be demanding, but the author offers some practical suggestions. Some of the scripted lines may be inappropriate for this young age group as well.

If handled properly and rehearsed well, this production could be enjoyable for all involved.


Reviewed by Jennie Tobler

*Amber Waves* is a modern drama about a farming family who are caught, unaware and unprepared, in the declining economy. Penny and Mike, the parents, attempt to shield their children from their financial problems, but the tension becomes so apparent that Mike, their sixteen-year-old son, starts having fights at school. Deb, their twelve-year-old daughter, begins having terrible nightmares. She finds comfort and support in One-Eye Johnny, an elderly neighbor who gives her odd jobs and talks to her honestly. Deb's parents finally realize that they must swallow their pride and make the changes that might allow them to survive this difficult time: Penny takes a job as a cook at the high
school, and Mike rents out part of the land. Although the problem is not completely resolved, the play does leave us with a sense of hope.

This play functions on multiple levels. On one hand, it is a social commentary that vividly dramatizes the plight of the independent farmer who cannot survive against corporate farming. On another level, the play explores the difficulties that arise in families when loved ones are not honest enough with one another to share problems and ask for help. The script could be performed effectively by adult performers for almost any age group. The set design in the script is very elaborate, but it could easily be simplified.

★★★★


A 5-Adult

Reviewed by Kim Dudley

*Six Canterbury Tales* is a delightful way to introduce Chaucer’s work to fifth graders through adults. This adaptation is inviting: the tales range from the hilarious, with "The Wife of Bath’s Tale," to the serious, with the "Nun’s Tale." This work should hold the attention of even the most critical audience.

The cast could be doubled, or it could be reduced to as few as six. The actors, however, need to be skilled or well directed, because timing and character are central for a worthwhile production. Costumes and sets require some creativity, but they are achievable, and some suggestions for managing them are given in the play.

This work would be a valuable introductory performance or perhaps even a worthwhile exercise in the classroom.

★★★★