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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


A- Pre-2 Reviewed by Kim Dudley

How Things Happen in Three is an upbeat musical with words and lyrics by Tom Behn and music by Rose Marie Cooper. With the proper director, choreographer and music coach, children from preschool through second grade could be spellbound as the various nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and stories are presented.

The cast can be condensed to as little as six to tour, but it easily welcomes expansion with its numerous characters and stories. This play contains excerpts from many favorites including "The Three Little Kittens," "The Three Bears," "Three Billy Goats Gruff," and "The Three Little Pigs." This catchy, fast-paced, and fun production will hold the wiggliest of crowds.


B+ 3-6 Reviewed by Mary Randak

This play is a lighthearted retelling of the biblical stories of Abraham and Isaac, and David and Goliath. The playwright has added two modern teenagers as "teen angels"; they are given the job of going back in time to retrieve certain objects, in a sort of biblical treasure hunt. By completing their task, they inadvertently help teenaged Isaac and David fulfill their destinies.

While some with religious sensibilities might be offended by "tampering" with the scriptures, I didn't find the play disrespectful. The play shows that sometimes humans need divine assistance. The "teen angels" need divine assistance as well.

This show calls for a cast of seven, but it could be done with five performers and one quick costume change. It is written to be performed on a bare stage with props to indicate scene changes. It is very lively with a lot of dramatic action that children would enjoy, such as when Abraham mistakes Ted
for the ram that he is supposed to sacrifice in Isaac’s place. It would certainly be an excellent show for a church youth group to perform, as long as the informal treatment and the colloquial language would not offend.


**C 6-8**

Reviewed by Kim Dudley

*The Trouble with Derek* (based on the comic strip *Luann* by Greg Evans), attempts to deal with the problem of drugs and with the fact that looks do not determine security or situation in life. However, the play deals with these significant topics stereotypically and only on a surface level; this nullifies the message.

Derek, a smooth-talking new guy at Pitts Junior/Senior High School, drives a fancy car and flatters and manipulates the people who buy drugs from him. He uses the locker of a homely girl named Bernice to store his drugs by making her believe he likes her. When she discovers he is using her, she exposes him, and the students turn on Derek.

The plot is not even remotely realistic, and it deals poorly with a serious problem now facing society.


**B K-6**

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

This book is a lively and entertaining musical version of Aladdin—complete with three genies, a monkey, a dragon, an evil magician, and his equally evil sister.

The script has the potential of being very enchanting. However, the language is often that of a melodrama instead of a magical fairy tale. Some of the characters, particularly Scherazade and the dragon, don’t seem to have any reason for being there. Perhaps if Scherazade were a member of the king’s court, she would fit in better. The dragon is cute, but unessential. The attempts at audience involvement are inconsistent and not integral to the play; they should either be expanded or dropped entirely. As it is, they are distracting and sometimes condescending.
The music is very good—melodic, rhythmic, with just the right Eastern flavor. Written in a range easily attainable for average voices, the music enhances the story.

There are parts for five males and fifteen females, as well as extras to act as citizens of Shammar and court attendants. The play could work as an elementary school production. Set requirements and costumes can be as simple or elaborate as desired. There are suggestions for set design at the end of the script.


A 5+ Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

In this one-act play about growing up, Timothy Kurtz, age sixteen, recalls the summer he was twelve. Tim’s parents have been divorced for some time. His father has been remarried for several years, and his mother, who has recently remarried, is on her honeymoon, so Timothy spends the summer with his recently widowed grandfather, who lives in a small college town in Minnesota.

Timothy and his grandfather view life very differently. For example, Timothy loves to read, while his grandfather thinks the only way to learn is to do things. Despite their differences, as the summer progresses, Timothy and his grandfather learn to respect, love, and accept each other.

The story and characters have depth and deal with a situation that many young people today can relate to. It suggests that finding out who we are through relationships allows us to grow.

The script requires eight actors, seven males and one female. Set requirements are minimal. Fifth grade through adult audiences would find this play entertaining and thought provoking.


B+ 5-8 Reviewed by Kim Dudley

This play invites the audience to examine people before making rash judgments. It takes place in a high school bathroom and gym during a dance. There are only five characters, and the set is not demanding. The characters are
high school juniors, and none of them, except Clarisse, who must be pretty, have strict casting requirements.

Most audience members will be able to relate to the story line. A popular girl, Clarisse, befriends a loner-type girl, Julie, in the bathroom at the school dance. Julie was forced to come to the dance by her mother. During their discussion they begin to view each other as individuals and not as the stereotype. Julie gains more confidence and attracts others to her after Clarisse encourages her to join the dance. The characters are well developed and endearing.

The play is enjoyable and worthwhile because it encourages participants to learn about others. The script alone should hold the audience.


*The Adventures of Babar* is based on characters and events from the beloved children’s "Babar" storybooks. Thomas W. Olson worked with the author of these storybooks, Laurent de Brunhoff, to insure accuracy. Younger children who enjoy the "Babar" stories will probably like this play because it so closely follows the characters and events. One disadvantage of reading the play is the constant use of French words, but the phrases can be clarified during production as long as the director or actor speaks French.

The play centers around the kidnapping of Babar’s children and their rescue, which also includes the rescue of the kingdom. Much of this story is narrative because the animals themselves do not speak.

This production would require a great many props and special lighting and costumes, but children would thoroughly enjoy the spectacle.


This play is a very entertaining and sobering look at Samuel Clemens’ later years (Mark Twain). The action centers around a young publisher, Harold Atwater, who attempts to squeeze another childhood adventure book out of Clemens, who insists that he has "lost the river."
There are ten characters, five male and five female. One set is slightly elaborate, consisting of a Victorian parlor and Clemens' adjoining study. The script is very well-written, and the dialogue presents themes from Clemens' later years. This script could be used in conjunction with a study of Clemens' life or works. The actor who plays Clemens must be strong and versatile. The script would be best suited for a community theater because of the range of ages in characters and the set requirements, but a talented high school troupe could pull it off.

Much of Clemens' later life is often associated with misery or ignored completely, but this play has a very optimistic conclusion and explores some less realized aspects of this great writer's personality.


**B+ 9-12**

*One Thousand Cranes* is about atomic and nuclear bombs and their effect on children. The script is dated because of the reference to the arms race between the United States and Russia, but it does reveal some truths. Thomas' play follows two story lines: Sadako, a young Japanese girl, discovers she has leukemia as a result of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; and Buddy, a Canadian boy, is so obsessed with the threat of nuclear war that he becomes an avid peace protester. However, these story lines are not developed enough—we do not follow either of the characters closely enough to deeply sympathize with them. Also, the audience finds out from a narrator that Sadako dies; this seems to detract from her story a great deal because the title of the play refers to cranes, which are symbolic of Sadako's hope. One other problem in the play is the use of the Japanese word *chan*, used by older people who are addressing younger people, as it is in Japan, but also by younger people addressing older people, which is incorrect usage. This error detracts from the storyline.

The play does have some merit: it deals with a solemn topic while still keeping the viewer entertained with songs and dances. It also seems to capture nicely some of the characters' relationships.

Thomas offers many suggestions for all aspects of the performance. This play may be effective in teaching history, and it could be performed in an amateur classroom setting or on a greater scale. Children may have fun with the music and dancing, while adults may enjoy its message.

**Reviewed by Mary Randak**

Teenage suicide is a difficult subject, and few plays for youth have dealt with the subject. *Thistle Blossoms* is such a play, but it seems seriously incomplete. It consists of one scene between a college professor and Lisa, a "troubled student," and the dialogue does not provide the audience with a deep enough understanding of Lisa to believe what she says. She talks about how she feels, but we never see her show how she feels. As a result, I was left wondering whether she was serious about killing herself or was just trying to get out of doing a difficult assignment. This is too serious a subject to have an easy ending such as this play has.

If *Thistle Blossoms* could be developed into a full-length play and if the main character were developed more, I think the play would be a valuable addition to the literature on teen suicide. As it stands now, however, I would not recommend it other than for a classroom drama exercise.

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