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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


The Bridgework Theater offers several dramatic programs that deal with social problems. This particular program is on Child Sexual Abuse and consists of two plays and a resource manual. Whether you are bringing in The Bridgework Theater, or you are interested in buying the rights to perform the plays, the resource manual gives background material for their program. The Bridgework Theater will not sell the rights to the play without feeling comfortable that those wishing to perform are adequately trained in dealing with sexual abuse. They, themselves, offer a teacher training session, and advise that a Child Protective Agency be involved. The cost of bringing The Bridgework Theater to perform starts at $400. The cost of buying the right to perform the plays live is $1000 for the first performance, and $300 for each additional performance. A video tape is also available at $150 a piece. (For additional prices contact The Bridgework Theater.)

The first play, *Little Bear*, is geared for the lower elementary grades. It shows and discusses appropriate and inappropriate behavior between children and adults. The play demonstrates and discusses the difference between a warm, comfortable hug, and embarrassing, uncomfortable touching. They also show, so that there can be no confusion, what and where your “private parts” are. A discussion is led so a child will know what to do in case he/she feels threatened. The script helps the actors learn to handle group discussions in the context of the performance and how to get the children involved. It is a very frank play and is very good in dealing with this somewhat tender subject. For Pre-school through third grade, and maybe fourth, it appears to be a very effective medium for the message of the Prevention of Child Abuse. My only objection would be in including the upper Elementary grade children in the audience. The script indicates that grades 4-6 might laugh at certain parts, and I believe they will. I think the script may be, for lack of better words, “too cute” for these older children and they may be too “mature” to see themselves in the play and report any abuse they have experienced. Those age groups would probably be better served by the other play Bridgework offers: *Out of the Trap*.

*Out of the Trap* is geared for Middle school-aged children and talks non-discreetly about what constitutes Sexual Abuse. The play is in two parts. The first part is in play form with three players acting out a probable scene. It shows the beginning stages of sexual abuse and refers to a serious episode of abuse. The girl tries to stop the deed and does not succeed. Later she tries to tell her parents and they try, ignorantly, to pass it off as “nothing.” In the second
part the actors try to help themselves understand what the abuse was all about and what can be done about it. Through this rehearsed “improv” they come up with real life solutions so the “victim” can keep from being a victim. They reaffirm the fact that you can say “NO,” and encourage children to continue telling a trusted adult until someone believes you. Out of the Trap is not as well-written as Little Bear, but the message is strong and leaves no misunderstanding of what is appropriate and what is not. Both plays are highly recommended.

—Erin Caldwell


The play begins with Claus, as a baby, being found by a fairy who raises him as her own. The scene jumps ahead to Claus, as an adult, leaving home to make his way in the world. The action centers around the experiences of Claus in the Laughing Valley of Hohaho where he makes toys for the children. The children are so delighted that they name him Santa (Saint) Claus. The Awful Awgwas hatch a plot to steal the toys and kidnap Santa. The children discover the hiding place, attempt to recover the toys and rescue Santa, but are caught in the act. Elves from Santa’s mother appear with magic toy bags to temporarily “freeze” the Awgwas. Santa knows he must find a place far away where no evil can come to prevent his toy making. His mother tells him of the North Pole and gives him a sleigh and reindeer for the journey. Santa promises to return in his sleigh each year with toys for all the children of the world.

Although rather trite, The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus can be fun to produce for younger elementary and preschool students. The script is overly simplistic, but contains all the basic elements needed for a “fairy” story: the hero, the nasty villains, and magical solutions to problems. Santa’s kindness and generosity is overshadowed by the greed and selfishness of the children. Even his rescue is secondary to the desire of recovering the toys.

The script could stand on its own, but is accompanied by a musical score. The best song is the theme of the Awful Awgwas, which when accompanied by their antics, stalking walks and face-making is a lot of fun. The songs for Claus are extremely high for a male singer and could cause some problems.

The show tends to be prop and set heavy, limiting its versatility, but could be successfully staged using lights or platforms to indicate various locations. The script jumps around from shop to valley to cave and back, and includes a sleigh and reindeer which appears to “fly.” The cast of 17 could be enlarged. Costumes are basically simple other than those for the Awgwas.

The script could be used as a springboard for discussion of greed and selfishness. The class could then be guided to present another version of the story stressing the children’s concern for Santa’s safety and the Christmas spirit of helping and giving, which the current play does not provide.

—Christine Bartlett

Having looked and looked for scenes from plays that today’s students can identify with and finding nothing, Kat Sawyer-Young has written her own. Suitable for ages ten through seventeen, these twelve two-person scenes are written about contemporary issues with contemporary names and language patterns. Subjects such as friendship, divorce, parents, boy/girl relationships, and sibling rivalry are adequately covered. Some of the better scenes are Camp-out and Divorce for Elementary, and Fishing for Junior High. I was not that impressed with the four scenes for High School.

The scenes range from one to two minutes in length. The dialogue is “similar to the actual dialogue the students would be encountering in film or television scripts.” Some profanity is used but could be edited with little difficulty. Many of the scenes have weak endings. They seem to end in the middle of a conversation, or the actors leave because it’s time to end the scene. A strong punch line or at least some sort of focussed ending would improve them.

These scenes are good for beginning actors; however, I feel there are some plays dealing with contemporary issues from which scenes can also be taken. They can be used individually for classroom study, or can be performed as a showcase with simple costumes, props, and set pieces or blocks.

—Dianne Breinholt


This collection of monologues are divided into four areas: Girls: 13-15, Boys: 13-15, Girls: 16-18, and Boys: 16-18. The subjects cover everything from insecure feelings, such as being ugly or fat, to social issues such as pregnancy, sexual abuse, and divorce.

Though some of them may seem a bit short, they are written to last one minute which will cause beginning actors to think before speaking. The language is written in a contemporary “teen” style. Though some may be offended at the profanity, it can easily edited.

These monologues are designed for classroom use, but can be used as audition pieces or performed by a group in a showcase. Most students will find these challenging and satisfying.

—Dianne Breinholt


*Really Rosie* is a compilation of Maurice Sendak’s Nutshell Library books. The story centers around the attempts of Rosie and her inner-city friends to escape from reality through the use of their imagination. Rosie, the leader of the group, imagines making a movie of her life on Avenue P. Her friends, Kathy, Johnny, Pierre, Alligator, and Chicken Soup (her little brother), are all caught up in the play and each contributes a scene. The children’s frustrations
with their real home lives, their feelings of rebellion towards verbally abusive and uncaring parents, and their desires for something better comes through strongly. The play ends on a definite up as Rosie determines to someday make Avenue P as it ought to be — “a terrific place for people like me.”

The music by Carole King is delightful. Ranging from nursery to jazz, from religious chant to pop, the variety is well suited to the dialogue and capable of keeping the interest of young and old audience members. The staging requires two distinct areas which could be done effectively with platforms or a turntable. Costuming is simple with props kept to a minimum. The cast of 11 could be expanded as needed. The script is fast-paced and full of movement.

This play could be produced by Junior High or older students with the presentation acceptable for elementary grades. Mixed Groups would benefit from the performance of this script.

—Christine Bartlett