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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


*Gammar Gurton's Needle* is a slapstick farce full of chases, mock fights, and mistaken situations that are all brought about by one rogue named Dick. Vern Adix has adapted, for children, this sixteenth century English comedy using an old English dialect that adds flavor to the piece. He has omitted the earthy and coarse humor and left the pratfalls and farcical incidents.

In this delightful comedy, Dame Gammar Gurton loses her needle and ends up accusing her neighbor, Dame Chat, of theft. It is the wily n'er-do-well Dick who tells Gammar that Dame Chat has stolen her needle while he also tells Dame Chat that Gammar Gurton has roasted and eaten her rooster. This is just the beginning of false information and confusion that Dick brings to these two neighbors. The resolution to this entertaining farce is when Hodge, Gammar Gurton's servant, is found to have the needle in the seat of his pants. The play is continually full of mischief and intrigue, but the climax falls a little short when the rogue, Dick, is so easily forgiven for all the trouble he has caused.

It would be an easy play to mount as there are only two houses that are used throughout the story. The costumes would be either Middle Ages or early Renaissance.

*Gammar Gurton's Needle* would lend itself well to discussion of a society where a needle was not to be bought at the department store or the supermarket. I recommend it for upper grades in elementary school and middle and high school.

--Gayanne Ramsden


*The Mermaid's Tale* is a simplified adaptation of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid*. The little mermaid makes a choice to leave the ocean and become a human. She hopes to have the prince fall in love with her for she loves him. She fails, for the prince loves and marries the princess. The sea witch has made it possible for her to become a human and gives her a choice, either to kill the prince, or die, herself, of a broken heart. She chooses to die herself. Since she has lived and loved unselfishly, she will not die, but becomes a beautiful spirit and helps people by bringing to them light, sweetness, and health.

*The Mermaid's Tale* is quite simplistic in both plot and character development. By staying with the elementary principles of the story, there is little motivation for
most of the story line. The piece loses the charm of the original through its use of coloquial language and deviations from the original story. Its most positive aspect is the theme of unselfish love. This work is recommended as a classroom exercise for audiences kindergarten through third grade.

--Wyatt Hester


Mark Twain's most popular novel, and the author himself, come to life in Goodman's play adaptation. Mark Twain becomes the narrator of this adventurous tale which includes some of the most exciting scenes not usually included in play adaptations. We see Tom and Huck at the graveyard witnessing the murder of Doc Robinson by Injun Joe. Later, in the courtroom scene where Muff Potter is on trial for the murder, we witness Tom courageously taking the stand to reveal the real murderer. Finally, when Tom is lost in a cave with his girlfriend, Becky, Injun Joe appears and attempts to kill Tom. But Muff Potter arrives on the scene and confronts Injun Joe. During the fight between the two men, Injun Joe accidentally falls on his own knife. And so, Muff saves Tom's life in return for Sawyer's previous heroic deed.

This play is well presented with Twain as the narrator who bridges the gap between scenes, making for smooth transitions. The presence of the storyteller in the play adds interesting touches of reality to the fictitious tale which makes the story especially captivating to young audiences. Although the cast is large (26 plus townsfolk), characters can be easily played by actors taking on double parts. No scenery is required, only a few tables, chairs, and benches. These instructions are built into the narrator's lines which is unnecessarily restricting for those who would prefer to include elaborate scenery as part of the production. However, the play is well-written and suitable to be performed by high school students and adults. Highly recommended for family audiences.

--Violet J. Balzan


*Cheaper by the Dozen* is based on the book with the same title by Frank B. Gilbreth, Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey. The story deals with Frank Gilbreth, a scientist who dealt with time and motion study, and his wife and their twelve children. The main action of this musical play centers around their oldest daughter,
Anne, as she matures to a young woman. She comes to terms with dating, being attractive, and feminine. Her father, on the other hand, is content with her success as a scholar and continues to apply his scientific approach to learning. Anne does not understand how her father can push her through these ridiculous methods to learn all types of unusual data. She discovers, however, that he does not have long to live and is trying to prepare his family to be self-supporting in his absence. Anne matures and understands what her father is trying to do for the family. Dad, as well, learns a lesson of life. He realizes that Anne needs more than study and invites Anne's boyfriend, Larry, to the family council meeting before he has to leave.

_Cheaper by the Dozen_ is a subtly moving play. It is well-written and has excellent lyrics and music. Through we are faced with the death of the father, the tone of the play continues to be uplifting as we see the family confront life and learn better how to live it.

This musical is fast paced and exciting. It requires multiple settings and mature actors for parental roles. This play is recommended for professional and educational productions for an audience of fourth grade to adult.

--Wyatt Hester


Sternberg and Beechman's drama retells the life of Sojourner Truth from early childhood to old age. Through narration and vignette scenes, we see Sojourner as the young slave girl, Isavella, and her longing for freedom. When freed by the New York State Emancipation Act of 1827, she begins to travel and proclaim abolition of slavery and equal rights for all women. Sojourner continues her struggle throughout her life and in the final scenes of the play talks with President Lincoln and the United States Senate about her causes.

Sojourner has inherent production problems with the use of large number of loosely connected scenes. It also requires extensive doubling for characters in a brief amount of time. The part of Sojourner requires a mature, experienced actress with the ability to sing black spirituals in a cappella. The drama is faithful to the history of Sojourner and captures her spirit and charm. This script is recommended for readers' theater and classroom exercises. The recommended audience is sixth grade through high school.

--Wyatt Hester