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Play Reviews

Harold Oaks

Gayanne Ramsden

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The traditional story of the egotistical king with an obsession for clothes has a new twist. A father and son con team happen into the village and witness the pompous king and court (Minister of Fashion, Sultan of Style, Duchess of Dressing Up, etc.) on a visit to buy more new clothes, even though bills for past shopping trips have not been paid and the villagers are short of food. The selfish king can only seek his own pleasure and is an easy mark for the "Master Weaver" and his apprentice. The new clothes, light as air and possessing magic qualities allowing only those "qualified" for their offices to see them, are woven and donned, and, as the king parades, a child shouts "He's not wearing any clothes" (boxer shorts provided by the Underload of Undress prevent total disaster).

The play moves well, has some clever lines, and is designed to play out of a "Book" setting on almost any playing space. Characters are overdrawn and allow room for exaggeration. It is an interesting variation on the classic tale.

A production of adults or teens for children, or of older children for younger children would be possible.

—Harold Oaks

Maar, Paul. *Make a Friend, Find a Friend.* Translated by Anita and Alex Page.

Stephan has a new mother, a new school, and a new friend. But the new friend is not real. Unable to adjust to changes in his life, Stephan makes up a companion. The playmate plays by Stephan's rules and is an alternative to confronting his problems. As the story progresses, and Stephan starts to make friends with a real child, Stephan finds himself resisting his classmate Katy's friendship because she will not always do what he says, as his pretend friend does. Stephan also is having trouble with his parents. He is jealous of his stepmother, and his father is getting impatient with the imaginary friend.

At the end of the play, Stephan's father attempts to show Stephan his "friend" is imaginary only to find that Stephan, himself, has rejected his pretend world.

The story is done in short scenes and the conflict between Stephan and his school friends and his parents builds throughout the play. The characters are well drawn and we...
are sympathetic with Stephan's dilemma. On the whole, the story moves well, although the dialogue is somewhat stilted and may require a rewrite to sound more like everyday conversation. The climax is quite humorous with confusion caused when the parents and a neighbor lady attempt to interact with the pretend playmate. But Stephan has already dismissed the pretend friend and has made a real friend in Katy. The end is satisfying, mostly because it is Stephan's decision to end a counterfeit relationship without coercion. But the denouement, while funny, is unnecessary and is confusing to the plot when we find that the neighbor lady has a pretend friend of her own.

The story on the whole, however, is good and it would be a fine production for lower grades. It would be best if the parents and neighbor could be played by adults and the young people by children of appropriate ages.

—Gayanne Ramsden

Melanos, Jack A. *Sinbad and the Evil Genii.*
Anchorage Press, 1986. 84 pp. Royalty available upon request.

This is a play of high adventure with a mischievous boy, an evil merchant, a princess, a genii, and Sinbad: the sailor. Abou Hassan, a spunky young boy of thirteen, is waiting for his father to return from the Magic Isle of the Genii. Abou’s father had hoped to find treasure on the distant island and bring it back to his family. But an evil merchant wants the treasure himself and kidnaps Abou hoping that the boy can lead him to the treasure as Abou’s father has left him a map to the Isle of the Genii. Sinbad, a friend of Abou, is also captured to sail the ship, and a young princess who is out for a day of freedom becomes involved and is also taken by the evil merchant. Eventually, all make it to the Genii’s island and there, Abou, who has learned goodness and obedience from Sinbad, is able to outwit the wicked Genii and save the princess. In the process, the princess learns that she has been selfish and learns humility. Eventually, the merchant is destroyed by the evil powers of the island.

*Sinbad and the Evil Genii* would be very good for older elementary age children. It has a strong plot with heroes and villains and it’s theme of good versus evil could be easily understood and appreciated by children. It is a complicated story so it probably would work best for fourth through sixth grades rather than for younger children. The play would also be an excellent introduction for students to another culture with it’s belief in Allah.

The play could be done simply and the show would be able to tour, although it would be most effective with good lighting. It would be best if it were acted out by both adults
and children, although it is a play that older children could perform. The special effects are not difficult, and costuming should be done in an "Arabian Nights" style. The cast consists of twelve actors, although it can be reduced to six with an experienced and versatile cast.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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Mercati, Cynthia. *Facing-Up.*


In a lower income high school, the nerds, the leftovers, and the cast-offs are paying money to Johnny Pomeranian and his gang for the right to not get beaten up. Martin, one of the nerds, enlists the aid of the tough kid, Shane, to defend those who are being bullied by Johnny, who is really a coward. The play, at first, seems to deal with stereotypes, but as we get to know the different students, even members of Johnny’s gang emerge as individuals who are all trying to pretend they are someone else in order to gain acceptance from their peers. Finally, Martin challenges Johnny to a fight without the help of Shane. As Martin is willing to take a chance on himself, he makes Johnny back down and the other students are willing to face-up to who they are.

While some of the dialogue is weak and rather trite, the story is good and the audience will get involved with the high school kids and their problems. The theme of high school students finding their own identity is an excellent one. This would be an excellent play to be performed by high school students. The cast is large and there are good parts for both boys and girls.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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