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Play Reviews

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### A 3-6 Fam

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

This two-act comedy has the flavor of a melodrama. There is a good guy, Sir Oblong Fitz Oblong, and a bad guy, Jasper, the fifteenth Baron of Bollingrew; and each of them is assisted by an assortment of interesting characters. The Duke’s knights, Sir Oblong among them, have vanquished all the dragons in the country and are given a long vacation. Although the other knights think the vacation a good idea, Sir Oblong objects. He is made a Knight Errant and given a "Mission Impossible"—to rid the Bollingrew Islands of an unjust ruler and a ferocious dragon. Undaunted, he sails forth. With the help of the peasants and some animal friends, he restores a church Sir Bollingrew has destroyed, and he then proceeds (most unwittingly) to overcome the evil plots of Sir Bollingrew. Bollingrew is aided by Doctor Moloch, a professor of magic, and Moloch’s magpie, Mazeppa. Virtue and truth triumph. Bollingrew is deposed and goes north to slay dragons for sport, while Sir Oblong is made ruler over the Island of Bollingrew.

The play is well written and would be enjoyed by family audiences. Scenery is limited; the focus is on costumes, props, and the creation of characters. The large cast of twenty-nine would make it difficult to tour with this show; but it would work well as a community theatre piece.

★★★★


### B 5-Adult

Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Beatrice is about to lose her boarding house to the evil Luther Swett, her deceased father’s partner who, according to her Father’s will, holds all the family’s assets. Swett offers to marry Beatrice and pay off all her bills. Beatrice and her boarders try to start a ”Broadway and Brunch” establishment.
that would offer food and entertainment. The project fails when the "dip" prepared by the hard-of-hearing Beulah Mae turns out to be "pasty" instead of "tasty." The marriage is about to be performed when the real will is found and the villain unmasked.

This short slapstick melodrama offers light entertainment. The cast size is flexible. This play would be a fun class play or school or community fundraiser.


B 8-12 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Mike and Michelle’s parents have just gone through a divorce, and the strain is telling on all the family members. Michelle doesn’t like to be home, because of her mother’s depression and anger. Michelle is befriended by Chuck, who offers alcohol and drugs as a way to escape reality. Michelle’s grades drop, she loses friends, and she is eventually caught with some of Chuck’s marijuana. Michelle expects Chuck to come forward and admit his guilt, but he disappears. She discovers who her real friends are when they, her family members, and her teacher, make it possible for her to get a suspended sentence after her conviction.

This thirty-minute play would work well as a classroom project, even as a reader’s theatre piece, to foster discussion about various teen problems. Staging requirements are minimal, and the play could be toured easily. Character and plot development are adequate for illustration purposes but are not strong enough for powerful drama.


B+ 1-4 Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Seagirl and her friend Yingt’ai see The Dragon Kin and all his followers land on a mountain near their village. The grown-ups tell them that can’t be so, and Yingt’ai begins to doubt and to believe that the grown-ups are right—it was just a cloud they saw. Then the river dries up and the crops die, and the villagers decide they must move away. Seagirl is convinced that the cause of all the villagers’ problems is the Dragon King, and she sets out to see if she can
solve the problem. Through the help of some animal friends and the third daughter of the Dragon King himself, Seagirl is able to restore the river to its normal flow—at great sacrifice to herself and to the daughter of the Dragon King.

In a fun, sometimes humorous way, this well-adapted story teaches about overcoming fears and making personal sacrifices that benefit others.

Three actors and one musician/prop person are needed, although more actors may be used if desired. Stage requirements are minimal. The script suggests a playing space defined by a carpet, with all the props and costumes placed around the edges. The play would tour easily. Sound effects can be used effectively to create both mood and setting.


B- 7-12 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Ten short sketches comprise this teen view of mall life. These sketches include a look at a pick-up artist, customers and stylists in a hair salon, and patrons of a tanning booth and a restaurant. The play could be used in class for skits, or the sketches may be combined for a variety show.

The humor is shallow, the characters are stereotypical, and the humor is stretches; these shortcomings limit the interesting possibilities of this piece.


A 2-4 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

A peaceful, friendly, poetic dragon comes to live in a cave by an English village. He is befriended by a boy, and the two of them enjoy reciting poems to each other. When the villagers discover they have a dragon neighbor, they declare him "a scourge, a pest and a baneful monster" without even meeting him. The boy is very worried for his friend, but the dragon, who refuses to be concerned, tells the boy to work something out. When St. George is brought in to rid the village of the dragon, the boy meets him and convinces him that the beast is not dangerous. St. George and the dragon are introduced, and the boy urges them to plan and carry out a mock fight for the benefit of the villagers;
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this fight is followed by a banquet at which the dragon is introduced into society.

This adaptation of Kenneth Grahame’s story uses much of the original language and retains its muted color and charm. Characters are well drawn, and the message of nonviolence is excellent. The adaptation uses a story-theatre style—characters give stage directions directly to the audience as they carry them out. There are alternative openings and closings, allowing the producer to use the original story-within-a-story format or to just use the medieval tale. Production requirements for this delightful tale are minimal.


B 9-12 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

A television game show format is used to present gun safety information and to emphasize the fact that guns can kill. The host calls himself Billy the Kid and hypes the audience with basketball-game enthusiasm as the two opposing teams compete for prizes like a trip to Boot Hill and a coroner’s pass to the next autopsy to be performed on a teenage handgun victim. An intruder interrupts the action, trying to call attention to how deadly serious the topic is.

Teen handgun violence is a major problem in the United States. This approach may help focus on statistics and may foster discussion, but it does not address the consequences of handgun activity on real people. This one-act play is well written and clever and would focus audience attention on a topic that needs addressing. Perhaps with other production elements (posters, program notes, victim slides, and post-production discussions), it would come closer to accomplishing its stated objective.


B K-3 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Mowgli is a boy of ten who has been raised by a wolf pack and who is now challenged by a man-eating tiger. We meet Baloo the Bear; Bagheera the panther; Kaa the python snake; and Shere Khan the tiger, who wants to rule the jungle and eat the young hero. With the help of "the red flower" fire, Mowgli
is able to defeat the bully and save Great Wolf. He also finds his mother and
decides to leave the jungle and live in the village.

This adaptation of the "Mowgli" stories of Rudyard Kipling has a flexible
cast of five with limited set requirements. It is an audience participation work,
requiring audience members to make jungle animal sounds and to come onstage
to play various animals. It would be most successful with a fairly small
audience who surround the action and with performers who are experienced in
leading drama activities with children. The audience participation sometimes
delays action and slows the progression of the plot. Producers may want to
check other adaptations of this story to compare approaches.

Lahr, Jeff. Lunch Bunch Battle: The Nerds Fight Back and Win! Contemporary
Drama Service, 1990. $18.75 for complete playkit with twelve scripts. 26
pp.

B+ 7-8

Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Six young people sit around a lunch table talking. They are the "losers,"
a term they use to describe themselves. The term is also used by the "Tuffs,"
who visit the Losers' table to trash at the Losers. Sarah, a loner and "the
toughest kid at Grover Junior High" asks Tim to keep her knife because the
principal is looking for her (and it). Tim decides to keep her knife as a way to
keep Sarah around to discourage the Tuffs. True self-respect begins when the
Losers convince Sarah to join them in forming "The Dead Dog Club" (eaters of
corn dogs). Together "The Dogs" stand up to the Tuffs and win.

This is one of Contemporary Drama Service's "High School Experience"
plays; it is intended to help young people see themselves in real situations and
to improve. It could be performed in class or in a small assembly by students
for their peers. Characters are sketched rather than fully developed, but the
characterization works in the framework created by the plot. Only a simple set
is needed, and there are no special costume requirements.

per playbook. 13 pp.

B 9-12

Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Four young people, three sisters and a male cousin, are traveling in a car
across a southwestern desert to their grandparents' house for Christmas. The
driver, Camille, feels very strongly about obeying the law and will not drive over the 55-mile-per-hour limit, much to the irritation of her companions. They come to a red light and Camille refuses to proceed until the light changes, even though there are no cars coming. When duty and citizenship intersect with blind obedience, what does one do? The four youth finally get through the light—but to where?

This is more a class exercise than a dramatic work. It would stimulate a discussion of moral values and situational ethics. Not dramatically powerful, it moves slowly. The ending is intended to leave the audience wondering, "What next?"

✦✦✦✦