Play Reviews

Melissa Oaks
Harold R. Oaks
Colleen M. Baum
Tracy Lybbert

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* K-12 Reviewed by Melissa Oaks

A princess is cursed by the wicked and nasty wizard Wartsitch. The curse states that on her twenty-first birthday, a tree will begin to grow out of her head. The play begins as her father announces that she shall select a husband from the available and eligible princes. Her father is distraught at discovering the tree growing out of her head, but he cannot send the princes away so he sends for the good Wizard Gimlet, who comes and eventually saves the young princess. They visit with the East, West, North and South Winds, who give them clues to help them solve their problems. Then the wizard and the princess return home. The wicked wizard also returns to claim the princess for his garden, but the good wizard uses the clues to solve the puzzle. The good wizard then disappears. The tree disappears as well and the young princess starts receiving princes. The first prince is Gimlet as a young man!

The play is most enjoyable, and viewers will become very involved with the storyline. The production will appeal to young people who enjoy a chance to laugh and to escape from the real world. Seven major characters and several courtiers are needed. Elaborate costuming, with one set and minimal staging. It is an excellent theater piece for all ages!


C 6-9 Reviewed by Melissa Oaks

The author must intend this play as an introduction to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for those unable or unwilling to endure the language or the sometimes complicated plot of the original play. There are two narrators who comment on the action and dialogue, aided by two sign changers who also comment with their written notes. Most of the lines of the original characters are taken from the play, but the lines are simplified. The narrators then do another level of interpretation in contemporary teen language. Situations and characters are used for humor by the narrators and sign changers. There is a strong feeling of "poking fun" at the Bard, rather than aiding in understanding him.

Contemporary clothing and minimal staging add to the ease of producing this play.


A- 4+ Reviewed by Tracy Lybbert

Alicia has difficulty accepting her Mexican heritage since she has become lost in the American melting pot. One day she goes with her mother into a Mexican curio shop, she reaches for a doll, trips over a pot, and bumps her head. She then enters an adventurous excursion where she finds herself and her heritage. It is truly a wonderland--Mexican style. On her trip, many fun figures representing various mind frames appear. There are those who deny their heritage, those who laugh at everything, and those wanting
to assist this young girl in finding her heritage. There is the tree of heads; the puppet Ramon, and the gang of Elvira women. After Alicia finds the answer to her question at the temple, she saves the doll, Rosa (who comes to life) from the Elvira gang. Rosa asks Alicia what she learned on her journey through the various lands and with the numerous figures. Alicia describes herself, and all people, as a Mexican blanket, many colors and many differences that combine into one unified art form. As she symbolically wraps herself in the blanket, she is aroused to reality and makes peace with her mother. Then she is willing to go home to help prepare a goat's head for dinner.

The play is enjoyable and the reader will find it interesting, though not emotionally riveting. The author delves into a complex conflict which many people feel and experience in America. The author did a good job discussing the issue and coming to an adequate conclusion. The play is two acts, yet seems to scramble the issues as it touches on various aspects of cultural adjustment. The play is well structured. The conflict is adequately set up; the journey begins in a believable fairy tale manner. However, the journey is rushed and much is being thrown to the audience at once. It is an excellent work to build pride in one's heritage and to help Anglo audiences to become aware of the colorful cultural heritage of Mexico.

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**A- 5+ Reviewed by Melissa Oaks**

Aliesha wins a contest and receives a large book called *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. The book is very heavy and no one will help her carry it home, so she tears some pages out and throws them in a garbage can. Then characters from the plays begin to appear. Aliesha meets Kate and Petruchio, Juliet, Puck, and the three witches. She and her brother try to get the characters back into the book before the police come and cart them all away. Finally they succeed with the help of Puck. Both Aliesha and her brother Josh realize that Shakespeare can be pretty cool, and they go home to study some more.

This is an excellent teaching play. One can picture on stage these people running around causing havoc. This is definitely a play that could be performed to get young people interested in Shakespeare and to introduce them to some of his interesting characters.

Both period and contemporary costumings are required. The set may be quite simple, but requires a huge book from which characters enter the stage. Nine cast members (6F, 3M) are needed.

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**A 6-12 Reviewed by Colleen M. Baum**

This heart-warming adaption of Louisa May Alcott's novel begins with Josephine March as an older adult and an accomplished authoress giving a lecture to the Springfield Ladies Literary Society. Josephine narrates about her family and about her life growing up in the March home. The March family is portrayed by younger actors in scenes between Josephine's brief narrations. Marmee, the mother, leaves home to take care of Mr. March, who has become ill while serving as a chaplain in the Civil War. Meanwhile, Beth, a younger sister, contracts scarlet fever and becomes very sick. Jo moves to New York and meets a dashing German professor while her younger sister, Amy, travels to Europe. There Amy falls in love and marries Laurie Lawrence, a friend of the family.

This adaption includes many more of the March family's adventures, all of which are suitable for the stage. The dialogue remains true to Alcott's novel and is very understandable for
young audiences. This piece can be performed on a high school level as well as professional and community theater levels. Casting includes five men and twelve to eighteen women. Some of the women's roles may be doubled. Suggested cuts are given as the length may be too long for some groups. Suggestions for set, properties, sound, special effects, and costumes are included.


A 3+ Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

The general store is where a printer, river boat pilot, newspaper reporter, and dressmaker meet with the owner on the store's porch to share stories. Each of Twain's tales is acted out by the five players, story theatre style. Each follows the original story line and contains most of the dialogue and colorful Twain language. Stories included are: "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Tom Sawyer (cutting), "Science vs. Luck," "The Joke That Made Ed's Fortune," "Is he Living or Dead?" and "The Belated Russian Passport. The general store's goods become props for the tellers, and also provide costume item changes (hats, gloves, vest, etc.) to distinguish characters. The play is well written, cleverly conceived, and should provide excellent classroom and general public entertainment and fun.


B+ K-8 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

This story centers on two sets of twins. Two girls are born in a poor home and two boys have wealthy parents. The mother of the boys wanted a girl, so she switches one of the boys for a girl. Then the mother of the twin girls disappears mysteriously, and the two children are put into homes with mean parents, who make them do all the work. Both poor children have the "magic" happen to them, and they are a hit at the ball that the other set of twins has set up. The couples meet and the twins are united, wed, and live happily ever after.

This is one of a series of plays being published by I.E. Clark with both an English and Spanish text. It is intended to be produced in both languages simultaneously. It would be an excellent tool in a Spanish class and for mixed audiences of Spanish speakers even though parts of the play are confusing and verbose. It is an interesting, new interpretation and use of the classic fairytales.


B+ K-5 Reviewed by Melissa Oaks

This adaptation of The Nutcracker begins as Marie's family is having a Christmas party and Marie receives a gift from her godfather, Drusselmeyer. It is a nutcracker. That night a war commences between Marie's nutcracker and the Mouse King, a seven-headed atrocity. The
nutcracker, aided by Marie, wins the battle and becomes a prince. Marie becomes the hero and is taken to a beautiful kingdom called the Sugar Plum Land where the Sugar Plum Fairy entertains them. There Marie is told the story of why her prince must fight the Mouse King. The Mouse King enters at the end of the story, and the prince does battle again, this time killing the Mouse King and becoming human forever. Marie, however, wakes up from the dream. Drusselmeyer arrives that morning to wish Marie a Merry Christmas and to have her meet his friend whom he is sure she will love. The friend is the Nutcracker Prince.

This play is a large-cast musical intended to be done with many children and a few adults. It was originally staged by the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks. Most plot elements are presented, and preschoolers should be able to understand the story. However, the ninety-minute presentation may be more appropriate for children six years old and older.


A-2-6 Reviewed by Melissa Oaks

King Goodheart and his wife wish for a baby. The queen makes a wish to have a child with a soul as pure as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony. The wish comes true with the birth of Snow White, but the good queen dies. The good king marries a shrewish wife, who cares only for her own vanity. When it is discovered that Snow White (the good king's daughter) has become more beautiful than she, the queen sends her two huntsmen into the woods to kill her. Snow White is protected by one of the huntsmen, who tricks the queen by bringing back a pig's heart, instead of Snow White's heart as the queen had instructed them. Snow White stumbles upon a small cottage in the woods and meets seven dwarfs who say she can live with them.

The queen finds out the deceit of her huntsman and changes into a witch. She then brings Snow White a poisoned apple that can only be cured with a true love's kiss. Fortunately for Snow White, a prince finds her and breaks the spell. The evil queen finds out Snow White is back, turns herself into a witch again, and is poisoned by her own vanity.

This is an outstanding retelling of the story, with a cast of fourteen (3F, 11M), moderately elaborate costumes, and stage sets that may vary in complexity.


A-2-5 Reviewed by Melissa Oaks

The argument between Logic and Science is set forth clearly in this demonstration of Galileo's life. Beginning in medical school, we see his questioning of Aristotle's theories. We see how some theories are disproved, yet they are still rationalized by current scholars. When Galileo persists, he is finally arrested and brought forth before an inquisition where, under the threat of death, he denies his beliefs and published works. However, he is still placed under house arrest for the rest of his life.

The play contains excellent information, presented in ways that are accessible to young viewers. The fight Galileo fought was against Aristotle and common sense. Aristotle is portrayed in a negatively although Aristotle was not wrong in everything. Some balance might be useful. The play alludes to the church's involvement in the controversy, but does not suggest why the church would have such power over Galileo. A young viewer may wonder why the church was so opposed to Galileo's ideas.

The play book contains a full teacher's guide and historical notes to help viewers understand the play and the issues involved.

**B+ 7-12 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks**

This short musical review is intended to train audience members to take the English portion of the SAT college entrance examination. Two characters exchange ideas, concepts, approaches, and strategies that will help in taking the test. The combination of music and rapid paced action makes the subject matter more interesting. The play can be used in the classroom, with parts being acted out, or may be staged for the larger audience. Props are mimed, except for graphics that are used as a visual reinforcement throughout the play.

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* 3+ Reviewed by Tracy Lybbert

Susan Zeder created a beautiful realistic story revolving around the death of a vibrant, exciting 84-year-old-woman. The woman's son, granddaughter, and niece come to her home to prepare for the estate sale. Conflicts, questions, and emotions are explored through the story. A delightful boy, Nobody, enters the grandmother's home and leads the family through an exploration of who Lillian truly was. Nobody covertly leads the family through life's questions and answers. This amazing emotional journey for the characters and audience occurs through the pictures the grandmother has painted on her walls. The walls and ceilings of this house became a mural allowing others to explore her life and the feelings that were created and experienced in this home. Beautiful themes intertwined concerning relationships, emotions, human nature, families, and forgiveness to create an intense drama. The playwright is talented and ingenious. The words and sentences and the combination of characters and feelings are very enjoyable. The organization of the play is superb and helps tantalize the audience. It is a delightful, insightful, entertaining play!

*Do Not Go Gentle* was originally commissioned by the Kennedy Center's Theatre for Young People, in association with the American Association of Retired Persons. It was first performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. on October 18, 1991. It has a cast of six (4F, 2M) and a single set.

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