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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


*Dandelion Wine* is the story of an idyllic summer which the boy, Douglas, tries to freeze within his memory. It is a story of perfect summer days, movie theaters, new tennis shoes, and all the people who inhabit Greentown, Illinois, in 1928. As well as all of the perfect moments of that year, Douglas also undergoes some painful growing up: his best friend moves, and, most of all, he encounters death for the first time. This version of *Dandelion Wine* was adapted from the novel by its author, Ray Bradbury. In the play, he adds the character Bill Forrester. Forrester is a mysterious interloper who adds tension to the script. It is not until the end of the story that we learn Forrester is Douglas at age thirty-eight. The man is trying to get the young boy inside to let go of a painful and wonderful period and move on. While the play is in many ways different from the novel, it still evokes the joys and despairs of youth and the feeling of innocence.

This is a sophisticated theatrical piece with excellent cameo roles. It evokes a simpler time, and yet also brings in a feeling of suspense and sorrow. While the parts of the children could be acted by children, the adult parts call for more mature and experienced actors. It is a difficult piece theatrically, as it calls for many effects and split-second timing. It would be difficult to tour, although it could be done. It would best be performed by both adults and children. Many of the scenes are slow-paced, and, therefore, the play would be better for sixth grade through high school. If you are looking for a literary piece that will challenge your audience, this is it.

—Gayanne Ramsden


In this dramatization of *Dandelion Wine* by Coger and Hunt, a world of words, youth, summer, friendship, life, and death has been created. Beautifully written for reader’s theater, the cast of nine men, five women, and a narrator recreates one summer in the life of the boy Douglas Spaulding. He learns the inevitability of death and that the human race can be kept alive by memory.
Well written, this piece conveys much of the imagery and fluid phrasing of Ray Bradbury's book from which it had been adapted. It is closer to the original book than Bradbury's own adaptation for stage. The story evokes the joy and carefree feeling of a child's summer. Amid the life and vibrancy of childhood are the elderly, and the elderly must die. When Douglas realizes that his great grandmother can die, he is faced, in the climax, with the realization that someday he, too, will die. But his grandmother's words, that she will live on in the family members, comfort him.

This play can easily be produced on a platform stage and would be enjoyable for junior high through adults. It would also make an excellent production for high school students. Like Bradbury's version, mentioned in the first review of Dandelion Wine, it is a literate and well-crafted piece.

--Gayanne Ramsden


Fear can create enemies out of friends as is the case in A Separate Peace, an adaptation of John Knowles's novel by the same title. The play centers around two best friends, Gene and Finny, during 1942. Gene becomes jealous of the athletic and charismatic Finny, and without thinking, jostles the limb of a tree upon which Finny is standing and causes him to fall and seriously break his leg. Later, when Gene tries to admit his guilt, a shaken Finny, unable to confront his best friend's pointless moment of hatred, refuses to listen. Finally, when both boys are forced to confront the painful reality behind the accident, Finny is able to forgive, and at Finny's death, Gene understands that Finny was never afraid because he never hated anybody.

Although Nancy Gilsenan's adaptation is well done, and was approved by John Knowles, reading the original novel will help with characterization and understanding the subtext of the piece. The play deals with themes such as hate, insanity, and the foolishness of war, and requires both mature actors and mature audience. Some profanity is used throughout the play and there is a scene during which the boys smoke. However, with permission from the publisher, both the smoking and profanity could be omitted if necessary.

A Separate Peace requires seven male actors and is highly recommended for a mature audiences grade eight through adult.

--Kelli Jo Kerry

Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus are busily preparing for Christmas when an unexpected knock is heard. Fearing that it is the dreadful Wicked Wazoo, they are afraid to answer the door. (The Wicked Wazoo is "a horrible witch who was driven from her kingdom by a more powerful witch and who hates Christmas." She wants the North Pole for her new kingdom.) To their relief, the visitor is a human-sized Leprechaun who has run away from his village because he is too tall. After warding off an attack by the Wicked Wazoo's Trolls with a broom, Santa hires the Leprechaun as a guard. Putting a sleeping spell on those in the workshop, the Wicked Wazoo shows up with her defroster machine and proceeds to melt the polar ice which will flood the North Pole. However, with the help of the audience, the Leprechaun saves the day with leprechaun dust to which the Wicked Wazoo and her Trolls have a strong allergic reaction. Maureen, a girl from the Leprechaun's village, arrives to take him back home. With the help of a "magic" mirror, Santa convinces the Leprechaun that he, like everyone, is special and unique. The Leprechaun returns home with Maureen, and the rest return to Christmas business.

Not very many plays show Santa's "human" side, but in this comedy, we see Santa's fears and worries, and a nervous Mrs. Claus who finds listening to Christmas songs distracting while she is trying to work. I found the Trolls particularly hilarious as they reminded me of sassy brats that even I wanted to take a broom to. Though some of the characters border on a two-dimensional level, the challenge is there to make them three-dimensional. Even with all the chase scenes, and downright zaniness, the play encourages everyone to look in the mirror and like what they see.

This short play would make a fun classroom project for the fifth through ninth grades or could even be used as a skit in a high school assembly. The scenery and props are minimal making it ideal for touring to elementary schools or shopping malls. The cast of twelve can be enlarged to as many as desired, and featured are showcase parts for a clown and a ballerina.

--Dianne Breinholt