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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


**B- 7-12** Reviewed by M. Colleen Lewis

*And Then There Was One* is a one act comedy/mystery geared to the junior high age group. A group of strangers have been invited to spend the weekend on the island of the wealthy Mr. Reese. Once on the island, the guests have no access to outside communication or transportation. They are led to believe that they are going to be murdered, one by one. Each guest feigns his own death in order to deceive the true murderer. It is finally realized that there is no killer, and the guests were invited to the island to see if they could write the “perfect murder mystery.”

Casting requires five males and five females. Sets and costumes can be as simple or elaborate as desired. The plot is predictable and the characters purposefully stereotyped (as one might find in a melodrama). The humor is simple with numerous jokes and puns. The play presents an opportunity for nonsensical fun and frivolity for junior high school students—perhaps as a classroom project. Performance rights are granted with the purchase of a playkit that includes script copies for production.

★★★★★


**B+ 9-12** Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

This collection of five short comedies has solid dialogues, believable central characters, and concise plots. The comedies may be done for public performance, but all would be interesting in-class projects. Each play has a stage diagram and staging suggestions. Here are brief plot descriptions:

*The Kissing Bandit* (10-15 minutes) involves a young man on his first day of work in a small grocery store which is held up by an attractive young woman. When she receives all the money in the till, she gives him a kiss. When other customers, the store owner, and police arrive, comedy comes.
with them. One male, one female, four more of either sex; simple set; modern dress.

*How Many Guys Does It Take To Change a Light Bulb?* (7-10 minutes) is a take-off on the ancient joke. Four girls develop a “David Letterman” type list of stupid things boys do, but all four go off with guys by the end of this skit. Four females, two males, classroom set.

*How Many Girls Does it Take to Change a Light Bulb?* (7-10 minutes) plays the other side of the same joke, with girl activities being the focus. This time, sensitivity and awareness win the opportunity to take a new girl out. Four males, one female, classroom set.

*The Big Debate at Philistine High* (20-30 minutes) focuses on a speech class assignment to debate “Resolved: The State Lottery Does More Harm Than Good” and explores some interesting points of view on this subject. Another theme is the developing relationship of two “outsider” young people. This is an interesting piece with substance that could generate insightful discussion. Six males, six females, classroom set.

*Postholes Dug Free* (10-15 minutes) opens with two teenagers starting a church service project to clean up and repair a widow’s yard. They have gotten the address mixed up and, as a result, have the police called out by the reclusive widow who lives in the house. They are able to convince her to let them finish their project, and their kindness and energy draw others to help too. One male, two female, others of either sex; house exterior; simple directions on how to handle setting.


**B- 6-9**

Reviewed by Rebecca Hess and Harold R. Oaks

Slices from the lives of a dozen young adolescents and their friends are presented in this play. The audience visits their school, a sleep-over, a school dance, and a hospital room. Early teen relationships; peer, school, and parent pressures; and personal trials are represented, including an attempted suicide. Many of the issues addressed would be excellent discussion starters for study. There are, however, some problems with the script. Character development is shallow and some plot situations seem contrived. The dialogue does not have a contemporary feel and sometimes seems wordy. The play would probably work best as a classroom project. With the purchase of a playkit that includes script copies for the cast, the
producer is given rights to produce an unlimited number of performances at one location for the period of a year without further royalty payment. The play calls for a cast of 26, and all roles could be played by young people.


**A 3-8 Fam**

Reviewed by Rebecca Hess and Harold R. Oaks

Two boys—one a prince and the other a pauper from the street—look uncannily similar. They devise a plan to switch places, and each experiences many new and unusual adventures. Eventually Tom, the pauper playing the prince, saves the real prince’s life. Then the boys take their own identities; and Edward, as King, keeps Tom as his ward.

This adaptation of Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper* manages to encompass the original story and focus on the problems of the two boys as they switch roles. The characters are well-drawn and the story should keep audiences of all ages interested in what is to happen next. Harris has chosen to use much of the original style of the language from the book, which will take some adjusting to by audience members, but it preserves the period feel of the play. The play is conceived to be presented on a “space” stage (to keep the action moving quickly from scene to scene), so scenic requirements may be minimal or more elaborate as desired. Costumes that suggest the period and the station of characters are vital.


**B+ K-6**

Reviewed by Rebecca Hess and Harold R. Oaks

This adaptation, based on James M. Barrie’s play *Peter Pan*, omits the first scene in the Darling home and goes directly to Neverland. Most of the original characters are here, with a few additional ones. The incidents are also similar. The music is original for this work and is not the same as that used in the popular musical version.

This “updated” version does allow for either elaborate staging or a more simplified non-flying version, dependent on budget conditions. Production
notes are included. Cast size is variable, with many roles either male or female. The only “adult” roles are the pirates, and several of them are rather childish. Elementary school children could play many of the roles. Junior high or high school students could easily play all roles. Playing time is 90 to 100 minutes.


A- 8-Adult

*Trapped in a Villain’s Web* takes place in Brooklyn, New York in the 1890s in a “Made in Paris” hat shop—a front for a sweat shop where orphans are forced to work long hours for low wages. Heroine Victoria Ox-Bow is nearly robbed of her inheritance by villain Scar Malone, until hero Johnny Sage rescues her from the villain’s evil clutches.

This classic melodrama has the potential to provide an audience with an evening of fun and laughter. The main characters are well drawn and hilarious. A cast size of ten women and four men with one unit set is required. The script could be performed by middle school students, older students, or adults.


B+ 3-6

*Tally doesn’t play games because she thinks games are immature and only “children” play them. When her friends ask her to play, she says she might chip one of her freshly painted fingernails or get her blouse dirty. They tell her having fun playing together is worth the risk to enjoy the fun. Tally’s grandmother gives her a quilt shaped like an owl which has magical powers and then takes Tally to several countries to play games with local children. Tally learns that games and playing with friends can be fun and that childhood is to be savored and enjoyed—the secret her grandmother wished to have her learn.*
The play captures the energy and spirit of game-playing in various countries and should motivate viewers to want to try to play some new ones. Full directions for each game would be helpful (and could also be part of a Teacher or Parent Packet) because the reader is not always sure of what the object of each game is, or, even with the action outlined in the script, how it is played. Some indication of how the owl was handled in the original production would also be useful. Three women and two men play multiple roles in this fast-paced production.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦


A - 1-5

Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

This is a stage adaptation from Rudyard Kipling’s story from the *Jungle Book*. Rikki-Tikki-Tavi is a mongoose who is found nearly drowned and is rescued and raised by an English family living in India. Rikki-Tikki-Tavi becomes a household pet and constant companion to the young boy, Teddy. When a pair of cobra snakes decide to move into the garden and to take over the house, the cobra fighting-mongoose defends the family.

The action of the play is quick-moving and focused. Dialogue sharpens and defines character, as well as keeps the action going. The two snakes are portrayed as villains worthy of death, since that is what they plan for the family and anyone else in the way of their plans. Most characters are meant to be played by actors in animal-suggestive costumes, but there are also two puppet birds. One unit set serves the action well. The play was originally produced by EarlyStages, The Children’s Theatre troupe of Stages Repertory Theatre in Houston, Texas.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦


A 2-6 Fam

Reviewed by Donna Moore

L. M. Montgomery’s classic novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, is brought to life in this excellent adaptation for the stage. Marilla, a spinster, and her bachelor brother Matthew live on a farm on Prince Edward Island, Canada.
Matthew Cuthbert convinces Marilla they should adopt an orphan boy to help on the farm, but when Matthew goes to the train station to pick the boy up, he is surprised by a red-headed, hot-tempered orphan girl named Anne Shirley, who has been sent by mistake. Anne’s adventures with the Cuthberts, her experiences at school, and the many people whose lives she touches are what the audience sees in the rest of this delightful play. Much of the dialogue has been preserved from the original novel. The characters are well-drawn, and the action moves effectively to keep the audience interested.

Staging the boat scene on the river will be a challenge, but can be very effective. Two girls, one boy, three women, and two men are required, but more can be used since three of the adults play multiple roles. This play was commissioned and originally staged by The Seattle Children’s Theatre and is recommended for professional theatre production, but could be done by experienced amateur groups.


Reviewed by Dana Keiter

*Make Me Pele for a Day* is a comedy-fantasy about Paulito DeSilva, a California twelve-year-old who wants to be a professional soccer player like his deceased father. Paulito has never been very good at soccer, nor does he do well at school. Feeling like a failure, he turns to his magical, conjuring grandmother, Dona ZeZe. His grandmother is no ordinary lady. She’s hip, rides a skateboard, works as an extra in movies, and is eccentric. Through her magical conjures, Pele pays a visit (along with a few other famous people from the past) to help build Paulito’s self-image. They teach him some important life lessons about success. By the end of the play, Paulito doesn’t necessarily “save the day,” but he does learn the importance of perseverance and giving one’s all.

This is a fun script with well-developed, interesting characters. It addresses questions to which most adolescents can relate—peer pressure, school demands, home expectations, and sports fantasies and its pressures. It is fast-paced and entertaining. For a most effective performance, it would be necessary to have special effects and projection screens which are used to change location throughout the play. A multicultural cast of four men and two women is required, but additional performers could be used if desired.
The play was commissioned and originally staged at Seattle Children’s Theatre. It is geared to upper elementary through middle school-aged young people or for families.


**B Pre-2**

A leafless tree in an abandoned park is miserable because The Blues who play instruments, and The Greens who love to recite poetry, refuse to associate with each other. These groups cannot get along because they focus on their differences. Then a storm blows the stranger Allina from the land of Purple into the park. She becomes friends with both Blues and Greens and is able to combine their differences and strengths to make music. She sings and is able to unite first individuals and then the two groups.

*Just Like Us* is about prejudice and how differences in others are automatically viewed with hatred and distrust. The play is written to be performed with minimal set and costume requirements. Casting is flexible (only two female and one male role are gender specific).

The play would be better if it were less blatant with its message. And, if the feelings run as deeply as suggested, only in a land of “make believe” would the change come as easily as it appears here.


**B+ Fam**

This play takes the classic characters of *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* and adds a fun and original twist. It is the late 1940s and Baby Bear, who now prefers to be called Lenny, has just come home from military service. He announces his desire to become a songwriter, much to the chagrin of his parents. Papa Bear would like to see him play baseball with the Cubs or the Bears, and Mama Bear has difficulty seeing him grow up at all. But Baby Bear tells them of his love for a young singer named Goldie Locks whom he met at one of Bob Hope’s USO shows. However, poor Goldie is being
trailed by the notorious gangster, Bugsy. When this villainous cockroach
kidnaps Goldie, the Three Bears must come to the rescue.

*The Three Bears: A Forties Fable* is a cleverly written script, full of
lighthearted fun. It does, however, contain many of the frivolous
conventions often common in children’s theatre, such as overly used physical
humor, the characteristic chase scene, and a simple plot with little insight into
life. Play time is 50 minutes with a cast requiring three men and two
women. Elaborate sets and costumes are not necessary, but the intricate set
and costume plots described in the play book are creative and would add to
the frolic and "forties" feel of the script. This play could be successfully
staged by amateur, community, and professional theatres.

★★★★

Wright, Mickey. *Prince Eugene and the Cinder Queen*. Encore

B+ 3-8 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

This updated version of *Cinderella* has her riding to the ball on a
zucchini scooter and the Prince trying to find the girl with an orthopedic foot
pad containing a certain smell. There are three stepsisters, Zappy, Giddy,
and May, and a stepmother-from-hell. There are also several direct questions
to the audience, encouraging them to help find where characters have gone or
are hiding. There is an Angel Godmother accompanied by her husband,
Angel Godfather Virgil, who does most of the “magic” while his wife
bungles with her spells. Several entrances and exits are through the
audience, including Virgil and Cinderella going to the ball on the scooter.

This is more of a spoof on the story with farce characters and situations.
Junior high students would probably enjoy playing with this version of the
traditional story. Staging requirements are minimal, and costumes are a mix
of traditional and contemporary.

★★★★