Play Reviews

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**A 3-6**  
**Reviewed by Braden Gregory Bell**

Into a circle surrounded by children come Zero and his friend Wisteria. They talk and play until interrupted by Wistera's Father and Ms. Dupres, who organize the set and the three other cast members for performing the play, "Three Little Pigs." Each is given their role which interweave the title stories in a unique and enjoyable way. We see them "try on" their characters, even asking for help from the audience.

Participation by the audience is built into the script throughout the play and is used to advance the action. Songs are simple and should be easily learned.

This play was originally mounted by Stage One: The Louisville Children's Theatre by professional performers. It requires two male and two female cast members. The form and style, however, would lend themselves to experienced performers who can work well with participation theatre. Selections from the play might be staged by young people for their peers and parents (with permission from the publisher).

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**A+ 1-12**  
**Reviewed by Shiela Heindel**

This collection of forty-eight original monologues for ages 6-17 is based on literary, historical, and real life situations, ranging from one to four minutes in length. There are also some "mini-logues" for ages 4-8. The author began writing by creating material for his wife to use in her Kindergarten classroom.

These are definitely comic and creative. It is a collection suited for classroom, but also for school programs, recitals, auditions, speech classes, church programs, and as short fillers for various stage presentations. "Fairy Tale Party," for example, incorporates fairy tales and nursery rhymes and would make a delightful presentation by an upper-elementary-age child. This is an excellent addition to the field and makes fun reading.

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**B 3-6**  
**Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks**

This is a new musical version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy and Toto meet all the regular friends: The Scarecrow, Tin Woodsman and Lion, and have the adventures and challenges of the original story. The play is long and cutting may be advisable to keep it moving. A new character, the China Princess, has been added but does not advance the plot. The presentational, fourth wall production style is broken late in the play by the Wicked Witch, who, with little motivation, asks the audience to help her choose a spell to stop Dorothy. A bit later, the action of the play is stopped again for her song, which does not advance the action.

Overall the play works quite well and contains low budget staging suggestions for amateur production by secondary schools or others looking for a less expensive version of this popular work.

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A 3-12 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

A young Polish woman, Pawlina, is surprised when a mound of hay moves and a young mother and her two children appear. They are Jews, fleeing for their lives from the German soldiers. Knowing that she could be killed for hiding them, Pawlina overcomes her fear and helps dig a bunker under the floor of a storage barn behind her home. Then she brings one other young girl and finds scarce food and drink during them all for the next two years to keep them alive. Several times she is nearly caught, and is finally arrested, beaten and imprisoned. Fortunately, she is able to escape. Even though she is caught, her Jewish friends are able to survive and celebrate Pawlina’s recognition as a hero of the Holocaust.

*Angel in the Night* (a combination of fact and fiction) is inspired by the true story of Marysia Pawlina Szul, a young Polish-Catholic woman who saved the lives of four Jewish people. It moves quickly from scene to scene, keeping us wondering how each challenge will be met. The play won the 1996 Distinguished Play Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, a well deserved honor.

An Epilogue and Prologue occur in the present. The action of the play occurs during World War II, 1942-44, in Southeast Poland near the city of Zoborow. It can be staged with four men, four women and one girl with doubling, but may be expanded to nine men, seven women and one girl. The prologue and epilogue require characters in their mid to late 60’s. Scene shifts are rapid and numerous (eight locations) and would need careful planning.


A K-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

The Bailiff has taken excellent care of the castle and lands for many years, but he is now old and must pass on the responsibility. He calls his children, Lars and Gertrud and charges Lars with the responsibility of being the new Bailiff. He asks Gertrud to help see the tasks are done well. Lars is also given The Green Coat, the sign of authority that has always been worn by his father, and is told that as long as he does his work well it will fit. The old man dies and young, proud Lars assumes his position, neglecting responsibility. The servants become disrespectful, the crops and cattle neglected, and work time is spent in sports and play. The Green Coat, Lars finds, cannot be made to fit.

Gertrud watches in bewilderment as the castle declines. Finally she goes to speak to her brother and the servants, tossing The Green Coat over her shoulders since it is cold outside. The coat miraculously fits as she organizes the staff, saves the crops, and brings the castle into line. In spring the master returns, finds out who the true bailiff is, and offers to make her his wife.

This interesting Swedish legend emphasizes responsibility and the rewards of dedicated service and work. It would work well as a classroom exercise to help better understand Northern European culture. It would also be successful as a public presentation for parents and others. There are roles for four men and five women, some roles that can be either, and several additional attendants and servants. There is only one set, but the suggested costumes are eighteenth century.


A K-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Humai, the Shah of Persia, fears for the life of her child, for enemies have killed his father and would also like the heir dead. The child is put in a small ark which floats down the river and is found by a poor launderer and his wife. They raise the boy, whom they name Darab, as their own. War comes to the nation when Darab is eighteen and he goes to help save Persia. There he meets and deeply impresses the General of the Persian army, who takes Darab to meet the Shah. Through a series of questions,
his true identity is discovered and he is restored to his rightful place as the new Shah.

This interesting story is based on an ancient Persian tale and is presented in Persian theatre style, similar to Indian theatre: simple decorative backdrop; visible property people; and flowing, presentational action bridged by a narrator. It would work very well as a classroom exercise and as a presentation for parents. Properties, set, and costumes could be easily assembled using the suggestions at the end of the script, and some research into middle eastern arts.

The production requires two females and five males with some additional parts played by either male or female, including courtiers, musicians, property people, etc.


A-  K-6  Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Several very lazy people let an old man create monkeys to do their work, but in the process, lose their identities as worthwhile people. They find they must work for themselves to be happy. Based on a legend from Colombia, South America, this dramatization would be fun to do as a classroom project or as a presentation for parents. It explores the reasons for and satisfaction of work and helps readers and viewers understand other cultures' explanations of how things came to be.

A narrator/storyteller introduces the action, created by three men, three women and four children, and ten creatures resembling monkeys. Staging and suggestive costumes can be done simply.


B+  3-5  Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

A young man, Sir Robert, is knighted and married on the same day, but because of a vow, must immediately make a pilgrimage to Saint James. When he returns a year later, the castle has been taken over, and Sir Robert is without home or wife. At this time of dejection, a young squire (actually his wife, Genevieve, in disguise) offers to serve him. During the seven years that follow, with the help of the squire, the Knight is able to regain wealth, position, and eventually his castle. When he enters the castle he finds his wife has also returned and they are reunited. But he cannot rest until he brings the helpful and loving squire, only to discover it has been his wife all along.

Based on a French legend, this play creates the action effectively. It is a remarkable tale of loyalty and love. It could be used as either a class project or as a presentation for parents. It requires a cast of four men and four women, but could be expanded significantly.


A-  4-8  Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Two fairies, Flute and Flutter, dance on stage around a large oak tree. They are followed by a sixteen year old Gypsy girl, Jacquelin, carrying a large charm book. With the help of the fairies, she changes the oak into her Gypsy tree, complete with a rainbow of colored leaves.

Jacquelin is less successful trying to change first the young woodcutter, Jeremy, and then herself, to make love work between them. She is interrupted by her granny/mother, who uses spells to attempt to control all those around her (also unsuccessfully) and by a lifelong older friend, Nathaniel. Magic spells work in interesting ways and the play resolves unexpectedly, but happily. It is an intriguing story, told with skill and color. Audience members are challenged to consider who they are and what brings true happiness.

Production requirements are not excessive and it may be staged by secondary education or community groups. The small cast (three women, three men) make it worth considering for professional production as well. Optional musical score enhances the magical qualities of the play.

**A 3-8** Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

This new adaptation of L. Frank Baum’s classic uses a carnival theme, locating the storm there, and setting the lands of Oz in distinctly American locales. Munchkinland is inhabited by child size New England rural folk and the Wicked Witch of the West is a six shooter wielding cowgirl, whose former subjects hold a hoe-down to celebrate their liberation from her.

The play contains several new characters and scenes and would appear to play well over two hours if uncut. Writing is inventive and colorful with all characters well drawn. The “magic” in the play is managed by several OZ-ABOUTs, visible scene changers and puppet manipulators who operate like Bunraku puppeteers. Technical requirements can be relatively simple or elaborate. The play was originally staged by The Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis and is appropriate for professional or very experienced amateur performing groups.


**B 7-12** Reviewed by Shiela Heindel

This collection of fifty-two short monologues for actors ages 13-18 examines the process of growing up from the young person's perspective. The compiler indicates that they are designed for “class work, monologue work and a full evening's performance.” The authors are students from Spanish Fork, UT, High School, and most monologues help us see the world from their perspective. They are first person descriptions of common, and sometimes not so common adolescent problems and experiences.

This collection would be an excellent tool for classroom use. They would also be exceptionally valuable as discussion starters for a mixed audience of parents and teens or just teens. In addition to theatre classes, these could be very useful in a Life Skills class.


**A 9-12** Reviewed by Shiela Heindel

This is a collection of eighty-four monologues for young actors ages 14-22 from contemporary and classical drama and non-dramatic literature. The editors have selected challenging and perceptive material. Slaight is Director of the Young Conservatory at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, and Sharrar is Registrar and Director of Alumni Relations for ACT. Each monologue is prefaced by a brief synopsis and its original source. Average length is three minutes. Selections are divided into Contemporary Stage Monologues for young men, Contemporary Stage Monologues for young women, Classic Stage Monologues for each, and Non-Dramatic Literary Monologues for each.

This is a much needed and welcome addition to the teaching and acting tools available for this age group as acting exercises and an introduction to a wide range of dramatic literature. Most could be used for audition material.


**A 6-12** Reviewed by Shiela Heindel

This collection contains sixty-two monologues for actors ages 11-22. The editors include a brief synopsis of the selection and the original source. The monologues are taken from plays, poetry, and fiction. Some are known classics (such as selections from *The Dybbuk, A Raisin in the Sun, No Place to be Somebody, Peer Gynt* and *Playboy of the Western World*) while others
are from recently produced scripts. They contain experiences from the lives of early teens to those just past their teen years.

As indicated by the title, selections have been chosen to represent a cultural range to serve as “exploration tools, while at the same time providing a journey rich in diversity.” They are intended to challenge the young actor to dig into the cultural backgrounds of the characters, especially those coming from backgrounds different from their own. They should serve as excellent classroom material, possible audition choices, and an insightful introduction to the wider world of literature and life.


Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

The tale of *The Little Red Hen* has been enjoyed by generations of children. The Little Red Hen finds a wheat seed, plants and waters it, harvests the wheat, takes the wheat to the mill to be ground, goes home with the flour, and makes herself a loaf of bread. Throughout the process she has asked for the help of a cat, mouse, and goose, who are unwilling. When the bread is ready to eat, they are all willing to help with that, but the Little Red Hen tells them that since she did all the work, she will enjoy eating the bread alone.

Thistle has presented the story in a picture-book format intended for use in the primary elementary grades. Available in either Spanish or English, the text and illustrations are simple and clear. Red print calls attention to the main text of the story; words or actions to be emphasized by repetition appear in a box within the text. Suggestions for actions to be used in telling the story appear next to illustrations depicting the animals doing the actions.

Thistle suggests several ways of using the story to encourage language development. She also includes an activity sheet and some critical thinking questions encouraging use of all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.