Play Reviews

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**B 6-9** Reviewed by John Dilworth Newman

The twenty-five scenes in this anthology are actually two-character “short-act plays” intended to stand on their own in a performance situation. Most of the characters are contemporary teenagers, with a few adult characters interspersed. Teen actors will be able to relate easily to the situations and the characters.

This anthology of contemporary scenes could effectively replace the skits and melodramas that predominate in middle school theatre. The scenes are short and manageable, and the situations are readily understood and easily recognizable. Allen, in developing these scripts, worked with students at Hood Junior High in Odessa, Texas, and thus they have been aimed at the middle school drama program.

Unfortunately, the characters are mostly one-dimensional, and few of the dialogue-based scenes call for any physical action. The teen characters, although generally better developed than the adult characters, usually fail to develop beyond one apparent attribute. Also, because the scenes are not drawn from full-length works, students cannot seek out the original play and draw more information about characters who appear so briefly in the scenes. The dialogues are quick-moving and fairly engaging, but they do not allow young adolescents the opportunities they need to physicalize characters and situations.

While other anthologies from the same publisher carry statements which permit the use of the scripts in educational and contest settings, this anthology has no such statement, making it somewhat ambiguous whether this volume of scenes could be legally used for its most likely purposes.

★★★★


**A 1-6** Reviewed by Jette Halladay

This play is a crisp, musical romp through the life of Christopher Columbus from adolescence to his discovery of America. While the production is playful and active, the lyrics are thoughtful and relationships are well-developed. We see Columbus’ tenacity as he persistently pursues his dreams.

The play can be easily adapted for touring with a cast of either twelve or four with doubling. Simple stage requirements include five hanging drapes on poles, two trunks, a stool, a plank of wood, and a steering wheel. Fast-paced and interesting.

★★★★


**A 9-12** Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Rachel is trying to get to her locker when Frank blocks her way. He makes comments that obviously make Rachel uncomfortable. Her friend Angela, on the other hand, likes the comments and attention of her boyfriend Jason. So what is sexual harassment? What do we do about it? In their classroom with Mr. O, the girls and Miles
discuss what it is—that it is often about power, and what can be done about unwanted advances. This informative and interesting scene is followed by an illustration of the principles in action as Rachel tells Frank how she feels, and he leaves her alone.

This is an effective tool to help address a difficult problem facing many young people today. Harassment is defined as any acts meant to disgrace, degrade, or injure an individual. It briefly surveys the range of the harassment (racial, intellectual, demeaning, etc.), but focuses on unwanted sexual interaction. The information is approached from a teen point of view and has been designed to carefully integrate local school policy into the presentation. Recommended for presentation by experienced professional actors. Some mild sexually explicit language is used to establish negative examples. The play is written to be performed by four actors (two male, two female) with doubling, and can be easily toured, since staging is simple.


**A 6-8**

Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

*Expect Respect, Too* is indicated as being aimed at sixth to eighth grades, but only very minimal changes are made in the script between this version and the one used for high school age youth (see the review for *Expect Respect*). It would depend on the nature of the school environment whether the work as presented would be appropriate for a younger audience. I recommend that representatives from the school see a performance or read the play before making production decisions.

The play does address an issue that needs attention. I also recommend pre- and post-show discussion in the classroom to deal with questions and to give further clarification where needed.


**B Pre-3**

Reviewed by Jette Halladay

Mrs. Anderson, a lonely old woman, wants a child. She visits the local witch, who promises her a child born from barley corn. When Thumbelina is born, she is small enough to fit into a walnut shell. And an accidental sneeze from Mrs. Anderson sends Thumbelina on a giant-type adventure.

First, she encounters Tabitha Toad, who sees Thumbelina as a prospective bride for her slimy son. Thumbelina is held captive until she is rescued by the Butterfly. Next Thumbelina is captured by the June Bugs, who also want to marry her. This time, she is saved by Martha Mouse, who cares for Thumbelina through the winter and proves to be an honest friend—that is, until she insists that Thumbelina marry Malcolm Mole. Just before the wedding, a friendly bird, Orville, swoops in and rescues Thumbelina. Orville takes her to a community of little people where Thumbelina meets the Prince and falls in love—this time, to marry as she wishes.

*Thumbelina* offers a cast of eleven colorful characters. There are also opportunities to add more characters at various places, making this a workable and enjoyable script if performed by and for children. Costumes can be simple or elaborate, definitely colorful.


**A 5-12**

Reviewed by Jette Halladay

The selkie-folk are seals that live in water, but change into humans one magical night each year—Midsummer’s Eve. In the old Celtic tales it is said that a man who steals the skin of a selkie may take her to wife until she finds the skin and returns to the sea.
Gollobin weaves her tale with lyrical Celtic dialect as she tells the story of Ellen Jean, the land-born daughter of a captured selkie maid. Born part-land, part-sea, Ellen Jean grows to adolescence as an outcast because of her webbed hands and unusual ways.

Then one Midsummer’s Eve, Ellen Jean finds her mother’s seal skin. Mother and daughter return to the sea.

One year later, Ellen Jean returns, changed and confident to keep her promise to dance with Tam, her only landborn friend. “And so it was tha’ the sea married the land. And in the union the island folk saw the birth o’ a new kind.”

The script requires adult actors/dancers (three men, four women). Recommended for professional companies and very experienced amateur groups. A truly beautiful, haunting, engaging tale.


A 4-9 Reviewed by John Dilworth Newman

“Papa, do you remember . . . what the lady said to the soldier? That all of Denmark would be the king’s bodyguard? . . . Well, now I think that all of Denmark must be bodyguards for the Jews.”

Annamarie Johansen is a fourteen-year-old Danish girl living under the German occupation of her homeland. Her best friend, Ellen Rosen, is one of the seven thousand Jews living in Denmark who are in danger of being “relocated” by the Germans. The Danish people undertake a daring plan to smuggle the entire Jewish population to neutral Sweden in fishing boats. As the action of the play unfolds, Annamarie finds herself accomplishing a dangerous task only she can do which will help Ellen and her family successfully escape the country.

This recent Newbery Award-winning book comes to life in Larche’s faithful dramatization.

While the heroine is fictitious, the circumstances and details of the Danish underground have been carefully researched and accurately presented. The dialogue is peppered with a generous dose of Danish phrases to give it an authentic local flavor. The relatively short length of the novel allows every major episode to be presented during the play’s seventy-five to ninety-minute running time.

The play is episodic in structure, with twenty scenes set in ten different settings. Clever use of a unit set would be essential to a cohesive production of the play. The strength of the script lies largely in the strength of the novel, which it reproduces. The play features a strong adolescent protagonist who is able to take meaningful and plausible action to preserve the life of a friend.


B 7-12 Reviewed by John Dilworth Newman

This diverse collection of monologues, which range in length from two to seven minutes, was developed for high school students in contest situations. Notes in the table of contents indicate that the thirty monologues may be used royalty-free in contest and classroom situations, although other performance situations would require a small charge. This collection could be a valuable resource for high school drama teachers who want to incorporate a monologue unit into a drama class or who want a primary resource for drama competitions.

The language of the monologues is fast-moving and rhythmic. Many of the character portraits they paint, from a presidential assassin to a human duck, are intriguing, quirky, and entertaining.

Most of the monologues tell an interesting story, but few have a definable and playable objective. Thus, they are well-suited to high
school contests, but ill-suited to college and professional auditions. There is a clear through­line of thought in most of the monologues, but the audience is sometimes left wondering what motivates this character to share the story. There are notable exceptions, but in general the monologues do not provide the clear objectives that adolescent actors need to perform effectively. As a storytelling exercise, the style works; as an acting exercise, the style falls short.

Also, it seems strange that among the thirty monologues intended for “student“ (most likely “high school student“) performance, only two of the thirty characters are in the appropriate age range. A few are children and a fair number are in their twenties, but it seems that a monologue collection of this sort should provide more age-appropriate characters.

Overall, this anthology is a good starting point for drama class units and monologue contests, but it lacks several characteristics that would make the collection better suited to its target audience.


A K-5 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Amy is playing at her grandmother’s house when she discovers a magic trunk and wonderful powers she didn’t know she had. With the help of spells, a music box, and the trunk she is able to overcome the spell of the evil Ivan and save the circus. We are able to see the circus acts and the reformation of Ivan (with Amy’s help) before Amy wakes up in her grandmother’s chair. Amy has a remembrance from the attic, so we are left wondering if it was a dream or if it was real.

This is a fast-moving, action play with many characters (cast of eighteen plus extras, with some doubling possible). Originally produced at Playwright’s Workshop Theatre in Phoenix, Arizona, this play could be done successfully by youth groups or as a class project. Scenery requirements are minimal, but there could be some interesting experimentation with circus costumes, especially for the Octopus Woman and the Siamese twins. It would be fun for groups to work with.


A 1-8 Reviewed by John Dilworth Newman

The scenes and monologues in this anthology are taken from well established works for children in dramatic literature and other genres. The eclectic collection is drawn from the works of such diverse authors as Timothy Mason, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Lillian Hellman, Kathryn Schultz Miller, Horton Foote, Tom Stoppard, Marsha Norman, Christopher Durang, Isreal Horowitz, Thornton Wilder, James Lapine, Christopher Hampton, J. M. Barrie, Truman Capote, Oscar Wilde, Antoine de St. Exupery, Clark Gesner, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

The adaptations are faithful and, in most cases, word-for-word cuttings of the author’s original words. Because of this, some of the scenes and monologues begin and end abruptly, but the student is given the advantage of using the authentic, uncut literary material. The introductions are clear and concise, providing adequate background information while always encouraging the young reader to seek out the full work from which the passage is taken.

The scripts have been used by the authors in their work with young people at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. The scenes and monologues lend themselves to honest, multi-layered, and well-motivated portrayals by child actors. The anthology draws more from child novels and adult theatre than from the growing canon of quality dramatic literature for children, but the collection represents a viable cross-section of the better known “mainstream” genres.
The book includes an extensive list of permissions and copyrights, some selections being more restricted than others. With all the restrictions listed, an overriding statement about the legal and fair uses of the material would be helpful.


**A 9+** Reviewed by John Dilworth Newman

The monologues in this anthology are taken from quality contemporary and historical scripts, with an emphasis on contemporary. The collection is divided into three categories (subdivided further into male and female characters): contemporary plays, classical plays, and nondramatic literature. The plays from which the monologues are drawn are, almost without exception, of the highest literary quality. The cuttings tend to be taken from lesser known works, especially in the classical sections, offering the student exciting and viable material which is not overdone.


The selected monologues have strong, playable objectives and yield themselves to physical, honest, motivated acting. In order to maintain the integrity of the original material, some monologues begin and end rather abruptly, but the introductions provide the actor with the necessary bridges to the rest of the material. The collection exposes the young reader to some of the most interesting and valuable, if not always the best known, material in both the contemporary and classical genres.

The volume contains an extensive index of permissions and copyrights. With all the stated restrictions, a statement about the fair and legal use of the monologues would be helpful.


**A 10-12** Reviewed by Athena Madan

From Ibsen’s _Peer Gynt_ to Lorraine Hansberry’s _A Raisin in the Sun_, to powerful poems translated from Arabic, Greek, and Chinese, this diverse collection of monologues for young men and women is refreshing. Young minority actors and actresses will find monologues in this collection with which they can identify. Of course some are more passionate than others, but those characters they choose to create will reflect the irrepressible spirit of their heritage, promoting points of view uniquely their own. Articulating its very purpose and creating a deeper passion for the theatre, *Multicultural Monologues* broadens the understanding of all those participating in the performance.


**A 10-12** Reviewed by Athena Madan

One of the greatest joys of acting is playing characters from many walks of life. The heightened life of the actor reflects the need to live life more fully than most people. Like all artists, actors feel passionately about
articulating our living experiences. Dramatic literature throughout the world is rich in the reflection of human struggle, happiness, and continual questioning. To embrace the art of acting is to constantly enter different worlds, . . . and embrace the rich diversity of our world in considering your own point of view about the theatre and about life.

So write the editors of this compilation of scenes, as diverse as their collection of monologues for young actors. They have well captured the essence of “articulating [the] living experience” in these scenes, whose characters are from all walks of life and experience such themes as criminal refuge, dysfunctional families, self-preservation, the perennial quest for love and its sometimes unrequited nature. Though these themes are universal in truth, young actors will find these characters challenging and exciting to understand in their own cultural context beyond the printed one we find here.

Recommended for young people and those who work with them in creating and understanding characters. This is a useful, new tool for the field.

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Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Amie is concerned. Her family has just moved to a new school, and she is trying to make friends. That’s hard when you are in the fifth grade. The three kids who seem to want to be her friend want her to bring cigarettes and booze when she meets them, but she is not sure she wants to start smoking and drinking. So she gets herself grounded to avoid meeting her “friends.”

Part of the “grounding” is to clean the cluttered attic, where she meets a talking head with magical powers that helps her explore the consequences and causes of substance abuse and addiction. What she learns makes her sure she will not start these destructive habits. Then her mother helps her work out ways to deal constructively with her friends.

This play, written and produced by CLIMB, Inc., presents a great deal of information in a concentrated period of time. Success would rely on follow-up discussions with audience members. It is designed to tour and is recommended for professional production only.

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