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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


A 8+ Reviewed by Melissa Oaks

Anne Frank and Me begins as a story about a modern-day Nicole. Her English class is studying The Diary of Anne Frank, but Nicole’s father strongly believes that the Holocaust never happened. He believes the Jews are just asking for sympathy. Nicole shares this view, because she is not affected by the Holocaust in her daily life.

Nicole worries more about her clothes and boys than grades or ideas. When she is jilted by the boy she likes the most, she runs into the street and just misses being hit by a car, but falls and hits her head. We are taken with her mind, to Paris during the occupation in 1942. Now her family is Jewish and Nicole gets a first-hand look at the treatment of Jews at that time. She changes drastically from a skeptic to a firm believer that the Holocaust did happen and had a strong impact on millions of individuals.

This highly effective play shows the audience how closely related the teenagers of that time period are to the generation of today. The author does an excellent job of portraying contemporary life and its challenges as well as creating a sense of “now” in the flashback sequence.

The set, costume designs, and visual effects are doable on a limited budget. Calls for a cast of twelve, but can be expanded to as many as seventeen. Written to be staged with either age-appropriate casting or by capable high school-age performers.


A K-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Young Jack wants to marry Jennie, but she and her parents seem so silly in dealing with a simple problem that he refuses to marry her. Jack decided he will marry Jenny if he can find three other people who are sillier than they are. He finds a farmer’s wife who has a unique way of keeping a cow, a traveling salesman who jumps in his pants each day, and a schoolboy who tries to fish the moon out of a pond. Jack, of course, returns to marry Jennie and they “lived happily every after—or happier than most,” according to the narrator, Piper.

This is a short, simple play that could be done as a class project or as a presentation for others. It moves quickly, maintains the flavor and color of the old English folktale from which it is taken, and should be easy to stage.


A K-8 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

The basic story is still there, but this adaptation from the Grimm Brothers adds some interesting elements that make the play unique. We actually meet Cinderella’s mother just prior to her death, and also watch the hazel tree grow over her grave. Also seen is the white, talking bird that performs several magical feats, which allows Cinderella to go to the ball and win the prince’s hand. In this version, Cinderella’s father has a more prominent role, first as a hen-pecked husband and then finally standing up to his new wife to defend his true daughter and make the match possible. The bickering sisters are well drawn and are the butt of considerable humor,
while the Step-mother is a classic “heavy” character.

This version can be done with or without music—the songs add to the work and are recommended. Staging can be simple or elaborate. It calls for a cast of ten (five female, three male, two either) and was originally mounted at STAGE ONE: The Louisville Children’s Theatre. It should provide a delightful evening’s entertainment in many venues in the future.


A 3-6  Reviewed by Athena Madan

We ride the Orphan Train—the Orphan Train Deserted, unwanted children seeking, searching for a home.

We are part of the history of our country.

To help solve a social problem we didn’t make, From the slums and orphanages in the cities

We come with fear and a hope to find a helpful home.

Some do. Some do not.

It is a train of hope, of wants, of dreams

A train of “Please/Take/Me.”

This play is based on Charles Loring Brace’s emigration program which, from 1854 to 1929, relocated 250,000 orphan children in overcrowded New York slums to farms in the Midwest. Some endings are happier than others, but for the most part these orphans who ride the westward bound trains in search of a better life find it. A series of vignettes, we are introduced to seven young children during their moment of reckoning at the train station. Given that the time we spend with each character is brief, Harris succeeds in creating distinct personalities with depth and believability, speaking candidly of their stories; their aspirations and idiosyncrasies are ones with which children will relate. However, though this vignette style of theatre is not unlike the concept of the train itself, it may prevent a child audience from coming to

trust, identify, or even care about each individual character.

The cast is flexible—eleven male/fourteen female, but doubling can reduce the cast to as few as four male/four female, if desired. May be performed both with and for children. Set and costumes are minimal. Would work well as a touring production.


B K-9  Reviewed by Tabatha Odom

This is a sequel to Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, but it uses the same plot. Tiny Tim Cratchit has grown up and owns his own toy store in New York. He has become a bit of a “Scrooge” in his adult years. Ebeneezer Scrooge, who has died a few weeks earlier, pays the avaricious Tim a visit (much as Marley did for him), taking him to Christmas past, present, and future in hopes of helping the adult Tim remember what is important in life. Tim, like Ebeneezer, becomes a changed man. He starts to apply the forgotten ideals of his youth.

Grace Wallis, the manager of Tim’s toy store, is in love with Tim. Tim’s changed view of the world helps him value Grace and her attempts to help the poor children who cannot afford the toys sold in the shop. One of Tim’s acts of kindness is to give two very expensive, life-size toy soldiers to the children Grace has tried to help.

The play can be easily produced, would be fun for young people, especially as a Christmas production. Calls for a cast of seventeen, but could be reduced with double casting.


A K-6  Reviewed by Tabatha Odom

This adaptation of the stories of Beatrix Potter into a musical for young people is a lot of fun. It includes the struggles of Peter Rabbit with
Mr. McGregor, who has planted a garden in the spot where there used to be a meadow in which Peter, his family, and friends played and found food. Peter and his best friend, Benjamin Bunny, go into Mr. McGregor’s garden to find food in spite of instructions from their parents to stay away from it. Peter Rabbit’s father was caught and cooked by Mr. McGregor, so Peter’s mother is extra cautious. Peter loses his jacket in the garden, and his mother tells him to go get it from where he left it (without knowing it was lost in the garden). The play ends with the rabbits, crows, and other animals chasing Mr. McGregor away, and they are left in control of the garden. The music for this production is happy and upbeat, adding significantly to the mood of the story.

The adaptation is well written, giving us a good feel for the characters, while the music makes the whole experience enjoyable. This would be an excellent show for older students to put on for younger children, but it would take some time to put together. It requires choreography and music work (there are sixteen musical numbers) in addition to regular drama rehearsals. It should be worth the time, however, and be a satisfying experience for all. There are twelve name characters, and room for additional roles, as desired.


A 9-12 Reviewed by Tabatha Odom

The rich teen culture of the fifties is the primary substance of this light musical. Included are many of the fads from that era. There is Ziggy Springer, an “Elvis” type rock singer who is requested by one of the teen characters to sing at “The Big Dance.” We follow several teenagers as they prepare for a big school dance and other common period activities.

The production notes include costume suggestions and a listing of fads, new words/phrases, clothes, major programs on TV, rebel movies, and theatre hits of 1955 to 1959. There are also suggestions for flexible casting and simplified staging. This would be a fun high school production that students should enjoy both doing and seeing. A production/rehearsal tape is available.


A K-6 Reviewed by Tabatha Odom

This adaptation of the Mowgli stories by Rudyard Kipling structures the play around the storytelling of the old woman, Nyra. We feel the fear of the jungle population for the powerful tiger, Shere Khan, and meet Baloo, the bear and the other well-known instructors of the young man child, Mowgli. The mongoose, Rikki-Tikki Tavi, serves as a link between the jungle and the man village, because he lives in both worlds.

The animal characters are well drawn, and suggested staging seems to be effective, flowing easily from scene to scene. Music for the production seems less supportive of the jungle setting. A tape is available for production use. Cast of twenty-two, and more if desired. Written to be produced for and by community or educational groups.


B 7-12 Reviewed by Athena Madan

It's not unusual: just a group of friends getting together, cranking a few tunes, having a couple drinks. There's nothing else going on, except maybe school . . . and for Jeff, Bill, Debbie, and Sharon, it's only a few weeks until they never have to walk their high school halls again anyway. This time their habitual game of “quarters” unravels to a tragic end. How will this group of friends face the painful resolution?
Written to help prevent alcohol abuse among junior and senior high school students, Turning Points dramatizes how excessive drinking can affect personal performance and judgment, destroy relationships with others, and endanger physiological well-being. Needless to say, this is quite a difficult task to accomplish in thirty-two pages. Rye's intention is clear. The intentions of his characters, however, are not. We assume they are friends because they never hang out with anybody else, but their conversations leave us wondering where they connect. The descriptions Rye gives us in his cast list preceding the play explain the motives that the dramatization lacks. Though we witness their drinking, we are never quite sure why they drink, who instigated the drinking, or even how the characters feel about their taking part in it. Perhaps the superficiality of the typical high school social scene itself explains why these characters and their interrelationships are so superficial. Or perhaps, in the absence of explanation, teenagers will come to question their own motives, habits, or thoughts on drinking. Whatever the result, Rye's intention remains: to promote understanding of alcohol abuse so teenagers may make safe and healthy choices in the future.

The cast is small: four males, five females. Because production requirements are simple (this may even be performed effectively on a bare stage), this would be easy to take on tour. Includes an appendix to facilitate audience discussion following performances.


A K-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Actors come singing and dancing down the aisles, telling us about Tokoloshe, the trickster from Zulu folklore. He can assume any shape, they chant, and can rub a magic stone and become invisible. He lives in the clear stream, which he must not leave for long, or he risks becoming nothing but a mist over the water.

The performers create a river with a flowing fabric of blue. A young girl and her dog come on, telling of a mother who died in childbirth and a father who went away and didn't return. She now lives with her cruel grandmother who beats her and wants to sell her into marriage with Lucky Makhathini, a young layabout who wants her to serve him. When the girl, Thandi, drops her fish line in the water, she catches the Tokoloshe. He helps her out of her trouble by driving off the suitor. The grandmother threatens to bring another, and Thandi runs away to the city to find her father.

Thandi and her talking dog find nothing in the city but filth and hunger. They end up on a polluted riverbank looking for a scrap of food, calling for the lost Tokoloshe who might be able to help them. Instead, Lucky appears, intending to beat her into submission, but as he raises the stick, he is interrupted by the Tokoloshe, who drives him off, feeds the wanderers, brings her father, and then collapses because he has been too long from his river. Then a wonder happens, and without magic he gains a new life as a human—one who loves the girl he has helped so much. In the end, all go away happy together.

This delightful Zulu tale flows with poetic power, inspired by colorful, imaginative characters and vivid images of their African world. Producers and audiences will enjoy this production. Costumes should be imaginative, settings are simple and suggestive, and a brief commentary and pronunciation guide is included to smooth the way. Requires a cast of ten, but can be reduced with double casting, or expanded if desired. Originally staged in the Natal University Open-Air Theatre.


A 1-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

This adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's book takes a very faithful approach to the original. It is told by Mahammed Basu, the storyteller, to the village children. The children help form the chorus that comments on the action of the play...
and indicates transitions. The power of the characters comes through clearly, and Mowgli's adventures are powerfully dramatized. The animal characters have the unique combination of animal and human traits, and the weaknesses and strengths of men and beasts are to be seen clearly. The play moves well and holds interest. Family audiences as well as children will enjoy it.

Staging can be simple, with suggestive costumes, sets, and properties. There are suggestions for these elements following the play. There is a core cast of perhaps ten (with double or triple casting), but it could be much larger. The original production at the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre had a cast of thirty-four.


A 3-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

It is 1692 in a small New England village only a few miles from Salem, Massachusetts. The Reverend Stone and his daughter, Rachel, have been to the witch trials in Salem, and the reverend is concerned about possible witches in his own parish congregation. Rachel is very impressed by the power and respect possessed by the teenage accusers in Salem. They have whatever they want, and wherever they go people defer to them. Rachel plots with two of her friends, Joanna and Anne, to pretend they are possessed and accuse a woman who has recently upset Joanna.

The girls' plot works so well that it gives some of the community leaders an idea of how to get out of a problem they have created by "borrowing" the money from the town treasury to invest in a ship that, unfortunately, has sunk. By seizing the property of accused witches, they hope to replace the money they stole and save their skins.

All this action is observed by The Wise One and his granddaughter, Megan. They possess magical abilities to bless the lives of mortals, but can lose them if they fall in love and tell they have such nonmortal powers. This Megan does by falling in love with Nathaniel, whose mother is accused of being a witch. Complications follow complications, but are all resolved in the end. The characters are interesting, the plot swift-moving, and the dialogue crisp. The only problem is the rather sudden resolution when characters "repent" and change very quickly. This should be a fun play for amateur groups looking for a large cast (eighteen) production. Requires one set, some special effects, and period costumes. Estimated playing time is about two hours.


B K-6 Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Danny is a lonely boy who is unhappy in not being able to celebrate any holidays, so when a little witch loses her broom and he gets it, he makes her cast a spell that allows him to capture the holidays. When we see the results, he has Priscilla (Thanksgiving), Arbie (Arbor Day), and Pat (Saint Patrick's Day) trapped behind an invisible wall that prevents them from getting back on the calendar.

Meanwhile, Kim and her toy dog, Pete, are trying to help Julie (the Fourth of July) get "around the corner" safely when Danny comes to take that holiday, too. Kim and Pete try unsuccessfully to protect her, but are able to follow her to the cave where she and the others are held captive. Kim goes in to try to free them, but is caught herself, so she sends Pete back to bring her parents. Before they arrive, Kim is able to help Danny see that happiness comes from being kind rather than demanding things of others. He cooperates to free the holidays and the calendar returns to normal.

This light-hearted musical (sixteen numbers) should be fun and easy to stage. The action moves quickly and the characters are easily recognized. Appropriate for staging by young people or community theater groups. A piano/vocal score and video tape of the premier production are available from the publisher.