

Gretel Was a Princess

by Patti Veconi

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DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to the original cast of students from the 2013/14 fifth grade class at Bay Ridge Prep School in Brooklyn, NY: Adem Abdelhadi, Yiorgos Alexandrous, Abigail Brodsky, John Calacanis, Richard Cohen, Steven Franco, Chris Galette, David Geyser, Jason Ghiz, Samantha Landy, Autumn Santo, Michelle Shtutman, Priscilla Sideris, Evan Stone Lemberg, Bridget Villamarin, Chloe Wiederhorn, Kayla Zisimopoulos.

STORY OF THE PLAY

The drama club members assemble to perform "The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales," but realize there isn't time to do the whole collection and still eat the cookies waiting in the lobby for after the show. The actors condense the tome down to their favorite parts, mixing, matching and mashing up characters, while a clever casting director challenges stereotypes to meet the demand for princess roles among the girls in the company.

With the help of a group of musician-dwarfs to play and punctuate the story, the characters head out on a quest to find the king's missing son, the Frog Prince, and win the reward of their dreams. When the delivery of a kiss transforms the frog back to his true, princely self, everyone is surprised except Gretel, who always knew she was a princess.

This show is intended for upper-elementary and junior high student performers borrowing from British pantomime conventions including music, the use of a narrator, frequent interaction with the audience, and creative interpretations of familiar characters. About 35 minutes, depending on optional music.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Speaking roles for 18 (4 m, 7 w, and 7 flexible)

As many extras and sound effects/musicians for ensemble as desired.

Roles for females:

AUTUMN (Fairy)
SAMANTHA (Red Riding Hood)
CHLOE (Witch, Grandmother)
MICHELLE (Gretel)
KAYLA (Cinderella – a feminist princess)
PRISCILLA (Rapunzel – a feminist princess)
MARY (Snow White – a feminist princess)

Roles for males:

JOHN (Hansel)
CHRIS (King)
DAVID (Frog Prince)*
GEORGE (A shy boy who doesn't want a speaking part)

Roles for Either Gender:

NARRATOR (Can be played by up to six different actors.)*
BRIDGET (Tailor)
ABIGAIL (Casting Director)
EVAN (Woodsman)
RICHARD (Wizard)
ADAM (Wolf)
STEVEN (Beggar-Thief)

- * The FROG PRINCE may choose to simply stand throughout the play, or the actor playing him could squat, like a frog, from the moment he takes the part. If so, the metamorphosis back into a prince at the end of the play is funnier as he stands up with a slide whistle sound effect.
- * When using more than one NARRATOR, the most elegant places to change actors is during the transitions into Scenes 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10.

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SETTING

The original production was performed on a black box stage with three choral risers upstage center and a few shelves and hooks on the wall for holding props. Some props such as the apple can instead be tucked under the risers for easy access. A lectern or other designated spot for the narrator is down right. The actors used various tableaux to visually suggest the changing environments of the fairy tale kingdom, keeping the entire ensemble engaged and relevant throughout the play and eliminating the need for entrances and exits. For example, a forest is shown by the actors who are not playing characters in the scene standing with their arms up as though they are trees, and the door to a cottage is created by two actors facing each other and creating a doorway with their arms or two sticks.

MUSIC

Suggested songs are provided with the script and this play lends itself nicely to a school music program that includes recorders and/or Orff instruments. However, the music is optional. In the original production, various sound effects were employed with hand percussion instruments such as chimes, vibraslap, ratchets, rasps, bells, drums and more to lend interest and comedic emphasis throughout. Whether your student musicians are accomplished enough to play Renaissance music, or simply want to ham it up in the "pit" with an occasional interjection of sound, they should be considered part of the ensemble and play to their strengths.

PROPS

Copy of "The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales" and a "tiny book" to represent the very condensed version (NARRATOR); king's crown (CHRIS/KING); wizard hat and wand (RICHARD/WIZARD); fairy wings and/or fairy wands (AUTUMN and SAMANTHA); Red Riding Hood's cape and basket (SAMANTHA/RED); apple (CHLOE/WITCH); clipboard and pencil (ABIGAIL/CASTING DIRECTOR); measuring tape and frog-sized robe and crown (BRIDGET/ TAILOR); green "frog" collar and folded paper crown (DAVID/FROG PRINCE); cardboard "axe" and plaid shirt (EVAN/ WOODSMAN); bonnet and basket filled with chocolate kisses (MICHELLE/GRETEL); cap and shawl (CHLOE/GRAND-MOTHER); yardsticks or rope for supplementing scenery if so desired by the ACTORS who create the cottage doorway.

Scene 1: How Things Used to Be

(AT RISE: ACTORS enter in a processional from the aisle, singing "Entrance Drone." NARRATOR leads the line, and – with much panache and flair – conducts the ENSEMBLE for their cutoff. ALL freeze in a brief tableau while the NARRATOR walks to the lectern, speaking the opening line.)

NARRATOR: This is a story of how children were entertained in a time long, long ago...

MARY: Before the internet and video games.

JOHN: Before movies and television.

CHLOE: Before iTunes, CDs, records or 8-track tapes.

BRIDGET: What are 8-track tapes?

CHLOE: No idea; it was in the script.

STEVEN: It was a time before radios and telephones –

JOHN: Including land lines!

AUTUMN: Before electricity and amusement parks.

CHRIS: Before laser tag or even birthday bowling parties.

DAVID: You're probably wondering: How did kids have any fun at all?

SAMANTHA: They used...

ALL: *(Singing a fanfare.)* Bum-ba-da, bum-bum-bum-baaaaa... *(Mysteriously.)* MAGIC!

MARY: Wait, I thought the answer was storytelling?

MICHELLE: I thought the answer was singing and dancing?

ABIGAIL: I thought we had agreed that it was live theatre?

(Bit of ad-libbing agreeing and arguing this point.)

PRISCILLA: Hey, everybody, you're being silly. Storytelling and music and theatre ARE magic.

(Ad-libbing their agreement on this point.)

RICHARD: OK, just to be clear, you're saying that if we use theatre and music to tell stories, we're making magic?

PRISCILLA: Yes.

RICHARD: Then I can make magic?

PRISCILLA: *(A bit hesitantly.)* Yes?

RICHARD: Then that means I'm a wizard?

(Ad libs as ALL consider this a moment, then general agreement.)

PRISCILLA: Why not?

RICHARD: Good! I'll get ready.

(RICHARD runs upstage to get the wizard hat and wand.)

NARRATOR: Let's begin. *(Calling over his shoulder.)* Script!

(ACTORS take the large Grimm Fairy Tales book off the shelf and pass it, one-by-one, up to NARRATOR. This can be a "lazzo" bit, complete with SOUND EFFECTS. Narrator finally takes the book, opens it with some combination of reverence and flair, clears his/her throat and begins.)

NARRATOR: Places, everybody!

(ACTORS turn to face upstage and freeze.)

Scene 2: The Complete Brothers Grimm

NARRATOR: *(Cont'd. Reading.)* "The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales." Page 1, "The Frog Prince." *(Beat.)* In olden times, when people could have all they wished for at once, there lived a king –

(CHRIS turns to audience, putting a crown on his head and striking a very kingly pose. The crown may have been handed to him by RICHARD, who went upstage to put on the wizard hat.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont'd.)* – who had many beautiful daughters.

End of Freeview

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