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*Dramatic Publishing*

MASTERFUL AND HEARTRENDING  
*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

# Zink: the Myth, the Legend, the Zebra



*Drama*  
*by*  
*Cherie Bennett*

*The Dramatic Publishing Company*

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Brilliantly exposes and explores important  
themes while avoiding clichés  
and easy resolutions  
Milwaukee Shepherd

# Zink: the Myth, the Legend, the Zebra

**Drama. By Cherie Bennett.**

*Cast: Version for 25 or more actors.* Commissioned by First Stage Milwaukee, *Zink* is about true courage in the face of unpredictable predators. Imaginative, funny, and heartbreaking, it's the story of the relationship between Becky, a lonely pre-teen girl with leukemia, and her guardian-angel herd of zebras on the African savannah. The zebras range from street-smart Ice Z to grandfatherly Papa Zeke, effete Zilch to endearing Schlep, a furry green monkey sure he is actually a zebra. In Africa, Becky learns about Zink, a mythical polka-dotted zebra once an outcast but later a hero with the most courage and biggest heart. Becky's health worsens and she zaps back and forth between her real life and the zebra world until the shattering, breathtaking and uplifting climax. Never maudlin, "playwright Bennett does a masterful job of balancing the hard realities of illness and the magic found on the zebras' African plains. A clear case of theatrical risks bringing great rewards. (*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*) "Brilliantly exposes important themes while avoiding clichés and easy resolutions. Superb." (*Milwaukee Shepherd*) *Zink the Zebra* diversity curriculum available from Zink the Zebra Foundation, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. *Family drama, best for ages 8 and up. Simple, flexible set.*

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Front cover: First Stage Milwaukee premiere  
production. (l-r) Clifton Williams, Tracy McCoy,  
Tracey Hassinger and Clare Connolly.

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**ZINK:  
THE MYTH, THE LEGEND,  
THE ZEBRA**

(Large-cast version)

**A Play for Young Audiences  
by  
CHERIE BENNETT**

**Based on a theme from the Zink the Zebra Foundation and  
commissioned by First Stage Milwaukee [Wis.]**



**Dramatic Publishing**  
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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—Large-cast version—

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For my dad, Dr. Bennett H. Berman, who has gone to his  
own land of the zebras, but who lives on in my heart,

for my husband, Jeff Gottesfeld, my partner in life and in  
art, who brilliantly served as dramaturge for this play,

and

in memory of Kelly Weil.

## SCRIPT HISTORY

*Zink* was commissioned by First Stage Milwaukee (FSM), one of the nation's leading professional equity companies for youth and the family, and was based on a theme suggested by the Zink the Zebra Foundation. FSM offered the commission to the playwright in early 1997. The mission: write a play about a girl with leukemia, zebras, and in keeping with the foundation's mission of promoting diversity in all forms.

The first draft was completed in April and read publicly at FSM in late May. The world premiere was in November 1997 at First Stage Milwaukee, Rob Goodman, Artistic Director.

Chris Gantry, author of many No. 1 country songs, wrote and licensed the song "ZZZZ Z-Z-Z Zebras of Course!" while "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" was licensed by its publisher to the playwright.

The play won the 1997-98 Jackie White Memorial Children's Playwriting Competition based in Columbia, Mo., making the playwright the only two-time winner of that prestigious competition. She previously won the 1995 competition with *John Lennon & Me* (Dramatic Publishing Company, 1996).



# ZINK: THE MYTH, THE LEGEND, THE ZEBRA

A Play for Young Audiences

For 20 to 25 or more actors

## CHARACTERS

### The Humans:

REBECCA (BECKY) ZASLOW . . . A leukemia patient, 10.  
DIANE ZASLOW . . . . . Becky's mother.  
TED ZASLOW . . . . . Becky's father.  
LEE ZASLOW . . . . . Becky's sister/brother, 8.  
NURSE PAT (f or m) . . . . . Becky's nurse.  
DARLENE DUNBAR . . . . . Becky's hospital roommate, 11.  
KATIE BOWERS . . . . . another hospital roommate, 11.  
TERRY BELCHER (f or m) . . . . . Becky's teacher.  
ASHLEY CHAFFIN . . . . . A classmate of Becky's, 10.  
SARA BOWDER . . . . . Ashley's follower, 10.  
JULIE FINN . . . . . another follower, 10.

### The Animals:

SHLEP (f or m) . . . . . A monkey who wants to be a zebra.  
PAPA (or MOMMA) ZEKE . . . . . Leader of the zebras.  
ICE Z (f or m) . . . . . A zebra  
who sings lead in the Zenzational Z'Bras.  
ZIP (f or m) . . . . . A member of the Z'Bras trio.  
ZAP (f or m) . . . . . Zip's twin, also in the Z'Bras trio.  
ZILCH (f or m) . . . . . Another zebra.  
ZUZI (f) . . . . . A young zebra.

ZTUDLY (m) . . . . . A studly zebra.  
ZGORBY (m or f) . . . . . A foreign diplomat zebra.  
ZBIG (m or f) . . . . . Zgorby's translator.  
ZELVIS (m) . . . . . An Elvis zebra.  
ZCARLETT O'ZEBRA (f) . . . . . A southern belle zebra.  
ZA ZA (f) . . . . . A former femme fatale zebra.  
ZERO (m or f) . . . . . A child zebra.  
ZORO (m or f) . . . . . A very young child zebra.

TIME: Now.

PLACE: The African plains, Becky's home,  
Ashley's home, the hospital, Becky's school.

## NOTES ON CASTING

- In this large cast version of *Zink* there are 26 speaking roles. The cast can be expanded even further by using additional actors as zebras in the African scenes.
- Color-blind casting is encouraged. Also, there are many opportunities for the director to select the sex of the cast member, as indicated in the cast list.
- If the director desires, actors cast as humans can double as zebras in the African group scenes. The more zebras, the better.
- A version of this script for a smaller cast with as few as 11 actors is also available from Dramatic Publishing.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### Set

The only definite prop is the tree, as described at the beginning of the play. It is large and should be able to be climbed easily. Otherwise, the set is at the discretion of the production team: simple, with a few easily moveable pieces and careful lighting to indicate location, or as complex as the director and the designer desire. A rocking chair may be a useful item for the director to employ.

### Costumes

ZEBRAS' faces should not be obscured. Costumes should allow free movement, with quirky additions that typify the individual personality of each zebra. Zebras walk like people. SHLEP THE MONKEY should be Astroturf green and able to shed. BECKY can lose her hair by having her put her own hair under a bald cap, covered by a wig from the opening of the play. Then, she need only remove the wig offstage at the appropriate time. Or she can cover her head with a close-fitting scarf or baseball cap.

### Language

Idiomatic teen language (such as "the bomb," meaning something is terrific) may be altered at the discretion of the director.

### Additional Character Notes

**REBECCA (BECKY) ZASLOW:** Kind, on a journey where she discovers the indomitable power and spirit of her own heart.

**DIANE ZASLOW:** Loving, strong, sometimes overpowering, overly protective of her ill daughter.

TED ZASLOW: A policeman. Gentle, loving.

LEE ZASLOW: A regular kid who is scared and angered by Becky's illness.

NURSE PAT: An honest, straightforward, caring nurse.

DARLENE DUNBAR: Also has leukemia. Manipulative, bratty to cover up her fear.

KATIE BOWERS: Has bone cancer. Covers up fear the way Darlene does.

TERRY BELCHER: Earnest and sincere.

ASHLEY CHAFFIN: The prettiest, most popular girl in Becky's class. Conceited. Accustomed to winning.

SARA BOWDER: Tentative, sweet.

JULIE FINN: A sycophant.

SHLEP: A very small, very enthusiastic, green monkey who desperately wants to be a zebra.

PAPA (or MOMMA) ZEKE: Old-school borscht-belt sensibility. Old, smart, impatient, blunt, funny, the elder leader of the zebras.

ICE Z: The coolest of the cool, lead singer in the Zenzational Z'Bras.

ZIP: Also an incredibly cool zebra who sings doo-wop in the Z'Bras trio.

ZAP: The third incredibly cool, doo-wop-singing zebra in the Z'Bras trio.

ZILCH: A pompous, snobby, conceited zebra.

ZUZI: A very perky, young zebra.

ZTUDLY: Deep TV announcer-type voice.

ZGORBY: Speaks only Zlotzian, a nonsense language that has the sound and cadence of Russian.

ZBIG: Speaks English with Zlotzian (vaguely Russian) accent. Preferably small in stature.

ZELVIS: Complete with pompadour and blue suede hooves. Preferably can sing and dance á la Elvis.

ZCARLETT O'ZEBRA: Overly dramatic in a *Gone With the Wind* way. Southern accent.

ZA ZA: Hungarian accent.

ZERO: A Zilch-in-training.

ZORO: A young-as-possible child zebra who wears Zorro mask and cape.

### Percussion and Music

On-stage and/or off-stage percussion may be used throughout the play to set mood, add humor, heighten tension, etc. If percussion is not used, music that takes us from scene to scene or for internal use is at the discretion of the director.

### Intermission and Ending

This play is designed to be produced without an intermission. However, if an intermission is desired, it is so noted at the proper point in the script. Depending on his or her individual interpretation, the director may bring the play to an end by fading lights to black during the final savannah sequence, as indicated at the end of the play by an asterisk.

## ZINK: THE MYTH, THE LEGEND, THE ZEBRA

AT RISE: *A spot up on BECKY ZASLOW, thin, pale, timid, and insecure, but with the light of something very special in her eyes. She holds a small, stuffed zebra in one hand and a hairbrush, which she pretends is a microphone, in the other, and plaintively sings the first two lines of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."*

BECKY (*singing slowly and sweetly*). "In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight. In the jungle, the quiet jungle, the lion sleeps tonight..."

*(Magical music. Fade to black. Roar of a distant lion. Lights up on the plains of Africa. UC is a large tree. In it is SHLEP. He blends in with the tree. A mike stands center. A sign reads: SAVANNAH ROOM TALENT SHOW AUDITIONS TODAY. ZEBRAS ONLY. Downstage, ZEBRAS buzz with excitement, preparing—vocalizing, stretching, etc., all loud and dramatic. In charge is PAPA [for MOMMA] ZEKE assisting ZTUDLY. R are ZCARLETT O'ZEBRA, ZA ZA and others who have already auditioned. L are ZILCH, ZERO, ZELVIS, ZGORBY, ZBIG plus the doo-wop trio of ICE Z, ZIP, and ZAP, who wear black leather jackets with Z'BRAS printed on the back.*

*ZIP and ZAP, as twins, are in perfect synch. Tension is high; a lot is at stake.)*

PAPA ZEKE. Okay, okay, time to continue the audition. Time is money, zebras. Who's next, Ztudly?

ZTUDLY (*checking his list*). A recitation by Zilch the Zebra.

*(ZILCH, an affected snob, and ZERO, a child zebra who hero-worships ZILCH and mimics his every move, come forward.)*

PAPA ZEKE. Zilch, babe, I'm looking for passion, excitement, star quality. In other words, make me weep. (*ZILCH haughtily assumes Shakespearian recitation stance. ZERO mimics his every move. Into microphone, ZILCH recites melodramatically.*)

ZILCH. I, Zilch, am a zebra. We roam in herds on the vast savannah plains of Africa, and are herbivores, meaning we eat only plants. (*ZEBRAS dis him.*) All we fear are meat-eating predators, such as lions, who want us to be their breakfast, lunch and dinner. Or as we say *en l'Afrique francophone, le petit dejeuner, le dejeuner*---

PAPA ZEKE (*cutting him off*). Thank you. *Next!*

ZILCH. But there's more!

ZERO. And it's brilliant!

PAPA ZEKE. Zilch, babe, how can I say this so it won't hurt your feelings? You *stink!* *Next!*

ZTUDLY (*consulting his list*). Next would be ...

*(ZORO, a baby zebra wearing a black Zorro mask and cape, tugs on ZTUDLY.)*



ZORO. Mr. Ztudly, I want to audition.

ZUZI (*getting ZORO*). Zoro, what did I tell you?

ZORO (*deeply disappointed*). That I'm too little.

ZERO (*to ZORO*). Ha! Shrimp.

ZUZI. That's mean.

ZILCH (*with pride*). That's my foal.

ZTUDLY (*consulting his list*). Visiting from the vast savannah plains of Zlutz, Most High Minister of Culture, Zgorby Zebra and his translator, Zbig Zebra.

*(ZGORBY, who speaks only Zlutz, and his translator the diminutive ZBIG, hurry forward. The sound of Zlutz should approximate Russian. ZBIG speaks with a Zlutzian accent. Throughout the play ZBIG whispers translations to ZGORBY.)*

PAPA ZEKE. Welcome to Africa. Whaddaya got?  
*(ZGORBY whispers in ZBIG's ear.)*

ZBIG. Most High Minister of Culture Zgorby of Zlutz, say he wishes now to make stand-up comedy routine. *(Note: Whenever ZGORBY speaks, he simultaneously acts it out as if playing charades. Between this and the cadence and bits of fractured English, the meaning of what he is saying should always be obvious.)*

ZGORBY (*into the microphone*). Ish-pish *trey ze-braz-nik en shlitzki*.

ZBIG. *Shlitzki* means "lifeboat."

ZGORBY (*certain he is hilarious*). Da! *Trey ze-braz-nik en shlitzki*. Uno zebra pish Bap-teest, uno zebra pish Cat-olic, ay uno zebra pish Jew-ish—

PAPA ZEKE (*loudly cutting him off*). Thank you!

ZBIG. He no finish routine? But he very funny zebra!

PAPA ZEKE. Please tell the cultural minister that I said thank you for his heartfelt audition. *Next!* (As auditions continue, PAPA ZEKE indicates that ZTUDLY should pick up the pace. Intros grow faster and faster. Each act is worse than the one before, PAPA ZEKE can't take it, cuts them off quickly.)

ZTUDLY (consulting list). Former star of stage and screen and now faded into oblivion, Za Za Zebra.

ZA ZA (into the mike, with a Hungarian accent). How can I perform after such an introduction? I can't vurk under zeez conditions!

PAPA ZEKE. *Next!*

ZTUDLY (consulting list). A dramatic reading by Zcarlett O'Zebra.

ZCARLETT (into the mike, dripping with southern melodrama). As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry a—

PAPA ZEKE. *Next!*

ZTUDLY (checking list). The king of rock 'n' roll, Zelvis the Zebra.

ZELVIS (into the mike á la Elvis). Thank-yu, thank-yu very—

PAPA ZEKE. *Next!*

ZTUDLY (checking his list; he knows the next act is great). Last and certainly not least, twins Zip and Zap (They do a quick hip-hop move together.) and Ice Z, (ICE Z gives a clenched-fist salute.) the Zenzational Z'Bras!

(ICE Z, ZIP, and ZAP cross center. ICE Z grabs the mike, all three turn their backs to the audience.)

ICE Z (*into mike*). Ladies and gentleman, zebras of all ages, The Savannah Room is proud to present...the one, the only...the Zenzational Z'bras!

*(ZIP might play a note on a pitch pipe. Z'BRAS swing around. They have donned zebra-striped sunglasses. They sing "ZZZZ Z-Z-Z Zebras of Course," a cappella [or to a pre-recorded track], with ICE Z on lead. If the director prefers, the number may be rapped.)*

WEE-OO, BABOON-A RHINO RHINO

WAY OUT IN AFRICA ON THE SAVANNAH  
WHEN IT COMES TO BEIN' COOL WE'RE TOP  
BANANA

WE'RE PRETTY AND WE'RE TOOTHY  
WITH MICK JAGGER LIPS  
WE KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING  
WE'RE NATURALLY HIP

WE GOT A HOOF, HOOFY STRUT  
THAT SAYS WE'RE BAD  
CRUISIN' ALL THE WATER HOLES  
THAT'S OUR BAG

WE AIN'T A TIGER, A MONKEY, A  
CANDY-STRIPED HORSE  
WE'RE THE ZZZZZZ ZZZZZZ Z-Z-Z ZEBRAS OF  
COURSE

BRIDGE

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR KICKS OR SOME  
 AFRICAN ACTION  
 CHECK OUT ZEBRAS WE'RE THE MAIN  
 ATTRACTION  
 IF YOU WANNA KNOW THE INSIDE SCOOP  
 WHERE IT'S AT  
 ASK FOR ICE Z, ZIP AND ZAP

WE'LL ROCK YOU ALL NIGHT  
 DANCE YOU 'TIL DAWN  
 'TIL YOU GIVE OUT A  
 BIG HIPPOPOTAMUS YAWN

WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WITH US  
 YOU KNOW YOU'VE BEEN WITH THE BOSS  
 WE'RE THE ZZZZZ ZZZZZZ Z-Z-Z ZEBRAS OF  
 COURSE

WE AIN'T THE RHINOS, WE AIN'T THE HIPPOS,  
 THE LIONS  
 THE OSTRICHES, THE GATORS, THE CROCS  
 WE'RE THE ZEBRAS... YEAH

*(They are beyond great. All except ZILCH and ZERO  
 applaud wildly. ZUZI, other young zebras get their auto-  
 graphs.)*

PAPA ZEKE. Fantastic! Congratulations, Z'Bras. You're  
 the winners! Tell 'em what they've won, Ztudly.  
 ZTUDLY *(like a TV game-show host)*. Right, Papa Zeke!  
 Z'Bras, as winners of the talent-show audition, you'll

headline Papa Zeke's Savannah Room extravaganza. But wait, there's *more!* You've also won... a trip to the human world! Yes, Z'Bras, you'll fly non-stop via the imagination right into the world of our very own human, Becky Zaslow! (*ZEBRAS all talk and argue at once, all very excited and surprised. This is a shocking development. Z'BRAS give each other a high-five [or something similar] handshake, ending in shouting "STRIPES!"*)

ZILCH (*calling to PAPA ZEKE*). Point of order!

ZERO. Point of order!

ZILCH. Might I point out that only you, Fearless Leader, have ever crossed over into the human world. To what do we owe this shocking breach of protocol?

PAPA ZEKE. What can I tell you? I'm washed up, finished, I don't have what it takes anymore.

ZUZI. Don't say that, Papa Zeke.

PAPA ZEKE. It's true. You know what it takes to cross over to the human world? Youth, energy, will to live!

ZCARLETT (*horrified*). You've lost your will to live?

PAPA ZEKE. Never! I'm talking Tolive, Doctor Will Tolive, the greatest veterinarian in all of Africa and a close personal friend of my close personal friend Mel Brooks. Tolive tells me one more trip to the human world and I could—

ALL ZEBRAS (*worried*). Could what?

PAPA ZEKE. *What* is what you don't have to worry about. No more crossing over for me. The Z'Bras will carry on.

ZILCH (*derisively*). But why should *they* be the first ones to meet our human? They're nobodies.

*(ZEBRAS all argue and take sides, as SHLEP climbs out of his tree and quickly crosses to PAPA ZEKE.)*

SHLEP. Wait, wait! Hold it, hold it, you guys! What about me? I didn't audition yet.

ZILCH (*derisively again*). You? Surely you jest.

PAPA ZEKE. Hello, Shlep. Sorry, but I'm only auditioning zebras.

SHLEP. Right-a-rooni-rhino! That would be me. Yep. I'm a zebra. (*Singing à la the Z'BRAS.*) Wee-oo, Baboon-a-Rhino-Rhino—

ZILCH (*laughing at SHLEP*). How droll.

ZA ZA. How ridiculous.

ICE Z. Little buddy, you're too short.

ZIP & ZAP. You're too green.

ALL ZEBRAS. You're a monkey.

SHLEP. But I wanna be one of you guys! You know, swing with the stripes, hang with the homie herd, get down with the—

PAPA ZEKE. Sorry, Shlep. Oy, something I ate for lunch is eating me back. I need a seltzer and a nap. (*PAPA ZEKE heads slowly for the exit.*)

ICE Z. Yo, Papa Zeke!

ZIP. We've never

ZAP. gone to

ZIP. the human world before.

ZIP & ZAP. We don't know what to do.

PAPA ZEKE. I didn't tell you? (*Z'BRAS shake their heads.*) Oy, my mind is going. (*Crosses to Z'BRAS, puts his hands on their foreheads.*) There. I just did a mind-meld thing. Now you know everything you need to know about our human.

ZIP. But what

ZAP. is it

ZIP. that

ZAP. we're

ZIP. supposed

ZAP. to do

ZIP. for her,

ZIP & ZAP. exactly?

PAPA ZEKE. The answer to your question *is*: I don't know. The only one who would know is Zink the Zebra. Zink the Zebra, the—

ALL ZEBRAS (*they've heard it many times*). —wisest zebra of all, with the most courage, and the biggest heart.

PAPA ZEKE. Exactly. Wiser even—I know this is hard to believe—than me. Zink would know.

ZUZI. But isn't Zink just a made-up story, Papa Zeke?

PAPA ZEKE. My beloved great-grandmother of blessed memory, may she rest in peace, said her mother had a friend, Zaidey Zebra, who had a sister who had a cousin by marriage, Zachariah Zebra, who claimed he once drank dirty pond water next to a polka-dotted zebra named Zink. But I heard this Zachariah was a big liar. So the answer to your question *is*: I don't know.

ZILCH. A polka-dotted zebra named Zink. That sounds almost as hideous as a little green monkey named Shlep.

SHLEP. I'm a zebra, I tell ya! (*ZEBRAS all argue about Zink.*)

PAPA ZEKE (*interrupting them*). Enough already! Five zebras, ten opinions! You're giving my indigestion indigestion. (*Slowly crosses towards exit.*) Z'Bras—have a safe trip, don't forget to write, may the force be with you, phone home, et cetera, et cetera. And now, I'm dying for a seltzer.

ZILCH (*running after him, ZERO follows, mimicking him*). Wait, Papa Zeke! I'll get your seltzer! And fluff your

pillow! And if I might suggest myself as the under-study— (*PAPA ZEKE, ZILCH and ZERO exit, as do all except Z'BRAS and enthusiastic SHLEP.*)

SHLEP. Hey, you guys, what do you wanna do now? Wanna play a game? How about monkey in the middle! Who's gonna be the monkey?

ICE Z. You heard Papa Zeke. We won, little buddy. Ergo, we got business to take care of.

SHLEP (*with awe and excitement*). Right! Human business! We're gonna be great, huh, you guys? Doncha think our human will fall in love with a small, green, furry zebra like me?

Z'BRAS. You're a monkey.

ICE Z. What say we check out the human world before we cruise over.

*(ICE Z snaps his fingers. Lights up on the Zaslows' living room. Some stuffed animals, including BECKY's favorite toy zebra, are scattered around. DIANE ZASLOW brushes BECKY's hair. Z'BRAS and SHLEP watch from Africa.)*

BECKY. Please quiz me on African animals, Morn. (*She hands her mother a school paper.*) Start with the vocabulary words.

MRS. ZASLOW (*still brushing BECKY's hair*). Becky, honey, you don't have to do that now.

SHLEP (*to Z'BRAS*). Becky! Hey, you guys, that's our human!

BECKY. Herbivores. Animals who eat only plants.

SHLEP (*to Z'BRAS*). That's us, you guys!

MRS. ZASLOW. Becky—