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## **Family Plays**

# JOHNNY MOONBEAM AND THE SILVER ARROW

*A Play for Young People*

by  
JOSEPH GOLDEN



# JOHNNY MOONBEAM AND THE SILVER ARROW

Indian adventure, told in narration and mime.

***Indian adventure. By Joseph Golden. Cast: 3m., 3 either gender with option to add extras.*** To earn the coveted silver arrow, Johnny Moonbeam is required to take rain from the Rain God, fire from the Fire God, and maize from the Earth God. The quest is fraught with dangers, and manly courage is demanded of the 12-year-old boy. When at last he has overcome all obstacles, and holds the three powers of the world in his hands, he is subjected to a further test, to determine how he proposes to use power. He returns to his tribe empty-handed. *One symbolic set. American Indian costumes.*

Code: J52

## Family Plays

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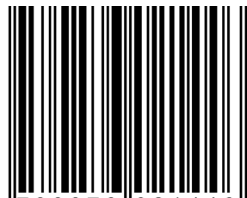
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For  
DAVID

JOHNNY MOONBEAM was first produced in August, 1957, by the Magic Circle Theatre, of Tufts University, at Medford, Massachusetts, under the direction of the author.

On this occasion, it was shown, in arena style, to the delegates assembled at Tufts University for the national Children's Theatre Conference.

# JOHNNY MOONBEAM AND THE SILVER ARROW

by  
JOSEPH GOLDEN

## Cast

NARRATOR  
JOHNNY MOONBEAM  
MEDICINE MAN  
RAIN GOD  
FIRE GOD  
EARTH GOD

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Although the narration and stage directions depict a fairly specific sequence of actions, it is hoped that the reader will find a wide margin permitted for the imaginative director. To such persons, the stage business provided in the text of the play becomes an *outline* for action rather than definitive business, and thus may be embellished and enriched to the limit of the director's and performer's capacity.

Furthermore, JOHNNY MOONBEAM may be treated as a *dance* and can be mounted for the stage by a choreographer as well as by a director. Music for the dance, beyond what is suggested in the text, may be specially contrived for the play or use be made of recorded music already available.

In regard to style and quantity of stage movement, size of cast (during instruction and final scenes) or treatment of Narrator, the director has considerable freedom of choice.

The stage effects called for in the play need not be, of course, as elaborate as indicated. The mood created by a response to even suggestive light or sound patterns by the performers is of primary importance. All sound effects are available for manual or recorded use. Lighting effects can be accomplished with almost any basic set up of red-green-blue circuits or strips and about a half dozen small, strong spots.

# Johnny Moonbeam and the Silver Arrow

*The curtain opens slowly, accompanied by a distant and incessant throb of drums. For a moment the stage is in darkness, with only the sound of the tom-toms breaking the emptiness. A sharp shaft of white light slowly dims up revealing the NARRATOR who is perched on the stage apron. His dress may be an odd combination of costumes. It is meant to suggest that while he is essentially a part of the stage picture, fully capable of thrusting himself into the heart of the action on Johnny's behalf, he is also identified with the audience. He is a virile, earthy character, but he can consort with moonbeams, moving nimbly among them, because he spins the dreams common to all boys. When the beam of light is up full he gestures to indicate that he is listening intently.*

NARRATOR: Sh-sh! Listen!

*(He listens intently again, turning his head fully to all sides to indicate that the sound of the drums is all around him.)*

Ya hear that? Injuns! All around us. Ya can't take five steps in any direction but you'll run smack into an Injun standin' there with a head full of feathers, all proud and strong, with a tomahawk in his hand, and a quiver full 'o arrows. He'll be searchin' the night sky, or countin' stars, maybe, just like you do. Or he'll be settin' in a cool beam o' moonlight, like I'm doin' right now feelin'—oh, I don't know, sorta lonely maybe, but also feelin' kinda strong and proud 'cause he's got this beam o' moonlight all to himself. Like livin' in a small, round, white house with a great big dark outside.

*(The drums stop suddenly. NARRATOR tries to peer into the darkness around him. Suddenly a voice, apparently from nowhere in particular, breaks the silence. It is a male voice, chanting a strange incantation. It is a powerful voice, rich and melodic.)*

There. You hear? The ceremony's 'bout to begin. So hold on tight to your seats 'cause only Injuns are

supposed to know about this. It's a strange sort of ceremony . . .

*(A blue light begins to dim up slowly at center stage, revealing a boy kneeling before a grotesquely ornamented MEDICINE MAN.)*

. . . strange and powerful. Happens only once a year in this tribe and then only when the moon gets hooked on a crag of one of those steep cliffs out there on the horizon. And when the prairie is dark and cool on such a night, the chief Medicine Man sets up a lonesome kind of music—just like you hear him doin' right now . . .

*(The MEDICINE MAN's arms are raised and are describing arcs in the air, slowly, eerily. On the circle of light are four—or any number—other persons, barely visible.)*

What's it all about? Well, if you're not an Injun it might be hard to understand, 'cause you and me, well, we act and think different. But this is the night when Johnny Moonbeam's gotta go in search of the Silver Arrow!

*(The chanting stops abruptly. The MEDICINE MAN is handed a small colored wooden bowl. During the following speech by the NARRATOR, the MEDICINE MAN holds the bowl aloft over JOHNNY'S head, weaving intricate patterns with a free hand. He then places the bowl on the ground and begins to dance around the boy, shaking feathery sticks and rattles.)*

Well, it's not exactly a search. But it's a way the tribe has of makin' a twelve year old boy prove he's ready to be treated like a man. The silver arrow is . . . well, it's sort of a symbol, kind of a sign you get if every-

thing's done all right. And this is the night for Johnny Moonbeam. It's gonna be a big night, a lonely night. A night full of danger for Johnny Moonbeam. He's got things to do. Not easy things like pickin' a quart of blueberries, or jumpin' off a tree, or wrasslin' with a tiger. Why any good Indian can do that! What Johnny's got to do is . . . Oh-oh! Watch. The Medicine Man's gonna give him final instructions.

*(The drum starts again, slowly and softly at first, and gradually building up as the three assignments are given. The MEDICINE MAN dips his hands into the bowl and scatters droplets of water up into the air. He repeats this three times whirling about each time he flicks the water off his fingers. Suddenly, he reaches out and snatches at an imaginary falling drop. He clutches it to his chest, bends over to conceal it, then turns and twists within the group to suggest that he has stolen something and is running away with it. He stops abruptly—as do the drums—and points at JOHNNY.)*

Oh-oh! 'Fraid of that. Johnny's gonna have to search the land, and the mountains, and behind all the clouds in the sky he can grab hold of. Johnny's gonna have to search all the dark corners of the night. He's gonna have to find the Rain God!

*(JOHNNY shakes his head "no" and rises to one knee, a fearful and perplexed look on his face.)*

Not only find 'im, but steal rain from the Rain God!

*(The drums start again, a bit louder this time. The MEDICINE MAN crouches opposite JOHNNY and begins to collect bits of wood from the*

*ground. He is building an imaginary fire.)*

Do ya think Johnny knows where the Rain God lives? Not a bit! Why, he could live where the water trickles out of the sides o' mountains, or up where icebergs melt, or where fierce dark clouds seem to hang like a scary roof at the tops o' trees. Anywhere at all. Wherever there's water. But Johnny's gotta find 'im and steal the rain away from 'im! It's a big thing to do for one Johnny's age . . . but it's only the first thing. To get the Silver Arrow is like learnin' to start your life all over again. Watch now. 'The Medicine Man is showin' Johnny the second thing he's gotta do.

*(The MEDICINE MAN has finished assembling and stacking the wood for the "fire." He stands back slightly and sets a "torch" to it. With gestures and movements of his body, he indicates the upsweep of the flames, their heat and awesomeness. He stalks the fire, suddenly lunges at it, seems to encircle the flame with his arms, tears it from the wood, and runs off with it. He abruptly turns to JOHNNY and points. The drums stop.)*

Whoever heard of such a thing? Whoever in this world! You saw it. You saw what that Medicine Man expects Johnny to do. That boy's gonna have to dig deep into the earth, or twist the tail of a lightnin' bolt or shut the blazin' sun up in a bottle. 'Cause he's gotta go out into the gloomy forest and find the Fire God!

*(JOHNNY rises from his kneeling position, stumbles back a step and falls into a sitting position. Again shaking his head.)*

And he's gotta *steal* the fire from the orangey scorching hands of the Fire God and bring it back. First the rain, now the fire. Why, that's like tryin' to steal the purr from kittens or the nose right off the elephant's face! But the Silver Arrow's mighty important to Johnny. And if it takes him all the days and all the nights and all the cool breezes that blow across the prairie, why he'll have to do it! And bring back the rain, and bring back the fire. And then he'll—

*(Drums again. Stronger and more insistent. The MEDICINE MAN starts by making wide gestures with his arms, as if indicating the shape of the earth. He is handed a second bowl. He follows this with movements suggesting the sowing of seeds. He traces the fall of a single seed, kneels beside it, and by a series of hand motions, urges it to sprout. It does, very quickly, and he follows its growth upward until it becomes a tall sturdy plant. He looks about furtively, takes the "plant" in both hands, wrenches it from the ground, and suggests that he is running off with it. He again turns to JOHNNY and points sternly. The drums have reached their climax here and stop suddenly.)*

Well, I never saw the like! Never since this old hat I got holdin' my hair down got dented and bent. And that was a long time before you got born. But there it is. The third thing Johnny's got to do to win the Silver Arrow. In every furrow a farmer turns in his earth, deep in the roots of giant trees, wherever a tiny seed warms itself and explodes in the brown soil, there Johnny will have to search for the Earth God!

*(A man and a woman, apparently JOHNNY'S mother and father, kneel beside him to comfort him.)*

The Earth God! Wouldn't ya know it! There'll be a lot of stones to turn, Johnny, a lot of valleys and meadows and green slopes to climb. A lot of ups and downs, Johnny, 'cause the Earth God is wherever you are, and never all where you are. And when you find him, Johnny, you gotta steal the maize that grows in the earth!

*(The drums again, to the rhythm of the following lines. The MEDICINE MAN starts some gyrations. The man and woman raise JOHNNY to his feet. The boy is brought to Center and is gradually left alone, the pool of light slowly narrowing around him.)*

Wet is the Rain God—  
Rain you must steal, Johnny.  
Warm is the Fire God—  
Fire you must steal, Johnny.  
Green is the Earth God—  
Corn you must steal, Johnny!

Where is the Rain God?  
Rain God's above the earth.  
Where is the Fire God?  
Fire God's within the earth.  
Where is the Earth God?  
Earth God's around the earth.

*(The drums stop.)*

Darts and spears and rods of steel  
Will fright the morning sparrow,  
Johnny,  
And blades of wicked point will mark  
the warrior,  
But a *man* holds the Silver Arrow,  
Johnny!

*(JOHNNY is now completely alone in the pool of light. A flute is heard distantly, playing a strange melody. Note: Debussy's Syrinx Suite for Solo Flute is suggested here. JOHNNY begins to turn slowly peering apprehensively into the darkness surrounding him.)*

Nothin' out there but the night and the forest, Johnny. And it's all waitin' for ya. Not much moon tonight to help. Just the one beam you're standin' in. That one's yours. And it'll be waitin' for ya when ya come back. So ya better get started.

*(JOHNNY steps gingerly out of the protection of the moonbeam, is overcome by the darkness again, and hops back in.)*

And don't be scared of shadows, Johnny. They're awful good to hide in. So go ahead, boy!

*(The music stops. With a determined look JOHNNY darts off into the darkness. No sooner does he vanish than there is a low rumble of thunder, and a light flicker of lightning. The NARRATOR glances suspiciously off into the distance. He sets his hat a little more firmly on his head and turns up his collar.)*

I wouldn't want to be Johnny Moonbeam tonight. No, sir! Not at all. Not for a free ride on a kangaroo! Hear that rumble up in the sky? Know what it is? Thunder, you say? I guess you're right, but it's more'n that. It's that ole Rain God. He must've been squattin' on his black cloud, thinkin' o' where to shake his wet hands on next. And he must've heard the Medicine Man tell Johnny to steal the rain. Now, I know the Rain God. He can be like your best friend, the kind you'd invite into your back yard for a cold drink on a hot day. But he can also be—

*(There is a sudden clap of thunder, and another flicker of lightning.)*

There! Hear that? He's got a temper, that Rain God! As fierce and

fearful as you ever saw or heard. And he's not one t' hide from the likes of a twelve year old boy. No, sir! He's movin' in, and he's mad . . . (*Thunder again*) and he'll set that black cloud o' his right down on Johnny's head so's that he like to swallow up Johnny!

*(Sound of wind and rain are heard, faintly, but steadily growing louder during the ensuing scene. JOHNNY'S moonbeam pool begins to fade.)*

Hey, you Rain God! Leave that alone. Johnny needs that moonbeam t' find his way back! Move on! Move away! Leave the boy some light!

*(He is answered by another clap of thunder and a brighter flash of lightning. The remaining pool of light snaps off.)*

Well, looks like there's nothin' for a fella like me to do when it's rainin' but try to protect his own body a bit.

*(He reaches behind himself and picks up an umbrella. Quickly opens it. He sets it into a slot, becoming a self-supporting canopy against the "rain.")*

Johnny! Where are ya now, boy? How're you doin'? We'll find you and watch you, Johnny! We'll go where you are, 'cause we got eyes like magic lanterns and we can flash a picture of you movin' through the shadows with all the color that drips from the trees and glimmers off the rivers. Where are ya, Johnny?

*(Thunder. Suddenly the stage is bathed in blue light. It reveals two elevations on either end of the stage. Each is an irregularly stacked group of platforms representing a pile of boulders or small hills. At the peak*

*of each there is an opening, although not immediately visible to the audience. The opening should be large enough to permit a person to rise out of the "hills." JOHNNY enters from L. showing signs of straining against the mounting wind. The sound of rain has increased and the thunder and lightning continue intermittently. JOHNNY stumbles to C. and tries to study the terrain.)*

Johnny, Johnny, why'd ya pick this place? Devil's Mountain just is no place for a boy! And the wind, Johnny, and all that thunder and lightning! Why, Satan himself wouldn't set foot on this spot!

*(JOHNNY starts to move curiously toward the mound at stage R. Fighting the wind and rain, he comes to the foot of it, removes a small tomahawk from his belt, and starts to circle it cautiously and apprehensively.)*

Careful, Johnny! Easy! That Rain God is everywhere! He'll streak down a gulley before you can count the ears of a rabbit. He lives in the sea and roams in the sky and visits the earth. He'll tickle the end of your nose and turn a brook into a wild thing at the same time!

*(JOHNNY has started to mount the mound at R., his tomahawk poised. He reaches the top and looks around. He begins moving along the edge of the uppermost level, but moving gingerly, almost fearfully, carefully placing each step and looking down as if it were a long way to the bottom.)*

Step easy, Johnny! Step easy! That's a mighty steep cliff.

*(JOHNNY wavers a bit.)*

Look out, boy! (JOHNNY rights himself.) Whew!

(JOHNNY continues his perilous search of the hill. He has reached the summit when—suddenly—thunder, lightning, and rain cease abruptly. There is an ominous calm. JOHNNY drops to a kneeling position and looks fearfully around. From the hole in the L. hill, a bluish-white light appears, first faintly, then growing brighter. NOTE: it perhaps would be more effective if the light shone from inside the hill, but a shaft from above or behind would do equally well.)

(Whispering) Johnny! Behind ya!  
He's here!

(JOHNNY whirls and crouches on one knee.)

Oh, the Rain God's a clever one! He made the rain drops stream down the side of the hill, knowin' all along you'd follow it up to the top. Ya got 'im now, Johnny—or he's got you. What'll ya do now, boy?

(JOHNNY quickly returns the tomahawk to his belt and removes a hunting knife. He starts to move slowly down the side of the hill in the direction of L.)

Don't ya be a little fool, Johnny! Go carve a piece of wood with that knife or clean a buffalo skin, but you try and cut water and all you got is a rusty blade! Throw it away, boy, before it's washed clean out of your hands!

(JOHNNY hesitates, looks at the knife, He discards it. At that moment, there is a low steady rumble of thunder and the RAIN GOD begins to emerge from the top of the hill L. The RAIN GOD is a tall, slender, impressive crea-

*ture whose dress seems to sparkle and shimmer with droplets of water, all silver and blue. An expressionless mask covers his face. A glistening cape stands out from his shoulders as though in a perpetual state of being blown by a gust of wind. On his head a crown, with jagged lightning bolts as points. His hands are covered by gauntlet type gloves that come almost to the elbows. JOHNNY crouches low to avoid being seen. Suddenly the sound of thunder stops. JOHNNY looks around surprised and curious. The RAIN GOD actually turns away from JOHNNY. The boy rises slowly and starts moving cautiously toward the hill L.)*

Careful! Careful! (*Whispering*) I told you he's a clever one! Playin' possum, that's all. He knows you're here. Think he turned off his lightnin' and rain just to make it easy for ya to sneak up on him? He's just not that kind, Johnny!

*(JOHNNY pauses, then drops low on all fours and begins a deliberate and determined approach to the hill.)*

I warned ya, Johnny. Can't say that I didn't boy! But go to it. And not a sound! Crawl without touchin' the ground. Move every muscle slow . . . slow, that's it! If ya let one eyelash bat against another, he'll soak ya, all over and right through, too. Make the body float on the earth, Johnny. Pull ahead again, boy . . . again, pull slow and soft!

*(JOHNNY has reached the base of the hill and has started to pull himself up it.)*

If ya gotta breathe, people, breathe, but don't open your mouth to make a sound.