

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew

By

WILLIAM GLENNON

From the book

by

MARGARET SIDNEY



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MM by
WILLIAM GLENNON

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS AND HOW THEY GREW)

ISBN: 0-87129-996-8

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

For Donna
and
For Duffy

The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew

A Play in Two Acts
For 5 Men and 4 Women

CHARACTERS

MRS. PEPPER. the mother
BEN PEPPER. the oldest, a teenager
POLLY PEPPER. a near teenager
JOEY PEPPER about two years younger
DAVIE PEPPER. the youngest boy
PHRONSIE. the youngest girl
MR. KING a visitor from the city
JASPER KING his son, about Ben's age
GRANNY BASCOM. no relative,
but everyone's favorite granny

TIME: Late 19th century.

PLACE: Badgertown, a small country village.

ACT ONE: An afternoon in late spring

ACT TWO: Scene One: The following week
Scene Two: Two weeks later

SETTING

An all-purpose room of the small Pepper house. It has an exterior front door, an interior door to a bedroom, windows, open fireplace, a portion of a stairway to a sleeping loft and a small arch or opening to the partially visible kitchen. The back door in the kitchen is offstage. The room is filled with old country furnishings including a dining table (perhaps made with a sawhorse), six or seven mismatched chairs, a rocker, an old wing chair, stools, etc., all well-worn, a jumble with some appeal, but one that mostly reflects the poverty of the Peppers.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *POLLY is seated near a window mending a garment with a pile of other pieces yet to be mended on a nearby stool. JOEY is hammering on a handmade box in progress near the fireplace on the opposite side of the room. DAVIE is cleaning the room, sweeping with a hearth broom, now using short, very fast movements to sweep dust into little piles. Quickly, he sweeps the piles into his dustpan and rushes out of sight into the kitchen. He returns without the dustpan, leans the broom against a chair and starts on the spots, rubbing with a rag he takes from the bucket. The first spot is near JOEY. After much rubbing he glances at JOEY, who is watching him. He rubs more vigorously.*

JOEY. That ain't a spot, Davie, it's a stain, and it won't come out no matter how hard you rub. (*Goes back to work.*)

DAVIE. Oh. (*Watches JOEY work for a moment.*) Need any help?

JOEY. No. (*DAVIE goes back to his bucket, wrings out the rag and then finds a spot near POLLY.*)

POLLY (*pleasantly*). Sounds like you're using a lot of nails on your box, Joey.

JOEY. Some of 'em are awful weak.

POLLY. Weak?

JOEY. Yep, they bend real easy.

POLLY. You better get your brother to help you.

DAVIE (*stops rubbing the spot*). Well, first you gotta hit the nail straight on...

JOEY. She means Ben, my brother, Ben.

DAVIE. Oh.

JOEY. I can do it myself.

POLLY. We just don't want to waste nails, knowing what they cost these days, do we?

JOEY (*holds up a couple of nails*). I found these two on the road by the stage stop last week. Wasn't I lucky? Next time I hope it's two nickels. (*DAVIE finishes rubbing the spot, puts his rag back in the bucket with a flourish and starts for the kitchen, leaving his broom against a chair near POLLY.*)

POLLY. Looks very good, Davie. Not a spot or a crumb in sight.

DAVIE. The way Mamsie does it. Keeps the dust down. I watched her. (*He exits.*)

JOEY. She ain't coming yet?

POLLY. Isn't.

JOEY. Isn't. (*He grunts.*)

POLLY. I'll let you know as soon as I see her come over the hilltop. Don't worry. We'll all keep your box a secret.

JOEY. Wait'll she sees it right there in front of her next week. Know what we'll get then, Polly?...a big smile that'll go from here to here, by wickety!

POLLY. Yes, I can imagine it all now. Makes *me* smile.

(*DAVIE comes back in and with a burst of energy grabs the broom and rides it back to the fireplace.*)

POLLY. Giddy-up, horsey! (*Laughs.*)

DAVIE. Giddy-up! (*He stops and gives a little performance sweeping dust into the fireplace before hanging up the broom or leaning it beside the fireplace.*)

JOEY (*taking the box with him, goes to POLLY*). Here, I'll let you take a look. Mr. Henderson gave me the wood. (*DAVIE rushes to look, too. This box is a nice example for a young craftsman.*)

POLLY. My! You're getting better all the time, Joey.

JOEY. You think so? 'Course, it ain't finished yet.

POLLY (*gently corrective*). Joey.

JOEY. Well, it ain't! I plan on a special lid. Mebbe some molding. Whaddya think about rubbin' it with something...

DAVIE. I know how to rub...

JOEY. For color, not for cleanin'. Granny can tell me what's proper. Berry juice, mebbe.

DAVIE. Berry juice? That'll make a mess and Mamsie'll cry her eyes out. (*He gives a little crying performance and JOEY grunts. Then, sincere:*) Let me help. I can saw pretty straight. Clean up. Everything. Please?

POLLY. Come to think of it, Mamsie would be mighty pleased to know you both worked on her gift.

DAVIE. See?

JOEY (*weakening*). But it's my box.

DAVIE. I want to do something for Mamsie besides pickin' some posies. (*As a last resort he drops to his knees and acts.*) Pretty please!

JOEY (*joins POLLY in laughing*). Talk about silly. All right now, go find me two nails in the shed 'bout this long. Two, understand? (*DAVIE holds up two fingers.*) Oh, and something to keep all my nails in.

DAVIE. *Our nails. (He giggles.) Watch me go! (He races through the kitchen, laughing.)*

POLLY. Doesn't that make you feel better?

JOEY. I guess. *(He takes his box back to the fireplace. We hear BEN outside whistling a tune. POLLY runs to the door and JOEY to a window.)*

POLLY *(opens the door)*. Well! Home at last!

JOEY *(jumping from behind the door)*. 'Lo, Ben!

(BEN enters carrying an armful of kindling wood.)

BEN. Joey and good ole Pollywoggle, right and ready to greet me at the door!

JOEY. Would you look at that load of kindlin'!

BEN. Should be enough, I reckon, to give our old black stove a full day of bakin', don'tcha think?

POLLY. From Mr. Henderson?

BEN. Yep.

POLLY. No wonder you look so happy.

BEN. Well, I am, real happy to get back home on a day like this. Ain't nothing better'n a warm spring afternoon, especially when work's all done with.

JOEY. He said "ain't"!

BEN. Go pump some water for my wash-up. *(JOEY laughs and exits to the kitchen.)* Ma home yet?

POLLY. Not yet.

BEN. Where's Phronsie?

POLLY. She's playing with Baby, or napping, and Davie's looking for nails in the shed. He's going to help Joey build his box.

BEN *(as he exits)*. Glory be!

(POLLY hums as she folds the mended garment and adds it to the pile. Then she starts setting the table for a meal. If possible, pumping sounds are heard throughout the play when appropriate. BEN and JOEY talk off in the kitchen about storing wood, making the box., etc.)

BEN *(off)*. Polly, where's the towel?

POLLY. I put a clean one by the pump handle.

JOEY *(off)*. Here 'tis!

(JOEY enters, POLLY continues with the table setting.)

JOEY. The wood box is plumb full up. *(Drops to his knees by the fireplace.)* Now I'm gonna clean up these nails I ain't used yet. Ben'll like that. He can't wait to see my box. *(Off, we hear BEN and DAVIE. POLLY and JOEY continue their chores.)*

DAVIE *(off)*. Ben! You're home!

BEN *(off)*. Look who's here! Wild and woolly Davie!

DAVIE *(off)*. I swept the whole room, Ben, all of it, on account of Mamsie's over to the Talbot's. Wanna look?

BEN *(off)*. In a minute.

DAVIE *(off)*. Pick me up, Ben.

BEN *(off, but enters the room drying his hands, trying to dodge DAVIE, who's following)*. You're too big. You're no baby anymore. Besides, my hands are all wet.

DAVIE *(following as BEN moves faster)*. I don't care! Please, Ben, I wanna ride the horse.

BEN. That's for a two-year-old. You're an old man now. *(BEN ducks back into the kitchen.)*

DAVIE. I don't care! Please, Ben!

(A little ad libbing, then BEN enters carrying DAVIE on his shoulders.)

BEN. Look what I found in the wood pile. I think it's a skunk.

DAVIE. I'm not a skunk! See, I'm out on the stage road, riding my horsey! Giddy-up, horsey!

BEN *(winding up near the big table)*. This is where you get off, Davie boy!

DAVIE. No! Not yet! Be a horsey some more! Please!

BEN. Off!

DAVIE *(reluctantly dismounts)*. See, Ben, I swept the whole room today, everything! Oh! The nails! *(He rushes out to the kitchen, yelling "giddy-up" and returns with a tin can and the nails. He dumps the two nails on the table and plunks the tin can beside them.)* There!

JOEY *(puts the nails he's gathered up on the table, too)*.

Best I know how many I got, so I can space 'em right.

DAVIE. Polly'll count them, won't you, Polly? *(They gather around and POLLY begins, dropping a nail in the can on each count.)*

POLLY. One...two...

BEN. Button my shoe. *(All laugh.)*

POLLY. Three...four...

DAVIE. Close the door!

POLLY. Five...six...

JOEY. Pick up sticks!

POLLY. Seven...eight...

BEN *(a hint)*. Lay...

DAVIE. Lay 'em straight!

POLLY. Nine...ten...

ALL *(shouting)*. Big fat hen!

POLLY (*tossing in three or four leftovers*). And several to grow on! A good supply, even if some are a little bent!

BEN. Now, brother Joey, what's all this I've been hearin' about a...what was it...?

JOEY. A box! For Mamsie! (*He runs and gets it.*)

DAVIE. I'm in charge of nails. That's the best part.

JOEY. There! (*He puts it down for inspection.*)

BEN. Would you look at that! Polly, shake hands with my brother, the carpenter!

JOEY. Oh, come on, Ben. I ain't no carpenter.

POLLY. Your turn, Ben! What's your big surprise for next Tuesday? We'd better hurry before Mamsie walks in.

BEN. Gather 'round! And prepare for an eye-poppin' display! (*They murmur excitedly as BEN "plays" to them, gently teasing.*) First! (*He takes a few coins from a pocket and slowly puts them on the table. They "ooh" and "ahh."* DAVIE touches one.)

JOEY. That's a nickel.

POLLY. Is this your wages for last week?

BEN. Yes, but there's more to come! (*DAVIE touches another coin.*)

JOEY. That's a quarter. Twenty-five cents, I think.

DAVIE. How much together? (*JOEY shrugs and they look at POLLY.*)

POLLY. Thirty cents. Let's count it all! (*She mutters as she moves the coins.*) Eighty-five cents! (*All laugh and applaud.*)

BEN. Yep. Eighty-five cents for Ma's savin' sock. But now comes the big surprise. (*He takes more coins from another pocket.*) There!

POLLY (*flabbergasted*). Ben! (*She counts.*) A whole dollar!

BEN. For all the extra wood I chopped and extra chores I did this spring. Mr. Henderson kept account and saved it for me 'til now. I didn't wanna risk losin' some or spendin' it.

DAVIE. Mamsie'll faint. I know I would.

JOEY. Tell her it's for something nice. Not the rent.

DAVIE (*disgusted*). The rent! No wonder our saving sock never fills up.

POLLY. Well, we do need a roof over our heads.

JOEY. One that leaks?

DAVIE. Polly, you haven't told us about your gift yet.

POLLY. Well...guess!

JOEY. Give us a hint. A big one.

POLLY. Well, it's, uh, something we don't always have but always want on a birthday. Think hard. (*They are puzzled.*)

JOEY. Something to wear?

POLLY. No.

DAVIE. Some sugar for cookies?

POLLY. Nope.

JOEY. I need a bigger hint.

POLLY. A birthday cake! (*They cheer and applaud.*)

JOEY. It *is* something I always wanted, but I never had one.

BEN. Don't worry, Joey. Your time's a-comin'.

JOEY. Guess I gotta wait 'til our ship comes in. Like Ma says.

DAVIE. I want mine big, with raisins.

POLLY. We don't have any raisins, but I certainly mean to make it big as I can.

DAVIE. Good!

POLLY. With Granny's help. I'm even going to ask her if I can use her stove so Ma won't see me at work or smell the cake baking.

JOEY. You can keep it over at Granny's 'til we're ready to shout "Happy birthday!"

DAVIE (*shouting*). Happy birthday! (*All laugh. BEN puts his money back in his pockets.*)

BEN. You suppose my little chicken is still napping after all this noise?

(There is a tapping at the door. They're a little startled. JOEY grabs his box and hides it. POLLY opens the door and GRANNY BASCOM enters carrying a heavy kettle with a lid and a basket with napkin-covered cookies. They are all delighted to see her and ad lib greetings as DAVIE does a fast whirl around her, hooting and laughing.)

GRANNY. Somebody's been talkin' about me. My ears are burnin'!

POLLY. We were, about two minutes ago!

GRANNY. Thought so. Here, Ben, take this pot and put it on the cookstove. Keep it warm for your supper.

BEN. Thank you, Granny. Smells so good! (*He takes it to the kitchen.*)

POLLY. Granny, how wonderful!

GRANNY (*hands her the basket*). Don't be too sure. You ain't tasted it yet.

JOEY. I wanna taste it right now. (*Heads for the kitchen.*)

DAVIE (*following*). No, let me!

GRANNY. Nobody's doin' any tastin', not 'til your ma gets home and has you all properly 'round the table.

JOEY. What's in the basket? Can I smell?

POLLY. Let Granny catch her breath.

BEN (*back from the kitchen*). And take off her shawl.
Here, let me help.

GRANNY (*handing it to him*). I can only stay a minute.
Just want to say hello to your ma as soon as she's back
from the Talbot's.

DAVIE (*to BEN*). Did you taste it out in the kitchen?

BEN (*nods, very serious*). I ate the whole thing. (*DAVIE
gives him a push as BEN hangs up the shawl.*)

GRANNY. Where's Phronsie?

JOEY (*heading for the bedroom*). I'll tell her you're here.

DAVIE (*following*). So will I. (*They exit but can be heard
talking off.*)

GRANNY. You still helpin' out over to the Henderson's?

BEN. Yep. I'll be there 'til his nephew comes for a sum-
mer visit.

GRANNY. When's that?

BEN. Soon. Too soon for me.

JOEY (*runs back into the room followed closely by
DAVIE*). She's not there! Not in the bed! Or under it, or
behind the curtains...

DAVIE (*finally getting a word in*). Or anywhere.

BEN (*dashing off to the bedroom*). Let's have a look.

POLLY. See if she's upstairs, Davie.

JOEY (*as he goes from window to window*). Phronsie!
Come on, Phronsie, where are you hidin'?

DAVIE (*up the stairs*). I'll find her! You'll see! Phronsie!

BEN (*out of the bedroom and exiting through the kitchen*).
She must be out back. (*He's gone.*)

POLLY. Yes, she loves that swing.