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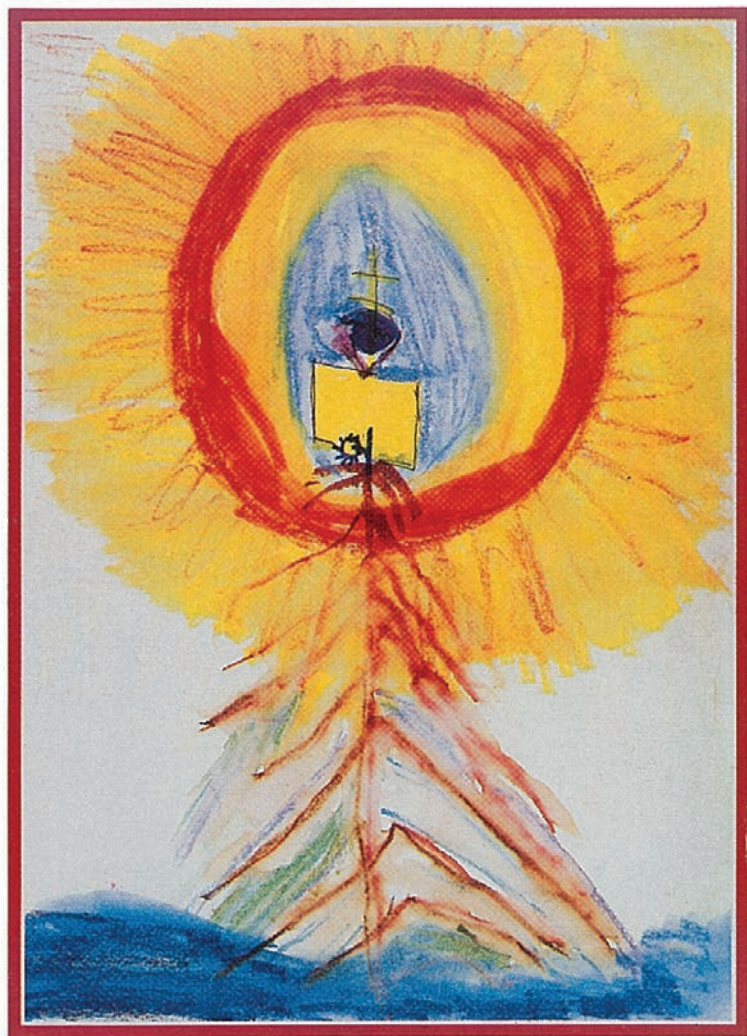
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Dramatic Publishing



The Yellow Boat

by

David Saar

briefly. . .

THE YELLOW BOAT

Cast: 4 men, 3 woman. Recommended for audiences aged 8 and older, parents, families and adults.

THE YELLOW BOAT is based on the true story of David and Sonja Saar's son, Benjamin, who was born with congenital hemophilia, and died in 1987 at the age of 8 of AIDS related complications. A uniquely gifted visual artist, Benjamin's buoyant imagination transformed his physical and emotional pain into a blaze of colors and shapes in his fanciful drawings and paintings. The story of THE YELLOW BOAT is a glorious affirmation of a child's life, and the strength and courage of all children.

A Scandinavian folksong tells of three little boats: "One was blue, one was red, and one was yellow as the sun. They sailed far out to sea. The blue one returned to the harbor. The red one sailed home too. But the yellow boat sailed up to the sun." Benjamin always concluded his bedtime ritual by saying "Mom, you can be the red boat or the blue boat, but I am the yellow boat." This remarkable voyage of Benjamin was extensively developed and widely produced in America for several years, always to ovations.

Playwright: DAVID SAAR

Is the Founder and Artistic Director of Childsplay, Inc., an award winning theatre for young audiences in Tempe, Arizona. THE YELLOW BOAT premiered at Childsplay in 1993 and received the Distinguished Play Award in 1998 from the American Association of Theatre and Education. Saar has also overseen and directed a number of new plays in development including THE YELLOW BOAT, HUSH: AN INTERVIEW WITH AMERICA and PHENOMENAL SMITH. His community work includes a three year term on the Tempe Municipal Arts Commission, he is a board member of the US branch of ASSITEJ: the International Children's Theatre Association and is active in the American Association for Theatre and Education.

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THE YELLOW BOAT

by

DAVID SAAR

Cover art by Benjamin Saar



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(THE YELLOW BOAT)

ISBN: 978-0-87602-352-5

For
Sonja and Benjamin

Characters:

Benjamin
Mother
Father

A chorus of 4 actors, play the following roles:

Actors #1 and #2: male
Actors #3 and #4: female.

They will play the following roles.

Chorus
School children
School teachers
Parents
School administrators
Kids
Eddy
Joy
Doctors

Playwright's Note:

In the early drafts of the play, the chorus parts were called "T.P.'s" - shorthand for "Transformational Potential." While their names have changed, they continue to serve this purpose in the play. They play all the above roles, but can also be used, for example, to "create drawing" - or anything else the director might want to use to tell the story.

Time is fluid in the play and should be approached cinematically rather than realistically. We can and will move forward, back, and across time. "*Time shift*" means just that - a cinematic shift to another moment.

The drawings that Benjamin describes in various monologues can be "drawn" in the air or on a blank piece of paper with a prop crayon.

The boat mentioned in some stage directions refers to a set piece used in the Tempe and Seattle productions, a small, movable Yellow Boat that was manipulated to become an ambulance, a bed, etc. There are many scenic solutions; this is provided as just one example.

The Yellow Boat was first presented by Childsplay, Inc. at the Tempe Performing Arts Center, Tempe, Arizona in October, 1993. It was directed by Carol North. The dramaturg was Suzan Zeder; associate dramaturg, Judy Matetzschk. Scenic design by Greg Lucas, lighting design by Amarante Lucero, costumes by Susan Johnson-Hood. Original music composed and performed by Alan Ruch. The cast was as follows:

Benjamin:	Jon Gentry
Mother:	Ellen Benton
Father:	Dwayne Hartford
Joy:	Debra K. Stevens
Eddy/Chorus #1:	D. Scott Withers
Chorus #2:	Alec Call
Chorus #3:	Alejandra Garcia
Chorus #4:	Helen Hayes

A touring version of The Yellow Boat was first presented in February, 1994, by The Metro Theater Company, St. Louis, MO. It was directed by Jim Hancock. The dramaturg was Suzan Zeder; associate dramaturg, Judy Matetzschk. Scenic design by Nicholas Kryah, lights designed by Jack Brown, costume design by Clyde Ruffin, original music composed and performed by Al Fischer. The cast was as follows:

Benjamin:	Jennifer Makuch
Mother:	Grace Adellen
Father:	Nicholas Kryah
Joy:	Gina Ojile
Eddy/Chorus #1:	Eddie Webb
Chorus #2:	Al Fischer

A study guide is available from
Childsplay, Inc.
P.O. Box 517
Tempe, AZ 85281

THE YELLOW BOAT is also available in an abridged version more suitable for touring.

Playbooks and royalties are the same for each.

* * * *

More information about THE YELLOW BOAT and Benjamin Saar may be obtained from Kathy Krzys. She is the curator of the child drama collection at ASU in Tempe, Arizona.

Please contact her by e-mail: kathy.krzys@asu.edu

(Soft light, sound swirl. The time is past, present, future. Lights come up on a boy who will become Benjamin playing with a toy boat.)

BOY: It began . . . 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1: Blast-off!

(Vocalized sounds of rocket launching.)

Beep, beep, beep, beep . . .

CHORUS #1 - #4, MOTHER and FATHER: It began before the beginning . . .

(The boy's play holds stage alone for a moment, and then others, the characters who will become the parents, doctors, and community members become part of the playing space. Their voices overlap, and build.)

#1: This is a story about . . .

#3: This story is about . . .

#4: Not an ordinary story . . .

#2: It happened . . .

#3: Did it happen?

FATHER: How could it happen?

#4: This is a story about . . .

#3: This story is about . . .

FATHER: Not an ordinary story . . .

MOTHER: It happened . . .

#2: Did it happen?

ALL: It happened.

(The Boy looks around at this gathering for the first time.)

BOY: This is a story about . . . me.

(From the perimeter of the playing space the other characters begin to vocalize different parental labels.)

MOTHER: Mother . . .

FATHER: Father . . .

#4: Momma . . .

#2: Pappa . . .

#3: Mommy . . .

FATHER: Daddy . . .

#1: My Old Man . . .

BOY: It began before the beginning with a sort of choosing . . .

(Choral voices continue to offer up a variety of "parental choices" from which the boy will make his selection.)

MOTHER: Mommy's here.

#1: You're getting so big.

#3: What did you do in school today?

#2: Brush your teeth.

FATHER: Way to go! I'm so proud of you.

#4: Do I have to stop this car?

FATHER: That's my boy.

MOTHER: Sweet dreams.

BOY: Mom? Dad?

(Boy shifts his focus to father and mother. The scene "shifts" to a more realistic style.)

FATHER: You're what!?! Are you sure?

MOTHER: I'm sure.

FATHER: Positive? You're sure? Whooh . . . ! This is great! It is really great, isn't it?

MOTHER: I've never felt so happy; . . .

FATHER: Can you feel him yet?

MOTHER: No, but I know he's there.

FATHER: 'He.' We both said, 'he'!

MOTHER: I know.

FATHER: What does . . . he feel like?

MOTHER: He feels like himself.

BOY: *(The boy points to mother and father.)*

You will be my Mom. And you, my Dad. This is a story about us. And it takes . . .

(The chorus begins a vocalized list of "time choices" which overlap and build. The "choices" may be repeated if desired.)

#4: Forty-eight years, sixty-seven years, fourteen years, three years . . .

#2: Ninety-six years, seventy-nine years, sixty-seven years, thirty-two years . . .

#3: Eleven months, five months, seven months, three months . . .

#1: Fourteen days, four days, twenty-three days, nine days . . .

(He stops the time swirl with his announcement.)

BOY: It takes: eight years, four months, twenty-nine days . . .
That's enough!

(This launches a "birth dance" with Mother, Father and Benjamin. As Benjamin names each color, chorus members swirl colored silks into the air, transforming the playing space into a swirl of color.)

I see . . . red.
I hear . . . blue.
I feel . . . purple.
I taste . . . green.
I . . . choose . . . yellow.

(Mother gives birth to a small yellow doll that "becomes" the baby Benjamin. Mother and father use the doll as baby while the actor playing Benjamin voices and reacts for him.)

FATHER: It's a boy!

MOTHER:- A boy.

BENJAMIN: My birthday. April 19,1979.

(The chorus form a cradle of ribbons in which the doll Benjamin is rocked, and become various doctors, and friends.)

#2 and #4: Congratulations!

#4: Yes, it's a boy. That I'm sure of.

#2: Yup, a boy.

#3: Ooohhhhhh! He's so little. I keep forgetting how little they always are.

#1: Now don't wait too long to have a brother or sister for this one, . . .

#3: Is'm's Mum'sy's and Dadsy's little itsy bitsy . . . ooh, look, he's smiling at me!

FATHER: I think it's gas

(The ribbon cradle breaks away, and the parents are in another space.)

MOTHER: A beautiful boy.

FATHER: Seven pounds, six ounces.

MOTHER: His fingers are right, and his toes are on . . . The nurse says he's the most beautiful child she's ever seen.

FATHER: She says that to everyone.

MOTHER: Still, today . . . I went down to the nursery . . .

FATHER: . . . just to check out the competition?

MOTHER and FATHER: She's right.

FATHER: So what's his name . . . ?

MOTHER: His eyelashes are the longest . . . and his little fingers, look . . .

FATHER: The nurse says they'll hold him for ransom if we don't give him a name.

MOTHER: He's small, and wise, and . . . mine.

FATHER: And mine.

(Mom gives baby to dad, who doesn't quite know what to do with him.)

MOTHER: That's it!

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: His name. "Benjamin."

FATHER: Benjamin?

MOTHER: It works in lots of languages. Translate: Ben . . .

FATHER: "Son."

MOTHER: Ja . . .

FATHER: "Yes."

MOTHER: Min . . .

FATHER: "Mine."

(Father cuddles his son and parents simultaneously translate his new name.)

MOTHER: Son. Yes, he's mine!
FATHER: Ben. Ja. Min.!

(Benjamin begins a fussy cry, Dad gives doll back to Mom. They move to another space. "Busen lull" underscoring begins.)

BENJAMIN: Once upon a time, there was a Mom, a Dad, and a little, teeny baby . . .

FATHER: Welcome, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN: And a song!

MOTHER: This is a story my mother used to tell to me every night before I went to sleep. It's about boats, and sails, and . . . it takes place in a harbor . . .

FATHER: far, far away . . .

(The actor Benjamin "claims" the doll Benjamin and the

mother holds both in her arms to tell the story. From this point until doll Benjamin “grows up” to actor Benjamin, the doll is manipulated by the actor.)

MOTHER: Now inside this harbor there were three boats. A red one. A blue one. And a yellow one. They all sailed far out to the sea, and the red one came back, and the blue one came back; but the yellow boat? The yellow boat sailed straight up to the sun.

(Singing.)

Busen lull, cook the kettle full,
There sailed three boats from the harbor,
The first was so blue,
The second so red,
The third was the color of the sun.

MOTHER and FATHER: Busen lull, cook the kettle full,
There sailed three boats from the harbor,
The blue carried hope,
The red carried faith,
The yellow filled itself with love.

FATHER: I sail the blue boat

MOTHER: The red one's for me . . .

(The lullaby has almost put him to sleep.)

BENJAMIN: I am the yellow boat.

(He falls asleep. The music resolves. Parents “pull away” from the baby to work.)

MOTHER and FATHER: Work time!

MOTHER: I'll weave you a sail . . .

FATHER: I'll write you a world . . .

BENJAMIN: *(Sleepily)* I'll do it myself!

(Father and Mother separate to their individual work spaces. Mother weaves some of the colored silk ribbons, Father works on a new story. The chorus are used to help create these work environments or assist in the creation of the work itself - they are "transformational potential." Each parent works to rhythms which weave together and separate. The intention of this movement/music beat is to show the parents at work, and the baby Benjamin discovering that he has the power to interrupt that work. Use the following choral litany to underscore the scene - or figure out another way to do it!)

#3 & #4: Shuttle, Beat. Shuttle, Beat. Shuttle, Beat. Shuttle, Beat. *(Repeat.)*

#1 & #2: Comma, Dot. Comma, Word. Comma, Dot. Comma, Word. *(Repeat.)*

(Benjamin awakes, and watches the surrounding activity, perhaps joining in, or getting in the way, and then, tired of no one paying attention to him, starts to cry. Both parents come running, Benjamin gives them his most charming smile.)

FATHER: What's wrong?

MOTHER: Oh, you're okay.

FATHER: Now, where was I . . . ?

(They return to work, and after a short time Benjamin begins to cry, again.)

MOTHER: *(Not wanting to interrupt her weaving.)*

Mamma's right here. *(To Father)* Can you see what he needs?

FATHER: Yeah, sure.

(He tries to ignore the crying for a beat, so Benjamin intensifies his efforts.)

FATHER: Okay, here's the scoop. I'll write the story, and you color it!

(Father hands Benjamin a crayon, and the actor Benjamin manipulates it for the doll. Rhythm starts. Father returns to writing, and the story gets the interest of the chorus.)

Now, once upon a time . . .

#1, #2, #3, #4: Hmmmmm?

FATHER: Once upon a time . . .
In a . . . land-kind-of-place,
Where the palm trees grew . . .
And the sky was painted . . .

BENJAMIN: *(He chooses.)*

Blue!

FATHER: Blue?

BENJAMIN: Blue.

(A bluesy kind of music is heard, the stage turns blue, and the chorus illustrates the color in movement as Benjamin colors.)

#1, #2, #3, #4: Cool, cooler, coolest, blue, Smooth, soothing, blues . . .

FATHER: That's exactly what I mean.
And the trees are painted . . .

BENJAMIN: *(Holding up another crayon.)* Green.

(Change in sound as he colors, the stage turns green and the chorus explores "green" in movement.)

#1, #2, #3, #4 It's a mean kind of green, like a scream in a dream, Like a . . .

BENJAMIN: Ghost . . . on Halloween . . .

(They all react in Bella-Legosi style.)

FATHER: No that isn't what I mean. Those trees are . . .

BENJAMIN: Red. And they're dead.

(Blackout)

FATHER and MOTHER: Hey!

FATHER: What's going on here?

MOTHER: What happened to the lights?

FATHER: I don't know. Maybe it's . . . Or the . . . ? Or maybe it's a kid?!?

(Lights up and Dad finds the chorus in shaped positions representing the wall drawings that Benjamin has created. He is in their midst, happily drawing with the crayon. Dad takes the crayon from him.)

MOTHER: What?

FATHER: Well, I gave him some crayons and, . . . uhhhh, he got a little carried away and scribbled across the wall and the light switch.

MOTHER: Is he alright?

FATHER: He's fine, but the wall's a goner.

(She crosses over and looks at the damage.)

MOTHER: Oh Benjamin . . .

(Then looks more closely at the wall, assessing . . .)

Oh . . . !

(Father joins her.)

FATHER: Oh . . . ? Oh . . . ! Look at the . . .

MOTHER: And the . . .

FATHER: Not to mention the

FATHER and MOTHER: *(Appreciative)* Oh . . . , Benjamin . . .

MOTHER: That's a very nice drawing . . . , but it would be so much nicer on a piece of paper . . .

(She hands him a sheet of paper. With her finger she defines the space of the paper.)

Here. Draw here. You can draw from here to here, and from here to here.

(Mother helps Benjamin draw a long line on the paper.)

A nice, long line that connects from here to here, and from here to here.

BENJAMIN: Line?

MOTHER: Line.

(Benjamin takes the crayon and draws a line.)

BENJAMIN: Line.

MOTHER: Lovely!

(Mother returns to her work. Benjamin begins to explore the concept.)

BENJAMIN: Line! Here. Line here. Here. Line here. Here. Line here. Line!

(Benjamin draws a long line right off the paper. Suddenly discovering another dimension, he abandons the paper)

and moves into the third and fourth dimension, moving through space as he explores "line." The chorus illustrates his "line exploration" with colored elastics which they manipulate to create visible lines and shapes in space.)

BENJAMIN: Line!

#4: S-p-i-r-al.

BENJAMIN: Line!

#2: Straight!

BENJAMIN: Line.

#1: An-gle?

BENJAMIN: Line!

#3: Curving

BENJAMIN: Line!

#4: Squiggle!

BENJAMIN: Line!

(Benjamin is delighted by his line drawings and his explorations grow bolder and bolder. Finally Father notices, and calls to Mother.)

FATHER: Look, look what he's doing!

MOTHER: Those aren't just scribbles, those are shapes!

BENJAMIN: Shapes?

MOTHER and FATHER: Shapes!

(A music and movement section follows. As Benjamin draws, the chorus illustrates with the elastics and his

parents help by naming the shapes.)

MOTHER and FATHER: Square, triangle There's a circle . . .

BENJAMIN: Circle? Wavy circle.

(The circle becomes so.)

MOTHER: Lines and shapes for a . . .

MOTHER and FATHER: Picture!

BENJAMIN: Picture of . . . a tree!

(#1 and #3 use yellow and orange elastics to make a tree.)

A heart.

(#2 and #4 use the blue and green elastics to make a heart shape that "beats.")

A bow and arrow.

(#1 makes the bow with yellow elastic; #3 Makes the arrow with the orange elastic which is "shot" through the heart, pulling the bow and #1 with it.)

Lines and shapes and colors make a picture . . . of a house with about a million rooms.

(#1 - 4 form an abstract shape with the elastics that has lots of room shapes.)

Roof top, mountain top . . .

(The house is transformed to a mountain.)

Lines for a picture of a yellow sun,

(The mountain is transformed into a sun.)

BENJAMIN: Lines for a boat. Yeah! A yellow boat!

(The elastics are formed into the shape of a small sail boat. Benjamin jumps onto the boat, and beckons his parents, all the while drawing with the crayon.)

Come on board!

(Mom and Dad come aboard. Benjamin finishes by drawing the round sun in the air above the boat.)

BENJAMIN: Yellow Boat sailing . . . , sailing . . . , sailing . . . , to the sun! Stop!

(The boat “disappears,” and the chorus moves upstage.)

New Drawing. Benjamin’s Body!

(Benjamin picks up the paper he was drawing on earlier, and begins to draw again. Mother and Father are seated on the boat with the doll. Benjamin begins to draw the story as the parents live it.)

Here’s a picture of Mom, and she’s singing to me.

(The Mother and the chorus begins to hum “Busen lull” softly in a minor key.)

Then she sees something funny.

(Benjamin “draws” a bruise.)

MOTHER: Look at this bruise. It seems to hurt him if I touch it.

FATHER: So don’t touch it.

MOTHER: What caused it?

FATHER: It’s just a bruise. Stop worrying.

BENJAMIN: I cry. *(He does.)* Loud. Lots! They worry! *(He cries more.)*

MOTHER: He keeps crying, just keeps on crying . . .

FATHER: I'll change him.

MOTHER: He doesn't need changing.

FATHER: Colic?

MOTHER: Four nights straight? Something hurts!

(Benjamin cries more.)

FATHER: Teeth?

(Very loud crying. Both react.)

MOTHER: Something's wrong!

MOTHER and FATHER: Call the Doctor!

(The boat piece becomes the ambulance. Benjamin draws as he tells.)

BENJAMIN: I'm going to the hospital in an ambulance. Just me . . . and Mom, and Dad. Big Siren! Cars scoot out of the way . . . Fast. Neat! Then . . . Doctors!

(Doctors enter with clip boards, and whisk the baby away from the parents. They are robotic, clinical; the parents are left waiting outside, overhearing what is being said.)

DOCTOR #1: Hematocrit every two hours.

MOTHER: What? What does that mean?

DOCTOR #3: Two pints whole blood, . . .

FATHER: What's wrong?

DOCTOR #1: . . . and a CAT Scan.

FATHER: What are you testing?

DOCTOR #2: Wait here, please. Just a few more tests . . .

BENJAMIN: More checks.

(Doctors move to continue exam.)

DOCTOR #1: Left pupil, three millimeters: right pupil, four millimeters.
Note.

DOCTOR #3: Check.

DOCTOR #1: Charted?

DOCTOR #4: Check.

DOCTOR #1: Irregular.

DOCTOR #3: Highly irregular.

DOCTOR #1: I don't understand all this bleeding.

(Doctors #1 - #3 cross to Benjamin. He tears a piece of his drawing paper, and hands it to one. Each "reads" the test result, each says "Hmmm?," and passes it to the next. The last to receive it is Doctor #2.)

BENJAMIN: Then they figure it out.

(Doctor #2 announces to the parents.)

DOCTOR #1: Blood tests confirm that your son has . . . Classic hemophilia, Type A.

MOTHER: What does that mean?

BENJAMIN: It means my blood isn't like everyone else's. It's missing the "Stop Bleeding Stuff." So, when I get a cut or bump inside, it doesn't stop bleeding. It just keeps dribbling and drabbling . . . like a leaky faucet.