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Dramatic Publishing



Us And Them

A One-Act Play

By

DAVID CAMPTON



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

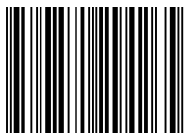
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Us and Them

Drama. By David Campton

Cast: variable from 6 upward, either sex. A meaningful play that begins with two groups of wanderers looking for a place to settle. They agree to share and mark the line between their territories, then build a small wall. The wall is built higher and then still higher. Suspicion and mistrust grow to the point where the groups must inevitably explode in conflict. Bare stage w/props.

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DAVID CAMPTON



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DAVID CAMPTON

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(US AND THEM)

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US AND THEM
A One-Act Play
For Any Number of Characters of Either Sex

C H A R A C T E R S

The Recorder

Spokesman A

Spokesman B

Other As

Other Bs

Time: Any time.

Place: Any place.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING about *Us and Them*...

“An innovative, timeless play that brings a cast together as a unified group.”

*Ray Deans,
Riverview Collegiate,
Moose Jaw, Sask.*

“This abstract social commentary fit well in our high school program because it challenged thinking and performance and was casting size and gender flexible.”

*Evie Lewis,
Jackson Hole High School,
Jackson, Wyo.*

“It was a rousing success at competition. It was a great statement and a great piece of theatre.”

*Drama Director,
Cullman High School,
Cullman, Ala.*

“A good production for students. Easy to mount but provides opportunities to teach ensemble acting and peer cooperation. The students enjoyed the message and enjoyed performing it.”

*Kerrie Rasmussen,
West Mesa High School,
Albuquerque, N.M.*

US AND THEM

SCENE: A bare stage.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The RECORDER enters with a large book and pen. He looks around.

RECORDER. How odd. I felt sure there was someone here. Just a minute ago. There's still the trace of an echo. I could have been mistaken, though. They come and go . . . Well, it's my job to wait and see. (He makes himself comfortable.) I may have to wait some time . . . But there's nothing I can do about that. Time passes. (A pause.) Listen. Footsteps coming from this direction. And more footsteps coming from that direction. Something is about to happen. I must make a note.

(Parties A and B enter from opposite sides. They pause wearily.)

“Party A from the East. Party B from the West. Worn out with travelling, they come to rest.” (He ponders over the last note.) Verse in an official record? (He crosses out the last words.) “At first they are too exhausted for words.” . . . That's better. “Gradually they look around them, at first critically, then

with growing admiration and delight. But too taken with their own concerns to notice the other group.”

A1. Here?

B1. Here.

A1. It's a good place.

B1. Yes, it's a good place.

A2. Better than any other place we've seen.

B2. It's a good place all right.

A1. To pause at.

B1. To stay at.

A2. To make our own.

B2. For ever and ever.

A1. This is our place.

B1. Ours.

A2. Ours.

B2. We took long enough to find it.

A3. It was a long journey.

B3. But it was worth every day we searched.

A1. It was worth every mile we tramped.

B1. Look at it.

A2. Just look.

B2. Look here.

A3. Look there.

B3. Look.

A1. Look. (They point out things that please them.)

RECORDER. Of course, they could have commented on the natural advantages of the place – such as the average hours of sunshine, the mean rainfall, the geological structure, the chemistry of the topsoil, and the lush pasturage. They'll find the words in time. But next they notice each other.

A1 (as they begin to point out each other rather than the delights of the place). Look.

B1. Look.

A2. Look!

B2. Look! (The GROUPS chatter excitedly among themselves.)

RECORDER. Party A goes into a huddle, looking warily at Party

B. Party B goes into a huddle, looking warily at Party A.

Nothing to comment on there. It's the usual pattern. Any minute now the Spokesmen will face up to each other.

SPOKESMAN B (stepping forward). Who are you?

SPOKESMAN A (stepping forward). Who are *you*?

SPOKESMAN B. We've come a long way.

SPOKESMAN A. *We've* come a long way. (The SPOKESMEN return to their groups for quick conferences. After a few seconds, they step forward and face each other again.)

SPOKESMAN A. We want to live here.

SPOKESMAN B. *We* want to live here. (The SPOKESMEN return to their groups for quick conferences. After a few seconds, they step forward and face each other again.)

SPOKESMAN B. We won't let you drive us away.

SPOKESMAN A. We don't want to drive you away. (The SPOKESMEN return to their groups for conferences.)

RECORDER. One man, one vote. It takes time, but that's democracy. There's no guarantee that they'll come to the right decision in the end, but that's democracy, too. Not that I'm complaining about democracy. It encourages a sense of responsibility. In theory, anyway. (The SPOKESMEN step forward and face each other again.)

SPOKESMAN A. Isn't there enough room for all of us?

SPOKESMAN B. There's enough room for everybody.

SPOKESMAN A. You could have all you see from there to here.

SPOKESMAN B. You could have all you see from here to there.

SPOKESMAN A. Agreed?

SPOKESMAN B. Agreed. (The As and Bs shout "Agreed." The

SPOKESMEN shake hands.)

SPOKESMAN A. Do you mind if we pause in negotiations?

SPOKESMAN B. For a conference?

SPOKESMAN A. Agreed. (They go into a conference again.)

RECORDER. Proposals, counter-proposals, resolutions, amendments, points of order, appeals to the chair, motions, votes, polls, divisions, objections, and recounts. Everybody has a say. It can become tedious, but it has one advantage – if anything goes wrong, everyone is to blame.

SPOKESMAN A. We have come to a conclusion.

SPOKESMAN B. A conclusion is a good thing to come to. We have reached an agreement.

SPOKESMAN A. It's always as well to reach an agreement.

SPOKESMAN B. That you take that stretch of country with all its natural amenities, grazing rights, water rights, hunting rights, fishing rights, arable land, and mineral deposits.

SPOKESMAN A. And that you take that stretch of land with all its natural amenities, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

SPOKESMAN B. Furthermore . . .

SPOKESMAN A. Furthermore?

SPOKESMAN B. Yes, furthermore. For the benefit of all concerned . . .

SPOKESMAN A. Does that include us?

SPOKESMAN B. It includes everybody. That a line be drawn.

RECORDER (musing aloud). A line?

SPOKESMAN B. A line. That a line be drawn to mark the place where your land ends and ours begins.

SPOKESMAN A. Ah, yes. I was just about to add that a line be drawn to mark the place where our land ends and yours begins.

SPOKESMAN B. Good fences make good neighbours.

SPOKESMAN A. Good neighbours make good fences.

SPOKESMAN B. Shall we mark it now?

SPOKESMAN A. Why not?

SPOKESMAN B. Chalk?

SPOKESMAN A (producing a length of string). String. (The As and Bs join forces to survey the ground. They peg out the string in a straight line. Everyone seems to have his own idea how the job should be done. Eventually it is finished.)

RECORDER. I don't know who gave me this job. I seem to have been doing it as long as I can remember. Not that I'm complaining — someone has to do it. The record has to be kept. Who knows — one day someone may learn from it. (The As and Bs stand back and admire their handiwork.)

SPOKESMAN A. It's a good line.

SPOKESMAN B. Though I say it myself.

A1. I don't know.

SPOKESMAN A. Are you criticizing this line?

SPOKESMAN B. Perhaps you could make a better line.

SPOKESMAN A. We're all listening. What have you got against this line?

A1. Chickens.

As and Bs. Chickens? What have chickens got to do with it? Take no notice. Got chickens on the brain.

A1. I know something about chickens, I do. There's not much you can tell me about chickens. I was brought up with chickens. And I'll tell you this: chickens can't read.

SPOKESMAN B. Chickens can't read?

SPOKESMAN A. What difference does that make to this line?

A1. None at all to your line.

SPOKESMAN B. Or to your chickens for that matter.

A1. No use putting up your "Beware of the Bull" signs. No use sticking up your "Trespassers will be Prosecuted" notices. And you might as well forget your "One-Way Streets," your "Divisions," and your "Roads Closed." The chickens go where

they want to go. No use drawing a line, and expecting the chickens to stay on this side of it. Or on that side of it for that matter.

As and Bs. True. That's a point. I never saw a chicken reading.

Or taking any notice of a line.

SPOKESMAN B. But what does it matter where the chickens go?

A1. Oh, if it doesn't matter there's no more to be said.

SPOKESMAN A. Good. Now we can get on with . . .

A2. But suppose it should be sheep.

B1. Sheep?

A2. Sheep can't read either. At least I never saw a sheep reading.

Ignorant animals really.

B1. A line won't keep a sheep from straying.

B2. Especially if they can't read.

A3. Or cows from wandering.

B3. Or horses from getting lost.

A2. And as for rabbits . . .

SPOKESMAN B. All right. What do you want?

SPOKESMAN A. Schools for animals?

A1. What we need are fences.

B1. Walls.

A2. Thick enough to stop cows from breaking through.

B2. High enough to stop chickens from flying over.

A3. Good walls make good neighbours.

B3. Good neighbours make good walls.

SPOKESMAN A. You want walls?

SPOKESMAN B. Shall we build walls?

A1. Before we do anything else. (SPOKESMAN A and SPOKESMAN B take opposite ends of the string, and raise it about six inches off the ground.)

SPOKESMAN A. This high?

B1. Higher. Think of the cows.

SPOKESMAN B (raising the string waist-high with SPOKESMAN A). This high?

A2. Higher. Think of the horses. (The SPOKESMEN raise the string shoulder-high.)

SPOKESMAN A. This high?

B2. Higher. Think of the chickens. (The SPOKESMEN stand on their tiptoes and hold the string as high as they can reach.)

SPOKESMAN B. I think that should do.

B1. Yes, that should do.

SPOKESMAN A. It had better do. Now make it fast. (The SPOKESMEN tie the ends of the string to posts.)

SPOKESMAN B. And build the wall. (The wall is built. See Production Notes. The RECORDER looks on and takes notes. After a great deal of activity, the job is completed.)

RECORDER. I won't say they're right. I won't say they're wrong. It's my job merely to record events. Events speak for themselves. They wanted a wall: they've got a wall. Neither side can see over, or through, or round. That's a wall. (All the As are on one side of the wall and all the Bs are on the other.)

SPOKESMAN A. That's a wall. That ought to last.

SPOKESMAN B. Nothing we need to learn about making a wall.

RECORDER. Except how to make a way over, or through, or round.

SPOKESMAN A. Are you there?

SPOKESMAN B. We're here. Are you all satisfied?

SPOKESMAN A. Everything went according to plan. What now?

SPOKESMAN B. We settle down. And you?

SPOKESMAN A. We settle down, too. It's good land.

SPOKESMAN B. It's very good land. We're lucky. We've got good neighbours.

SPOKESMAN A. We've got good neighbours, too. It's a good wall.

SPOKESMAN B. Good walls make good neighbours.

SPOKESMAN A. Good neighbours make good walls.

SPOKESMAN B. Good-bye, then. There's work to be done.

SPOKESMAN A. Good-bye. Must get down to work. (The As and Bs shout "Good-bye" as they pick up their belongings and move off stage. The "Good-byes" die away in the distance.)

RECORDER. Nothing left but the wall. And the chickens on each side of the wall. And the sheep on each side of the wall. And the cows on each side of the wall. And the horses on each side of the wall. And the people on each side of the wall . . .

(The As and Bs reappear from opposite sides of the stage and begin to work on their respective sides of the wall.)

It's a busy life — and the great advantage with being busy is that it occupies the mind. Working keeps thoughts under control. Thoughts are more apt to run wild than any sheep. Thoughts can fly higher than any chickens. In fact, walls make thoughts fly even higher. But as long as thoughts are kept under control, there's no harm done. Except that there comes a time when all the chickens have been fed; all the cows have been milked; all the sheep have been rounded up in the fold — and thoughts are free to stray. (The As and Bs gradually give up their work, and make themselves comfortable.)

A1. I wonder what they're doing over there.

A2. Over there?

B1. Over there. What do you think they're doing?

A2. Why?

A1. Why not?

A2. Why do you wonder what they're doing over there?

B1. We can't see them, can we?

B2. They can't see us.

A1. I just wondered.

B1. Anybody can wonder.

A1. Just a thought – like do spring and summer come before autumn and winter, or do autumn and winter come first?

B1. Like – can a worm think?

A1. Like – what are they doing over there?

A2. The usual things, I suppose.

B2. They'll be doing the usual things.

A1. What do you mean – the usual things?

A2. Things that you usually do.

B2. Things that we usually do.

B1. Not the things that *they* usually do?

A2. The things that they usually do.

B1. You said the things that *we* usually do.

A2. They're the same things.

B1. Are they the same?

A2. Why shouldn't they be the same?

B2. Why should they be the same?

A1. They're not like us.

A2. Aren't they?

B1. It stands to reason.

A1. Work it out for yourself.

B1. Just work it out.

A1. For instance – you're not like me, are you?

A2. Not much.

B1. You're not a bit like me.

A2. So they're not a bit like us.

B2. So they're not a bit like us.

A2. We're on this side of the wall.

B2. They're on the other side of the wall.

A1. Fancy living on the other side of the wall.

B1. Fancy wanting to live on the other side of the wall.

A2. When you could be living here.

B2. Fancy not wanting to live here.

A1. Funny.

B1. They've got some funny ways.

A1. Yes, they've got some funny ways.

B2. Have they?

A2. Of course. You've got some funny ways, too.

B1. They look funny to me all right.

A2. We've all got funny ways.

B2. But their ways are funnier. Over there.

B1. We don't even know what ways they've got.

A2. If they've got ways we don't know about, they must be funny ways.

A1. Still, as long as they're on the other side of the wall, it doesn't matter.

B1. It doesn't matter as long as they're on that side, and we're on this.

A2. I'm not so sure.

A1. What do you mean?

B1. I've been thinking. They're very quiet.

B2. We're quiet.

B1. We've got nothing to make a noise about.

A2. What about them, eh?

A1. What about them?

A2. What have they got to be so quiet about?

B1. It's unnatural.

A1. It's unusual.

B2. It's disturbing.

A2. It's disquieting.

B1. It's abnormal.

A1. It's uncomfortable.

B2. It's sinister.

A2. It's not as it should be.

B1. It's enough to send cold shivers down your back.

- A1. It's enough to make your hair stand on end.
B2. Just thinking about it.
A2. Just wondering.
B1. What are they up to?
A2. What are they doing behind that wall?
B2. They could be doing anything behind that wall.
B1. Like what?
A2. Just think.
B1. Ah!
B2. Oh!
A1. They wouldn't.
B2. Not that!
A2. I wouldn't put it past 'em.
B2. Not them!
A1. Not that!
A2. Not what?
A1. Not what you're thinking.
B2. Oh, would they really?
B1. They're not to be relied on.
A1. You're exaggerating.
A2. Exaggerating?
A1. You wouldn't expect anybody to do that.
B2. We wouldn't do it.
B1. We're not like them.
A2. They're not like us.
B2. But they wouldn't. Not . . .
B1. Like . . .
A2. For instance . . .
B1. Or even . . .
A1. Not to mention . . .
A2. Just you wait.
A1. Wait for what?