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Jesse and Grace: A Best Friends Story

Comedy By
Sandra Fenichel Asher



Jesse and Grace: A Best Friends Story

Comedy. By Sandra Fenichel Asher. Developed from the poetry of Sandy Asher and David L. Harrison. Cast: 1m., 1w., 2 either gender, plus puppets; may be expanded to a total of 21 m. and w. without puppets. Commissioned by Pollyanna Theatre Company, Austin, Texas; a winner of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's Unpublished Play Award; and a Purple Crayon Players' PLAYground Festival selection, Jesse and Grace uses art, music, puppets, and poetry in unique ways to create a child's world that's entertaining, convincing and tourable. Jesse and Grace have been best friends since birth, almost 10 years. Their moms were best friends before they were born. It never mattered that Jesse is a boy and Grace is a girl. They always understood each other, protected each other, comforted each other, and shared their jokes, toys, dreams, and love of poetry and basketball. But now they're in 4th grade and about to celebrate their 10th birthdays. When Grace writes a birthday poem and gives it to Jesse one Monday morning at school, their classmates begin a routine of nonstop teasing: "Jesse's got a girlfriend! Gracie's got a boyfriend!" Denial only makes things worse. Hurt and confused, Jesse crumples up the poem and throws it away. Now it's Grace's turn to be hurt and confused. Before long, the two have stopped speaking to each other. Each goes in search of a new best friend and soon finds that no one else fills the bill quite as perfectly. Try as they might to avoid each other, they're in the same class, and all eyes are upon them. Every encounter breeds more teasing, humiliation and anger. Then everyone is invited to a skating party in celebration of Grace's birthday. Unable to avoid each other—or the teasing—at the rink, and secretly longing to forgive and forget, Jesse and Grace finally discover that "A best friend is the best kind of friend of all." Area staging. Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: J46.

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JESSE AND GRACE: A Best Friends Story

By
SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER

Based on the poetry of
SANDY ASHER and DAVID L. HARRISON



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(JESSE AND GRACE: A BEST FRIENDS STORY)

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For Greg,
one of our family's Best Things Ever

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Jesse and Grace: A Best Friends Story was commissioned by Pollyanna Theatre Company, Austin, Texas, and premiered there in June 2008 under the direction of Judy Matetzschk-Campbell. It featured the following ensemble:

CAST

Kathleen Fletcher
Robert Berkhalter
Skip Johnson
Stacey Glazer

PRODUCTION STAFF & CREW

Production Designer Ia Layadi
Costume Designer Pam Fletcher-Friday
Lighting Designer Don Day
Sound Designer Peter Blackwell
Graphic Designer John Howrey
Stage Manager Andrew Perry

The script was further developed thanks to a staged reading at Northwestern University as part of the Purple Crayon Players' PLAYground Festival on April 18, 2009. Directed by Alex Young, the reading featured the following:

CAST

Grace Harrah Friedlander
Jesse..... Cole Galvin
Musician and others.....Rachel Berger
Artist and others Sarah Radov

PRODUCTION STAFF & CREW

Artistic Directors Bryce Norbitz and Madeline Scheffler
Producers Allison Finn and Alyssa Vera Ramos
Stage Manager Breanne Ward
Lighting Designer Jacquelyn Guerrero
Sound Designer Kara Goldsmith
Costume Designer Karen Bowmann
Graphic Designer..... Kelby Siddons

JESSE AND GRACE: A Best Friends Story

CHARACTERS

Four actors (1m, 1f, 2m or f) and 6 puppets play a total of 21 characters. For a larger cast, characters may be assigned to additional puppeteers and/or live actors.

GRACE a 4th-grade girl
Also plays **BABY GRACE**, **TODDLER GRACE**
(puppets), **CHILD GRACE**

JESSE a 4th-grade boy, **GRACE'S** best friend
Also plays **BABY JESSE**, **TODDLER JESSE**
(puppets), **CHILD JESSE**

MUSICIAN male or female
Also plays **CHILD LANCE**, **LANCE** (4th-grader),
JESSE'S MOM, **GRACES' DAD**, **COURTNEY**
(4th-grader, puppet), **SOPHIE** (4th-grader, puppet),
PAUL (4th-grader), **TODDLER** or **CHILD JESSE**
(puppet, when noted)

ARTIST male or female
Also plays **MRS. PADRON** (4th-grade teacher),
SELINA (4th-grader), **GRACE'S MOM**, **MATHE-**
MAGICIAN, **JESSE'S DAD**, **TODDLER** or
CHILD GRACE (puppet, when noted)

NOTE: In the Pollyanna Theatre production, **MUSIC** and **SOUND** were provided offstage and the third actor simply played the roles assigned.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Various places in the lives of JESSE and GRACE, including their homes, their schoolyard and classroom, and a skating rink. All are created on a stage bare except for three or more large whiteboards on which pertinent words, set pieces, or other objects relevant to the scenes are drawn. It's preferable that the drawings be done by the ARTIST in full view of the audience, and that MUSIC and SOUND be created onstage by the MUSICIAN but, as noted above, other options may be used. ALL may help move props, make music, draw on and erase whiteboards as needed. The boards at left and right represent JESSE's house and GRACE's house exclusively. The center board or boards are used for all other scenes.

JESSE AND GRACE: A Best Friends Story

AT RISE: MUSICIAN enters, silently acknowledges the audience with a smile and a wave, arranges musical equipment, and settles into what will become his or her “home base.” MUSIC. ARTIST enters, silently acknowledges the audience and MUSICIAN, arranges art equipment in what will become his or her “home base.” ARTIST creates GRACES’s house on board at right and JESSE’s house on board at left. GRACE and JESSE enter, carrying cradles that contain BABY GRACE and BABY JESSE puppets, baby versions of themselves. They silently acknowledge each other, MUSICIAN, ARTIST and audience, set the cradles and puppets down on their respective sides of the stage, then sit beside them. The puppets wear infant knitted hats that read “JESSE” and “GRACE.” ARTIST becomes GRACE’S MOM, enters GRACE’s house area, checks on BABY GRACE, then dials a phone. MUSIC fades as MUSICIAN creates SOUNDS of phone being dialed and ringing, then puts on wig to become JESSE’S MOM and enters JESSE’s house to answer it.

JESSE’S MOM. Hello?

GRACE’S MOM. Hello! Tea at four?

JESSE’S MOM. I’ll be there!

GRACE’S MOM. See you soon!

JESSE’S MOM. Bye-bye!

(JESSE'S MOM picks up BABY JESSE and cradle and crosses to GRACE's house. With alternating murmurs of "Ohhhhh" and "Ooooooh," MOMS set BABY GRACE and BABY JESSE side by side in their cradles, facing the audience, hug one another warmly, and briefly admire their offspring, then step away from them.)

GRACE'S MOM *(offering a tray of cookies to JESSE'S MOM)*. Homemade!

JESSE'S MOM *(takes one and tries a bite)*. Mmmmm!
Homemade is always better!

(MOMS sit down with cookies and cups of tea, their backs to the audience. GRACE and JESSE sit beside or behind the cradles to work and speak for the puppets. BABIES are asleep and gently snoring. After a moment, BABY GRACE pops up, crying loudly.)

BABY GRACE. WAAAAA! WAAAAA! WAAAAA!

(MOMS start toward BABIES in alarm, then watch, smiling, as BABIES comfort one another.)

BABY JESSE *(pops up and looks at BABY GRACE, who looks back at him and abruptly stops crying in mid-"WAAA.")*. OOOOOgle?

BABY GRACE. Oooo.

BABY JESSE & BABY GRACE. OOOOOgle-oooo.

(BOTH giggle, then sigh happily, and fall back asleep, snoring. MOMS return to their tea. A moment later, BABY JESSE pops up, crying loudly. MOMS repeat their actions. BABY action repeats as before, but with roles reversed.)

BABY JESSE. WAAAAA! WAAAAA! WAAAAA!

BABY GRACE. OOOOOgle?

BABY JESSE. Oooo.

BABY GRACE & BABY JESSE. OOOOOgle-oooo.

(BOTH giggle, sigh, and fall back asleep, snoring. A pause, and then BOTH pop up, crying loudly. MOMS repeat their actions. BABY action repeats as before, but in unison.)

BABY JESSE & BABY GRACE. WAAAAA! WAAAAA!

WAAAAA! *(A beat, then...)* OOOOOgle? *(A beat, then...)* Oooo. *(A beat, then...)* OOOOOgle-oooo.

(BOTH giggle, sigh, and fall back asleep, snoring. With alternating “Ohhhhs” and “Ooooohs,” MOMS rise and admire their babies.)

GRACE’S MOM. Maybe someday our little Jesse and Grace will be best friends.

JESSE’S MOM. Just like us!

(THEY hug. MUSICIAN returns to “home base.” MUSIC. GRACE’S MOM clears cookies and tea. JESSE and GRACE clear BABIES and cradles and replace them with TODDLER JESSE puppet in JESSE’s house and TODDLER GRACE puppet in GRACE’s house. JESSE and GRACE remain near their puppets. MUSIC fades. MUSICIAN, as JESSE’S MOM, picks up TODDLER JESSE puppet as GRACE’S MOM picks up TODDLER GRACE puppet and crosses to JESSE’s house. Same alternating “Ohhhhs” and “Ooooohs” as they greet one another, then hand puppets to JESSE and GRACE who

place them side by side at center, facing audience, and sit behind them. MOMS hug.)

JESSE'S MOM (*offering a tray of cookies to GRACE'S MOM*). Homemade!

GRACE'S MOM (*takes one and tries a bite*). Mmmmm!
Homemade is always better!

(MOMS sit down with cookies and tea, their backs to audience. TODDLER JESSE and TODDLER GRACE sing "pat-a-cake" together.)

BABY JESSE & BABY GRACE.

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake
Baker's man
Bake me a cake
As fast as you can
Roll it and pat it
And mark it with a T
And put it in the oven
For Baby and me!

(BOTH laugh. MOMS smile at their offspring.)

TODDLER GRACE. They're looking at us.

TODDLER JESSE. Are they smiling?

TODDLER GRACE. Uh-huh.

TODDLER JESSE. They think we're cute.

TODDLER GRACE. We are!

(TODDLERS giggle; MOMS enjoy this, put down cookies and tea, hug goodbye. MUSICIAN removes wig and returns to home base. MUSIC. ARTIST removes GRACE'S MOM gear and creates playground on white

board at center. JESSE and GRACE put away TODDLER puppets and become CHILD JESSE and CHILD GRACE by kneeling side by side, facing audience. CHILD JESSE mimes steering a car. BOTH pretend to be taking a fast and hilarious ride as MUSIC fades.

Note: CHILD GRACE, CHILD JESSE and CHILD LANCE could be done with another set of puppets, operated by JESSE and GRACE actors here and by OTHERS where noted. In the Pollyanna Theatre production, the live JESSE, GRACE and LANCE played their “CHILD” selves entirely on their knees. They wore knee pads, to which were attached “shoes” made of Styrofoam.)

CHILD GRACE & CHILD JESSE. ZOOM! ZOOOOM!
ZOOOOOOOM! RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR! HONK!
HONK!

CHILD GRACE. My turn to be the driver!

CHILD JESSE (*mimes passing her the “wheel”*). Okay.

CHILD GRACE & CHILD JESSE (*as CHILD GRACE mimes driving and BOTH pretend to ride as before*).
ZOOM! ZOOOOM! ZOOOOOOOM! RRRRRRRRRRRR!
HONK!

CHILD JESSE. Going to my cousin’s house!

CHILD GRACE. Going to my grandma’s house!

CHILD JESSE. Going to the beach!

CHILD GRACE. Yeah! The beach!

CHILD JESSE. Yeah! Let’s go!

CHILD JESSE & CHILD GRACE. Zoom! Zoom! Zoom!
HONK-HONK! ZZZZZOOOOOOOM! RRRRRRRRRR!

(CHILD GRACE “drives” crazily and BOTH bounce around and laugh as MUSIC plays. After a moment, CHILD GRACE “pulls up.” BOTH make the sound of

screeching tires, laugh as they bounce to a stop, and walk on their knees away from the “car.”)

CHILD GRACE. We’re here!

CHILD JESSE. Let’s build a sandcastle!

CHILD GRACE. Okay!

(They mime building a castle. MUSICIAN becomes CHILD LANCE and stomps across the stage between them.)

CHILD GRACE. Hey!

CHILD JESSE. Lance! You stepped on our sandcastle!

CHILD LANCE. What sandcastle? I don’t see any sandcastle.

CHILD GRACE. We’re pretending to build one.

CHILD LANCE. Oh. Then I’ll pretend to step on one. *(He stomps back across the stage.)*

CHILD GRACE. Quit that!

CHILD LANCE. It’s just pretend.

CHILD JESSE. No, it’s really mean, Lance.

CHILD LANCE *(mocking him)*. No, it’s really mean, Lance.

CHILD JESSE. Don’t!

CHILD LANCE. Don’t!

CHILD JESSE. Stop that!

CHILD LANCE. Stop that!

CHILD JESSE. I mean it, Lance.

CHILD LANCE. I mean it, Lance.

CHILD JESSE *(really hurt)*. Quit it!

CHILD LANCE. Quit it!

CHILD JESSE. Go away!

CHILD LANCE. Go away!

CHILD GRACE. Leave Jesse alone!

CHILD LANCE *(mocking her now)*. Leave Jesse alone!

CHILD GRACE. Leave us both alone!

CHILD LANCE. Leave us both alone!

CHILD GRACE (*a beat, then, mocking him*). Leave us both alone.

CHILD LANCE (*starts to speak, then hesitates*). Leave us both aaaahhhh... (*Beat.*) Wait a minute. I'm supposed to be doing that.

CHILD GRACE (*with the upper hand now*). Aaaahhhh... Wait a minute. I'm supposed to be doing that.

CHILD LANCE. Stop it, Grace.

CHILD GRACE. Stop it, Grace.

CHILD LANCE (*flustered*). Oh, phooey on you! (*He gives up and exits scene.*)

(MUSICIAN returns to home base.)

CHILD GRACE. Oh, phooey on YOU!

(SHE does a little victory dance as she and CHILD JESSE laugh in delight at their liberation from LANCE's teasing.)

CHILD JESSE. I hate it when people repeat what I say.

CHILD GRACE. It's your Worst Thing, huh?

CHILD JESSE. My what?

CHILD GRACE. Your Worst Thing. The thing you hate the worst. Everybody has a Worst Thing.

CHILD JESSE. What's yours?

CHILD GRACE. Grapefruit! (*With an exaggerated grimace and shudder.*) Eeeeeeeew!

CHILD GRACE & CHILD JESSE (*laughing and shuddering together*). EEEEEEEEEEW!

(MUSIC. JESSE and GRACE exit scene. ARTIST erases center white board. GRACE gets a basketball and dribbles across stage. ARTIST creates classroom on center white board as JESSE and GRACE, now 4th-graders, take turns dribbling ball and guarding one another. MUSIC fades. GRACE tosses JESSE the ball and flops down on her back DC. JESSE puts ball away, then sits on floor and listens to GRACE's poem, which she begins reciting from the floor. She is speaking to the audience.)

GRACE.

Today in school,
we made maps
of ourselves.
We each stretched out
on a big piece of paper
and then
someone traced all around
us with a Crayon.
I laughed so hard,
I had to ask Mrs. Padron
for the restroom pass.

(She sits up.)

When I got back,
everyone was filling in
their contents.

(She mimes writing on the image of herself.)

On my heart, I wrote my family:

MOM, DAD,

baby brother KYLE,

GRANDMA JOYCE, GRANDPA BILL,

and GRANDMA RUTH.

Then I wrote GRANDPA JOE,

even though I didn't know him very well,

and now he's gone.
On my head, I wrote
DOGS AND WOLVES
AND HORSES AND POEMS
my favorite things to think about.

(A beat, then...)

On my tummy, I wrote
PEANUT BUTTER and ICE CREAM,
MOSTLY CHOCOLATE—
my favorite things to eat.

In my hands, I put
BOOKS and BASKETBALL.

On my feet, I wrote
NOTHING.

I hate to wear shoes.

(A beat, then...)

Then I remembered
I needed a special place
for my best friend.
So I wrote JESSE
on my big toe.

(JESSE guffaws and falls over laughing.)

GRACE *(cont'd)*.

He laughed so hard!

(Grinning, GRACE lies back as before. JESSE flops back and also begins his poem from the floor; to audience.)

JESSE.

Last week we drew
maps of ourselves.

Grace put me on her big toe!
(Sits up and scribbles on his own "image.")
 I put her on my little toe.
 She's so funny!
 Good old Grace.
(A beat, then...)
 I had my party Saturday
 but my birthday is today.
 Hooray!

(He stands up. ALL arrange desks and chairs for class-room. GRACE exits. ARTIST, as "MRS. PADRON," hands JESSE a book. He sits at his desk, still speaking to audience.)

JESSE *(cont'd)*.

Grace and her folks
 were out of town
 for her grandfather's funeral.
 She didn't know him very well
 but she said her dad
 was really sad.
 She said she's bringing
 my present to school today.
 Hooray!

(As he continues, GRACE reenters carrying a brightly colored envelope with her poem in it, plus a note for the teacher from her mom.)

JESSE *(cont'd)*.

She said
 I'm going to love my present.
 I bet you a dollar