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*Dramatic Publishing*

# DOORS

DRAMA BY

SUZAN ZEDER

# DOORS

***Drama. By Suzan Zeder. Cast: 3m., 1w., including 2 adults and 2 pre-teen boys.** Doors is an emotional, yet humorous, work with language that rings true. This script has been widely produced on stage and is also used as a book in the classroom. In *Doors*, a son copes with his parents' divorce. It is the day of his parents' separation. Before Jeff can deal with the impending divorce, he must face and play out his fears and his fantasies with his best friend, Sandy. Although the situation of the play involves separation and divorce, the subject of the play deals with the importance of talking and listening. Once the unspoken is finally out in the open, the whole family can begin to heal. *One set. Contemporary costumes. Time: the present. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: DB9.**

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Doors



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Drama by  
SUZAN ZEDER



**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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**DEDICATION**

**For, with, and because of  
Jim**

## **A Note From the Playwright**

This play began for me with a real child and a real divorce. A friend, whose marriage had recently exploded, shared a story about her ten year old son reaching out from his own pain and sadness to comfort her. It was an act of two human beings meeting in a moment of healing that went beyond the boundaries of a "social problem" into the realm of art. The story haunted me for years until I gave it a second life in the final lines of this play.

The next image that came to me was the door, and with it came the title. At first I didn't trust it. I thought the title needed to be something grander, more evocative. So I experimented with other titles such as *Separate Doors*, and *Through Separate Doors*. But the image was wiser than I, and the play must be called what it has always been, *Doors*.

The first production of this play in 1981 was its formative one. I am deeply grateful to Greg Falls for his initial commission and for the showcase production which gave the play its present substance and shape. Jim Hancock, my husband, was the director, but his role was that of a collaborator. This is as much his play as it is mine.

For fifteen years I have written plays about children, not from any social, educational, or therapeutic motivation, but simply because they fascinate me as a dramatist. I am profoundly interested in children as protagonists who find themselves in crises, who struggle against overpowering forces, and conduct themselves as heroes. I respect the efforts of parents and children facing troubled times with dignity and depth. I find these efforts to be legitimate and compelling dramatic territory.

I offer this play to you, not as an examination of a significant "social problem" but as a theatre experience which chronicles the journey of three individual survivors through a particularly difficult day.

Suzan Zeder  
Dallas, Texas 1985



## **Production Notes**

### **Off-stage Argument**

I have deliberately not written specific dialogue for the off stage argument. In an earlier draft I did try to sketch it out, but I felt it tended to limit and constrain the actors, and sounded artificial.

It is my intention that the argument should be created improvisationally by the actors and the director.

Some guidelines might be helpful:

It should be a real argument, and not random words or sounds. The actors should decide what specific circumstances have led Ben and Helen to this particular moment.

The dynamics of the argument must be modulated to work with the primary action on stage. Off-stage sounds must never overwhelm what is happening on stage, but should underscore action.

When Ben and Helen enter a scene on stage in 'reality' they bring some of their previous offstage emotions with them. When they enter a scene in 'fantasy' they are primarily projections of Jeff's thoughts, fears, hopes, and feelings.

### **Treatment of the Fantasies**

Fantasies are grounded in Jeff's needs in real life. It is this relevance to reality, rather than a departure from the real world, that gives these scenes their power.

Every director will interpret this in a different way, and will make his or her own stylistic choices. Light and sound can be important elements in introducing and underscoring these scenes. Fantasies must move the dramatic action of the play forward, rather than divert it.

### **A Final Note**

The words and actions of this play provide all the essentials for production; but much of the depth and intensity of this script must be found between the lines, in subtext, and in silence. I urge you to be bold in your emotional choices, to be clear and specific with the development of relationships, and to bring the same emotional intensity to the words of the text and the thoughts and to feelings which remain unspoken.

## **CHARACTERS**

Jeff, eleven years old  
Ben, his father  
Helen, his mother  
Sandy, his best friend

## **SETTING**

Jeff's Room

## **TIME**

The Present

DOORS was first commissioned by Gregory A. Falls and was showcased by A Contemporary Theatre at the Bush School in Seattle, Washington in 1981, with the following cast:

Jeff.....Marco Sawrey  
Ben..... William ter Kuile  
Helen.....Theresa DePaolo  
Sandy.....Chris Devore

The production was directed by Jim Hancock

Production rights for this play are granted with the implicit understanding that it must be produced as written. With the exception of updating and localizing specific references, any cuts, changes, or alterations must be approved in advance and in writing by the publisher who will consult directly with the playwright.

# DOORS

By Suzan L. Zeder

*A fragmentary set suggesting Jeff's bedroom. At first glance it seems to be the rather ordinary room of an eleven year old boy; but there are odd angles, slanting doorways, and joints that do not quite connect. The whole room is slightly off kilter.*

*The room is dominated by a large closed door, center stage. It is the door to Jeff's parents' bedroom. Down left is a smaller door to the rest of the house. The walls of the room are defined by large scrimmed panels. The panels are decorated with posters of movies, mostly science fiction adventure films, currently popular at the time of the production. The posters are oversized and made of a scrim material; they are also hinged so that actors can pass through them.*

*Also in the room are a small bed, a couple of chairs, a desk or work area, a T.V. set, a stereo, and an over-flowing laundry basket.*

*At rise, JEFF is alone on stage, seated at the desk. He is working intently on a large, complicated model of a spaceship. The model is almost finished. JEFF works with great concentration with the directions and a tube of glue.*

*The first sounds we hear are muffled voices coming from Jeff's parents' room. They are arguing. This argument will be ongoing during most of the play; at times, specific voices and words will be heard, at other times, muffled sound, sometimes, nothing. Care should be taken to preserve the illusion that the argument is continuous without detracting from the primary focus which is to be on stage with Jeff and his actions. (See Production notes at the end of the script.)*

*JEFF tries to concentrate on his task of building the model, but he is obviously distracted and upset by the sounds coming from behind the door. He reads from the directions.*

**JEFF:** 'When the glue is partially set, insert cockpit window flaps G and H into the main body of the craft.' *(The sounds of the argument grow louder and JEFF tries to concentrate harder.)* 'Hold firmly in place for a few seconds until the glue sets. . .' *(There is another sound from behind the door. JEFF looks up, the part slips. He tries again.)* 'When the glue is partially set, insert cockpit window flaps G and H into the main body of the craft.' *(As JEFF lines up the parts, a series of angry bursts are heard, they register on his face, but he does not move.)* ...

**JEFF (Cont):** 'until the glue sets' . . . (*JEFF rises, turns on the stereo set, and returns to the model*) 'Insert wheel hub N into wheel rim 0 and affix wheel assembly to landing gear C.' (*He looks all over the model.*) Where's the landing gear? Where's the landing gear? Where's that. . . (*Sounds from behind the door increase. JEFF picks up the model, looking for the landing gear and the cockpit falls off. The phone rings. JEFF looks at the door. The phone rings again. JEFF tries to return to the model, the phone rings again.*) 'Insert wheel hub'. . yeah. yeah... yeah. . . 'affix to landing GEAR!' (*The phone continues to ring. Finally, JEFF rises and answers. The stereo is very loud.*)

Hello? Just a second. (*JEFF puts down the phone, crosses to the stereo and turns it off. He returns to the phone.*) Sorry. Hello, Gramma. Yeah, this is Jeff. Yeah, we got out of school last week... No, I'm not going to camp this year... Gramma, they don't have camps for Grandmothers. (*Sounds behind the door increase.*) Yeah, they're both here, but they can't come to the phone right now. They're in their room with the door closed and I don't think I'd better... I'll tell them you called. I'm sure Mom will call you back later... Yeah, you too, Gramma. Bye. (*JEFF hangs up the phone, and crosses back to the desk, on the way he turns on the stereo and the T.V. very loud.*)

Stop it. Stop it! STOP IT!

(*JEFF sits and buries his face in his hands; the sound is tremendous. After a beat, the large door bursts open and BEN enters angrily.*)

**BEN:** Jeff! Turn it down! (*JEFF does not move.*) For Christ's sakes, Jeff! (*BEN crosses to T.V. and stereo and turns them off.*) We can't even hear ourselves think in there. Why does it have to be so loud?

**JEFF:** I like it loud.

**BEN:** Well, you're blasting us out of the house.

**JEFF:** Sorry.

**BEN:** Your Mother and I are trying to...talk and that doesn't help.

**JEFF:** Sorry.

**BEN:** If you're sorry, then keep it down. You can listen, but keep it reasonable, okay?

(*BEN turns the stereo back on much lower and starts to exit back through the door. JEFF rises and stops him.*)

**JEFF:** Hey, Dad?

**BEN:** *(Turning back to him)* Yeah?  
*(JEFF turns the stereo off)*

**JEFF:** Gramma called.

**BEN:** Oh... What did she want?

**JEFF:** I don't know, just to talk I guess.

**BEN:** *(Under his breath, with frustration)* Oh, Brother...

**JEFF:** What?

**BEN:** Nothing. *(BEN notices that JEFF is really 'down'.)* Jeff?  
*(BEN, not sure of what to do, assumes a wrestling stance.)* Hey, Jeff?

**JEFF:** Oh, no, Dad! *(After a beat, JEFF responds with a wrestling stance. They mock wrestle, resulting in a much needed laugh for both of them.)*

**HELEN:** *(Spoken from off stage)* Ben?  
*(BEN starts to go, JEFF stops him.)*

**JEFF:** Dad, can you have a look at this?

**BEN:** What?  
*(JEFF holds up the model.)*

**JEFF:** The cockpit keeps falling off.

**BEN:** That's really coming along,

**JEFF:** Mom painted the flag and the wing trim.

**BEN:** I was going to help you with that. I'm sorry, Jeff.

**JEFF:** Mom helped me with the body and the engine.

**BEN:** But things kind of got away from me.

**JEFF:** I can't get the cockpit to stay on.

**BEN:** Let me see it. *(BEN inspects the model.)* Well, the flag is in the wrong place and the wing trim's crooked. But you put it together just fine.

**JEFF:** Really?

**BEN:** Oh, yeah. Have you got a razor blade? (*JEFF hands him a razor blade. BEN scrapes the glue.*) The surface has to be clean for it to seal. Now, the glue, (*BEN applies the glue and positions the cockpit.*)

**JEFF:** You've got to keep holding until the glue sets.

**HELEN:** (*OFF*) Ben?

**BEN:** In a minute!

**JEFF:** Look out, Dad, it's slipping.

**BEN:** I've got it.

**JEFF:** Your hands are shaking.

**BEN:** They are not!

**JEFF:** You've got to hold it still.

**BEN:** I know!

*(There is a pause. BEN looks toward the door, back at JEFF, and toward the door again. JEFF notices.)*

**JEFF:** Have a look at this. (*JEFF shows him an old photograph.*)

**BEN:** Where did you get that?

**JEFF:** I found it.

**BEN:** That's our old house on Beachcroft. What are you doing with that?

**JEFF:** I just like to look at it sometimes.

**BEN:** You remember that place?

**JEFF:** I remember.

**BEN:** But that was years ago.

**JEFF:** I remember.

*(BEN takes the photo in one hand and holds the model in the other.)*

**BEN:** I built every inch of that house. Built it and rebuilt it.

**JEFF:** I remember my bedroom; it had clouds and stars on the ceiling.

**BEN:** We painted them for you when you said that you wanted to sleep in the sky.

**JEFF:** When I turned out the lights, the stars glowed.

**BEN:** That was a good house, Jeff, a good house. Solid foundations, thick walls, none of that stucco, pre-fab garbage. I can't build 'em like that anymore.

**JEFF:** How come?

**BEN:** I haven't got the time, and who's got the money, and nobody cares.

**JEFF:** I miss that house.

**BEN:** Yeah, so do I. (*BEN puts down the photo and looks at JEFF.*) Jeff, there's something going on here, something we all have to talk about...

**JEFF:** (*Interrupting quickly*) Dad, you've got to hold on to it!

**BEN:** Huh?

**JEFF:** The cockpit, it's slipping again. You've got to hold it in place or it won't work.

**BEN:** I've got it.

**JEFF:** You've got to hold it steady.

**BEN:** I am holding it steady.  
(*HELEN enters and stands in the doorway.*)

**HELEN:** What are you doing?

**BEN:** I'll be right there.

**JEFF:** Dad's helping me with my model.

**HELEN:** But, Ben...

**BEN:** I said, I'll be right there!

**HELEN:** Jeff, honey, you spend so much time inside these days, and it's a beautiful day out there. Why don't you go on over to Sandy's...

**JEFF:** I don't want to go to Sandy's.

**HELEN:** But, I thought you two were going to work on the movie.

**JEFF:** He's coming over here later.

**HELEN:** It's a beautiful day and here you are all cooped up.

**BEN:** He said, he didn't want to go.

**HELEN:** It was just a suggestion.

**BEN:** You know, you could have waited.

**HELEN:** Ben, I have been waiting...

**BEN:** I'm talking about this model.

**HELEN:** The model?

**BEN:** I was going to help him with it, just as soon as I got a little ahead on the Carlson development.

**JEFF:** It's okay, Dad.

**HELEN:** He needed help and he asked me.

**BEN:** You could have waited.

**HELEN:** Sure, I could have waited, but he couldn't.

**JEFF:** It's almost done now.

**BEN:** Just as soon as I finished the bids and worked out the contracts, and ....

**HELEN:** And when would that have been, Ben? Next week? Next month? Next year?

**BEN:** I was looking forward to it! (*The tension in their tone rises.*)



**JEFF:** *(Suddenly)* I don't feel well.

**HELEN:** *(Concerned)* What's the matter?

**JEFF:** I just don't feel so hot.

**HELEN:** Do you have a headache?

**JEFF:** I guess so.

**BEN:** He's all right.  
*(HELEN crosses to JEFF)*

**HELEN:** Do you have a temperature?

**JEFF:** I don't think so.

**BEN:** He's all right.

**HELEN:** *(To Ben)* How do you know he's all right?

**BEN:** *(To Jeff)* You're all right, aren't you?

**JEFF:** I'm all right.

**HELEN:** But you just said...

**BEN:** He just said he was all right!

**JEFF:** Dad, the cockpit's all screwed up again.

**BEN:** Helen, will you let me finish this?

**HELEN:** I was just...

**JEFF:** The glue's all over the place. *(JEFF takes the model from BEN and returns to the desk with it.)*

**HELEN:** I'll be in our room when you're finished!  
*(HELEN exits through the large door and slams it as she goes.)*

**BEN:** I'll be right there! *(BEN paces in anger as JEFF returns dejectedly to the model.)*

**JEFF:** Hand me the razor blade? *(BEN, distracted, does not answer.)* Dad, can you hand me the blade?

**BEN:** Oh, yeah, sure; just kind of scrape it there.... it'll be all right.

**JEFF:** Yeah.

**BEN:** Just hold it firm until the glue sets.

**JEFF:** Yeah.

**BEN:** You're all right aren't you?

**JEFF:** Yeah.

*(BEN crosses to the large door, hesitates for a beat, then exits.)*

**HELEN:** *(OFF)* When we discuss this with Jeff, will you at least do me the courtesy of allowing me to be there?

**BEN:** *(OFF)* We were talking about the model.

**HELEN:** *(OFF)* When we do talk to him, we can't be emotional and upset.

**BEN:** *(OFF)* I am NOT EMOTIONAL!

**HELEN:** *(OFF)* Then why are you shouting?

**BEN:** *(OFF)* I wasn't emotional then, now I'm emotional!  
*(JEFF slowly and deliberately pulls off the cockpit.)*

**HELEN:** Stop shouting!

**BEN:** Stop picking! You always have to pick at me, at Jeff!  
*(JEFF breaks off one wing. BEN and HELEN continue off stage.)*

**HELEN:** He said he didn't feel well.

**BEN:** He's all right.

**HELEN:** Just because you say he's all right, doesn't mean...

**BEN:** He said he was all right!  
*(JEFF snaps off the other wing.)*

**HELEN:** I was just concerned!

**BEN:** Can't you leave anything alone?  
*(JEFF suddenly hurls the model at the door. It smashes onto*

*the floor and breaks into pieces. JEFF rises and turns both the stereo and the T.V. on full blast. He returns to his desk and cradles his head in his hands.)*

*(After a beat or so, SANDY is heard pounding on the smaller door.)*

**SANDY:** *(OFF)* Jeff, you in there? Jeff? *(SANDY enters through the outside door. He lugs a life-sized dummy with him.)* Jeeze, Jeff, doesn't anyone around here answer the door? I've been out there about a half an hour ringing the bell and yelling. Hey, do you know the T.V. is on?

*(JEFF pulls himself together, but avoids looking at SANDY.)*

**JEFF:** Yeah.

**SANDY:** And the stereo, too? *(SANDY turns off the T.V.)* This much noise will rot your brain, at least that's what my Mom says.

*(SANDY starts to turn off stereo.)*

**JEFF:** Don't.

**SANDY:** Can I at least turn it down? *(JEFF looks toward the large door. SANDY turns it down but not off.)*

**JEFF:** What are you doing in here?

**SANDY:** I knew you were home and the front door was unlocked so I...

**JEFF:** What do you want?

**SANDY:** We've got to finish the script, remember?

**JEFF:** Look, Sandy, this isn't a good time.

**SANDY:** Don't you even want to see what I brought?

**JEFF:** What's that?

*(SANDY holds up the dummy proudly.)*

**SANDY:** It's a body for the crash scene! I figure we could put ketchup all over it for blood and maybe some dog food for brains.

**JEFF:** That's gross.

**SANDY:** Wait until you hear how I got it.

**JEFF:** Sandy... (*SANDY acts this out as he goes along.*)

**SANDY:** I was downtown in this alley behind Nordstroms and I saw this arm sticking out of a dumpster... I thought some bum had crawled in there and died, but then I figured out that it was a dummy. So, I asked this big goon by the loading dock, if I could have it. And he said, 'It'll cost you a dollar.' So, I grabbed it and ran down Fifth like I was kidnapping it, or something. Then this number Fourteen bus came along, and I hopped on. The driver said, 'You can't bring that dummy on this bus!' So, I said, 'How dare you insult my brother!' And I paid two fares, sat it next to me, and talked to it all the way over here. Man, everyone on that bus really thought I was weird.

**JEFF:** You are weird. (*JEFF turns away.*)

**SANDY:** You're the weird one. I thought that would really crack you up. All the way over here, I just kept thinking, 'this will really crack Jeff up!' (*No response*) What's the matter?

**JEFF:** Nothing.

**SANDY:** Your report card! Your parents hit the ceiling about that F in science.

**JEFF:** I never showed it to them.

**SANDY:** The dog! You finally asked them if you could have a dog, and they said no, and...

**JEFF:** I haven't asked them about that yet.

**SANDY:** Then what's wrong?  
(*Sounds can be heard from behind the door.*)

**JEFF:** Sandy, I'll come over to your house later and...

**SANDY:** Did you get the video camera from your dad?

**JEFF:** Uhhhh, he's been out of town.

**SANDY:** You mean you haven't even asked him yet?

**JEFF:** I'll ask him.

**SANDY:** We've got to start shooting tomorrow!

**JEFF:** I'll ask him later.