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Family Plays

PANDORA AND THE MAGIC BOX

**Myth by
I.E. Clark**

**Based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's story
"The Paradise of Children"**



PANDORA AND THE MAGIC BOX

Myth. By I.E. Clark. Based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's story *The Paradise of Children*. Cast: 4m., 11w., extras. This myth is about Pandora and the box of troubles left by the gods. Pandora knows she mustn't open the box—but her curiosity is overwhelming. She decides to take just a teeny peek. The troubles, who were locked in, throw open the lid and leap into the world. Nathaniel Hawthorne took the familiar story of Pandora from Greek mythology and wove it into a tale called "The Paradise of Children." I.E. Clark dramatized the story into a short play which will serve well in children's theatre and on the high-school or college stage. It is an exciting way to introduce Greek mythology to young people, and to get an entire class on stage. More children and troubles may be added as desired. The charm of this play is the charm of any fairy tale—magical things happen right before our eyes, transporting us into a world of make-believe which, for the moment, becomes the real world. *A director's script is available containing drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging, discussion of characterization, plot and theme. It also suggests the complete blocking and full stage directions for all movement and business. Set: empty stage with a large, decorative box. Time: long ago. Approximate running time: 20 to 25 minutes. Code: PH4.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

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By I. E. Clark

(Based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's story,
"The Paradise of Children")

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The charm of this play is the charm of any fairy tale—magical things happen right before our eyes, transporting us into a world of make-believe which, for the moment, becomes the real world.

The appearance of Quicksilver and the Princes “from nowhere” can be accomplished by the simple expedient of directing the audience’s attention to one side of the stage while they enter unobtrusively from the opposite side. Movement, dialogue, offstage noises, lighting effects—all are standard devices for making the audience look where you want it to look.

Pandora’s “daydream”—during which she becomes a beautiful princess—can be worked smoothly and artistically by having a helper behind the screen. If the helper holds the gown in proper position, Pandora can walk right into it and right out onto the stage again so that the illusion of “changing” costumes is really a startling one.

The magic knot which holds the box closed might be heavy yarn or light rope wound around a spindle. If the spindle extends through the front partition of the box so that someone inside can spin it to unwind the rope, the knot will seem to untie itself.

Nathaniel Hawthorne took the familiar story of Pandora from Greek mythology and wove it into a tale called “The Paradise of Children.” I. E. Clark dramatized the story into a short play which will serve well in children’s theatre and on the high school or college stage.

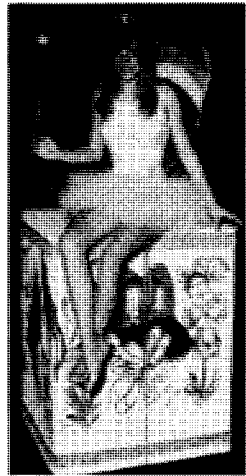
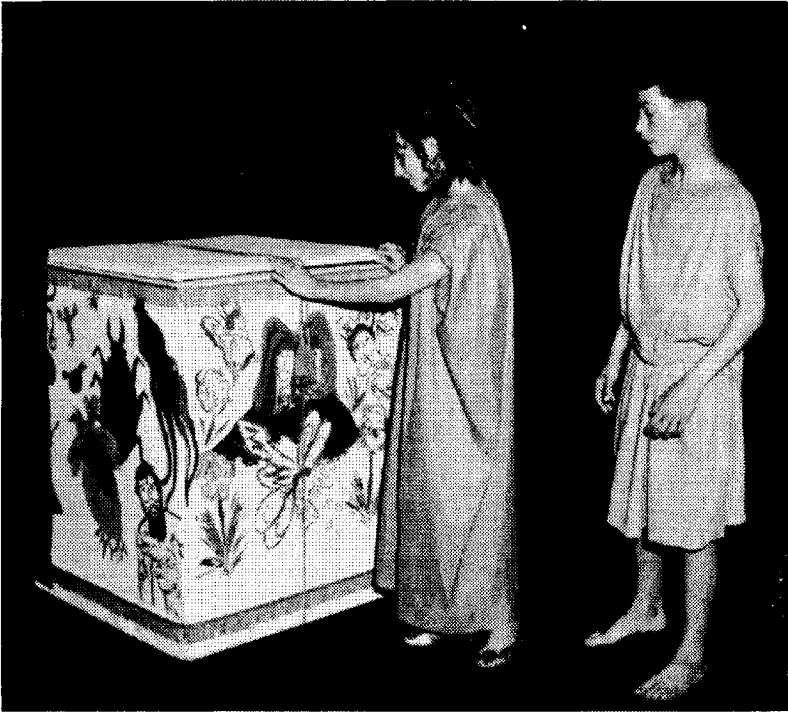
This play was first presented by the Schulenburg Junior High School Dramatics Club on March 28, 1968, in the Schulenburg, Texas, High School Theatre. Under the direction of Mrs. Claude Marty Jr., the play had the following cast:

PROLOGUE.....	Babette Haba
QUICKSILVER.....	Mark Meyer
PANDORA.....	Paula Schwartz
EPIMETHEUS.....	Ray Grasshoff
SORROW.....	Barbara Bucek
GREED.....	Karen Herzik
ANXIETY.....	Glenda Schroeder
BAD LUCK.....	Amparo Montes
DISEASE.....	Cindy Hefenbrock
HOPE.....	Nancy Sustr
FIRST PRINCE.....	Michael Hepner
SECOND PRINCE.....	Billy Wagner
THIRD PRINCE.....	Mark Meyer
BOY.....	Michael Hepner
GIRL.....	Cindy Triplett
CHILDREN....	Melissa Lewis, Diane Svrcula

More Children and Troubles may be added as desired

* † * † *

A Director’s Production Script (prompt book) is available from the publisher of this play. It contains drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging, discussion of characterization and plot and theme; and it suggests the complete blocking and full stage directions for all movement and business.



PANDORA

AND THE

MAGIC BOX

PROLOGUE. Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a child named Epimetheus, who never had a father or a mother. In fact, there were no fathers and mothers—everybody was a child. Parents weren't needed to take care of the children because there was no danger, no sorrow, no disease, no troubles of any kind. Whenever a child wanted his dinner, he found it growing on a tree. It was a very pleasant life indeed—no work to be done, no lessons to be studied, nothing but games and dances, and sweet voices of children talking, or singing, or laughing throughout the livelong day.

Most wonderful of all, the children never quarrelled among themselves, nor had any crying fits. And never had a single one of these little mortals ever gone into a corner and sulked. Oh, what a good time that was to be alive! The world was truly a paradise of children.

[Curtain opens on a group of happy children dancing and singing. At Stage Right, against the wall, is a beautiful box—about the size of a trunk. Its panels are carved or painted with figures of graceful men and women and children amid a profusion of flowers and foliage; and these various objects are so exquisitely represented and are wrought together in such harmony, that flowers, foliage, and human beings seem to combine into a wreath of mingled beauty. If you don't look too closely, however—that is, if you just casually glance at the carvings out of the corner of your eye, you get the impression that, here and there, peeping from behind the carved foliage, is a

face not so lovely, or something or other that is disagreeable. Nevertheless, on looking more closely, you can discover nothing of the kind. The box is fastened, not by a lock, but by a very intricate knot of gold cord.

As the CHILDREN continue dancing, two figures appear at Up Left. One has tiny wings on his shoes and on his helmet, and immediately you know he is the god Mercury, or Hermes, or—as he is called in this play—QUICKSILVER. Accompanying him is a pretty girl—one just beginning to feel the joys of being a girl. Her name is PANDORA. They stand Up Left watching the dancing children.]

QUICKSILVER. This is where Epimetheus lives.

PANDORA. Oh, what a happy room!

QUICKSILVER. Yes, and you will be happy here, too, as long as you follow the example that Epimetheus sets for you. He is a very special friend of mine; that's why I have brought you to his house to live. But I must leave now before he spies me, for I don't have time to stay and visit.

EPIMETHEUS. [*He has not seen Pandora and Quicksilver. He motions the other CHILDREN to follow as he runs toward the Down Right exit*] Let's go outside and play! [*The CHILDREN follow him out*]

PANDORA. [*She has been staring at the strange box. As the children leave, she steps toward it*] What is that strange-looking box there in the corner?

[When she receives no answer, PANDORA turns to look at QUICKSILVER. He is no longer there; he has disappeared. PANDORA goes to the box and looks at it critically; it holds a strong fascination for her. She touches the intricate knot which serves as a lock. The sounds of the children playing off Right grow invitingly

louder and she starts to join them; but she looks at the box again and then runs Up Left, calling:]

PANDORA. Quicksilver, where have you gone?

[EPIMETHEUS enters. He has forgotten his cap and has returned for it. He is somewhat surprised to see a stranger in his house, but not too surprised, for it has happened before. And as far as Epimetheus is concerned, there is no such thing as a stranger.]

EPIMETHEUS. Hello. *[The sound of his voice startles PANDORA, and she turns quickly to face him]* Won't you come outside and play with us? *[PANDORA makes no move to join him; she simply stands looking at him]* My name's Epimetheus. What's yours?

PANDORA. Pandora.

EPIMETHEUS. Welcome, Pandora. That's such a pretty name.

PANDORA. I was brought here from a country far away because I was lonely and had no father and mother. I was told that I would be happy here.

EPIMETHEUS. And you will be. Come on, let's join the others.

[EPIMETHEUS takes her hand. As they cross toward the exit, PANDORA again looks at the box with a strange fascination. She pauses in front of it, forcing him to stop, too, since he has her hand.]

PANDORA. Epimetheus, what's in that box?

EPIMETHEUS. That's a secret, and you must be kind enough not to ask any questions about it. The box was left here to be kept safely, and I don't know what it contains.

PANDORA. But who gave it to you? Where did it come from?

EPIMETHEUS. That is a secret, too. Oh, come on, don't think about the box any more. Let's run out and have fun with the others. [*EPIMETHEUS runs out, leaving PANDORA standing before the box, staring at it*]

PANDORA. I wonder where it came from? And what treasure can be inside?

EPIMETHEUS. [*Appearing with two friends, a BOY and a GIRL. There is the slightest hint of a frown on EPIMETHEUS' brow—very likely the first one that ever settled there*] Please come along, Pandora; my friends want to meet you.

GIRL. Yes, come and play with us, Pandora.

BOY. Epimetheus told us all about you.

[*PANDORA shrugs and goes out with them. But just before she exits, she takes one more look at the box. As they disappear, the sounds of the children's playing increase with shouts of "Here's Pandora," "Hi, Pandora," etc. Suddenly we are aware that QUICKSILVER is in the room. He moves swiftly but silently to the box. He examines the cord which holds the lid closed. He presses his ear to the box. Apparently he is satisfied, for he stands with a pleased look on his face and glances around the room. Again the sounds of playing grow louder, but above the other voices we recognize EPIMETHEUS and PANDORA. As they enter talking, we realize that QUICKSILVER has disappeared.*]

EPIMETHEUS. Always talking about the box. I wish you'd try to think of something else. Let's go and pick some ripe figs and eat them under the trees for our supper. And I know a vine that has the sweetest and juiciest grapes you ever tasted!

PANDORA. I don't like grapes and figs.

EPIMETHEUS. Well then, let's go back and have fun with our friends.

PANDORA. I'm tired of fun, and I don't care if I never have any more! This ugly box! I wish I didn't think about it all the time. I don't see why you won't tell me what's inside.

EPIMETHEUS. I've already said fifty times—I don't know. How can I tell you what's inside when I don't know?

PANDORA. [*With a hint of coquetry*] You might open it....

EPIMETHEUS. Pandora, what are you thinking of?

PANDORA. At least you can tell me how it came here.

EPIMETHEUS. [*Not sure whether or not telling this much will violate his promise, he looks at the box and then at Pandora. She is smiling sweetly, coaxingly. He stammers*] It—it was left at the door—just before you came—by a person who looked very happy and intelligent. He could hardly help laughing as he put it down. [*EPIMETHEUS is a little surprised that he hasn't been struck down by lightning; but he hasn't, and therefore he becomes more voluble*] He was dressed in an odd kind of cloak, and he had on a cap that looked almost as if it had wings.

PANDORA. Did he carry a staff?

EPIMETHEUS. Oh, the funniest staff you ever saw! It was like two serpents twisting around a stick. At first, I thought the serpents were alive!

PANDORA. It was Quicksilver! And he brought me here, as well as the box! I'll bet he intended the box for me—most probably it contains pretty dresses for me to wear!

EPIMETHEUS. Perhaps so...but until Quicksilver comes back and tells us so, we have no right to open the box. I'm going to join my friends—you can come along if you wish.

[*At his exit, PANDORA crosses slowly to the box and stares at it. She has called it ugly, but in reality she is*