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Family Plays

'HOODS

Drama by
Jerome McDonough



'HOODS

“The frightening world portrayed should sober audiences
and start them thinking.”

(Plays for Children and Young Adults)

Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 12 to 20 actors, flexible.* 'Hoods is the gang-slang word for “neighborhoods,” the turf that each gang intends to control at any cost. The one-act play is meant to inform—and to frighten. Along with alcohol and other drugs, promiscuous sex and AIDS, teenage street gangs are the greatest plague to hit America ... ever. Science is helpless with this new plague. Where is the cure? Enlightenment is part of the answer. Turning the spotlight on the horrors of these new “diseases” will help remove their glamour. Why should joining a gang be such a thrill when—if you change your mind—there’s virtually no way out except death? The answer seems obvious: “Forbidden fruits are sweetest.” The desire to please friends and be “one of the crowd” is irresistible. The fear of being a nerd or a geek or a goody-goody is devastating. The plague will stop only when greater fears and desires are substituted. Jerome McDonough’s plays, like *Addict*, *Juvie*, *Dolls* and *Alky*, are effective in building greater fears and desires. Your theatre’s spotlight can be focused on the horrors of joining gangs by mounting 'Hoods on your stage. *Set suggests a city block with many front stoops at several levels (a bare stage may also be used).* *Time: the present. Approximate running time: 35 to 40 minutes. Code: HE5.*

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'Hoods

'HOODS

In One Act

by

Jerome McDonough

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(‘HOODS)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

'HOODS

Cast of Characters

ARMANDO (ARMANDA)—Our guide*

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS—Played by the following performers or by
a "Street Chorus"

Frontier 'Hood

KA'RANNE (KA'MEEL)—Ghetto dweller*

OLO (OLA)—Militant gang member*

QUINT (QUINN)—Gang survivor*

YANCE—Gang member*

NANNAE (NATE)—Gang survivor*

MARIA (MARIO)—Gang relative*

ZAL (Z. A.)—Gang member*

RAFAELA—Feminist

KRIS—Gang violence victim*

SYNTHIA (SAMMY)—Social worker*

Adventure 'Hood

DIEGO—Hardcore gang leader

PRINCESS—Jailed female gang member-driver

FRANCO—Jailed gang member

Fantasy 'Hood

JACQUIE (JACKIE)—Crack addict prostitute*

U. B.—Look-out kid*

XTRA—Crack head*

GRAHAM (GRETCHEN)—Undercover cop*

WINTEO (WINTEA)—Drug go-between*

BERNADETTE (BERNIE)—Church congregation member

Tomorrow 'Hood

FULL ENSEMBLE

*May be played by a male or a female performer. Alternative names, in cases where they are needed, are enclosed in parentheses.

Synopsis

Time: Now

Place: Closer than you'd like to believe

ABOUT THE PLAY

The word *'hood* is gang-slang for “neighborhood”—the turf that street gangs want to control. Jerome McDonough did extensive research to make this play authentic.

'Hoods is meant to inform—and to frighten. Along with alcohol and other drugs, promiscuous sex, and AIDS, teenage street gangs are the greatest plague to hit America . . . ever. Automobile accidents (often because of driving while intoxicated) and gunfire (usually gang-related) are the leading causes of death among young people today. It used to be smallpox, typhoid fever, polio. But medical science has virtually eliminated these diseases. Science is helpless with this new plague. Where is the cure?

Enlightenment is part of the answer. Turning the spotlight on the horrors of these new “diseases” will help remove their glamor. Why should joining a gang be such a thrill when—if you change your mind (and you *will* change your mind)—there’s virtually no way out except death? Why is promiscuous sex something to brag about when chances are high in this world of AIDS that the reward is death? Why do children take their first drink or first drug when the odds favor years of misery ending in early death?

The answer seems obvious: “Forbidden fruits are sweetest.” The desire to please friends and be “one of the crowd” is irresistible. The fear of being a nerd or a geek or a goody-goody is devastating. The plague will stop only when greater fears and desires are substituted.

Jerome McDonough’s plays, like *Addict*, *Juvie*, *Dolls*, *Alky*, are effective in building greater fears and desires. Your theatre’s spotlight can be focused on the horrors of joining gangs by mounting *'Hoods* on your stage.

“Coming-of-age”

In the Multi-Cultural Setting of America.

Many people feel lost or threatened in our macro society and set up micro societies to insulate or to protect themselves.

Gangs are such micro societies. More to the point, they are a symptom of the socioeconomic polarization that plagues our world today. This alienation is caused by, among other things, the breakdown of the family, unemployment, poverty, urban paranoia, and, to some extent, by the participants themselves—all the things that separate the poor from the rich or the perceived rich. Or the perceived poor.

'HOODS cannot offer an answer to this monumental problem. It’s up to your generation to fix that. Please do.

Peace.

Jerome McDonough

Dedication

to

**Kent Gardner, Caprock High School Police Liason Officer.
“Sup, Homes?”**

Members of the Original Casts

**Misty Bailey, Kevin Burroughs, Sonny Calderon, Curtis
Castor, Krystal Chapman, Tina Cole, Mark Cruz, JoAnn Diaz,
Amy Fuentes, Sylvia Garcia, Scott Gately, Matt Johnson,
Missy Lacy, Sean Marra, Mario Medrano, Melody Montano,
Stephen Orcutt, Jerrod Ramirez, Mindy Robb, Misty Robb,
Claudia Rodriguez, Chrystal Samples, Stephanie Sargent, Matt
Sherman, Oliver Taylor, Robby Taylor, Lou Tracy, Caryann
Wheeler, Denise Wright; and Jeff Barajas, Christy
Bustamante, Marcus Canales, Jason Connell, Vanessa Fagan,
Dana Gressett, Brandy Griffith, Jeremy Hopkins, Jenifer
Kirby, Roberta Lake, Brandie Lancaster, Michael Massey,
Bobby McMillan, Bryan Pryor, Candy Reck, Jason Romero,
Donnie Skidmore, and Steve Solano**

PRODUCTION NOTES

Performance

The script is printed with standard proscenium arch stage directions, but an environmental or other intimate approach might be more effective. The original production worked in Environmental Style with a Three-Quarter Round physical arrangement. The audience members could not distance themselves from the problems, emotionally or physically, because the show was literally in their laps. Proscenium production, thrust stage, or in the round, the play is meant to deal directly with audience members.

Of course, if the production company has genuine concerns about security, standard staging should be employed. The advisability of even producing 'HOODS under such conditions may be questionable. Producers should evaluate each performance situation. The play is meant to be part of a search for a solution, not part of the problem.

Some on-site security is probably indicated for any production of 'HOODS—caring, sympathetic, reasoning security. No trigger- or bust-happy cowboys, please. It is also suggested that a good book on stage combat be used while coaching cast members. Any use of guns and knives, even prop ones, on stage can be dangerous. “Blanks” have been known to kill. Fights must also be carefully choreographed. For the protection of your actors and to avoid lawsuits against your theatre, we recommend Claude Kezer’s *The Principles of Stage Combat*, published by I. E. Clark, Inc.

Properties

Homemade knife (dulled)—Diego
 Crack pipe—Ensemble Member (Pusher)
 Flashlights, candles, etc. (optional)—Ensemble
 Non-firing guns and dull prop knives—Ensemble

Costuming

All cast members choose their own costumes based on their perceptions of their characters. Contemporary “gang” appearance is the watchword here. (See the Clothing section under “Gang Terminology” on page 19.) Non-gang performers reflect those characters’ social contexts.

The costuming of 'HOODS is easy. Making the look and the feeling fit together is the challenge.

Music

The musical orientation of 'HOODS will constantly change. It must always happen in the present and reflect the music of the day. Even subsequent performances by the same company at a later date may have to re-evaluate the musical choices. Today's runaway hit song is tomorrow's beat-up cliché in the world of popular music.

Lighting

Lights suggest the "Street." Some scenes can be played in daylight; others will probably succeed better with an evening feeling, all dependent on the Directors' choices. Special care and previewing need to go into the final scene, when characters illuminate themselves with flashlights, candles, etc. Moody though the effect may be, the audience must still be able to see the performers. An intimate setting, as recommended above, greatly facilitates this.

Deleting, Cutting, Adapting

Slang and "street" terminology will change as time goes by, so please reflect these changes in the play. Local law enforcement agencies are good sources for the latest word(s). (Of course, suitability of words for performers and audience remains a consideration.) Current "Gang" or "Street" movies or videos may also be helpful. 'HOODS is not intended to ever become a period piece.

If you can present the great percentage of 'HOODS only if certain sections are omitted or if you find yourself in an immutable time frame, please feel free to conscientiously abridge the play to answer these needs. DO NOT, however, cut the ending section, i. e. the outcomes, unless the referenced character was also cut from the earlier sections of the play.

Finally, no permission is given to elaborate, improvise, or expand upon the script. If other or additional material is presented at the same performance, it should be outside of the frame of 'HOODS and program-credited to author(s) of that material.

GANG TERMINOLOGY—LANGUAGE AND GRAFFITI

These terms were current at the time of the publication of 'HOODS, but will probably change rapidly and often. Check with local police juvenile divisions for updates.

“Bloods”—one of two major gang divisions. Their color is red. Members call each other “Blood.” They call Crip members “Crabs.”

“Crips”—the other major gang division. Their color is blue. Members call each other “Cuz.” They call Blood members “Slobs” or “Blobs.”

“Gangster,” “Gangsta” or “Ganxta”—terms for gang members.

“Hard Core”—an obsessed gang member. The gang defines his entire life.

“Set”—a sub-division of a larger gang, or the gang itself.

“Claiming”—claiming allegiance or membership in a certain gang or set.

’Banger or Gangbanger—a fighting gang member. (Not a sexual term in the gang world)

“Street Name”—a self-chosen name for a gang member.

“Tats” (tattoos)—gang identification. Often inscribed on the webbing between thumb and forefinger but can appear anywhere on the body.

“Cover my back”—protect me, run interference.

“Bust a cap”—shoot.

“Smoke him”—shoot him.

“Signing,” “Signs”—hand signals, signifying a certain gang.

“RNP” or “RIP”—Rest in Peace. Usually refers to a fallen gang member.

“In Honor of Our Home Boy”—Printed on shirt in respect of a dead gang member.

“5-O”—the police (pronounced “Five-Oh”).

“Gat”—gun. Usually a hand gun.

“Shank”—a homemade knife.

“OG”—Original Gangster—a founding member of a set.

“Jump In”—initiation into a gang through a beating by other members.

“Jump Out”—getting out of the gang through a beating by other members, typically much more violent than “jumping in.”

CLOTHING

Once again, this information reflects the date of publication of 'HOODS. Further, many of these clothing choices are often strictly cultural and not a reflection of gang affiliation.

Headgear:

Watch Cap (Toboggan)—worn primarily in winter but may be worn in summer. Pulled down to cover the ears with a small roll at the bottom.

Bandanna—“moco rag” worn just over the forehead, tied in the back. Various colors. May have member’s street name embroidered on the front. Usually folded lengthwise, two inches wide. Meant to intimidate as well as to identify as a gang member.

Hat—the “stingy brim” is often favored by gang members, but recently baseball caps and “bicycle” caps have been popular. May have the street name or gang name on the turned-up bill.

Floppy hats—often with jewelry attached.

Outerwear:

Trench Coat—worn to protect against elements and sometimes to conceal weapons. Dark trench also makes gangster look intimidating.

“Team” Jackets—large full-length jackets with logo of certain professional athletic organizations. Often hooded, called a “Hoody.”

Shirts:

Flannel—a long-time favorite, buttoned at collar and cuffs. Usually combined with bandanna.

T-shirt—worn during summer, round or V-neck, usually several sizes too large with bottom outside pants.

Undershirt (U-shirt)—commonly worn during summer, tucked into pants. “Buffed up” (muscular) gang members favor this shirt.

Pants:

Khaki Pants—khaki work pants, highly starched with a crease. Baggy and too long, sometimes slit up the side 6” to 8” above the ankle. Worn very large, a style called saggin’ or sagging.

Blue Jeans—highly starched, baggy (saggin’), rolled up in small rolls at the cuff.

Shoes:

Range from high-dollar tennis shoes to French-toed shoes. Leather shoes are highly shined.

Zoot Suits:

Some gangs wear zoot suits for formal occasions like weddings, baptisms, and presentations. For many, the cost is prohibitive.

Accessories:

Cane or walking-type umbrella.

Handkerchiefs—blue, red, other colors, hanging from rear pocket. Used to “fly the colors” of the gang set.

'HOODS

[At rise, MUSIC is playing. The setting suggests a city block with many front stoops at several levels. Ramps lead off Left and Right representing the continuation of the street. (A bare stage may also be used)]

Performers enter, in character, through the audience. GANG MEMBERS move to Down Right or Down Left. "GANG SURVIVORS" use the Center areas. SOLO CHARACTERS find positions at Left and Right related to whatever set pieces are used. Some performers stand, others sit, still others find alternative positions and levels. Scenes are played in turn, but there is the feeling that everything else continues. The street is almost a character. ENSEMBLE MEMBER parts are taken by appropriate characters or added "street chorus" members. MUSIC under]

ARMANDO. *[Entering. He is our Guide]* Welcome. Welcome to our . . . *[searching for a term]* theme park. Many exciting worlds. Pay one price and enjoy them all. Of course, the price is sometimes your life. But, hey, it's not your life. Not yet, at least.

There are lots of these places, and lots of names for them—the streets, the block, the neighborhood—sometimes we call it the "hood" for short. That probably fits best. So—our first stop: Frontier 'Hood.

[Where practicable, actions described in monologues, dialogues, and scenes throughout the play are acted out to make the performance more visually and emotionally involving. Some characters participate in the actions themselves, others function as narrators only]

FRONTIER 'HOOD

KA'RANNE. *[Enters, speaking, moving among the gangs]* A guy on TV said we have a crime problem in this neighborhood. I'd have never noticed if it wasn't for him. Tell you what. Come take a look out my Mama's window. *[Staring "through" the audience, as if looking out a window, seeing down among them and past them. Pockets of action accompany the narration]* Can you tell what's missing? Try this. You see any college textbooks down there? You see anybody digging through a trade school manual? No? So you figure nobody's been trained? Wrong. Look at that kid—about ten years old—by the car in the alley. The boy

with those plastic tubes he's selling? He's been trained by a father they send up the river for good next time he gets busted, so he puts his son on the street. Trained by a Mama that uses up half his stock before he can peddle it.

[Pointing to another area, other actions] How about that girl—the one I heard being born next door fourteen years ago—the one who's climbing into the back of that guy's van. Her stepdaddy trained her—all her stepdaddies trained her. Trained her to smoke the stuff she's living for now and how to do what it takes to get that smoke. They didn't teach her to be careful, or that she might die soon. But she'll figure it out. When it happens.

There are some people you can't see. They'll be out after awhile but you won't see them then, either . . . until it's too late. Muggers, burglars, rapists—all highly trained . . . trained by being frustrated, put down, cut out of everything that's decent. Violence teaches violence and we've got no shortage of teachers. And school's always open. *[She exits]*

OLO. *[At Left]* This neighborhood's like any place else. You take it the way it comes. But you still want a place to fit in, a place that's yours.

QUINT. So why a gang?

OLO. Because down here you get on one side or the other. And the cops can't do much. What's that leave?

QUINT. *[At Center. Sarcastically]* Gangs are a great idea, great status builders. When somebody asks . . .

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. What's your family's business?

QUINT. And you say, "Oh, we sell crack to fourth graders," that gets you respect everywhere.

YANCE. *[At Right]* We're kind of locked into this—gangs, clubs—whatever you want to call them. Most people don't think about it, but gangs have been around a long time. Especially down here. My father was in them. Even my grandfather was, in the early days.

ANOTHER ENSEMBLE MEMBER. And nobody wants out?

YANCE. Everybody wants out some of the time. But other times it seems like it's all we've got. Dad even jokes about it.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER (FATHER). We can't have a family reunion. They only let three people at a time in those visiting rooms at the state pen.

YANCE. Some days that's funny. Most days it's not.

TANK. *[At Left. His venom and intimidation tactics are directed at*

the audience] People say the gangs are nothing but an excuse for mindless violence. I say, "Who needs an excuse?"

NANNAE. *[At Center]* It's not enough they're killing each other, gang against gang. By now, it's open season. The cops are after them, State Troopers show up when it gets heavy, crazy old women sit in their front windows with shotguns, a Magnum hides under every candy counter. Everybody's shooting back—or shooting first. "Bang"—everybody's dead.

MARIA. *[Entering, speaking. Mimed action follows narration]* When my brother was born, his uncle bought him a tiny little bandanna. The right color, of course. He really looked like something in his diaper with that red thing tied low over his eyes. His uncle stayed in the middle of his life from then on. They were so close. Everything either of them did was just fine with the other one.

Of course, the gangs were part of our life. His uncle tried to talk it down, but what he said and what he did weren't the same thing, so when my brother turned thirteen, he wanted to join.

There's a gang initiation. They call it "Jumping in." Four or five of your own guys beat you for a couple of minutes. But my brother's initiation got out of hand. *[Action drops to slow motion]* Somebody slammed him into the ground and his head hit the curb real hard—the curb right by his uncle's feet. The blood didn't show on the bandanna. Not at first. *[UNCLE kneels beside the body, touches it, embraces it. Action resumes at normal speed]* All my uncle does now is drink. And get drunk. And pick fights. It's like he wants somebody to kill him, too. *[She exits. The "jumping in" ENSEMBLE returns to earlier positions as Zal's lines begin]*

ZAL. *[At Right]* I didn't just run out and join the gang.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. So how come you're in?

ZAL. I got invited to join. A bunch of us were. When we said, "No," we got invited again. We still weren't interested, so they backed off. But the next night we were standing in front of my house and a car came around the corner, lights out. We knew what that meant, so we started diving behind whatever we could find. A shotgun blast caught my brother in his ankle and shattered it.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. But that was cross-towners, right?

ZAL. That's what we got told. But no matter who did the shooting, all of a sudden joining the gang sounded like a lot better idea.

NANNAE. *[At Center]* There's a war down here. It never stops. And whether you join the gangs or you don't—you still get killed. And all it's about is a couple of blocks of pavement and dirt. People shouldn't die for dirt. Even if they always have.

QUINT. It's no war zone. In a war zone, you can tell who your enemies are. Like, with some gangs, you don't get in until you commit a crime—burglary, dealing, mugging.

NANNAE. *[Continuing Quint's thought]* That works as double insurance for the gang—it makes you a criminal and it lets other people in on it—so they can roll over on you if you foul up.

QUINT. *[Continuing Nannae's thought]* But check it out—they can roll over on you even if you don't foul up. They just have to THINK you fouled up.

TANK. *[Confronting an audience member]* You've got to have something. And when life gives you nothing, you start to take. If nobody minds you taking, that's fine. If they do, that's fine, too. Maybe better.

RAFAELA. *[She moves among the gang members, many of whom openly leer at her, make comments under their breath, and harass her]* Respect? Forget it. It's a useless word when all these macho types stand around sayin' . . .

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Who's that 'ho'?

RAFAELA. What century is it when all that a girl is worth depends on the arrangement of her body fat? *[Pointedly, to the males who are taunting her]* Learn it—if you're looking for raw meat, hang out at the butcher shop. *[To audience, particularly individual women]*

And you, girl. When a man, any man, but especially YOUR man, treats you like a thing, respond the way a thing does—which is to say, don't respond at all.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. *[Sarcastically]* You're really scarin' me.

RAFAELA. *[Ignoring the comment]* And if he keeps gettin' in your face or he starts beatin' you, don't BE a doormat—USE the doormat. Walk away—while you still can. *[She exits amid more disrespect]*

YANCE. Somebody said . . .

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. You got a retirement plan in that gang?

YANCE. I said, "Who knows? Nobody ever lived that long."

OLO. *[Confrontationally, to audience member]* What's all this about the streets not being safe? The streets are safe. Safe for us. You decide about you. *[Pause. He starts to turn away. On second thought . . .]* No, I guess we decide about you, too, don't we? You better keep us happy.