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*Dramatic Publishing*



by

**Suzan Zeder**

# STEP ON A CRACK

***Drama with optional music. Book and lyrics by Suzan Zeder. Music by John Engerman. Cast: 2m., 4w.*** A gifted playwright brilliantly captures the contemporary theatrical fantasies of Ellie, a little girl. This dramatization has been electrifying audiences of children and adults alike in both professional and amateur productions. In *Step on a Crack*, Ellie Murphy lived happily with her widowed father, Max, bowling, eating TV dinners and playing with junk. But now, suddenly, life is different. Max has remarried, and Ellie has a stepmother. Ellie and her imaginary friends, Lana and Frizbee, launch into a fantasy world as Ellie seeks to escape real-life problems. They romp through prison breaks, Cinderella, Snow White and Ellie's own funeral where "Everyone is really sorry for all the mean things they did to you." Only by running away and discovering what it is really like to be alone does Ellie begin to come to terms with herself and her own need for a mother. *Unit set suggesting Ellie's room, a bowling alley and the streets. Contemporary costumes and pieces. Approximate running time: 90 minutes to 2 hours. Optional music score available (QW3 - \$40). Musical: SW2. Non-musical: S1G.*

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Step on a Crack



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Suzan Zeder



**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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*To My Mother*

## FOREWARD

I offer this play to you with a profound respect for the complexity of childhood. As a writer, I have tried to confront the child within myself as honestly as possible in order to bring you a child of this moment. A funny, crazy, wildly imaginative child who arms herself with a full-blown fantasy life to fight her way through real life problems. Ellie's difficulty adjusting to her new stepmother is as classic as Cinderella and as timely as tomorrow.

I have been deeply gratified by audience reaction to this play. I remember one day after a matinee performance a child and a young woman sat quietly together in the empty lobby of the theatre. After a few moments the child turned to the woman and said, "That could have been about us." "Yes," the woman replied, "Do you want to talk about it?" The child thought for a moment and finally said, "Okay. Let's go home!"

Perhaps I might offer a bit of advice to potential producers and directors of this play. If a child actress with sufficient maturity, skill, and depth can be found; by all means cast her. But do not let this be a limitation. I have seen this play work equally well with a young adult in this role. Perhaps you might consider a college student with a bit of training behind her. I have even seen an impressive performance by a high school student.

If an adult actress is used I would urge her to spend some time with children; to notice how they move; to listen to the patterns of their laughter; to watch them closely in the whirlwind of temper tantrums, in joyous flights of fantasy, and in quiet moments of frustration and despair. All of these things are part of Ellie. It is my sincere wish that Ellie be played as a real child and not as an adult comment on childhood.

Above all, please have fun with this script . . . I have!

— *Suzan Zeder*



## **Musical Version of STEP ON A CRACK**

This edition of Suzan Zeder's widely acclaimed play has been slightly revised by the playwright. It is dedicated to those producers who wish to stage this play.

A musical version of STEP ON A CRACK was introduced by Seattle's PONCHO Theatre at the 1978 New Orleans Convention of the Children's Theatre Association of America. It is now available with the purchase of this playbook and the score by John Engerman, with songs by Suzan Zeder.

Cues for music and songs are indicated in this text by asterisks\*. The Engerman/Zeder score contains all dialogue bridges or alterations required within the text of the play. Producers wishing to stage this musical version may obtain rights and scores from Anchorage Press Plays, Inc.

*There is an additional royalty charge for each performance of the musical version.*

## CHARACTERS

Ellie Murphy: A ten year old girl.  
Max Murphy: Her father, about thirty-seven.  
Lucille Murphy: Her stepmother, about thirty-five.  
Lana: Ellie's imaginary friend.  
Frizbee: Another imaginary friend.  
Voice: Ellie's alter-ego.

## SETTING

Ellie's house  
A bowling alley  
The streets

## TIME

The Present

The premiere production of *STEP ON A CRACK* was presented on March 14, 1974, at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, with the following cast:

Ellie .....	Martha LaFollette
Lucille .....	Mary Jo Lutticken
Max .....	Ron DeLucia
Lana .....	Jackie Ezzell
Frizbee .....	John Rainone
Voice .....	Jennifer Glenn

The production was directed by Susan Pearson.

Set Design by .....	John Tillotson
Costume Design by .....	Nina Vail
Faculty Advisor .....	Charley Helfert

The cover graphic is the set as designed for *STEP ON A CRACK*  
by John Tillotson

# STEP ON A CRACK

By Suzan Zeder

The main playing space consists of two areas: ELLIE'S bedroom and a living room. A free standing door separates the two areas. The set should be little more than a brightly colored framework. Each space has a ladder which is hung with the various costumes and props used throughout the play.

ELLIE'S room is the larger of the two spaces. It is outlandishly decorated with old pieces of junk, flags, banners, old clothes etc. which have been rescued by ELLIE from her father's junk yard. The room is a mess, strewn with piles of clothes and junk. Up center is a larger box marked TOYZ'. At the far side of the room there is a stool surrounded by a simple frame. This frame indicates a mirror. This is VOICE'S area. VOICE never moves from this spot until the very end of the play. It would be helpful to have a microphone and P.A. speaker here. VOICE will make all of the sound effects used during the play.

The living room, MAX and LUCILLE'S space, is conspicuously neat. A coffee table and a few chairs indicate this area.

\*

At Rise: ELLIE, MAX, LUCILLE and VOICE are onstage. MAX holds one end of a jumprope, the other end is tied to the set. VOICE sits on the stool. LUCILLE sits in the living room area. ELLIE jumps as MAX turns the rope for her. She jumps for a few seconds to establish a rhythm.

MAX: Cinderella . . . Dressed in yeller . . . Went downtown to meet her feller. Cinderella . . . Dressed in yeller . . . Went downtown to meet her feller. [*MAX continues to chant and ELLIE to jump as LUCILLE speaks.*]

LUCILLE: Grace, Grace . . . Dressed in lace . . . Went upstairs to wash her face. Grace, Grace . . . Dressed in lace . . . Went upstairs to wash her face.

VOICE: [*Joins in*] Step on a Crack . . . Break your Mother's back. Step on a crack . . . Break your Mother's back. Step on a Crack . . . Break your Mother's back! [*ELLIE jumps out of the rope and hops four times firmly.*]

ELLIE: CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! Step on a crack, break your STEpmother's back!

VOICE: Red Light! [*All freeze.*]

VOICE: Ellie Murphy used to be a perfectly good little girl. Green Light! [*All come to life for a second MAX and ELLIE take a few steps toward each other.*]

VOICE: Red Light! [*All freeze.*]

VOICE: Her mom died when Ellie was just four years old, and everybody felt so sorry for her. They said "Oh you poor little girl." And they brought her extra helpings of cake and lots of presents. Ellie lived with her Pop, Max Murphy, boss of Murphy's Wrecking and Salvage Company. Green Light! *[During the next few lines MAX and ELLIE play a game of*

ELLIE: Not it!

MAX: Knock, knock . . .

ELLIE: Who's there?

MAX: Banana.

ELLIE: Banana who?

MAX: Knock, knock . . .

ELLIE: Who's there?

MAX: Banana.

ELLIE: Banana who?

MAX: Knock, knock . . .

ELLIE: Who's there?

MAX: Orange.

ELLIE: Orange who?

MAX: Orange you glad I didn't say banana?

VOICE: Red Light! *[All freeze.]*

VOICE: They played tag and went bowling; they ate T.V. dinners and practiced baseball for six years and they were very happy. Green Light! *[ELLIE and MAX mime practicing baseball]*

MAX: Listen Midget, if I told you once I told you a million times, you gotta keep your eye on the ball. *[He throws an imaginary baseball, ELLIE hits it and MAX follows the ball with his eyes and sees LUCILLE.]*

MAX: Fantastic!

VOICE: Red Light! *[All freeze.]*

VOICE: About two months ago Ellie went to camp and Pop met a pretty lady who taught music. Green Light! [ELLIE and MAX hug goodbye. ELLIE moves up her ladder and scratches her bottom, she mimes writing.]

ELLIE: Dear Pop, Today we went camping in the woods and guess where I got poison ivy? [Max moves over to LUCILLE]

MAX: [Slyly] Hi, my name is Max, Max Murphy.

LUCILLE: Pleased to meet you Max, I'm Lucille.

VOICE: Red Light! [All freeze.]

VOICE: And Pop liked Lucille and Lucille liked Pop. Green Light! [ELLIE puts a blindfold over her eyes]

ELLIE: Dear Pop, I can't go swimming today cause I got pink eye.

VOICE: Ellie came back from camp and everything in her whole life was different. [ELLIE, MAX and LUCILLE play blind man's bluff.]

ELLIE: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 . . . Ready or not here I come.

MAX: We're over here.

ELLIE: Where? Am I getting warmer?

MAX: Naw, you're a mile off.

ELLIE: Am I getting warmer?

VOICE: Red Light! [All freeze.]

VOICE: Pop and Lucille got married. Green Light! [MAX and LUCILLE move into wedding positions. They mime an exchange of rings and kiss.]

ELLIE: I said am I getting warmer? Hey Pop where did you . . . [ELLIE takes off the blindfold and sees them kissing. She claps her hand over her eyes and giggles.]

VOICE: Red Light! [All freeze.]

VOICE: Everything was different. Lucille cooked well balanced meals with vegetables. She kept the house neat and sewed buttons on all Ellie's clothing. Pop liked Lucille a lot, he wanted Ellie to like her too but somewhere deep inside Ellie's head this little voice kept saying . . . Look how pretty she is . . .

ELLIE: Look how pretty she is.

VOICE: Look how neat she is . . .

ELLIE: Look how neat she is.

VOICE: Pop likes her much better than he likes you.

ELLIE: No!

VOICE: Oh yes he does! [ELLIE turns away]

VOICE: Ellie Murphy used to be a perfectly good little girl. Green Light!  
[MAX exits. ELLIE moves into her room and picks up a Whammo paddle-ball. LUCILLE moves into the living room area and sets up a music stand and practices singing scales. She has a beautiful voice.]

ELLIE: [Hitting the paddle-ball] 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246 . . . [ELLIE misses, sighs, and starts again.]

ELLIE: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14 . . . [ELLIE misses, sighs, and starts again.]

ELLIE: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 . . . [ELLIE misses.]

ELLIE: I'll never make 300! 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 . . . [ELLIE misses. She crosses to the mirror. VOICE mimes her gestures.]

ELLIE: If I could make 300 I'd be famous. I'd be the world's champion. I'd be rich and famous and everyone in the whole world would come up to me and . . . How de do? Yes, it was very difficult, but I just kept practicing and practicing. No, it wasn't easy. [LUCILLE sings louder.]

VOICE: Considering all the racket SHE was making.

ELLIE: Considering all the racket SHE was making.

VOICE: How could anyone expect to concentrate with all that toot toot de doot?

ELLIE: How could anyone expect to concentrate with all that toot toot de doot..

VOICE: What does she think this is Grand Opree or something? [ELLIE clutches her throat and mimics LUCILLE, she warbles off-key.]

ELLIE: Laaaaa . . . Laaaaaaa, Laaaaaaa, Laaaaaaa. [*LUCILLE hears her and stops.*]

LUCILLE: Ellinor? Did you call me?

ELLIE: No. [*LUCILLE resumes the scales. ELLIE gets an idea. She crosses to the toy box and pulls out a wierd assortment of junk; a couple of old hats, a black cloak, a deflated inner tube, silver shoes, and a set of Dracula fangs. ELLIE dresses herself and makes à couple of menacing passes at the mirror. VOICE mimics her action. ELLIE sneaks out of the room and up behind LUCILLE.*]

ELLIE: I am Count Dracula and I have come to suck your blood!

LUCILLE: [*Startled*] Oh my!

ELLIE: Did I scare you?

LUCILLE: You startled me.

ELLIE: What are you doing anyway?

LUCILLE: I am just running through a few scales.

ELLIE: Do you have to?

LUCILLE: Well, yes. The voice is just like any other instrument, you have to practice every day.

ELLIE: You call that MUSIC? All that toot toot de doot?

LUCILLE: Well, scales aren't exactly music but . . .

ELLIE: [*Singing very off-key.*] "Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting." Uh . . . uh . . . uh . . . hu! \*\*

LUCILLE: Well, ummm that's very nice but . . .

ELLIE: [*Lying on her back with feet in the air.*] "I've got tears in my ears from lying on my back crying out my eyes over you." \*\*

LUCILLE: Ellinor, what in the world are you wearing?

ELLIE: Pretty neat huh? I got this stuff from Pop, it's from the yard. He said I could keep it. You should go down there, he's got some great stuff.

\*\*These songs should be constantly changed to songs that are currently popular.

LUCILLE: Oh Ellinor, you have such a nice room and so many lovely toys.  
Why do you keep bringing home all this junk?

ELLIE: This isn't junk! It's perfectly good stuff!

LUCILLE: But people have thrown it away.

ELLIE: That doesn't mean it isn't any good! How would you like to be thrown away?

LUCILLE: When I was your age I had a collection of dolls from all over the world. I used to make clothes for them and make up stories about them. You know I still have those dolls. I gave them to my brother for his children, maybe I could write to him and we could . . .

ELLIE: Dolls! Ugghhh! I like this stuff better. Besides most of it isn't mine. Most of this belongs to Lana and Frizbee.

LUCILLE: Oh?

ELLIE: This tire is for Frizbee's motorcycle and these hats and beautiful shoes are for Lana. She's a movie star and she needs these things in her work.

LUCILLE: I thought you told me she was a Roller Derby Queen.

ELLIE: She's both! Oh, the Dracula fangs . . . they're mine.

LUCILLE: Just put them away when you are through. Have you finished cleaning up your room yet?

ELLIE: Ohhh I have been busy.

LUCILLE: You promised to do it before your father came home.

ELLIE: Pop doesn't care. He never used to make me clean up my room.

LUCILLE: Look, why don't I give you a hand. Together we can do it in no time.

ELLIE: No way! You'll just make me throw stuff out. [*ELLIE walks back to her room and stands in her doorway.*]

ELLIE: Nobody gets in my room without a pass! [*She slams the door, LUCILLE sighs and turns back to her music.*]

VOICE: Red Light! [*All freeze.*]



VOICE: She doesn't like you. [*ELLIE is drawn to the mirror.*]

ELLIE and VOICE: Pick up your room you messy little girl. Why don't you play with dolls like normal children? You're freaky and you like junk. You could have such a lovely room if it wasn't such a mess.

VOICE: She could never like a messy little girl like you. Green Light! [*LUCILLE resumes her scales. ELLIE listens for a second and begins to mimic her.\*ELLIE leaps to the top of the toy box and warbles in a high squeaky voice. FRIZBEE pops up from under a pile of dirty clothes.*]

FRIZBEE: Bravo! Bravo! What a beautiful voice you have! You sing like an angel! You sing like a bird, only better. I kiss your hand. May I have your autograph?

ELLIE: Why certainly young man! [*ELLIE scribbles on his back*]

ELLIE: "To Frizbee from Ellie, the world's greatest opera singer."

FRIZBEE: I will treasure this forever. Here this is for you! [*FRIZBEE pulls a flower from nowhere and presents it to ELLIE.*]\*

LANA: [*Her voice comes from the toy box.*] Everybody out of my way. [*ELLIE jumps off the box, the lid flies open and LANA pops out.*]

LANA: Ellie Murphy, the great opera singer, do you have anything to say to our viewers at home? \*

ELLIE: How de do.

LANA: How did you get to be such a great opera singer?

ELLIE: Oh it was very difficult. The voice is just like any other instrument you have to practice every day. [*FRIZBEE presents her with a bowling pin.*]

FRIZBEE: Ellie Murphy I am pleased and proud to present you with this singer of the year award.

ELLIE: Dear friends, I thank you and I have only one thing to say, I deserved it. I practiced every day . . . [*LUCILLE starts to sing a beautiful melody . ELLIE moves toward the mirror.*]

ELLIE: I practiced until my throat was sore from singing and . . .

VOICE: Red Light! [*All freeze.*]

VOICE: You'll never be as good as Lucille. [*VOICE snatches the pin away from her.*]

VOICE: She's a much better singer than you are. Green Light.

ELLIE: [*Grabs for the pin*] This is MY prize and I deserve it! [*They struggle with the pin*]

ELLIE: [*To LANA and FRIZBEE.*] Hey you guys! [*They rush to her aid. The pin is tossed in the air and FRIZBEE catches it.*]

FRIZBEE: Ellie Murphy I am pleased and proud to present you with this singer of the year award.

ELLIE: Thank you for my prize. It is neat! [*There is the sound of thunderous applause. LUCILLE crosses to ELLIE's door and knocks. The applause stops instantly.*]

LUCILLE: Ellinor? [*LANA and FRIZBEE freeze.*]

ELLIE: Who goes there?

LUCILLE: May I come in?

ELLIE: What's the password?

LUCILLE: Please?

ELLIE: [*Peeking out*] Have you got a pass?

[*LUCILLE enters and looks around.*]

LUCILLE: Who were you talking to?

ELLIE: Lana and Frizbee.

LUCILLE: [*Playing along*] OH! Are they still here?

[*Frizbee pops his head up and makes a rude sound, then disappears into the box.*]

ELLIE: Sure, Frizbee just did a raspberry.

LUCILLE: Oh? [*LANA crosses in front of LUCILLE making ugly faces at her.*]

ELLIE: And Lana's making faces . . . like this and this and this . . . .  
[*LANA goes into the toy box. LUCILLE crosses to the middle of the room crouches down and speaks into empty air.*]

LUCILLE: Were you two helping Ellie clean up her room?

ELLIE: Lucille, they're not here. They went into the toy box.

LUCILLE: [*Playing along a bit too much*] Oh I see. Do they live in the toy box?

ELLIE: [*Nonplussed.*] It's too small to live in there. They just sit there sometimes.

LUCILLE: Oh. Please Ellie, let me help you. We'll have this place cleaned up in no time. Now where does this go?

ELLIE: No deal! You throw out too much!

[*ELLIE starts putting things away.*]

LUCILLE: Oh Ellinor, you've lost another button. I just sewed that one on too.

ELLIE: It is a scientific fact that some people are allergic to buttons.

[*ELLIE looks hard at LUCILLE*]

Hey, Lucille, how old are you?

LUCILLE: [*A bit taken aback.*] Uhhh, well, I'm thirty-five.

ELLIE: [*Very serious*] Boy that's old.

LUCILLE: Well, it's not that old.

ELLIE: Do you use a lot of make-up?

LUCILLE: I use some.

ELLIE: A lot? Do you put that goopy stuff on your eyes to make them look big?

LUCILLE: Would you like me to show you about make-up?

ELLIE: Uhhhgg. NO! Make-up is for girlies and OLD people.

LUCILLE: Come on Ellinor, let's get this room done before your father gets home. [*MAX enters with a football helmet and a feather duster for ELLIE.*]

MAX: Anybody home?

ELLIE: Too late! *[ELLIE runs to greet him and jumps into his arms. He gives her the helmet and duster, as LUCILLE enters ELLIE hides them behind her back and sneaks them into her room.]*

MAX: Hey Midget.

ELLIE: Neato. Thanks.

*[LUCILLE approaches to hug him.]*

LUCILLE: Hello dear, you're early.

MAX: Be careful, I'm a mess. I gotta wash up. *[LUCILLE gets him a rag. He wipes his hands and then kisses her. He sits down to take off his boots. ELLIE enters with his house shoes.]*

MAX: Hey Ellie, what's the matter with your shirt?

*[MAX points to an imaginary spot on her shirt, ELLIE looks down and MAX tweaks her nose.]*

MAX: Ha! Hah! Gotcha! Can't have your nose back. Not till you answer three knock knocks . . . Let's see . . . Knock, knock . . .

ELLIE: *[With her nose still held.]* Who's there?

MAX: Dwain.

ELLIE: Dwain who?

MAX: Dwain the bathtub I'm dwoining.

ELLIE: Hey, I got one. Knock, knock.

MAX: Who's there?

ELLIE: DeGaulle.

MAX: Degaulle who?

ELLIE: *[Crossing her eyes]* De-gaulle-f ball hit me in the head and dats why I talk dis way.

MAX: Ohhhh.

ELLIE: Oh I got another one Pop. Knock, knock. . .

LUCILLE:     *[Jumping in.]* Who's there? *[ELLIE shoots her a nasty look and turns away.]*

ELLIE:       Nobody.

LUCILLE:     *[Puzzled]* Nobody who?

ELLIE:       *[Insolently]* Just nobody that's all! *[MAX and LUCILLE exchange a look.]*

MAX:         I've still got your nose.

ELLIE:       *[Back in the game]* Give it back you Bozo.

MAX:         Nope you gotta get it. *[MAX pretends to hold her nose just out of reach. ELLIE jumps for it. MAX tosses it to LUCILLE.]*

MAX:         Here Lucille, catch! *[LUCILLE, confused, misses it.]*

LUCILLE:     Huh? Oh I'm sorry.

*The game is over and Ellie scowls.]*

ELLIE:       Pop, do I have to clean up my room? Can I get you a beer? Can I watch T.V.? Do I have to throw out all my good stuff?

MAX:         Whoa! What's going on?

ELLIE:       Can I watch T.V.?

MAX:         Sure.

LUCILLE:     Max, I have been trying to get her to clean up her room for days.

MAX:         Awww it's Friday afternoon.

LUCILLE:     Max.

MAX:         Clean up your room Ellie.

ELLIE:       Awww Pop, you never used to make me.

MAX:         Sorry Midget. This ship's got a new captain.

ELLIE:       Awww Pop!

MAX:         Do what your mother says.