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Dramatic Publishing





I Know I Saw Gypsies

A Theatrical Presentation

The Work of Many Young Writers

Adapted by

TOM ERHARD



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(I KNOW I SAW GYPSIES)

ISBN 0-87129-221-1

NOTE ABOUT STAGING

This script can be produced in half a dozen ways, all of them easy. Because it runs under forty-five minutes, it can be read or staged in either a regular class or at an assembly, and is ideal for play festivals. Presented with another one-act, it makes a full evening's entertainment. Although the script was originally produced with four women and two men, it has been done with as many as twenty students. Because speaking roles can be rearranged, the script is ideal for giving everyone a chance. Staging can vary all the way from an actual reading with a minimum of action to full theatrical production. Probably the best approach is to follow the contemporary trend seen in such plays as *Equus*, *Amadeus*, and *Children of a Lesser God* and let the audience use its imagination. Thus, six chairs — or even better, stools or cubes — can be moved around quickly and easily by the performers to become athletic bleachers, automobiles, a family dining room, a bed in a nursing home, a schoolroom, or whatever. Set expense is zero. Dress the cast members identically — dark slacks and turtlenecks do fine for this kind of show — and use constant pantomime and reaction so that all six performers are involved in the action at all times. Staged this way, the poems and stories are easy to bring to life as an extremely creative form of theatre. The stage directions in the script have been used with great success and considerable ease in several dozen high schools. But don't hesitate to create your own additional business to enrich the script still further.

The only props needed for your production are as follows: A sweat band, several school books, a towel, a box of Cheerios, toy soldiers, a teddy bear, a football, several flashlights, a bowl, a tennis shoe, a match box, a pen and a piece of paper.

**THE STUDENT-WRITERS
IN ORDER OF PRESENTATION**

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Katie Kramer | 25. Michele Weeks |
| 2. Kathy Looney | 26. Kathy McGaha |
| 3. Mark Connell | 27. Jvonnie Johnson |
| 4. Kenny Mabery | 28. Matt Stothart |
| 5. Jim Rodriguez | 29. Lisa Beckett |
| 6. Anne Schwartz | 30. Michele Jensen |
| 7. Patricia Sallen | 31. Jvonnie Johnson |
| 8. Pamela Murray | 32. Denise Chavez |
| 9. Christine Pasanen | 33. Kernie Hair |
| 10. Laura Carter | 34. Agnes Pratt |
| 11. Kip Purcell | 35. Kip Purcell |
| 12. Amy Arcaro | 36. Theresa Martinez |
| 13. Karen Gregory | 37. Dan Erhard |
| 14. Sherri McCarthy | 38. Jeannie Blackmon |
| 15. Brian Sheffield | 39. Octavio Solis |
| 16. Charlene Newlin | 40. Beth Blair |
| 17. Barry Adkins | 41. Karyn Ames |
| 18. Amy Laird | 42. Mark Cook |
| 19. Laurie Bacastow | 43. Lorita Lynn Benell |
| 20. Sherri McCarthy | 44. Klaire Rowley |
| 21. Patricia Sallen | 45. Ruth Davis |
| 22. Michael Aaron | 46. Edward Rodriguez |
| 23. Dolores Startzman | 47. Kathy Sena |
| 24. Christie Cochrell | 48. Tim Tays |

*For Jim Mealy . . .
good friend, fine teacher,
who has read more than 20,000 stories and poems
by teenagers and still shares my excitement over the
creativity of young people.*

I KNOW I SAW GYPSIES

AS LIGHTS COME UP: The stage is empty. Approximately four minutes of introductory music [country/folk] is played from offstage. Recorded music will do, but live is better. Four GIRLS and two BOYS, all dressed to match, come on stage carrying light plastic chairs [or stools, or cubes]. The entire performance should give the flavor of improvisational theatre — and the characters who are not speaking should react with appropriate pantomime. For the most part throughout, BOY 1 is a bit shy, BOY 2 macho, GIRL 1 is romantic, GIRL 2 in a shell, GIRL 3 protecting herself with cynicism, and GIRL 4 a realist.

GIRL FOUR.

I am not afraid
Of black widow spiders
Or planets colliding with the earth,
But of empty rooms
And empty houses
And doors swinging on squeaky hinges that are
Rusting from long disuse.

I am not afraid
Of the howling Furies
Or the wrath of omnipotent Zeus,
But of big cities
And callous people

And waking up to cry at midnight
Without knowing why.

I am not afraid
Of mythical monsters
Or gold-eating, fire-breathing dragons,
But of growing old
And being alone
(Pause.)
And not being able to write a poem.

GIRL FOUR (openly addressing audience). Life, to those of us
in high school, is either . . .

GIRL ONE and BOY ONE. Bliss!

GIRL FOUR. Or . . .

GIRL TWO, GIRL THREE, BOY TWO. Misery!

GIRL ONE (gently).
Winds that blow cool
and fresh
Wash my mind
with the happiness
I find
in life.

BOY TWO (angrily).
Muddy cleats pound the concrete floor
Angry fists slam into a locker door.
Curses are muttered as sweat rolls down
Exhausted faces absorb the sound
Of total frustration filling the air.
The mass of faces molded in a single stare
Overlooks the slumped bodies draped on the bench
And recalls the scoreboard with a flinch.
Muddy jerseys lie heaped upon the ground.

As steam rises, the showers make a hissing sound.
The tape makes a ripping noise as mile
After mile is torn off ankles and arms while
From the training room solemn players file.
As lockers bang shut, coats are thrown on.
They push against the night air and are gone.

BOY ONE.

I threw my arms wide with gladness,
My fingers, reaching for the sky,
 left prints upon the sun,
And then turned downward
To wave a good morning to the world.

For one swift, fleeting moment
 I held the wonder of the world
 cupped in my hand,
Feeling the glory of it with my fingertips.
And my soul threw back its head
 and laughed
With the joy of being.

GIRL TWO (giving BOY TWO a contemptuous look).

I am reading the poem
by Williams that you
love so very much;
classical music is
playing on the radio;
it sounds so much
like the end of the
world that my heart
falls out of my pocket
and rolls around the
floor (Pause.) like ten thousand
crimson marbles.

GIRL THREE.

Royal Seduction.

(Pause.)

Hills of ice cream
rivered with sauce
Capped with snowy cream
and sprinkled with nuts.
One red cherry reigns.

Slender strips of potato
bubbled in tubs of grease
Laying on roughened paper
they drain their excess.
Salt crystals glisten majestically.

Golden yellow flakes
fringed in a lacy crust,
Seas of lemon brightness
fill the well.

Fluffy singed peaks swell regally.

(Pause, then great agony, for comedy.)

Oh, the pitfalls of a diet!

GIRL FOUR. Maybe our situation was most clearly described by the great playwright Eugene O'Neill in his phrase, "the intolerable chalice of life." So horrifying, yet so wonderful. (Pause.) This look at life, through the eyes of people like yourself, has been written *by* teenagers. These poems and stories all come from the annual Southwest High School Creative Writing Awards . . . a program which goes into five hundred high schools in seven states. (Pause.) After all, who can better understand our minds and feelings than ourselves? (Definite pause.) And even though we know better . . . what's *the one* elusive rainbow that we always chase? Popularity. (The other GIRLS pantomime cheerleading. The BOYS

pantomime being athletic heroes as GIRL TWO speaks.)

GIRL TWO.

I don't care that I lost.

I didn't want to be
a cheerleader, anyway.

I mean,
when you're a cheerleader,
you always have to be
bright and charming and bubbly and cute and spirty.
You always have to look good
for those football players
who swarm all over you.

And for the cameras
when you get your picture taken
umpteenth times for the yearbook.
Besides, during football and basketball seasons,
you're always busy, busy, busy,
and you rarely get any time
to yourself.

(Pause.)

Even the fact that I would look super
in a cheerleading outfit
doesn't matter.

(Pause. She joins the group. They leave her alone.)

I don't care at all.

(BOY ONE and BOY TWO dance gracefully, cheek to cheek,
with GIRL ONE and GIRL FOUR. On the line "He's too
busy" BOY TWO dances very close to GIRL THREE and
makes eye contact, which is agony for GIRL THREE.)

GIRL THREE.

Wallflower,
shy and lonely,

waiting for life
to ask her for
a dance.

But he's too busy
to notice, as he
twirls around the
ballroom a second
time with a
prettier, gayer flower.

She will forever
stand by the wayside
Not shunned, just
ignored. And the
hurt tears inside her
will gradually dry
up, and with age,
harden into tiny
stones.

BOY ONE.

My aloneness is not a lovely night-thing
that stares at stars
and walks mistily between rows of roses.
(Any white-robed Emily can wander in her garden
and smell the aloneness of the dark.)
I used to be like that.
Now, my aloneness is a feeling of the day:
The bite of a fire ant —
The hot, hard concrete stairway —
The sun burning on my blue jeans —
The sound of a ragged scrap of cellophane
dancing across the asphalt with the wind —
The sound of a basket ball game, loud and

sweaty and spitting —
The smell of cigarettes and automobiles —
The feel of gravel in the dust —
The thirst in my mouth.
My aloneness is not a marble bench in the moonlight;
It is a tough, stubborn grass
That gasps and squeezes through cracks
In the baked sidewalk.

GIRL FOUR (as the others arrange their chairs like desks in a schoolroom). We may agonize over our popularity, and think nothing else matters — but day after long day, even though we try to ignore it, we are in school. (A sigh.) Those classes. (Pause.) How about Mrs. Crenshaw's English class? (GIRL FOUR becomes the teacher.)

GIRL ONE (she has been called on, and is in despair.)

In darkening depths
of alliteration
lie devious syntactic traps:

deadly metaphor
odious onomatopoeia
and the fangs of horrific synecdoche

all waiting for little
simile —
like helpless Innocence —
to meander and gambol
gaily by

just waiting for unsuspecting
personification

to POUNCE
POUnce
Pounce
pounce

just waiting
 waiting
 waiting

to confuse
and confound

Naive me.
(She slumps into her seat.)

GIRL FOUR (still the teacher). In some classes it's never-ending horsing around. The classroom part of Drivers' Ed is always chaos . . . until . . . the day of the automobile accident film.

(BOY TWO and GIRL ONE move aside out of the classroom set and pantomime chivalric actions to the first three stanzas. When Girl Four reaches the fourth stanza, they slide back into their classroom seats and join in staring at the imaginary film. At the end, BOY TWO rushes out, gagging.)

GIRL FOUR.

He cradles her head in two palms —
 it is night
 it is love
and the crickets play harmony.
She rests secure in his arms
 and would not really care
 if the moon were extinguished.