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*Dramatic Publishing*



# THE PLAY CALLED NOAH'S FLOOD

Drama/Comedy  
by  
SUZAN ZEDER

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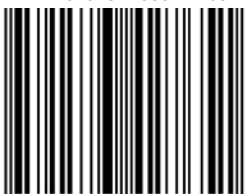
**AATE Distinguished Play Award Winner**

A play of universal delight about townspeople making a play in the Medieval era.

*Drama/comedy. By Suzan Zeder. Cast: 10m., 8w., with doubling, or increase the cast number by distributing the 49 roles. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the tiny town of Frogsham musters its dubious resources to mount the Corpus Christi play of *Noah and the Flood*. This medieval play-within-a-play presents a teeming townful of characters who mirror their biblical pageant counterparts, including the Seven Deadly Sins. It also provides a humorous glimpse of 15<sup>th</sup>-century stagecraft and the timeless panic of performers who must go on before the show is ready. Marvelous opportunities for medieval spectacle, innovative staging, costumes, masks, dance, all with an expandable cast, this script features a full-length adaptation of the *Noah* play based upon the celebrated Chester and Wakefield Cycles. *Unit set. Simple, medieval costumes. Incidental music score by Daniel Paul Davis available. Code: PF3.**

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The Play Called Noah's Flood



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**SUZANZEDER**



**Dramatic Publishing**

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(THE PLAY CALLED NOAH'S FLOOD)

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## Dedication

To the Flint Youth Theatre, Flint Michigan, who took the first chance with this play ... twice!

and

To Susan Pearson and Judith Levinson who helped keep the Ark on course.

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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## CHARACTERS

John Talbot	Blacksmith	Noah
Petula Talbot	His wife	Mrs Noah
Ira Talbot	His son	Shem
		Anger
Henry Wainwright	Carpenter	Ham
Eleanor Wainwright	Wood cutter	Mrs Ham
Nicholas Falconer	Shoemaker	Japeth
Jennifer Andrews	Seamstress	Mrs Japeth
Yerna Covetine	Weaver	Mrs Shem
		Envy
Pipe Mandel	Laborer	God
Hester Mountamous	Baker	Gluttony
Laggard Slog	Town Layabout	Sloth
Enoch Thornscrew	Money-Lender	Greed
Stephen Fitz-Stephens	Scribe	Pride
Lavidia Sly	Fruit Seller	Lechery
Verba Mandible	Brewer	Gossip
Loquilla Finn	Fishmonger	Gossip
Page	Page to Crinch	
Sir Criticus Crinch	The Pageant Master	

If cast need be expanded, others can serve as animals, musicians, extra townspeople, etc.

If cast need be reduced, sins can play animals and waves. But the 18 listed characters and roles are a minimum.

## SETTING

The town square and surrounding shops in Frodsham, a tiny town near Chester England.

## TIME

A bright June morning in 1491.

The premiere production of **THE PLAY CALLED NOAH'S FLOOD** was presented by the Flint Youth Theatre, in 1972. It was directed by Suzan Zeder and produced by Ann Elgood. A revised version was presented by the same theatre in 1982 with a different cast, directed by Judith Levinson. Both companies contributed enormously to the development of this script.

Original musical score for the pageant of **NOAH'S FLOOD** was composed by Daniel Davis and is available through the composer.



## Notes from the Playwright

The medieval mystery play dates back to a time when the world was just waking up from the Dark Ages. As cities and towns sprang to life from feudal fiefs; the plays were developed to teach Bible stories to an illiterate population. The plays began piously as lessons, but by the fifteenth century had blossomed into full blown theatrical extravaganzas with dazzling special effects and slapstick comedy. Actors, designers and directors were untrained amateurs infused with the love of doing. Scripts were shaped through performance and roles were handed down from generation to generation.

My own odyssey with the development of this play parallels its historical development. In 1972 Ann Elgood and the Flint Youth theatre gave me my first professional job in the theatre as playwright in residence and director of this play. I was barely out of graduate school and the challenge of bringing theatre history to life fascinated me. I adapted the 'pageant' from the original Chester and Townley cycle plays, maintaining the rhyme scheme, but taking the language out of Old English. The plot of the play which surrounds the pageant was created improvisationally by the teenagers in the summer company.

In the past eleven years there have been three formulative productions of this script, two by the Flint Youth Theatre and one at the University of Washington, under the direction of Susan Pearson. In all three productions, relatively young casts have worked to help give the script the shape you see here. It is fitting that these young people have helped to create a play about a time when the theatre was still in its youth.

I encourage you to be bold in your approach to the staging of this play. It will work in a regular proscenium auditorium space; but it cries out to be staged in a large open space, surrounding an audience, as in the medieval courtyards. It might also work outdoors, in a church, community hall, or in an interesting architectural environment.

I have departed from many of the actual conventions of medieval staging including having women take roles in the pageant. I have done so because I feel the essence of the play lies in what it says about theatre as a community collaboration rather than an historical portrait.

I give you this new/old play as a celebration of the power of the theatre to entertain, educate, energize and to hold a mirror up to our timeless selves.

Suzan Zeder  
Dallas  
1984

## THE PLAY CALLED NOAH'S FLOOD

By Suzan Zeder

The market place of the small medieval village of Frodsham. The time is early June in 1491. In Portugal, Columbus is still raising money for his voyage, but that is of no concern here in England. King Henry is stirring up another of the endless wars with France, but life in this sleepy little hamlet near Chester is peaceful to the point of indolence.

Center stage is the town square featuring a tall pole with a bell on it, used to assemble the townspeople in times of peril or celebration. Surrounding the square are a number of small shops, each with an awning or a banner, raised to signify that the shop is open. The shops are as follows: a blacksmith's forge, with anvil and hammers; a shoemaker's shop, with cobbler's bench; a carpenter's shop, with saws and wood; a tailor shop, with a spinning wheel, colorful bolts of fabric and the unfinished beginnings of costumes. The awnings are closed.

Music begins, lights come up, the town wakes. PIPE MANDEL enters first; he looks around to see if anyone is awake, knocks on the platform bearing the blacksmith's shop, and gets no response. He crosses to the tall pole, unrolls a scroll bearing the words "*Rehearsal Today! Be There!*" and tacks it to the pole. He rings the bell.

One by one the awnings open and the townspeople enter and begin to work in rhythmic activity. The work rhythms build in a kind of overture with the music. NICHOLAS taps at bench; HENRY saws wood; JENNIFER spins; JOHN joins in last at the anvil. Each craftsman greets PIPE.

While this is taking place, others enter from the house, hawking their wares as they come down the aisles toward the stage. Music builds with the sounds of the craftsmen and the cries of the vendors. HESTER MOUNTA-MOUS approaches the stage, she is a very large Baker with a cart heaped with breads and pastries.

HESTER: Bread! Buy my hot bread! Fresh from the oven, a nice tasty loaf!

*(She continues as VERBA MANDIBLE enters, selling wine.)*

VERBA: Wine! Wine! Buy some of mine! A nice keg of malsey, the finest you'll find!

*(She continues selling and calling as LOQUILLA FINN enters with a tray of assorted fish.)*

LOQUILLA: Fish! Fish! Fresh from the sea.

*(She continues as LAVIDIA SLY enters with fruit.)*

LAVIDIA: Fruit! Fruit! The finest you'll see! A nice bunch of cherries.

LOQUILLA: And I've a fresh herring.

HESTER: A rich cornish pasty.

LAVIDIA: Crisp apples so tasty.

VERBA: Drink fit for the Gods!

LOQUILLA: And I've a nice cod.

ALL: Come buy from me!

*(Sellers continue and craftsmen work rhythmically. Some speak to PIPE, others do not. VERBA waves to LOQUILLA.)*

VERBA: Yoo Hoo! Loquilla, Loquilla Finn!

LOQUILLA: Yoo Hoo! Verba Mandible!

*(They cross to greet each other.)*

VERBA: Loquilla! Pray tell me what does that notice say? I swear it is writ so small that I can hardly see it with these eyes!

LOQUILLA: Verba, my dear, it says, 'Rehearsal Today. Be There!'

VERBA: Rehearsal!

LOQUILLA: Today!

VERBA: Oh La! Isn't it exciting? A play done by our little village of Frodsham in the Corpus Christie Festival at Chester!

HESTER: Is it all decided then? Are we really going to Chester?

VERBA: We won't know for certain until after the Pageant Master sees our play.

HESTER: I have heard in Chester they have custard tarts as big as your fist!

*(LAVIDIA SLY approaches the women.)*

LAVIDIA: Would any of you . . . ladies . . . care for some fruit?

HESTER: *(Self-righteous)* Lavidia Sly, we are God-fearing women!

LAVIDIA: God doesn't like fruit?

VERBA: Have you never heard of Eve and a certain apple?

*(All women except LAVIDIA laugh as LAVIDIA moves on shaking her head.)*

LOQUILLA: *(To VERBA)* That was good, dear, very good!

VERBA: That Lavidia Sly!

LOQUILLA: Imagine, the nerve!

*(HESTER nods in agreement as PIPE approaches the women.)*

PIPE: *(Stammering)* G-G-G-G-good day, Ladies.

VERBA: G-G-G-G-G-good day, to you too!

*(VERBA and LOQUILLA laugh as PIPE turns away.)*

HESTER: Verba, you're terrible!

VERBA: Did I s-s-s-say something w-w-wrong?

*(They laugh again and move on. JOHN sees PIPE, stops working and gestures to him.)*

JOHN: Pipe! Pipe Mandel, come here a minute! What do you think of that?

*(He holds up a small metal hoop with points on it.)*

Well, what do you think?

PIPE: What is it?

JOHN: Can't you tell? It's a crown for God. I'll have Henry cover it with golden paint and it will look ever so much more crownly! Here, try it on.

*(PIPE puts it on and it falls over his ears.)*

It's for Will Thyxill and his head's bigger than yours!

PIPE: W-W-W-will Will be at the rehearsal today?

JOHN: No, I told him he could take his pigs to the Chester market! As Prompter it's your job to read in his lines.

PIPE: I know them by heart. G-G-God's my favorite part!

JOHN: Now, we have only five days left before the Pageant Master comes on the second Tuesday before Witsunday! Five days, and five thousand things still left to be done.

*(ENOCH THORNSCREW enters, looking like his name. He carries a money box.)*

ENOCH: Good day to you, Gentlemen, in the name of God and of profit!

JOHN: *(Stiffly)* Good day, Enoch Thornscrew, and what brings you to my shop?

ENOCH: I am inquiring as to young Master Ira. When he wasn't at the rehearsal yesterday I thought he might have left the village.

JOHN: He's around here . . . somewhere!

ENOCH: Would you be so kind as to tell him I called.

JOHN: May I also tell him the nature of your visit?

ENOCH: Beg to be forgiven, but I never discuss the affairs of my clients with anyone, even a father.

JOHN: *(Angry)* Does that boy owe you money?

ENOCH: Good day, in the name of God and of profit!

*(ENOCH exits and JOHN is clearly upset by his visit.)*

PIPE: Will Ira be at rehearsal today?

JOHN: Yes! . . . yes, he will, Pipe. Now, you see to the costumes.

*PIPE salutes him and exits. JOHN returns to work. PETULA enters with a full load of laundry. She sits and sorts.)*

PETULA: God be praised, you're working.

JOHN: I'm always working.

PETULA: And this time is it real work or something for that . . . play?

JOHN: It's a crown for God.

PETULA: John, the wheel for Stephen Fitz-Stephens' wagon is over two weeks late.

JOHN: It will be done, after Corpus Christie Day.

PETULA: After Corpus Christie Day? After Corpus Christie Day? I swear if I were to drop down dead you'd prop me up and tell me to wait until after Corpus Christie Day!

JOHN: Petula, I need you.

PETULA: *(Touched)* Oh, John.

JOHN: Who would play Mrs. Noah?

PETULA: John!

JOHN: Come sit with me a while.

PETULA: I've too much work to do.

JOHN: Oh, come!

PETULA: We can't all be idle in this flock.

JOHN: Petula . . .

PETULA: I've the washing, and there's kindling to be cut, and the eggs . . .

JOHN: Now, stop your clucking, Mother Hen, and roost with me a while.

*(Reluctantly PETULA sits, she sighs. There is a pause.)*

JOHN: Shall I tell you what it will be like?

PETULA: What?

JOHN: At Chester?

PETULA: Ever since you and Henry went to Corpus Christie Festival last year, you've talked of nothing else!

JOHN: Oh, Petula, see it with me, now.

PETULA: John . . .

JOHN: *(Ignoring her protest)* The plays begin at dawn, but long before the streets are packed with people waiting. At first light, the trumpet sounds . . . TA DAH! The festival begins; and then the cries, 'The wagons! The wagons are coming!' And there they are with flags and banners bright. Wagon after wagon, with players, and the scenes, and all the costumes glittering.

First, there is Creation of the World, with God and all his angels; and a world below filled with birds and trees and flowers so real I swear they smell; and then Lucifer in Hell, with fire, real fire, burning! It stopped my heart. On and on, they come all day, until the Crucifixion; and you would weep to see it, Petula. I did, and Henry too.

From dawn till long past dark, all through the town, are miracles. If just the seeing be that grand, to do plays must be wonder!

PETULA: No one here knows how to do a play.

JOHN: But we're working together, the whole village. Petula, it will be such an honor to be chosen.

PETULA: We haven't been chosen yet.

JOHN: That's why everything must be perfect when the Pageant Master comes!

PETULA: There has been trouble in this town ever since this started.

JOHN: Not trouble, excitement, there is a difference

PETULA: (*Affectionately*) My silly man, your head is in the clouds, but there is soot all over the rest of you. Give me your apron, I'm doing the washing.

(*JOHN hands her his apron.*)

JOHN: Will you wash the waves as well?

PETULA: Wash the waves?

JOHN: For the flood, for the play.

PETULA: That play again, as if I don't have enough to do with you and Ira.

JOHN: (*Quickly*) Is Ira home yet?

PETULA: He didn't come home all last night, John, I think there's something wrong.

JOHN: He's not ill is he?

PETULA: I don't think so.

JOHN: Good, I need him to play Shem.

PETULA: And what if he doesn't want to play Shem?

JOHN: Shem's a good part!

PETULA: Not if he doesn't want it.

JOHN: It is all settled. I am playing Noah and you are playing Mrs. Noah. Ira, our son, plays Noah's son, Shem! We are doing this as a family, together.

PETULA: I am your wife everyday; must I also be your wife in this play?

JOHN: What would you play?

PETULA: The sin of Lechery, I think; she wears a pretty dress and doesn't have to speak.

(*She pats him on the cheek, just a little too hard, gathers up the laundry and leaves the shop as JOHN returns to work. Just outside the door, she catches*



*sight of IRA sneaking into the house. She waits until he is almost upon her and steps into his path.)*

PETULA: Something lost?

IRA: Mother! I didn't see you.

PETULA: Nor I you, for at least a day or two. Where in creation have you been?

IRA: Out.

PETULA: And if I were to ask, would you tell me where?

IRA: I'd tell you something.

PETULA: Would it be the truth?

IRA: I've ridden all night, to the Chester Market . . .

PETULA: Chester?

IRA: To fetch this . . . kerchief, for you!

*(He hands her the kerchief, but she is suspicious.)*

PETULA: The truth, Ira!

IRA: It be true, if you let it be true. You have the kerchief.

IRA: Brother Benedictus says that you haven't been to lessons in three days.

IRA: Does Father know?

PETULA: Not yet.

IRA: Please Mother, don't tell him, not just now, there are things, things I have to do and . . .

PETULA: Ira, is something wrong?

IRA: No, Mother. Everything will be well, soon, I promise. What did you tell Benedictus?

PETULA: I told him you had a chill.

IRA: More like, his Greek and Latin made me ill.

PETULA: Oh, Ira! Go easily around your Father, he's angry.

IRA: Because I stayed out all night?

PETULA: Because you missed rehearsal.

IRA: That play!

PETULA: After Corpus Christie Day, maybe then all our lives will start again. Now, help your father in the shop; he's well behind in all his work.

IRA: Peace be with you, Mother.

PETULA: And with you.

*(PETULA exits, IRA sneaks around the back of the shop and disappears. JOHN works unobtrusively in his shop during the next scene. LAVIDIA SLY enters with her fruit, NICHOLAS FALCONER leaves his shop. LAVIDIA crosses to him seductively. She startles him.)*

LAVIDIA: Good day, Nicholas Falconer.

NICHOLAS: Oh, good day to you, Lavidia Sly.

LAVIDIA: Would you care for some . . . fruit?

NICHOLAS: Uhhh no, no thank you.

LAVIDIA: *(Sensuously)* But look, see how . . . ripe it is.

*(She bends to show the fruit and shows her décolletage. As she bends, VERBA and LOQUILLA enter and listen to the following.)*

NICHOLAS: YES! They certainly are ripe! That's what they are alright . . .  
RIPE!

LAVIDIA: The fruit!

NICHOLAS: Oh Yes, I mean NO, I mean . . . I'll take a melon,

*(VERBA and LOQUILLA bustle past in their usual moral outrage.)*

VERBA: The nerve!

*(They exist and NICHOLAS crosses to John's shop. He enters and strikes a dramatic pose.)*

NICHOLAS: *(Reciting)* "And I can well right make a pin, and with a hammer knock it in, and smooth it down as smooth as skin, for I am ready bound."

JOHN: *(Pleased)* Ahh good, you know your lines.

NICHOLAS: And listen. . . . "Father, I am ready bound an axe have I and by my crown, as fine as any in this town for I have work to do."

JOHN: But that's not your speech; Shem says those lines.

NICHOLAS: I know them, all of them!

JOHN: Ira is playing Shem.

NICHOLAS: He hasn't been at the last three rehearsals and I thought maybe I could play both Shem and Japeth!

JOHN: They're in the same scene.

NICHOLAS: I've thought of that as well . . . I could use this voice for Shem . . . *(Changes his voice)* . . . and this little pinched up voice for Japeth.

JOHN: No.

NICHOLAS: Or perhaps, I could play Shem very tall and Japeth very short. *(He demonstrates)* Or perhaps, I could wear two hats, one like this for Shem and another like this for. . . .

JOHN: Nicholas!

NICHOLAS: Or you could pen a prologue and tell the audience when I hold my face like this . . .

JOHN: You will play Japeth and IRA will play Shem.

NICHOLAS: But he hasn't been at the last three rehearsals.

JOHN: He'll be there today!

*(John tries to guide him out but another thought strikes NICHOLAS)*

NICHOLAS: How about an animal? I could be a panther or a . . . . .

JOHN: No.

NICHOLAS: A mouse! Surely there were mice on the ark and I can make ever such a little mouselike face.

JOHN: Nicholas?

NICHOLAS: Yes?

JOHN: No.

NICHOLAS: But . . .

JOHN: No.

*(NICHOLAS crosses back to his shop practicing animal sounds as he goes. JOHN goes back to work. STEPHEN FITZ-STEPHENS enters grandly. Everything about him suggests vanity.)*

STEPHEN: Salute, omnes, populo populorum!

*(NICHOLAS makes a sound of a donkey as he passes STEPHEN and continues into his shop.)*

JOHN: Stephen!

STEPHEN: Preggo?

JOHN: A word with you?

STEPHEN: A word, for I am on my way to see Jennifer Andrews about the final fitting for my costume.

JOHN: Stephen, tell me one more time what the Festival Council told you in Chester.

STEPHEN: But I have already told you that, Dolce Directorio, a thousand times or more! The Festival Council told me quite plainly, and I quote, "The Pageant Master will see your play, Two Tuesdays afore Witsunday."

JOHN: You're quite sure that's what they said?

STEPHEN: There hasn't been a mistake in the Fitz-Stephens family for over 100 years.