

Allied occupation. Without any doubt, these visual books for pre-readers or young readers are powerful tools which manipulate with subtle, or sometimes not so subtle, methods the opinions of children and adults – that is, a large part of the population.

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## PLAYS AND FANTASIES

**Playhouse: Six fantasy plays for children.** Joyce Doolittle. Northern Lights Books for Children, 1989. 202 pp., \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-028-8.

This collection of six plays by Canadian writers is a useful tool for teachers, librarians and theatre companies (both amateur and professional). It provides workable and imaginative scripts for child-audiences ranging from kindergarten ("Friends" and "The old woman and the pedlar") to grade nine ("Swimmers" and "Prairie dragons").

The term "fantasy" is emphasized in the title and introduction where it refers both to "fantasy" and "play". In two plays, *Swimmers* and *Friends* she quotes Bruno Bettelheim's *The uses of enchantment*, on the playful concept of fantasy: "Spinning out daydreams – ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures..., the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content".

*Friends* by Tom Bentley-Fisher focusses on the playing and on the real life-and-death concerns of children in a day care centre. One character learns to play and emerges from her shell at the same time the ducklings do (though some of them don't make it). *Swimmers*, a clever thought-provoking script by Clem Martini, explores the danger zones of play and fantasy worlds in which a child could become lost to reality. Both plays could be termed psychological problem plays as well as fantasies.

This playful quality strengthens our love of the great "if" of drama. As Peter Brook says in *The empty space* "in everyday life 'if' is a fiction, in the theatre 'if' is an experiment." Joyce Doolittle encourages playfulness in staging by incorporating design and production concepts within the scripts. How do dragons fly on stage? Douglas McCullough shows us. The use of different type face and drawings in the margin of the text is most successful in *The old woman and the pedlar* by Betty Jane Wylie and *Prairie dragons* by Sharon Pollock. The drawings of costume and props for comic business (by Tara Tyan) are particularly helpful in *The old woman and the pedlar* which combines nursery rhyme with exaggerated clowning.

Two of the plays selected seem dated. *The merchants of Dazu* by James Defelice is a moralistic play about greed in a folktale setting. The clever use of the two narrators for the supporting actors is innovative and would be fun to see on stage, but the play has the tone of Chorpenning's *The emperor's new clothes* (1931). *A nest of dragons* by Zina Barnieh is both heroic and comic, but the theme of the play is unclear. The hero needs to tame dragons whose parents he has slain. The special effects (shadows of the dragons' flight) could be beautiful, but the hero's confusing need to conquer nature is not timely and his wish to tame wild eagles at the end of the play shows he has not learned from his experience. The aims of the play, and the hero, are unclear.

The most fantastic of these plays is *Prairie dragons* by Sharon Pollock in which the dragons really do exist in our twentieth-century world, accepted by both characters and audience. This is the best-written play in the collection with the riddling dragon using poetic word-play. The heroine, Sarah, is feisty and persevering as she runs a farm on her own during a prairie drought.

Fantasy can be staged; simple and playful design can create special effects without destroying the day-dream. Joyce Doolittle has given us guidance, scripts and design solutions for achieving success when staging fantasies for children.

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## EXPLORING THE HUMAN ANATOMY

**My body inside out: An introduction to human anatomy.** Marie-Françine Hébert. La courte echelle, 1989. \$19.95 1 book, 1 guide, 1 game. ISBN 276-256-4115.

Author Hébert, in consultation with medical professionals, has created A Read, Play and Learning Set to aid children in discovering facts about their bodies. Her premise is that children enjoy learning about themselves by looking at photo albums and hearing stories about their growth. The book presents a series of events in a child's development going full circle from infancy to producing an infant. Each episode highlights parts of a child's anatomy and its functions.

The descriptions of various bodily functions are brief yet packed with facts and new vocabulary which will spark questions from the child – an excellent opportunity for expanding on the text and illustrations.

Intended for ages five and up, the book's vocabulary is fairly sophisticated and younger children will require help with both the words and concepts. The text is frank and concise, but uneven. Hébert uses correct terminology for body