

GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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Take A Quick Bow!

By Pamela Marx

Illustrated by Tom James

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS

To Mark
and to Megan, Holly, Ryan, Chris, and Michael

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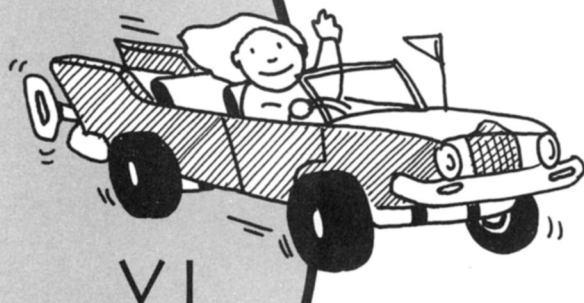
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book contains 26 short performance vehicles appropriate for children in grades 2–4. Most are easy-to-stage plays, while several are choral speaking performance pieces. Most of the plays have a linear structure that allows groups of actors to enter and leave the stage one after another, making staging easy and straightforward even in the most adverse settings (for example, front of classroom as stage). While the plays provide a performance structure, there is room in some plays for students to write certain lines themselves. As such the plays provide an opportunity not only for memorization and performance, but for creative thinking and some original script writing within a structured framework.

The book organizes the plays by content areas. These include **seasons; winter holidays; international folklore** (suitable for exploring cultural diversity, as well as celebrating holidays of different countries and ethnicities, such as Chinese New Year (“The Magic Pears”), Cinco de Mayo (“Tale of the Duendes”), and St. Patrick’s Day (The Children and the Leprechauns’ Gold”); **traditions and history of the United States** (suitable for Fourth of July, Flag Day, Presidents’ Day and Memorial Day); **environmental issues; the arts** (suitable for learning about art, sculpture, poetry, and, by reference to the seasonal plays, music); **equality and brotherhood** (suitable for Black History or Women’s History Months,

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, birthday, United Nations Day or peace-themed events); and **the sciences** (providing plays that let children tell about science facts they are learning in class, as well as complete plays on weather and technology—specifically, simple machines). With such diversity in subject matter, teachers and other play directors should be able to find an appropriate play for any particular school or community event.

Although some of the subject matter may seem advanced for the younger grades, it is never too early to expose children to history, art, literature, and so on, in this playful way. In later years children will study these areas further and will benefit by having this frame of reference.

The performance pieces in this book are simple enough to prepare for performance in four or five rehearsals over a one- or two-week period. Their duration is from three to four minutes for the shorter pieces to nine to twelve minutes for the longer plays. As such, they are quite usable as part of a larger assembly format in which many classes participate. Play directors who choose to use them for stand-alone performances may couple a play with other material for a longer performance. The “Perform It” section following the script text of each play includes ideas for oral speaking, song, and dance segments that may be performed in conjunction with each play.

THE PUZZLED PUMPKINS

PLAYERS

PUMPKINS 1–29

LITTLE PUMPKIN

SCRIPT

As the play opens, PUMPKINS are located about the stage, preferably arranged on steps or risers to approximate the look of a pumpkin patch. Actors will not need to move from place to place, so they should be placed so each is visible to the audience.

PUMPKIN 1 (*waving arms and wailing dramatically*): Oh, woe is me!

PUMPKIN 2 (*hands sweeping to show rest of patch*): Woe is you? Woe is us.

PUMPKIN 3: Here we are stuck in the patch, just growing and growing.

PUMPKIN 4 (*complaining*): And for what? We sit here like a bunch of old orange bumps on a log waiting for someone to come along and pick us out of the crowd.

PUMPKIN 5 (*disgustedly*): And won't that be fun! We spend our childhoods sitting here watching life pass us by.

PUMPKIN 6: Then they cut us free to fulfill our grown-up purpose.

PUMPKIN 7: Yes, we grow up so that they can poke at us, yank out our seeds, boil us, or bake us. What a life!

LITTLE PUMPKIN (*bewildered*): But who are "they"?

PUMPKIN 8: "They" are people. You know, humans. They take us from the vine and . . . (*snapping fingers*) just like that, it's over. (*Dramatically*) Oh, woe is us!

PUMPKIN 9: You know, I think you guys are looking at this thing all wrong. We pumpkins are part of a grand and glorious tradition.

Teacher's Notes
Begin on
Page 6



TRADITION: way of
doing things

CELEBRATING THE SEASONS

NATIVE: naturally found in a place

PILGRIM: English people who came to North America in 1620

JACK-O'-LANTERN: lighted, hollow pumpkin with a cut-out face

DRAMATIC: in a strong way

CENTERPIECE: table decoration

NUTMEG: a spicy seed used to flavor food

JOB OPPORTUNITIES: chances for future jobs or work

LITTLE PUMPKIN: We are? What tradition? Tell me.

PUMPKIN 10: Well, we are a native American fruit. We were here when the Pilgrims arrived.

PUMPKIN 11: And we play an important part in more than one holiday tradition.

PUMPKIN 12: Yes, I've always wanted to grow up to be a jack-o'-lantern with a happy face.

PUMPKIN 13: Personally, I'd prefer to be part of a dramatic centerpiece on a Thanksgiving dinner table.

PUMPKIN 14: Well, not me. I was born to be a mouth-watering pumpkin bread.

PUMPKIN 1 (negatively): What kind of life is that? Three gulps and you are gone.

PUMPKIN 15: No, no, no. You are still not seeing the point. We pumpkins have a lot to offer.

PUMPKIN 16: Yes, we are many things to many people. Me? I like to think of myself as a trim, healthful side dish.

PUMPKIN 17: That's true. What could be better than a slab of baked pumpkin with just a sprinkle of brown sugar and nutmeg?

PUMPKIN 18 (spreading hands to give credit to previous speakers): And, besides all these fabulous job opportunities, think of how important we are in stories.

PUMPKIN 19: Yes, without us, where would Cinderella be?

PUMPKIN 20: I'll tell you where. Without us, she'd never get out of the garden.

PUMPKIN 21: And don't forget about Mother Goose. Where would she be without us?

THE PUZZLED PUMPKINS

PUMPKIN 22: That's true. Remember "Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater . . . "?

PUMPKIN 23 (*thinking carefully*): Fellow pumpkins, maybe some of us haven't been looking at this whole situation the right way.

PUMPKIN 24: Yes, when you get right down to it, right down through history we've been playing a fine part.

PUMPKIN 25: I guess that's true. There are a lot worse things than sitting on a dinner table no matter what part of the meal you are.

PUMPKIN 26: Well, I hope I get to choose the job in my future.

PUMPKIN 27: Why is that?

PUMPKIN 28: Because if I had my choice, I'd like to be a nice slab of steaming pumpkin pie.

PUMPKIN 29: Yeah, à la mode—you know, with ice cream on top.

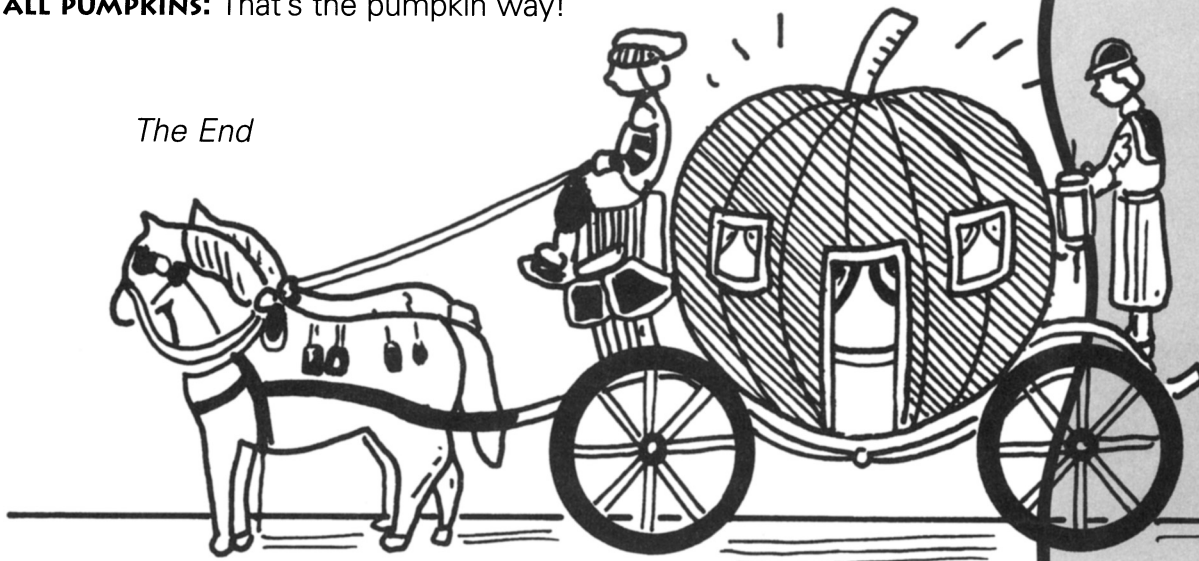
PUMPKIN 27: With such a wide range of job opportunities, how will we choose?

LITTLE PUMPKIN: Well, I don't care which job I get. I always say, "get a job and do it well." That's the best way.

ALL PUMPKINS: That's the pumpkin way!

HISTORY: study of the past

The End



TEACHER'S NOTES

PERFORM IT

You can costume your pumpkins easily by making large orange posterboard pumpkins that hang on the children's chests. Each child draws in his or her own face with markers. You can have Pumpkins 1–8 make sad or crabby-looking faces on one side of the posterboard. At the play's end, they can turn them over to expose smiling, happy faces like the rest of the patch. Alternatively, you can use orange no-sew tunics cut round at the bottom and, again, use marker to create the faces.

An enjoyable way to extend this play performance is to open and/or close the play with small group recitation or reading of several poems from Jack Prelutsky's holiday collections, such as *It's Halloween* or *It's Thanksgiving*. Choose those poems appropriate to your seasonal use of this play.

This play can be used in conjunction with any fall activities or events. It is suitable for Halloween and Thanksgiving performances as well as other harvest festival celebrations. To help prepare children for the play, talk with them about this special native American gourd. Not only was it here when the Pilgrims arrived, the pumpkin has become a part of Halloween,

Thanksgiving, and Christmas traditions. Have them think about how pumpkin is used by people during the fall and winter months. Finally, ask them to think about stories they know in which pumpkins play a part. Besides *Cinderella*, and *Mother Goose*, and *Charlie Brown's Great Pumpkin*, there is a myriad of stories in which pumpkins play an important role.

WRITE IT

Have each child draw his or her own pumpkin person. As a writing exercise, ask children to write a short story or paragraph describing their own pumpkin persons—how they feel, what they are doing, what their “career” plans are. Students might get ideas for their stories from the text of the play.

EXPLORE IT

Pumpkin season provides fun opportunities for exploring math creatively. Ask children to bring in enough pumpkins so that you have at least one pumpkin for every two children. You will also need string for this activity. Have children measure and weigh pumpkins, count pumpkin seeds, and make class graphs of the



THE PUZZLED PUMPKINS

results. Examples of the questions they can answer are:

- *How tall is the pumpkin?*
- *How big around (circumference) is the pumpkin?*
- *How wide (diameter) is the pumpkin?*
- *How much does the pumpkin weigh?*
- *How many seeds does the pumpkin hold?*

Once you do your “practical” math with the pumpkin you might want to continue the exercise with some cooking math by making pumpkin bread.

Pumpkin Bread

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vegetable oil
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup pumpkin
- 2 cups flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ginger
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cloves
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon nutmeg

Cream oil and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla and mix well. Add pumpkin and mix well. Add dry ingredients and stir until well mixed. Grease and flour a loaf pan, pour in batter, and bake at 350°F for 60 to 75 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean.

READ ABOUT IT

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