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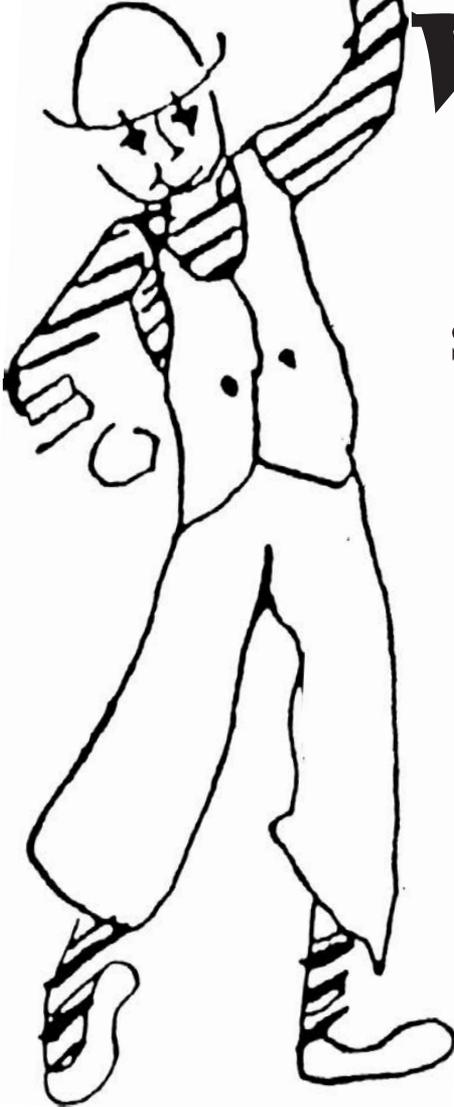
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Family Plays

IN OTHER WORDS



Comedy by
SHARON ELIZABETH
DOYLE

IN OTHER WORDS

A new form of play proven in professional and amateur performance. Designed to stimulate the creative actor and delight the child in all of us with human cartoons.

Comedy. By Sharon Elizabeth Doyle. Cast: 6 either gender, with option to add more. Join Professor Fleetfoot and his madcap friends on a zany exploration of communication. The acting ensemble transforms itself from the alphabet to geese honking southward to a string quartet. Baby discovers her first word, and Gunkymuck, head caveperson, discovers words in the first place. Finally, Adolphus Ignatius Fentwhistle, who only talks, and Sylvia Syllabub, who only dances, find out what real communication is when they begin to pay attention to each other. Ideal for either in-school or theatre performance. Simple set. Ensemble costumes. Music in book. Code: IB3.

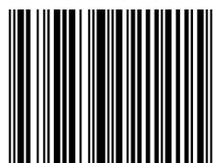


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by Sharon Elizabeth Doyle



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“Produced by special arrangement with
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To Bart,

**who understands taking electric type-
writers along on vacations in the woods.**

IN OTHER WORDS was originally written for and produced by **ARCHAESUS Productions, Inc.** The rehearsal process was improvisational and the actors contributed to the story structure of the last vignette by improvising with the characters.

IN OTHER WORDS was first performed at Wolf Trap Farm Park on September 4, 1976 at the International Children's Day Festival.

Director: Sharon Elizabeth Doyle

**Archaeus
Company:** Terence Aselford
Tom Holland
Leonore Logan
Matt Mitler
Susan Swarthout
Robert White

Producer: Gary Young

(Sketches in this playbook by artist
Jennifer Harper)

THE SET: Three abstract trees on which are hung large, very large, and HUGE letters which spell out the title of the show: IN OTHER WORDS.

If possible, they should be free-standing, but they must be light. The actors use these letters in the course of the play as props, set pieces, or appendages (the woolly mammoth's tusks, the dog's collar, the bee's knees).

PROPS: One professor's hat to be used by each of the three actors who play him.
It may be of whatever style the costumes are. We used a derby.
A bugle kazoo or other noise-maker that can play a tune.

NOTES TO THE DIRECTOR

The company which came together to create **IN OTHER WORDS** shared several things. The first was a love affair with clowns. The freedom of a clown to burst into a font of tears or to become hopelessly stuck to a chair touches people in a way which lets them drop their accepted structures of behavior—the cool or the proper—and laugh outright with joy. The second thing was a desire to make the actor as malleable as an animated cartoon. To stretch our bodies and voices so that we might draw with them whatever we wished. Since we could not compete with television or movies for illusion, we wanted to rely on the actor for everything—actor as prop, furniture, sound effects, or mood, changing his body rather than his costume. It is not, after all, such a mean resource. Ingenuity is pleasing to performer and audience alike; plus it is suggestive rather than actual. Television and the screen provide such detailed images for children that there is little room left for their own quirks of imagination. The old saw about everyone being able to imagine their own sea of chocolate pudding better than it can be realized is true. Sadly, these days, you often hear children play out scenarios with fixed and unalterable plot lines and characters which they take directly from the media. So we borrowed the quick and bright pace of the media, but kept ourselves as the magicians. The third thing was a conviction that there was no point in doing children's theatre that was not artistically satisfying for ourselves. The wonderful thing is to strike that chord which speaks to all ages. Truth is often the simplest way to say things. When you find that way, it is immensely satisfying.

IN OTHER WORDS is a concept play for children about communication. The form is a narrated physical-vocal piece. The narrator provides the pace and the focus while underlining the concepts. He is pleasantly mad. He must be able to talk to the audience as well as perform, for he is the key to the images they are seeing. There is interplay between him and the actors; indeed, at times they rebel and change narrators. The acting ensemble is the heart of the piece. They must be liquid and explore new shapes of expression together. Before attempting the script, some time should be spent developing the ensemble. Ideally, the freezes and takes which they perform together should not be dependent on counts and cues. An ensemble can learn how to listen to each other in such a way that they can feel how to start, when to stop, and how far to take a movement.

To this end, I recommend a lot of initial trust and sensitivity exercises: falling, flying, giving and taking of weight, sharing a center of gravity, blind exercises, and gentle games to loosen everyone psychologically. Once a degree of physical ease is established, play games involving physical-vocal sculptures. One of the best exercises I used for this is the following: Ask the actors to improvise a sculpture—one taking a pose and the others adding themselves in one by one. Establish a cue to start moving and one to stop. Emphasize keeping the movement spontaneous rather than considered. Establish a rhythm. When the actors are ready, let them move and freeze without cues. Vary the exercise by letting them make sounds as they move, do it with their eyes closed, pick one actor as the focus for the sculpture, ask them to move the sculpture through space, and give them topics to respond to or act out—the color red, a kindergarten birthday party, curtain call at the opera, a hurricane. Have them build the sculpture into an animal, letting the actors respond as a unit, physically and vocally, to your comments. Always encourage them to take chances, take weight from one another, use levels. This kind of work develops the kinesthetic sense of the ensemble as well as the actors' physical imaginations. Allow members of the group, especially the narrators, to be the animal or image director so they can observe the potential shapes and rhythms from the outside.

At the same time as you are developing the ensemble, be working on the individual freedom of the actors. Play physical-vocal impulse games, enact images, or demand an opera in five minutes and leave the room. There is no set way a person can be an "A" or three people make a mastodon. One exercise we did was very fruitful. Divided into teams of two, the actors created alphabets. We combined them to produce the one in the text.

At certain times in the play, physical conventions are required. The cavemen should all walk and stand in a certain way. The geese, the bees, and the coyotes need to be uniform. The mime illusions (walls, doors, rocks, etc.) need to be consistent. IN OTHER WORDS does not require highly trained specialists, but attention to detail and form is necessary to make it shine.

For the characters throughout the play, play games calling upon the actor to use his body and voice to physicalize psychology. Each character should have a different body and voice based on a strong

interior. All the technical flair in the world cannot replace emotional support. Develop highly physicalized stereotypes and have them interact improvisationally. The characters may be cartoons, but they must be approached seriously. Otherwise you will cheat yourselves and your audience of moving, exciting work.

The music in the show is all vocal and was done á capella. However, the addition of music is always a plus in a show using mime. It can be used to bridge scenes and punctuate movement. If you are able to have a live musician (say, with an electric piano and rhythm instruments), he can become a character—sassing the narrator and otherwise commenting with his music.

As usual words are inadequate to describe what needs to be done, not talked about. The best thing that can be done with **IN OTHER WORDS** is to have fun with it.

Sharon Elizabeth Doyle.

IN OTHER WORDS

PRESHOW

Actors take letters and improvise with them in the audience, using either mime or gibberish. They may sell things, do scenes, play musical instruments, etc., whatever the shape of their letter suggests.

When the time comes to begin, the Professor starts a tune on a bugle kazoo. The actors rush to the stage, talking to each other in gibberish across the audience. They rush around and hang the letters in the proper order to spell the title as the Professor finishes his tune. All pose and say: "Tadah!"

Actors remain frozen. Professor moves downstage.

PROFESSOR: Good morning. Greplesnigglefechornish. Bjor mai tai setwain.
Pugglepoo mitschnapps.
Or in other words,
Hi.
My word, I can't seem to word this properly.
Now, I gave my word that this would not be wordy but now it appears that I must eat my words.

He snatches his words from the air, puts them in his hat, and begins to gobble them up. Two actors break freeze, come downstage, whisper in each ear, and return.

They're passing me the word.
So
in a word
WELCOME

to Fester Fleetfoot's Farfetched Follies Featuring:

Professor gestures to introduce actors. They introduce themselves. Their names are words which form a sentence. It can be rearranged three ways. They physicalize the words as they pronounce them. Our sentence was: Rose Saw The Icy Sea.

No, no, that's the wrong order. . . .

*Actors rearrange themselves and get set.
I see (Icy) Rose Sea the Saw.*

You dummies, that's still wrong, wrong, wrong.

*With some discussion, the actors rearrange themselves once more to say:
I see (icy) the Sea-Saw Rose.*

Correct!!
And now. . . .

The actors all sing:



“Let’s-let’s-Get-get-Star-Star-Star-ated!”

They fall asleep immediately upon finishing the last note. Noisily asleep. The Professor contemplates them for a second and then turns to the audience to say. . . .

Did you know
that a long, long time ago
there didn’t used to be language?

*One actor wakes up to listen.
Wakes others.*

And even before a very, very,
long, long time ago,
Man could not talk. . . .

*Actors have horrified reaction.
(Single group movement and freeze)*

(To actors)
I mean, use words to say
what he meant.

Actors very relieved.

THINK ABOUT IT!

They do so.

No words. . . .
like peanut butter. . . .

*Actors butter themselves, lick fingers,
eat handwiches, etc. Freeze.*

or
help, there’s a lion. . . .

*One actor lunges as lion and roars.
Group shrinks way in a single motion.
Freeze.*

or
purple noses. . . .

Actors press their purple noses with appropriate purple sounds. Freeze.

For instance, people couldn't say. . . .

Actors build sculpture with word

phrases:

"I forgot."

"Your mommy's calling."

"Uh, pass me that piano."

"All over the floor."

Two do the last one, impersonating what spilled. Group reacts: "Yeech."

We didn't have a language.
But we had communication.
We had
Gestures. . . .

Actors make various gestures (waving, shaking finger, etc.) and freeze.

Faces. . . .

Actors make faces and then pass hands in front of faces and change them. Freeze.

and Sounds. . . .

Actors hoot, laugh, cry, etc. all at once. Prof. covers ears and shouts:

BUT NO WORDS!

Actors: Hmmm? (Single movement and a freeze.)

Words,
like IN

Two get letters I and N from title. They place them and say the letters with flourish.

or Pin. . . .

Two make letter "P" using prep like Hungarian acrobats (hup-hup) and say "P!" Then actors with I and N finish spelling the word: "I!" "N!"

or chin. . . .

Four make "C" and "H" with hup-hups. Group spells word.

or. . .or. . .can you guys rhyme
and words with “in”?

Professor takes two or three suggestions from the audience and actors spell out words.

See, now you and I, we all know words
because we know the. . .(get kids to say “alphabet”)
Right,
the ALPHABET. . . .Aaay. . . .

Prof. crosses in to meet an actor, they join hands and hit heads to make an “A” and freeze. Another peeps through and says, “A. A b. A bee see?” Points to actor who buzzes round the corner of A. going “dddeeddeeedde” and chases other actor who, of course, goes: “Eeeeeeee.” Actor steps in with a bug sprayer, “Eff, eff, eff.” Bee dies and all gather round: “Geee.” One actor starts to sneeze: “H-H-H.” Two actors on either side lift him to form H. Start off stage as ambulance: “Iiiiiiii.” Meanwhile, actor introduces Jay to Kay and they shake hands. Jay offers Kay LMN (alemon). She doesn’t quite get it. Actors upstage spell out letters with bodies: “L!” “M!” “N!” She gets it: “LMN, Ohh.” Jay, with amorous designs conducts Kay to sit stage right where they continue a conversation of “O’s.” Three actors sneak up on them and peering over shout: “Peek You!” (PQ) Prof., who has been left stage left, becomes tough cop. Crosses stage shouting: “RS, RsT-U!” (arrest you) One actor scuttles back of the trees. The two left make a “V” and say it imploringly. Cop steps between them and gets their wrists. They lean back to make a “W” and he says: “W”. Then he says: “X”. They turn to make “X” and he frisks them. J and K admonish them

“X-x-x-” The two make a “Y” and ask the audience: “Y?” Actor returns from behind trees with buzzer in his hand. He shakes hands with cop who starts going “Z-zzzz”; all try to help and, of course, all become attached to the electrical current. Prof. finally frees himself. Others freeze. He talks to audience.

Well, we all learned the alphabet because we went to school.

But how did you learn to talk?

Did your mommy give you the ability to talk for Christmas?

(Kids: No.)

Did you find it in a breakfast cereal box?

(Kids: No.)

Did you buy it in a store?

(Kids: No.)

No.

You learned to talk because people talked to you.

[Professor crosses out of scene while he is saying this. Actors move to places. Baby center.

Parents washing dishes stage right. Uncle Hymie and dog stage left. In this sequence, the parents talk. They should make a point of differentiating the way they talk to each other and the way they talk to Baby.]

Baby wakes, starts crying. She is in cradle. Poppa is sent to quiet. Father checks various reasons why Baby could be crying. Tickles it. Baby stops. Father starts to leave, Baby glares and resumes. Mommy comes. They try bottle. It works, but Baby, who just wants attention, catches them leaving and starts wailing again. . . Throws bottle, narrowly missing Father. They start to rock cradle, humming rock-a-

bye baby. Baby gets into it, falls asleep. Parents sneak out in time to last phrase of lullaby. Freeze upstage.

But babies are born
only knowing how to make noise. . . .

Enter dog. He smells Baby, crosses over to cradle. Baby hears dog, makes sound. He puts his paws on side of cradle (it tips) and barks hello. Baby rocks cradle until it tips over and Baby falls out. Baby and dog talk of this and that. Baby falls asleep curled up next to dog.

So the only way you communicated
with other people was through
Gestures. . . .

Enter Uncle Hymie. He kneels down and makes funny hello gestures.

and faces. . . .

Hymie makes a face.

and sounds. . . .

Hymie makes a face with noise. Dog, however, does not like Uncle. When Hymie first kneels down, dog crosses behind, growling. As Hymie goes to make sound, dog nips him and the sound he makes is, "OOOw!" Freeze.

You were really good at
imitating though. . . .

Hymie tries making face again, but with the proper sound. Baby makes face, but instead of making sound says, "Arf!" Hymie and Dog look at each other. Together: "Arf?" Freeze.

And you began to communicate
back because you needed things. . . .

Hymie gestures for Dog to leave. Dog pays no attention, plays with Baby. Hymie grabs leash and pulls unwilling Dog out of room and ties him up in yard. Baby watches. Uncle returns to play with Baby. Pats on head, she

makes noise. Tickles toes, she starts wailing.

Crisis.

Father and Mother return, get rid of Uncle Hymie who has no idea what he's done. Baby's crying has reached the hiccupy stage which she gradually turns into "Arf." She realizes what that means, repeats it. Parents dumfounded, together: "She spoke!" Baby repeats.

Father: "She said, 'Daddy!'"

Mother demurs.

Baby repeats. Dog hears and answers. Parents get the message and in a great profusion of joy and activity, Dog and Baby are reunited.

Parents: "Her First Word!"

Dog and Baby: (to audience) "Arf!"
Freeze.

Communication helps get things organized.

People know what to do with each other when they're communicating. . .

[The following should land everyone in position for geese sequence.] Actor approaches Hymie and knocks. Hymie opens door. Changes character. "Yes?"

Actor: "May I come in?"

Hymie: "Why, certainly."

Immediately upon his entering, the others crowd through the door with comments like "As long as you have the door open. . ." and "Is this the party?" Hymie keeps trying to close the door. Communication is not happening. General hub-bub. Continue until everyone is in place. (One couple upstage right, one single downstage right. One couple, Hymie included, downstage left.) Freeze.

But we're not the only ones who use it.

Animals are very good at it, too.
For instance,
geese flying south
for the winter. . . .

(Prof. takes off his hat and crosses to center as he says this line.)

[As Prof. says this last line he leads a very slow melt by all into sleeping geese position. He is head goose. Single d.s. right is oversleeper. The geese are asleep in tall grass. They cannot see each other. By means of their calls, they locate a third point in the sky at which to meet. It works by triangulation, believe it or not.]

Head goose wakes. Preens, calls. Other couples wake, preen, stretch, call back. Head flies up. Others join him. When they achieve formation and fairly unified honking, they pivot and fly behind trees. The honking becomes subdued and far away; their motion freezes.

Sleepy wakes with flurry and after several anguished cries, locates group. Just as she flies behind trees, group enters and flies across stage.

She enters, her cry alternating with that of group. She takes her position at the end of the "V", and honks happily to audience, in time to the group. Two honks later whole group turns on her with one angry honk. She does take. All freeze.

Prof. walks away from freeze as he starts talking.

That way, no one
gets left behind.
Now, a bee can tell the rest of his hive
where there's a particularly juicy patch of