

echoes

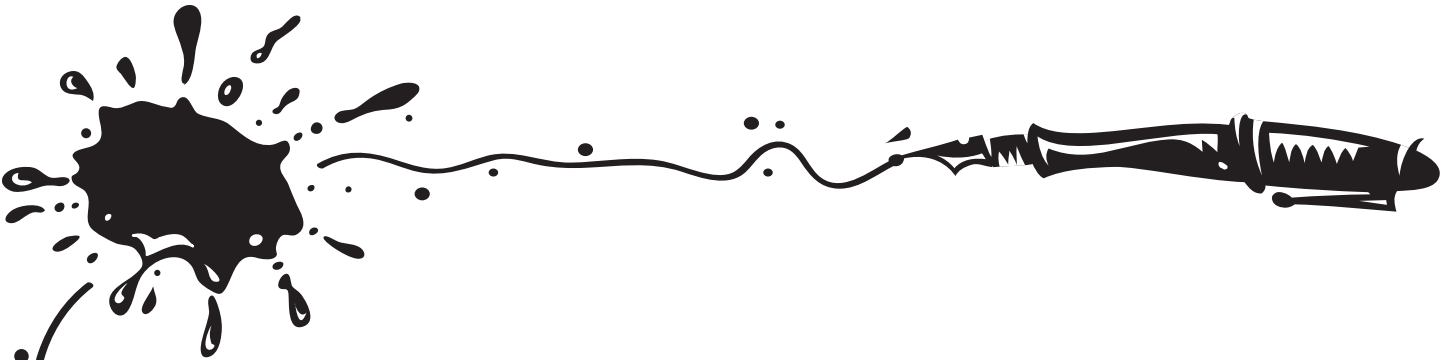
A Creative Drama Writing Project



Ed Sayles, Producing Director • Carole Estabrook, Educational Theatre Coordinator

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Dear Colleague,

Welcome to the exciting and unique program we call ECHOES, a creative journey through the wonderful imaginations of middle school students across New York State. Begun in 1991, this part literary competition and part professional performance is a singular opportunity for your students to express themselves creatively and possibly see their original work performed not only for your school but also at schools in over 40 districts throughout the state.

For those of you returning to the program, we welcome you back. For those of you who are new to us, we look forward to reading the many dynamic and wonderful pieces that your students will produce.

The heart and hope behind our ECHOES program is to encourage young people to write and offer them an unrivaled vehicle for self expression. What makes ECHOES so extraordinary is that it presents students with the opportunity to attack the process of writing as they would a game. If we can change the way students think about writing, perhaps we will encourage them to develop as writers and find enjoyment in the process. Good writers make for good thinkers and that is something to encourage in every young person.

Our commitment to quality is reflected not only through our productions, but also in our constant search for creative responses to the educational and logistical pressures of the school year. Merry-Go-Round Playhouse’s mission is to provide you and your students with superior arts programming that is part of, not a distraction from, your curriculum.

Once again, we welcome you to the exciting world of ECHOES. It’s truly a high point in our year and always our most challenging and rewarding production. Thank you for allowing us to share it with you and your students!

Excelsior,

Ed

Ed Sayles
Producing Director

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INTRODUCTION

ECHOES is...

ECHOES is a program developed by Merry-Go-Round Playhouse to involve and encourage middle school students in the creative writing process. The year-long project results in a performance consisting entirely of material written or suggested by middle school students, reflecting their unique thoughts, feelings and ideas.

ECHOES combines the limitless imagination of your students with the theatrical craftsmanship of our professional artists. Using characters and action envisioned by student authors, we add costumes, sets, props, music and sound effects to bring their work to life. Each year, the Merry-Go-Round brings to your school an exciting musical variety performance that showcases the talents of young writers from across New York State. We conclude each performance with an awards presentation to honor the outstanding achievements of the talented young writers of your school.

the PERFORMANCE...

While the ECHOES script changes from year to year, the power and enthusiasm conveyed remains the same. The performance is a 45 minute musical variety showcase, told with equal parts comedy and drama, that reflects what's in the hearts and minds of middle school students. During the performance, each piece is introduced with the name(s) and school of the contributing writer(s). Outstanding writers are heralded in schools across the state for their achievements.

the AWARDS PRESENTATION...

At the conclusion of every building's ECHOES performance, an award ceremony commences to honor student writers from that building for their achievements. Schools are notified in advance which students have been selected to receive awards in the event you wish to invite the parents and family of those students.

Writers whose work is of remarkable merit and chosen to be included in the performance will receive the ECHOES Showcased Author Award. Writers whose work is also of utmost distinction, yet not selected to be dramatized, will receive the ECHOES Award for Writing Excellence. It is important to note that in order to be selected for performance a piece must not only represent excellence in writing, but also must lend itself to dramatization. Both of these awards pay homage to writers whose work is clearly of distinction.

In addition to these awards for writing distinction, we present a number of Honorable Mention certificates recognizing those writers whose work is still is worthy of merit. After all, encouraging students to achieve as writers is the ultimate goal of the ECHOES Program.

As the effort to write is worth recognition no matter the result, each student who submits an entry will continue to receive our Certificate of Participation. The day of the performance your office will be provided with a packet containing these awards. As time is limited for the awards presentation, we ask that your building please distribute the certificates to students.

Each year we present Special Awards recognizing a higher standard of excellence in writing achievement demonstrated through the quality of the collected work of students. The award for Overall Excellence in Writing goes to a school or schools whose collective work shows exceptional writing talent and an overall joy for writing. We also present Outstanding Writing Achievement Awards for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades to schools that demonstrate excellence at a particular grade level.

Two special awards presented to students each year are Most Unique Submission and Best Overall Submission. These awards are presented to students who demonstrate particularly strong and/or unique pieces of writing.

THE KEY PLAYERS

As in any theatrical enterprise, there are roles to be played. Below, we describe them for you.

the STUDENT...

The student is the creative collaborator with MGR Playhouse. Students submit legibly handwritten or typed pieces of work to MGR for evaluation as a potential performance piece. The work need not have been written specifically for submission to ECHOES. Any piece of writing from a student's work portfolio may be submitted.

Students may work alone or collaborate together to submit any number of pieces in any format, i.e. poem, short story, skit, song, etc., on any topic of interest provided the piece meets the ECHOES guidelines and is accompanied by a completed Manuscript Identification Form. You can find this important form on the insert to this program guide, or download the form from our website, www.merry-go-round.com.

Students should know that pieces submitted cannot be returned. We encourage students to keep a copy of their work.

the TEACHER...

The teacher serves as a guide for the student. ECHOES was designed to serve as an impetus for creative writing and we encourage teachers to utilize this program as such; be it a specific writing activity for the individual student, as a classroom project, or in any manner that best suits your classroom needs and schedule. Later in this guide, you will find samples of previous entries to ECHOES and our comments. We hope that these will give you a clearer picture of the quality of writing we are seeking and can coach your students as needed.

The teacher collects the students' written materials and submits them to the Merry-Go-Round. We ask that you pay particular attention to the Manuscript Identification Form to ensure that each submitted piece has a form that is completed and legible. Please send all materials to:

Merry-Go-Round Playhouse
17 William Street, 2nd Floor
Auburn, New York 13021

Submissions must be postmarked on or before December 19, 2008.

Teachers, via the school office, will be provided by MGR with Certificates of Participation for student writers who submit work for consideration. We ask that you please distribute them to students.

the MERRY-GO-ROUND...

MGR serves as producer and collaborator with the student. We read and evaluate each submission and select those pieces we feel represent artistic and writing excellence. From these, we then select roughly 35 to craft into the ECHOES script. We add costumes, sets, props, music and sound effects and a production is born that highlights the thoughts and ideas of outstanding young writers.

GUIDELINES AND TIMETABLE

RULES of the game...

1. ECHOES submissions must be original work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If we find that a piece has been plagiarized, your school will be notified. Students should avoid using pop culture icons or famous characters, real or fictitious, e.g. Britney Spears, Bart Simpson, Austin Powers, etc; pieces that contain such characters are almost never performed.
2. Since time for the performance is limited and we want to include as many pieces as possible, we will only consider entries that are 1 to 1-1/2 pages typed or neatly printed. While it may not seem like much, this is more than enough space to tell a good story. Feel free as well to include drawings and other related artwork. They may prove useful to us in developing costumes, props, etc.
3. You may work with one or more friends or your entire class. If you find it easier to write with a partner or a group, feel free to do so. The only catch — remember to include every participating writer on the Manuscript Identification Form.
4. Students may write on any topic of interest. It may be amusing or serious. It is always best to write about something important to you; the best writing comes from commitment to an idea or concept. If you choose to write something humorous, remember that some things are not funny to all people; be sure to consider your audience's sensibilities.
5. Pieces with unnecessary or excessive violence will not be performed. It is possible to tell an extremely compelling story without violence.
6. You may write in any format you choose. You may submit a short story, poem, essay, skit, commercial or even short thought provoking idea. Clear themes and active storylines are best adapted to performance. We do not expect or need to receive pieces in the format of a play or skit.

the TIMELINE...

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER	Actors arrive at your school for the ECHOES Creative Writing Workshops.
OCTOBER – DECEMBER	Students work on their pieces.
DECEMBER 19	Deadline for submissions. All pieces must be postmarked on or before December 19th to be eligible for consideration. Please contact us if a problem develops and more time is needed.
DECEMBER – JANUARY	MGR creative team evaluates the submissions. This is an exhausting but exciting process. Last year, we received more than 3,500 submissions.
LATE JANUARY/FEBRUARY	The script is finalized and the new ECHOES goes into rehearsal.
LATE FEBRUARY – APRIL	ECHOES is on the road!

SELECTION CRITERIA

A newly expanded section in our ECHOES guide, the following will provide information regarding the criteria we use to select pieces for performance and examples of entries received in previous years with our comments regarding the work. We encourage you to read through this section thoroughly as we feel it may prove rather informative.

Each of the examples appears as we received it. Spelling and grammar errors remain intact. While only a few of these entries were performed, each contains a valuable lesson.

WE SELECT MATERIAL WITH THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA IN MIND:

- **Strong & Active Storyline** — As we all know, any good story, movie, book, play, poem, etc. has a defined beginning, middle, and end. We look for those pieces with a well-constructed and imaginative idea or theme. The piece should describe clear action. Remember, theatre “shows,” instead of “tells.”
- **Dialogue** — Students are naturals when creating realistic sounding dialogues. Although we can easily add dialogue to a piece, we are always interested in finding student-generated dialogues which add depth and meaning to their work.
- **Clear Moral** — It is our intent to educate as well as entertain. We look for pieces that communicate a lesson, theme or idea that the young author wants to convey. Whether through comedy or drama, we search for those pieces that offer interesting and clear views.
- **Topical Issues** — We rather enjoy finding entries that include a student’s perspective on current events and issues. Unique thoughts and creative solutions to “hot” issues are some of the treasures for which we look.
- **Staging Requirements** — It should be noted that regardless of the outstanding nature of a piece, we must consider a number of physical factors that are relevant to the production of any play. These factors include: the need for special effects and props, the number of characters and settings, the complexity of costumes, the opportunity for adding audience participation, music, mime, or dance. Sometimes your visions are greater than our ability to produce them.
- **Correct Grammar & Spelling** — While we are indeed looking for creatively expressed ideas, entries should be correctly spelled and grammatically correct.

EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUS ENTRIES

A 6TH GRADER
submitted this
commercial:

MGR: *Here we have an excellent piece written as a commercial. The piece is topical with a unique comic spin. The product is ridiculous, but almost seems credible. Only when the phone number is revealed do we truly understand the point the author is attempting to make. The use of dialogue is wonderful and correctly formatted for a play.*

Commercial Host: Hello, I'm Mr. Moo and I'm going to tell you about a product that will make you loose weight fast. The product is called Mr. Bob. This wonder product only costs twenty payments of 19.95 plus \$20 for shipping and handling. Our product is man that eats all of your food so that you practically starve to loose those extra pounds. You are probably asking yourself. "Why should I let a man eat all my food?" Well the answer is that you loose weight fast and when you get to just the right weight you can store Mr. Bob in a closet or under your bed. Mr. Bob won't starve because of all the weight he gained he won't have to eat for six months. Then if you get fat again you can take Mr. Bob out and you can loose weight again. If you don't believe me just listen to one of our happy customers.

Customer number one: I used to weigh 450 pounds. Since I got Mr. Bob I lost 190 pounds and I kept it off for three months. THANKS MR. BOB.

Commercial Host: So you see that our product works really well and ordering is as simple as calling 1-800-cheap-junk.

TV Host: now back to our program

A 7TH GRADER
submitted this
poetic piece:

MGR: *We felt the author of this piece of free verse truly understood the feelings being expressed, proving that the best writing comes from commitment to or passion for an idea. A hidden strength of this piece is that the author has given us a glimpse of not one character but two. By describing the relationship between father and daughter, the audience meets them both.*

In theatre, we want the audience to care about our characters. One of the best ways is to observe how characters interact with each other. Remember, it takes two people to have a relationship, which not so coincidentally is the same number of people you need for dialogue. The trick is that not every character has to speak to convey something.

NEVER THERE

You weren't there for me when I needed you,
You weren't there for me when I wanted you,
You weren't there for me to love,
You just walked out of my life,
It is hard for me to love you now but, you know I always will,
We can make up for lost time I know we will
I will love you always and then some still,
You are here know and I hope you stay true...
Because Dad I love you!!!!

EXAMPLES (con't)

A 7TH GRADER contributed this unique piece:

MGR: *This piece presented such a clever notion that it immediately grabbed our eye. While an unusual form for an entry, the piece, with only a short paragraph and list, presents a clear-cut idea. The language suggests a tone of amused, almost scientific wonder; a "character" was evident in the writing. With few staging restrictions imposed by the author, the piece was easy to adapt for performance and allowed for a unique creative collaboration.*

If you have visited America you know that there are many weird American terms. If you answered "wee wee" to this question then you are correct. America is home to many strange terms and slangs, such as "What's up" which doesn't mean the sky or asking if there is a plane overhead, it just means "How are you, what are you doing?" As you read on you will see many strange words that I like to call Weird American Terms

"Bites" – not appealing to a person, something that you don't like.

"Chicken" – someone who is unwilling or afraid to do something

"Daddio" – a name for someone like a friend

"Dog" – a nickname for someone, usually used in the hip-hop crowd

"Dude" – a nickname. Used to get ones attention. Something used to call someone unknown.

"Like" – in similarity. trying to explain something

"Peace-out" – a way or form of saying goodbye

"Phat" – cool, see Sweet

"Radical" – awesome, also see Sweet

"Sick" – disgusting, gross, not meaning germ infested

"Sucks" – see Bites

"Sweet" – meaning cool or appealing to someone, not sugar sweet

"Totally" – in agreement

"What a Beauty" – excellent, really good

"What's up" – a way of asking how are you, what are you doing?

"YO" – to get someone's attention or say hello

• • •

This poem by an 8TH GRADER is a long time ECHOES favorite,

MGR: *The following poem is obviously well constructed, with a clear theme and point of view. We adapted this piece by transforming it into a gospel song. The strengths of this work lie in the use of the first person and the simplicity of the action. The author presented us with a single poetic moment to recreate and by adding music we heightened the life in that moment.*

First person writing adapts well to stage. Keep the events or action simple. We have to act out the moments writers present. If there are too many moments or they are spaced out in time to a great extent, performing the piece becomes difficult.

THE BLACK LEAF

When the day ends
The children are asleep,
The canal is still
Awake and the moon is
Shining like a pearl
In the sea, The shadow

Of a dove is on the water
For the first time
I notice a single black leaf
Falling
Falling
Falling

EXAMPLES (con't)

A 6TH GRADER submitted this award winning dialogue:

MGR: Here we have an excellent, clever piece using mathematical terms and ideas in a detective skit. It's funny, creative, and original – the building blocks of an award winning ECHOES entry. In fact, this piece won the award of Best Overall Submission for ECHOES 2005. The author has strong background knowledge of the subject matter which is apparent in the clever way he utilizes mathematical terms. The best pieces come from subjects that the author feels strongly about, or is well versed in.

The Story of the Missing 11

Hello. My name is Lucas Simmons, Number Detective. (ring, ring) Hello, number agency. What! Missing 11? I'll be right over! This happens all the time. 11 is a little odd, but I'll go to find him.

(At the house of the lady who called)

"Is this the scene of the crime?" I asked.

"Yes," said the lady. It's so odd that my 11 is missing. He's always been there right after 10.

"Has 11 been hanging out with a lot of factors?" I asked.

"No" answered the lady. 11 is completely prime so he only hangs out with number one.

"How long has 11 been missing?" I said.

"Well, I'm not sure. He's usually here after 10, but I haven't seen him at all today."

"Any ideas where he might go?" I asked.

"Not really. I looked under the prime factorization tree down the street, but he wasn't there. I only found one, the poor lonely guy. Hey, you don't suppose it's a composite number crime do you?"

"Not a chance, sister! After all, 11 doesn't have more than 2 multiples. 11 is loyal to one and one only!" I said.

Then she exclaimed, "Hey! I read in the newspaper that the exponent gang was in town! Could they have taken my 11?"

"Those 3 exponents could have ganged up on him. 3^3 equals 27 and he is just 11 ...but wait! Those 3s got thrown in jail a few days ago for counterfeit multiplying, so it couldn't have been them who stole 11."

Then she asked, "Do you think he went with the multiples, you know, 22, 33, and 44, to the doubleday ball field to catch the base ball game?"

"No," I said. "I checked that out already and 11 wasn't with them when they left."

"Well, it could not be the factors because they are just one and 11. One is under the prime factorization tree and 11 is missing!" she cried. "I just hope 11 didn't get mixed up with the wrong crowd! You know who I mean, those common factors or common multiples!"

"He's no common criminal, ma'am. He's not even a square number. Up until tonight, he hasn't been in any trouble. In fact, he's been as straight as two lines!" I told the lady.

Suddenly, the door opens. In walks 11.

11 looks at us and says, "Hey! What's going on?"

"There you are!" exclaimed the lady. "I've been worried sick! I even called the number detective to find you when you didn't come home after 10!"

11 looked at the lady with frustration and said, "I said I'd be here before 12!"

EXAMPLES (con't)

a 6TH GRADER submitted this playful poem:

MGR: *The poem below has a distinct beginning, middle and end. The audience meets a seemingly fun character, the Spider, who has a clear point of view. The action is simple and limited to a few moments. Yet with all its strengths, the piece doesn't make any real statement; it's just kind of silly. While we do like a few silly pieces in the performance, we are more intrigued by student work that expresses unique thoughts and opinions.*

THE SPIDER

There is a spider amongst the web
He creeps, he crawls, he spins up thread
When the moonlight is out, at the end of the day
He sneaks around and hunts his prey
Then he wraps it up tight and tucks it away.
For a late night snack of a light buffet
Yum! Bug Souffle

• • •

a 6TH GRADER submitted the following short story:

MGR: *Here we have a good moral lesson trapped inside an incomplete story. We don't get to see the heroine learn her lesson. There is also a big jump in time in the middle of the story; this is hard to act out on stage. We certainly applaud this writer for her use of dialogue, even if incorrectly formatted, to compliment her story. It keeps the story active. With more detail and a little more action, this story could have made an interesting adaptation.*

One day there was a girl. The girl's name was Neptune. Neptune has a father that will give her anything she want. Until one day Neptune asked her father if she could have a horse. Neptune: "but father why can't I have a horse?" Father: "because my dear Neptune a horse is a big responsibility". Neptune: "Oh please, father!" Father "NO". Neptune: "I'll take care of the horse by myself." Father: "but Neptune where will you keep the horse?" Neptune: "I'll keep the horse in one of the empty rooms." Father: I'll make you a deal if you promise to raise the money for a horse I will get you one."

So Neptune worked and worked and worked for ten whole months. When Neptune had raised the money for a horse, her father took her to a farm and there she chose a quarter horse. Then Neptune and her father got home Neptune was in for a big surprise. Neptune: "Oh father taking care of a horse is too much for me." Father: "Well what do you want to do with the horse." Neptune: "maybe I could sell the horse." So Neptune was very happy to just go visit and ride.

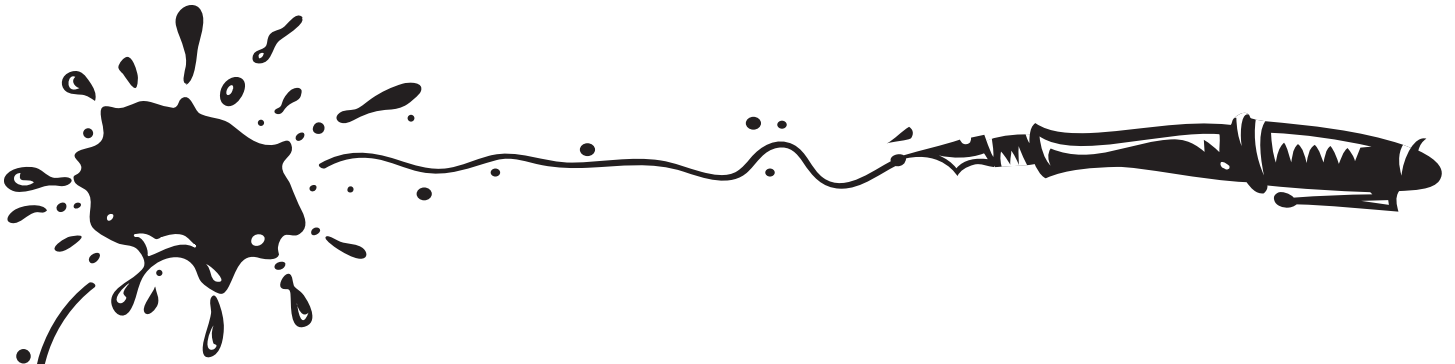


LEARNING STANDARDS

THE ECHOES PROGRAM BUILDS SKILLS AS DEFINED BY THE NYS LEARNING STANDARDS INDICATED BELOW...

ECHOES Creative Writing Workshop

Writing Process		ECHOES Performance		NYS Learning Standards
✓				ELA Standard 1.1: Language for Information and Understanding – Listening and Reading
	✓			ELA Standard 1.2: Language for Information and Understanding – Speaking and Writing
✓		✓		ELA Standard 2.1: Language for Literary Response and Expression – Listening and Reading
	✓			ELA Standard 2.2: Language for Literary Response and Expression – Speaking and Writing
✓				ELA Standard 3.1: Language for Critical Evaluation and Analysis – Listening and Reading
	✓			ELA Standard 3.2: Language for Critical Evaluation and Analysis – Speaking and Writing
✓		✓		ELA Standard 4.1: Language for Social Interaction – Listening and Speaking
	✓			ELA Standard 4.2: Language for Social Interaction – Reading and Writing
✓	✓	✓		ARTS Standard 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts - THEATRE
✓		✓		ARTS Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources - THEATRE
✓	✓			ARTS Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art - THEATRE
✓				ARTS Standard 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts - THEATRE



I want to **KNOW MORE...** Students are invited to contact us with questions via e-mail at **youthmgr@merry-go-round.com**. You can also check out our web page at **www.merry-go-round.com** for additional information about the Merry-Go-Round or ECHOES. Students are also encouraged to use the enclosed "Top Secret" Guide for tips and hints for writing for ECHOES.

Teachers and Administrators, if you would like to know more about the ECHOES Program, the creative writing workshop and/or the selection process, please contact **Carole Estabrook, Educational Theatre Coordinator**, at either **315-255-1305x26** or **youthmgr@merry-go-round.com**.

MERRY-GO-ROUND CREATIVE TEAM

Ed Sayles, Producing Director, is recognized in the *Who's Who in American Theatre* for his many accomplishments over his thirty year career. One of the first pioneers of the youth theatre movement, Ed helped to create innovations in performances for children and has spearheaded youth theatre companies in both Ohio and his native New York. During his tenure at the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, his leadership has seen the company gain national recognition for both its ground breaking youth tour and artistically acclaimed summer musical theatre.

Carole Estabrook, Educational Theatre Coordinator, is very excited to be scheduling the same educational theatre tours that she enjoyed as a child in the Southern Cayuga School District. Although she loves working in a busy office, the best part of Carole's job is meeting teachers and students throughout the state. In her spare time, Carole loves to read and write. Her dream is to one day publish a small collection of poems.

Lisa Myers, Youth Tour Director, is excited to be starting her fourth season with Merry-Go-Round! Past MGR shows include: *The Oldest Story Ever Told*, *The Paper Bag Princess*, and the *Comedia Princess and the Pea*. She recently worked with Prairie Fire Children's Theatre in her home state of Minnesota where she was the Genie in *Aladdin* and Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lisa graduated from Concordia College with a BA in Theatre. In addition to acting, Lisa loves teaching, directing, working with power tools in the scene shop, and playing with her fish.



Production guide authored by Timothy Fox & designed by Beth Culver, Coburn Design

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