

PINOCCHIO by JENI WHITTAKER

CAST in order of appearance

Puppetmaster
First Ticketseller
2nd Ticketseller
3rd Ticketseller
Gepetto
Narrator 1
Narrator 2
Narrator 3
Narrator 4
Narrator 5
Narrator 6
Pinocchio
Teacher
A child
1st Puppet
2nd Puppet
3rd Puppet
4th Puppet
1st Stranger
2nd Stranger
3rd Stranger
4th Stranger
5th Stranger
6th Stranger
Stationmaster
Overseer 1
Overseer 2
Narrator 7
Narrator 8
Narrator 9
Overseer 3
Narrator 10
Narrator 11
Narrator 12

When this was written it was a short piece for about 30 children between ages 8 and 10. I wanted to make sure everyone spoke, hence the number of small speaking sections - and I wanted to ensure that everyone was actively involved all the time. Hence, everyone becomes Pinocchios and Gepettos, the train, the schoolchildren, circus acts, puppets and so on. It worked very well.

Of course, it is easy to adapt to almost any number from about 10 upwards.

Depending on the extra improvised material - for which detailed ideas are given - that you add with your cast this play lasts between half an hour and one hour or more.

EXTRACT ONE

The whole cast enter from different parts of the stage and auditorium. The stage is empty. The puppetmaster directs proceedings. Try to individualise the way the stage is prepared in this first part. Some people are enthusiastic and busy, working in a quick rhythm whilst others are lazy and reluctant, working in a slow rhythm. The variety of ways in which the mimed tasks are tackled add to the interest of this opening. As with all the mimed and improvised sections of this piece, don't hurry the proceedings. Everything is sufficiently interesting to watch - and with large enough numbers and therefore different areas for an audience to focus on - for it to be important to allow an audience sufficient time to move their eyes around the stage and watch different groups.

PUPPETMASTER

Come on, clear this place up. We've got a show to put on here. Lots of people will be arriving any minute now. I've never seen such a mess and a clutter. There are huge pieces of heavy furniture everywhere. Move all that to the side.

Develop and improvise here, using clear specific mime, showing the size and weight of the objects and how many people it takes to move each item. The Puppetmaster can move between groups encouraging, admonishing and generally helping give reality to the mimed objects with his words ... 'Watch that piano there ... it's very heavy. You may find it better to push it carefully yes, that's right' 'Careful!! Don't stack those chairs so high they're teetering.... Come on you two idle loafers or we'll never be done ...' and so on.

PUPPETMASTER

Now move all the little bits and pieces that are left.

This too is done, concentrating on 'making real' smaller objects of all kinds and taking them to the sides of the stage, either 'throwing' them into the wings - which could cause hilarious anger from the puppetmaster ... 'Hey! That's my Great-Aunt Ermytrude's best china teaset. What's she going to say the next time she comes to tea??' or carrying them carelessly... 'Don't swing that poor canary in his cage like that, you're giving him a headache ...' and so on.

The skill of working up these improvised sections comes in fixing on an order and a 'script' amongst the cast so that for performance purposes, they know what they are doing, the order of events, and so on - a very good early training in devising.

PUPPETMASTER

And now a thorough sweeping and cleaning should do the trick.

This is done too, concentrating once more on a variety of cleaning methods and 'attitudes.' Contrast the lazy one who is flipping his dust-pile - with a sideways glance at the Puppetmaster to check he isn't observing - under the 'carpet' with the very enthusiastic sweeper who is creating such a dust-cloud that a number of others begin to choke and splutter and one, overcome by dust collapses and has to be carried to a safe area and fanned energetically to bring her round! There are windows to clean, furniture to polish - even the puppetmaster's face to polish perhaps! Once again, plenty of scope for imagination - coupled with clear mime skills. Finally ...

PUPPETMASTER

O.K. O.K. We seem to have quite an audience here now. Ticketsellers! Do your job!

FIRST TICKETSELLER

Roll up! Roll up! Come and see the greatest puppetshow on earth. Puppets so real you'd never believe your eyes! Strings, sir? Well, of course they've got them but they're so well disguised that you'll never see them.

2ND & 3RD TICKETSELLERS

Roll up! Roll up! Buy your tickets now for the fabulous puppet show!

All three move amongst the audience asking, 'Do you want a ticket?' 'You won't regret it. It's wonderful!' etc. Unless they are very confident youngsters, I wouldn't expect them to be able to ad lib with individuals in the audience, but that of course would be ideal! Probably they will need to work out a few set lines each - about the show, their favourite character or moment - without giving too much away - about the colour, the costumes, the reasonable price, etc. An exercise in selling/ advertising!

Enter Gepetto.

PUPPETMASTER

Welcome to the show, Mr Gepetto. You don't have to pay, of course, because you made all my wonderful puppets.

GEPETTO

Thankyou. You're very kind. I love every puppet I make, you know, as if they were my own sons and daughters.

PUPPETMASTER *patting him kindly on the shoulder*

Of course you do. You never married, did you? Never had any children of your own. It's very sad.

Gepetto shakes his head sadly and sits down in the audience. The puppets come on and dance and perform. An opportunity here for some of the group to work up a short 'puppet' show, with themselves as 'puppets.'. This could be just a dance or a little mimed simple bit of slapstick. Suggestions:

i.]a puppet wakes up - slow mime - to find he is all alone and everyone has left him. He shakes in his shoes. A number of other puppets jump out and surprise him from various parts of the stage. They end with a happy little dance.

ii.] one puppet shows in mime that he is very sad. Others take turns, or work together, to try and cheer him up - doing pratfalls, dancing, miming immense laughter, and so on. Nothing works. They end by giving up and are leaving when the sad puppet taps one on the shoulder. The tapped one turns, walks into the sad one's hand, palm out, falls over, rubs his sore head etc. ruefully. The sad one almost kills himself laughing. The others start to walk off disgustedly, but then change their minds, turn round and all join with the sad one in a short dance.

At the end of the 'show', Gepetto gets up and, still clapping, goes over to the puppets.

GEPETTO

That was wonderful. Well done, all of you. How did you manage to remember all that, all by yourselves?

The puppets slowly collapse around him. He looks at them sadly.

GEPETTO

Of course, I know it's not really you. It's just that you look so real sometimes, and I made each one of you with such love in my heart that I find myself ... well ... dreaming, I suppose. Oh, silly me - never mind. I must pull myself together at once. Goodbye, dear friends. I wish I didn't have to sell you all. I wish I could afford to keep one of you for my very own. Someone I could love as if he were my own son.

Gepetto moves to the front centre and sits down glumly. The lights fade and the puppets move off. The Narrators come on, as do all the cast, in pairs, as Gepettos and Pinocchios. Every Gepetto has a Pinocchio lying on the floor in front of him. Lights gradually come up as the Narrators speak. At the front, centre, are the pair who will be the main Pinocchio and Gepetto throughout the piece. Gepetto should be the person who has played him so far. The Gepettos and Pinocchios all mime to the narration as

follows.

NARRATOR 1

That night, Gepetto had the strangest dream. He dreamt he was in a great echoing room full of mirrors.

NARRATOR 2

In front of him was a piece of wood and his precious tools.

NARRATOR 3

As he touched the wood, a strange thing happened. It was almost like an electric shock, as if the wood were somehow alive.

NARRATOR 1

He began to shape the wood in front of him, but it was as if the tools had minds of their own.

NARRATOR 2

They flew over the wood much faster than usual and in a very short time, lying on the ground by Gepetto, was the figure of a boy puppet, more lifelike than any puppet he had made before.

Having mimed all the above, the Gepettos now stand and pull their Pinocchios up into a sitting position.

NARRATOR 3

Gepetto admired his handiwork.

NARRATOR 1

Oh, how real he was!

NARRATOR 2

The wood was so smooth and warm it felt like skin.

NARRATOR 3

And as for his mouth: the wooden lips seemed ready to open....

NARRATOR 1

The eyes to blink ...

NARRATOR 2

And even the heart to beat.

NARRATOR 3

But it was illusion. Poor Gepetto.

NARRATOR 1

He bowed his head over his creation and wept.

The Gepettos first bend over their puppets and cry, then turn away, overcome with sorrow. Behind them, the puppets start to stir.

NARRATOR 2

But what's this?

NARRATOR 3

Miracle of miracles! Where Gepetto's tears fell on the wooden puppet's joints, the hard wood softened.

The puppets begin to move, becoming more and more fluid. Finally, they walk over to their Gepettos and tap them on the shoulder.

PINOCCHIOS

Father?

Gepettos all turn and embrace their Pinocchios.

GEPETTOS

My son!

Pinocchios and Gepettos perform a little dance of joy. Three new Narrators come forward.

NARRATOR 4

You'd think everything would be happy now, wouldn't you?

NARRATOR 5

Well, mostly it was. Pinocchio seemed to be a real boy, but he wasn't quite.

GEPETTOS

Wasn't quite?

GEPETTO [*the main one*]

How can that be? Explain yourself please.

PINOCCHIO [*the main one*]

I want to be a real boy and I want it now!

ALL PINOCCHIOS *stamping their feet at the same time*

Now! Now!! NOW!!!

NARRATOR 6

As you can see, life with Pinocchio has its ups and downs!

PINOCCHIO

If I don't get what I want I'll be very angry. I'll kick and I'll stamp.

All Pinocchios demonstrate.

PINOCCHIO

I'll break things!

Pinocchios demonstrate this too.

PINOCCHIO

And if that doesn't work, I'll scream!

All Pinocchios scream and roar at once. Gepettos clap their hands over their ears.

GEPETTOS

All right! All right! All right!

The Pinocchios calm down.

GEPETTO

Now, sit down and listen. [*Sulkily, all the Pinocchios do. The other Gepettos mime Gepetto's actions as he speaks.*] To be a real boy, you need to learn lots of things.

Boys go to school with lots of other children to do that.

PINOCCHIO

Then I'll go to school!

A school bell rings loudly and the cast all reassemble themselves as children playing games in the playground....

EXTRACT TWO

The strangers, at least 6, come on and surround Pinocchio - though making sure he is still visible.

NARRATOR 6

When he woke up, he was surrounded by a number of strange people.

1ST STRANGER

Hello, Pinocchio.

Each of these speeches is followed by wheezy laughter from them all - more like hissing than anything else.

2ND STRANGER

Bet you don't know what we're doing here.

3RD STRANGER

We've come to take you to school.

PINOCCHIO

But ...

4TH STRANGER

Oh, not that school.

5TH STRANGER

You don't want to learn boring stuff like reading and writing, do you?

PINOCCHIO

Well, yes, because ...

6TH STRANGER

Oh, come on now! Surely you can do better. A clever chap like you.

The groupings of the strangers form and reform with dazzling speed as they mime each of the following in turn - quick bursts of mimed movement ending with bezazzy freeze-frames.

1ST STRANGER

How about yo-yoing!

2ND STRANGER

And hopscotch!

3RD STRANGER

Skateboarding!

4TH STRANGER

And throwing mudpies!

5TH STRANGER

Making faces at the teacher!

6TH STRANGER

Bet you can't make as ugly a face as she can! [*She points to 5th Stranger.*]

5TH STRANGER *proudly*

No one can! [*She demonstrates and Pinocchio tries it too.*]

1ST STRANGER

Not bad! Well?

ALL STRANGERS

Well?

1ST STRANGER

What do you think?

PINOCCHIO

Sounds like fun, but is it school? My father said I must go to school to be a proper boy.

ALL STRANGERS

School? 'Course it is.

1ST STRANGER

Who ever said school couldn't be fun!

2ND STRANGER

This school is the best there ever was.

3RD STRANGER

Fun all the day long!

4TH STRANGER

And plenty of sweets to eat and fizz to drink.

5TH STRANGER

And no homework ever.

6TH STRANGER *changing tone as all the other lean in*
And all it costs is two bright pounds.

PINOCCHIO

Oh, well that's that, then. I've only got one pound. [*He starts to leave.*]

1ST STRANGER

Stop! [*He beckons the others and they all go into a rigger scrum type huddle.*]

1ST STRANGER *breaking out of the huddle. The others form a group behind him*

We've decided to be generous.

ALL OTHER STRANGERS

Very generous!

1ST STRANGER

We'll accept your offer of one bright pound.

ALL STRANGERS

Call it a deal!

2ND STRANGER

Out of the sincere generosity of our hearts. [*All nod exaggeratedly, with mock sincere expressions on their faces.*]

3RD STRANGER

You can owe us the rest. [*The strangers start to surround Pinocchio, batting him to and fro between them. Pinocchio acts more and more confused.*]

4TH STRANGER

Say, a week, shall we? And we'll come by for it.

5TH STRANGER

We can't say fairer than that.

6TH STRANGER

I think you'll find our offer is more than generous and won't be bettered anywhere.

ALL STRANGERS *now standing over the bewildered Pinocchio in a threatening grouping*

We'll call it a deal then, shall we?

1ST STRANGER *sticking out his hand*

Shake on it!

2ND STRANGER

And your pound?

Pinocchio hands over his pound reluctantly. The 2nd Stranger takes it very quickly and there follows a bewildering series of moves as they pass the coin around, up and over, between legs and behind backs till it is pocketed by one of them.

6TH STRANGER

There! That's done!

5TH STRANGER *leaning confidently towards Pinocchio and, with the 4th Stranger, putting an arm round his shoulders, one on each side.*

I think you'll find you won't regret your decision.

Having led Pinocchio to front centre, they all call out together:

ALL STRANGERS

Bring on the train!

The rest of the cast come on as the train - a good old-fashioned steam one - miming doors opening and shutting. They absorb Pinocchio and the 6, who all then chuff round the stage until they come to a hissing halt. The person at the front of the train steps out to become the Stationmaster.

STATIONMASTER

Everybody off! All change! All change!

The 'train' becomes a milling crowd of children, including Pinocchio, and a number of fierce

Overseers [at least three], miming whips or cudgels, and laying about amongst the children. Three new Narrators take over at this general change around.

OVERSEER1

Line up in pairs. On the double! March!...

EXTRACT THREE

PINOCCHIO

This is the very fish that ate my father in my dream. I must be very brave. [*He turns to face the monster and calls out.*] Father! I'm coming!

He enters into the mouth and the cast start to move backwards, drawing the black cloth with them. The red cloth is raised to reveal Gepetto and then moved behind them, so that it is now stretched taut behind the pair. All cast freeze except for the two, who embrace. They then begin a foot-stamping, clapping dance, rather like a clumsy folk-dance. Gepetto begins the dance and Pinocchio starts to follow. They time their movements to correspond with the following:

NARRATOR 10

Gepetto couldn't believe his eyes.

NARRATOR 11

His heart felt as though it would burst with joy.

NARRATOR 12

So full was it, that he must express it somehow. His joy began in his toes and feet..

NARRATOR 11

... which began to stamp and skip ...

NARRATOR 10

His body followed, arms raised above his head, hands clapping ...

NARRATOR 11

Until feet and hands combined to such a rhythm of joy that Pinocchio couldn't resist and joined in with him.

NARRATOR 12

There were the two of them, deep in the belly of the fish, leaping and clapping, laughing and shouting...

NARRATOR 10

... and irritating the tender stomach-lining of that unfortunate creature so that his belly began to heave... [*The cast behind undulate the black cloth throughout the next few lines.*]

NARRATOR 11

His throat to gasp...

NARRATOR 10

His mouth to open and shut until, in one huge convulsion..... [*The cast with the black cloth move it about in a frenzied fashion. Gepetto and Pinocchio become muddled up with it.*]

NARRATOR 11

... Part belch,

NARRATOR 12

...Part sneeze,

NARRATOR 10

He shot the offending particles - Gepetto and Pinocchio - out of his belly, indeed up and up in the air [*The cloth descends over a single stage block placed at the back of the stage, Pinocchio and Gepetto standing on the block, covered with the cloth. The cast raise the sides of the cloth and undulate it gently around the central position of block with the two central characters standing on it. The effect should be that they are buoyed up by the cloth.*]

NARRATOR 11

So that for a moment, astonished people on the earth ...

NARRATOR 12

Farmers, officeworkers staring out of their windows, housewives hanging out their washing ...

NARRATOR 11

...Saw two specks that might or might not have been human, hanging suspended in the air, far far away -

NARRATOR 10

As if balanced on top of a giant water-spout -

NARRATOR 11

- There they hung until, gradually, the water-spout fell, slowly, slowly back towards the sea - [*The movements of the cast holding the cloth become more and more serene and lower and lower.*]

NARRATOR 12

Carrying Pinocchio and Gepetto with it, cushioned by water, cradled in the arms of the ocean, earthwards again

NARRATOR 10

Until with a tiny puff of air from the great fish's lips as they came down ... [*The cast face the front, making an interesting shape.*]

NARRATOR 11 ...The softest pfff - [*The cast behind blow out with their lips, making the same sound.*] ...soft as thistledown,

NARRATOR 12 ... they landed on their own two feet on dry land once more.

Gepetto and Pinocchio step from the top of the block at the back and move to the front, looking about them. The rest of the cast move quietly into their original positions as multiple Gepettos and Pinocchios, scattered all over the stage. They turn towards each other.

PINOCCHIOS

Father!

GEPETTOS

My son!

GEPETTO [*the main one*]

Pinocchio, you've changed. [*All the Gepettos touch their Pinocchios on their hands or arms.*] Your skin is soft, no longer hard as wood.

PINOCCHIO [*the main one.*]

And listen, father, a real heart beats inside me. [*The whole cast start a very gentle heart beat - perhaps with the lips and tongue alone at first.*] I can feel it. I'm a real boy at last.

The cast turn to the front and start to move forward, increasing the sound of the heartbeat, using hands on thighs, feet, whatever, until it reaches a crescendo at the same time as they reach the front of the stage. Their hands start to take the beat up with clapping palms, arms rising up above the head. Freeze all together to finish.

EXTRACT from Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS

The main intention of the play is to practice the use of a combination of script and other skills. The play makes an ideal 'first script' for young people, but it also stretches their skills in improvisation, devising, mime and physical theatre. Because of the teamwork involved throughout, it is a good training ground for the discipline necessary in putting on a production of any kind, but particularly of the physical theatre kind. The script

covers narrating skills as well as brief forays into a number of character roles.

Though it was written for 8 - 10 year olds, it is the kind of script that could be done with any age-group and could be stunning with a group of sixth-formers, say, wanting to explore the potentials of story-telling in a visual way.

The play tells the familiar story of Pinocchio in a very different way. It is different physically in that, though there is a 'main' Gepetto and Pinocchio, there are also times when everyone is Gepetto or Pinocchio. But it is also different in its impact from the often confusing and rambling original story. It seeks to expose the emotional central core of the story, using often poetic means to explore it: the lonely person who wants a child is the simplest thread - and Gepetto is rewarded for his good heart. The more complex thread is really an exploration of what it means to be human; Pinocchio is on a journey to discover this -and he learns about loyalty, kindness, patience, persistence and, above all, the capacity for love. It is the latter that breaks the shell of his wooden body and makes him human and, like in many of the greatest tragedies, it is suffering that is his real school master. Through suffering he learns to value the best thing about humanity: its ability to gain strength and focus through the power of an unselfish caring for someone else.

CHARACTERS

The characters are not developed into fully fleshed creations. Briefly, the PUPPETMASTER needs to be a confident person, since it is he/ she who opens the play. He is bossy and organising, needing that tone of voice - but he can be softer, as when he addresses Gepetto with sympathy. He should walk with a swagger - he is, after all, a showman. Big gestures, using the whole space of the playing area fully.

The TICKETSELLERS need good loud brash voices. They are advertising and need to attract attention, so use the full range of the voice. They need courage, since they have to move amongst the audience and address them directly.

GEPETTO is a gentle, kind old man. There needs to be a frailty about him, so emphasise his age and his physical weakness. Voice is difficult because it needs to be both strong and quavering.

The NARRATORS, all 12 of them, need all the usual range of skills - capacity to interest an audience, direct address, making sure the eye travels over the whole audience, not just aimed at one spot. Plenty of variation in pace and tone- err on the slow side rather than taking things too fast. These narrators too have to be quick on the uptake - they often have to pick up a cue instantly to finish the sentence for a previous narrator. This takes concentration and listening skills - to pick up the tone.

PINOCCHIO runs through a range of skills. He/ she must be strong vocally and physically. He can be sulky and brattish, hesitant and unsure, angry and certain. He needs to express wonder. After he is formed, I don't feel he has to move like a puppet. He is, after all, stringless.

TEACHER is a typical primary school teacher - rather patronising and slow in delivery. Her human side is discovered when Pinocchio kicks her!

The PUPPETS need strong physical skills. I used more for this section than the four who actually speak, because I wanted to explore the transition from the jerky puppet movements to the fluid human ones.

The STRANGERS are played as naughty school children - rebels, truants. Their voices are tempting and calculating. Their laughter mean and insinuating.

OVERSEERS have cruel , strong movements, loud bullying voices.

The rest are obvious.

SETTING

The play is best performed on an open empty space, not so big as to be intimidating to the youngsters, but big enough for such numbers to fill and all be seen separately. A studio is ideal. We performed on a vast stage which I reduced with black curtains to studio size. The neutral black curtains were also helpful, because the whale could blend into them, suggesting an even bigger size for it.

The cast create the environment with their bodies, so there is no need for any scenery. A single square block, painted black so that it blends in with the background, should be placed at the very back of the space. The only extra item that is needed is the whale. This, we also had laid out at the back of the space throughout, with the cane handles carefully placed so that it could just be picked up and moved straight into position. Behind the light black cloth is placed a shorter piece about five foot square, of red cloth, which is used in the last whale sequence. At the sides of the stage place short bamboo canes, three feet long, as many as needed for every 'donkey' to have two. Whatever pieces of cloth and equipment you are using for your circus acts, should also be placed neatly at the sides and back of the playing space...