

***THE JUNGLE BOOK:
MOWGLI
AND THE GREAT KAA***

*From the story "Kaa's Hunting"
by Rudyard Kipling*

Adapted by Kate Pogue

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The curtain rises on a jungle in India in the middle of the 19th century. A tribe of monkeys come chasing in with the boy Mowgli in their midst. They run in and out of the hut Mowgli has built. In the middle of their play, Kaa, the great python, comes through the jungle terrifying them and Baloo (a great bear) and Bagheera (a panther) who are Mowgli's friends and protectors. The monkeys disperse and Baloo and Bagheera, finding Mowgli safe from Kaa, scold the boy for playing with the monkeys. They teach him how to make himself safe in the jungle while exacting a promise from him that he won't go off with the monkeys again. They fall asleep. The monkeys, eager to get Mowgli to make them huts like his to keep them protected from the elements, wake him and drag him off with them through the jungle.

Baloo and Bagheera go to the great Kaa to ask for help in rescuing Mowgli from the monkeys. As Kaa despises the monkeys for their dirty habits and also finds them delicious to eat he agrees to go with them.

The monkeys have taken Mowgli to the Lost City. As he tries to teach them to make a hut Mowgli discovers how undisciplined, selfish and thoughtless the monkeys are and longs to be back with Bagheera and Baloo. The monkeys threaten to throw him in a snake pit if he tries to escape. Kaa and Bagheera arrive and Bagheera fights the monkeys to rescue Mowgli. Just as he is about to be overwhelmed by them Baloo, who was slow in arriving, comes and he and Kaa help Bagheera chase off the monkeys. Mowgli is rescued. He has learned that he doesn't want to be a monkey, he is content to be a human being, but is grateful that, as a boy, he can still live for a while with Baloo and Bagheera.

The play was commissioned by The Children's Theatre Festival, Houston, Texas and was first performed in the summer of 1993.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10 flexible parts)

MOWGLI: A boy, about nine years old.

BALOO: An enormous Old Bear; wise, kind firm.

BAGHEERA: Black Panther; strong, proud; a hunter.

KAA: Huge Python; narcissistic, mysterious.

MEECHEMI: Lead Monkey; assertive, smart, selfish.

KRAEKEFF: Old Monkey, deaf.

PLEEBAMA: Half-witted Monkey.

FREK: Clever, hyper-active Monkey

ZIKSHIE: Baby Monkey; copy-cat.

NOPNIT: Sidekick to Frek.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

The production problems inherent in this script can be solved by imaginative designers. If the set is based on ladders and jungle-gym elements hidden with leaves, the monkeys can climb and swing on the "trees". In the play's initial production, the snake pit was a box-like platform with a scrim front. When Mowgli was thrown in the pit, a light behind the scrim came up, showing Mowgli amid the snakes which were snake-like shapes cut from fabric and fixed to the bottom of the platform. When the strings were pulled by someone out of sight behind the platform, the "snakes" moved up and down.

Kaa is a combination puppet-costume. The head then can stretch above the actor's body, and if necessary can be manipulated with a stick; the tail stretched out far behind.

Much of the language of the play was borrowed directly from the Kipling story so that children who had read it, or would read it, could recognize, for instance, the rhyme "Brother, your tail hangs down behind." A few Hindi words, researched and suggested by the first director, were included to give an exotic flavor to the diction:

Sthula – Gross matter.

Neti – Not this, not that.

Sushumna – A term from Kundalini Yoga referring to the passage of energy up the spine.

Paramita – Yonder shore.

Tat twam asi – Thou are that.

Bandar-log is a term used by Kipling in his book to describe monkeys. In Hindi, Bandar means "monkey" and log means "people." Their scatterbrained anarchy causes them to be treated as pariahs by the rest of the jungle.

The names of the monkeys, and much of their dialogue, were invented. Their value is onomatopoeic.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: LIGHTS come up on the deep Indian jungle. A hill UPC; trees and jungle vegetation surround a clearing DSC where there is a little hut made of sticks and grass. Six chattering MONKEYS come swinging through the trees and leaping onto the stage. In their midst is a human boy, MOWGLI. They chase around in a game that looks like a combination of tag and hide and seek.)

MONKEYS: Bleckableckableckableck!

PLEEBAMA: Chiggery-chickery-chiggery ree ree ree!

KRAEKEFF: Sthula, sthulaaaa. *(Hindi word for gross matter.)*

ZIKSHIE: Blib, blib, blib

NOPRIT: Neti, neti! *(Hindi for "Not this, not that.")*

FREK: Nickity nee, nickity nee.

PLEEBAMA: Pibbilo, pibbilo.

FREK: Ooooooooouu...oooooooouuu.

NOPRIT: Wak! Wak!

MEECHEMI: Tackaberry, tackaberry. Tickamee roo!

(FREK tags KRAEKEFF who is furious.)

PLEEBAMA: Look, he's angry!

ZIKSHIE: But never mind!

NOPRIT: Brother your tail hangs down behind!

MEECHEMI: All the talk we ever heard

Said by bat or beast or bird

Hide or fin or scale or feather

Jabber it quickly all together.

MONKEYS: Bleckableckableckableck

Chiggery-chickory-chiggery ree, ree, ree

Blib, blib, blib

Nickity nee, nickity nee

Pibbilo, pibbilo

Ooooooooouu, ooooooooouu

MOWGLI: Wonderful! Say it again!

KRAEKEFF: Now we're talking just like men!

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MOWGLI: Let's play a game holding our tails. *(Looks behind himself for a tail and shows his anger and disappointment at not having one.)* Ohh!

(The other MONKEYS grab onto each other's tails and cavort in a ring.)

KRAEKEFF: Brother, your tail hang

FREK: Brother, your tail hangs

ZIKSHIE: Brother, your tail hangs down behind!

ALL: This is the way of the monkeykind!

(MOWGLI tags FREK. All the MONKEYS chase him into the jungle. Mowgli dashes back onstage alone and runs to hide in his little hut. The monkeys come out of the jungle and look for him. They can't find him. Mowgli can't stifle a sneeze.)

MOWGLI: Aaaaachoooo!

(The MONKEYS descend on the little hut. They discover Mowgli.)

MONKEYS: Netcheee. Netchee! Netchee!!

(THEY drag MOWGLI out as he laughs. They start to pull at the hut, picking it apart.)

MOWGLI: Stop that! Stop, I tell you! Don't pull at those sticks! You'll ruin it! And I made this myself!

(MOWGLI speaks with such passion and authority that the MONKEYS stop what they are doing and stare at him uncomprehendingly.)

MOWGLI: If you poke holes in it the rain'll come in and I'll get wet.

MEECHEMI: No rain in the little house?

End of Freeview

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