

# JUST SO, MR. KIPLING

*Inspired by the life and works of Rudyard Kipling*

**By Lisa Nanni-Messegee**

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## **DEDICATION**

*For T.L. and our beloved Evey*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Celebrated author Rudyard Kipling is shocked after receiving news that his only son John is missing in action in WW I. Kipling bottles his grief, throwing his focus on a new book. Suddenly he's interrupted by a mysterious little girl named Priyam. Charmed by her innocence, he shares his famous story "The Jungle Book" with her. As the tale of Mowgli springs to life, Kipling's own memories of how John became a soldier start to intertwine. As truth blends into fiction, Rudyard's memories shift to nightmares. He finally purges a painful secret, and Priyam reveals her true reason for her visit.

Many of John Kipling's lines, especially the monologues, are pulled directly from his own letters. Many direct quotes from Rudyard himself are also incorporated throughout the play. This beautiful ensemble drama will educate and challenge any theatrical artist.

## **ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

JUST SO, MR. KIPLING was produced by Acting for Young People at George Mason University's TheaterSpace in Fairfax, Virginia, opening on August 11, 2012. It was produced by Mary Lechter and directed by Lisa Nanni-Messegee with original choreography by Ahmad Maaty. Co-scene design was by Bradley Cooper and Todd Messegee; lighting design was by Mark Ormesher; and sound design was by Perry Melat. Costuming, puppets and masks were designed by Andria Bacus, Mary Sollosi, Kate Welsh-Levitt and Todd Messegee. Co-production stage managers were Patrick Magill and Kaity Cookson. (Please see end of script for premiere cast information.)

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*Cast size ranges from 14 minimum (5 m, 5 f, 4 flex) to 26 maximum speaking roles. Additional non-speaking roles are also available.*

### HUMANS

**RUDYARD KIPLING:** A distinguished, stiff-upper-lipped British celebrity writer, Nobel Prize winner and Poet Laureate. In his 50s. Wears spectacles to read and sports a thick moustache. He is the father of three with his eldest daughter having died at age seven, his youngest daughter Elsie staying at the house, and most recently having received word that his son John died in the Battle of Loos.

**PRIYAM:** British, female. Sweet, curious, and mysterious child; eager listener of Rudyard's stories. Helps him open up about his life and family. Age range 9 - 12.

**JOHN:** Rudyard's son, British, 18 years old. Always positive and cheerful even while reporting about the war; a truly charming and delightful young man. Was serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Irish Guards in World War I when he was killed in the Battle of Loos in France. He is a product of Rudyard's memories and guilt feelings.

**FRANK DOUBLEDAY:** Very close friend of Kipling and also his publisher. An American, speaks with a slight Brooklyn accent. About 47 years old. *(In Act I, Sc. 2 only.)*

**CARRIE KIPLING:** Wife of Rudyard, early 50s, American. A strong-willed, capable woman; able to show her feelings. At times, Carrie seems to be the parent figure in the family vs. Rudyard who had a childlike streak running through him throughout his life. In later years, Carrie's relationship with Rudyard remained devoted but cool.

**DR. LAWRENCE:** Caring but determined, male preferred. Flexible age. *(In Act I, Sc.5 only.)*

**LORD FREDERICK ROBERTS ("Bobs"):** Highly decorated Commander-in-Chief of British forces during the Boer War and others. He was good friends with Kipling; later pulled strings to help procure a commission in the Irish Guards for John. Bobs is deceased and appears to Rudyard in his dreams. *(In Act I, Sc. 5 only.)*

**ZAHIRA:** Storyteller, playful, intense, radiant. Female, flexible age range.

**YOUNG MOWGLI:** (*Appears in Act I.*) Playful, energetic, haughty, loving, innocent, clever, resourceful, brave. Male preferred. Age range 12 - 13.

**14-YEAR-OLD MOWGLI:** (*In Act II.*) Strong-willed, haughty, positive, resourceful, still innocent in the ways of the world; inquisitive and very brave. Male preferred.

**16-YEAR-OLD MOWGLI:** (*In Act II.*) Clever and brave, has been learning the ways of the villagers; still an outsider, a bit more serious now, biding his time and dedicated to his goal of defeating Shere Khan. Male preferred.

**VINEETA:** Pretty, innocent, and kind. She has a lovely singing voice. Age range 12 - 16. (*In Act II, Sc. 2 only.*)

**JHARNA:** Mother to Vineeta. Protective, angry. 30s. (*In Act II, Sc. 2 only.*)

**MESSUA:** The birth mother of Mowgli, lives in the village, kind, intuitive, concerned. 30s - 40s. (*In Act II, Sc. 4 and 5.*)

**IJANA:** Neighbor lady of Messua. Observant, calculating. 20s - 40s. (*In Act II, Sc. 4 and 5.*)

**BULDEO:** Ijana's husband, keeper of the bulls; interested in his own self-preservation; suspicious, superstitious, quick to blame. 30s. (*In Act II, Sc. 6 and 7.*)

*(The roles of 14-year-old Mowgli and 16-year-old Mowgli may be played by one actor.)*

*Continued*

## **ANIMALS**

**BALOO:** A bear. Protective, considers Mowgli to be like a little brother. Playful, loving, silly, fiercely loyal. Flexible gender.

**BAGHEERA:** A panther. Harbors a secret, intelligent, loving, protective; considers Mowgli to be like a son. Flexible gender.

**AKELA:** A wolf. Elder leader of the Wolf Pack and head of the Council on the Rock. He ages during the play, so he is seen as vital in his prime, but later as old and feeble. No matter the age, he is always noble and diplomatic. Flexible gender.

**ZEV THE YOUNG WOLF:** Gullible, eager for a free meal, youthful, jealous of Mowgli. We see him grow up. He starts as friends with Mowgli but changes loyalty to Shere Khan as he gets older. Flexible gender.

**KUMARA:** A more assertive monkey in the tribe. Forgetful, enthusiastic. Flexible age and gender.

**HEM:** The self-proclaimed smartest monkey in the tribe. Flexible age and gender.

**KAA:** A rock snake of considerable size. Seductive, smooth, dangerous, calculating, prideful. Female.

**MOTHER WOLF:** Considers herself to be Mowgli's mother; concerned for him, loving, and fiercely protective.

**SHERE KHAN:** A lame tiger. Bitter about his lack of power and wishes to turn the tables. Cunning, charming, vengeful. Flexible gender.

**TABAQUI:** A jackal. Given zero respect. A scavenger. Bitter and angry towards Mowgli and his friends. Vengeful, seething. Flexible gender. (*In Act II, Sc. 3 only.*)

## **ADDITIONAL ENSEMBLE ROLES**

Indian Dancers

WW I Soldiers

Monkeys

Old Men

Villagers

Council of Animals on the Rock

### **TIME**

Autumn, 1915.

### **SETTINGS**

Two locations: Rudyard Kipling's study in his home in Sussex, England, and a dream world, often the jungle or native village, where stories and memories collide.

Rudyard's study is a nice room with a desk and wooden chair. The desk holds a Remington typewriter, paper, an inkwell, and a Waterman fountain pen. We see a shelf of books. Among the books are Kipling's own works and the works of Jane Austen. Artwork fills the walls of the study, depicting scenes of Bombay, India, along with heroic-looking paintings of men in battle. A globe of the world takes a prominent place in the study as well as a small, decorative ottoman (or chair) for the occasional visitor.

The jungle includes ruins of the Lost City, an Indian village long forgotten. The place is in shambles. There are places for monkeys to perch upon and perhaps places to hang or lounge.

### **COSTUMES**

It is preferred that all the animals be represented by actors in mask. They may be dressed in loose Indian attire, dance clothes, or simple costume accessories, just enough to tell the story.

### **MUSIC**

In Act II Vineeta sings a pretty song she's made up for Mowgli's benefit. She can sing it a cappella or piano sheet music with guitar chords is available from the publisher.

## **End of Freeview**

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