

# 'ROUND THE WORLD AND BACK AGAIN

(A brief and inaccurate history of  
everything)

By Stephen Murray

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## STORY OF THE PLAY

This happenin' history lesson presents a fresh perspective as to who, what, where, when and how this crazy planet and its people came to be. From dinosaur extinction to Columbus, from the wheel to space exploration, they're all rediscovered in this clever, chaotic, comical cataclysm of creativity.

*'Round the World and Back Again* is a play designed to be flexible. Cast size can range from 12 to 60 and most roles are gender neutral. If working with a large cast, it can be helpful to split up into "scene teams." For instance: team A prepares scenes 2 and 5, team B prepares scenes 3 and 6, team C prepares scenes 4 and 7. A small cast can easily perform this as an ensemble piece with each cast member playing a variety of roles. The entire cast should participate in scenes 1 and 8.

## SET DESCRIPTION

Sets for each scene are not recommended. A bare stage and a backdrop with an outer space design would work quite nicely.

**Set props:** A tree, a shelter (a blanket or cardboard over a simple frame).

**Props:** Flashlights (voices); slide rules, calculators, scientific equipment, balloon or paper bag (scientists); tea set and table, poker table and cards (dinosaurs); rock made of styrofoam, tree, apples, mud pit (a brown sheet or blanket cut in a circle), chickens (or feathers), leaves, a wheel (humans) - note: many of these may be mimed; stick, a rock the size and color of a golf ball, peanuts (may be imaginary); a globe, a horned Viking helmet; sticks and rocks, swords, guns, rifles, missiles (either models or cardboard cutouts).

**Sound effects:** Roaring, falling bomb.

**Costumes:** Basic clothing should be very basic and neutral. Solid prints or sweatclothes in a variety of colors will do. Individual characters will add simple accessories to these. Scientists have white lab coats. The planets, sun and asteroids have sandwich boards with illustrations of planets, sun and asteroids; or they may carry beachballs, basketballs, etc. to represent the planets (these costumes may be as elaborate as you like). Dinosaurs wear baseball caps with half-pingpong balls for eyes on top; perhaps the outline of teeth hangs from the bill of the carnivores' hats. Primitive humans have animal-patterned skins draped over one shoulder a la cavemen (one human wears a sheepskin). Housey may have a cape and a headdress. Door-o could wear a spangled jumpsuit or some other "hip" rock star outfit. Woodpeckers have beaks: either attached to the bills of caps or conical drinking cups with rubber bands to wear them over their noses. Christopher Columbus, the Viking and the Native American should all wear clothing representative of their time and society, if possible; otherwise, Columbus can wear a Renaissance hat (a pillow if need be) and a cape; the Viking, a horned Viking helmet and a belted sheepskin; the Native American, a feathered headdress and fringed clothing. The three armies wear polka dots, plaids and stripes; these may be pulled from the performers' own wardrobes or (especially for the polka dots) be cutouts attached to the basic costumes. The Peace Child wears all white.

## **SCENE SYNOPSIS/CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

Each scene has a NARRATOR. Feel free to choose a different narrator for each scene, but make sure each has a strong voice. Several become involved in the action of the scenes.

### **SCENE 1 - IN THE BEGINNING ...**

MYSTERIOUS VOICES

FOUR SCIENTISTS: Three are standard academic types, one is a nutty professor.

### **SCENE 2 - THE SOLAR SYSTEM**

THE SUN: Loud, powerful, and a born leader. Should be a flamboyant, shades-wearing, Hollywood type.

EARTH: A motherly planet. Reasonable, level-headed. Caring to her companion, the Moon.

MOON: A clinging child. Always staying close to Mother Earth. A little whiny.

MERCURY: Small and speedy. The planetary equivalent of Warner Brothers' Speedy Gonzales.

VENUS: The glamour queen of the solar system. Named for the goddess of love.

MARS: Named for the god of war, Mars is a good soldier, ever ready to accept the commands of the sun.

JUPITER: The largest planet and briefly a rival to the sun. An Arnold Schwarzenegger type muscle man.

SATURN and URANUS: Are a couple of girls you might find hanging out at the mall. They love their rings and other accessories.

NEPTUNE: Is bored of everything, totally apathetic to the formation of the solar system.

PLUTO: The solar system's equivalent of the town weirdo.

THE ASTEROIDS: Planetary toddlers. Too small to be considered planets. They hate being ignored.

**SCENE 3 - DINOSAURS**

THE HERBIVORES: The number of herbivores is to be determined by cast size. They are upper-class, high society dinosaurs who drink tea with their pinkies in the air.

THE CARNIVORES: Number to be determined by cast size. They should be like a rough and rowdy crew of working-class sports fans during the weekend.

**SCENE 4 - THE FIRST HUMANS**

PRIMITIVE HUMANS: Any number of performers who take on the characteristics of simple, curious and often goofy men and women.

**SCENE 5 - HUMANS SEEK SHELTER**

HIGH PRIESTESS HOUSEY

THE GREAT GOD DOOR-O: Can be played as a hip rock star, perhaps Elvis.

PRIMITIVE HUMANS: Slightly more advanced than the humans of Scene IV but still relatively clueless.

ENCHANTED WOODPECKERS

**SCENE 6 - INVENTIONS**

VARIOUS INNOVATIVE HUMANS

**SCENE 7 - EXPLORERS**

TWO SPACE TRAVELERS: *Star Trek*-like explorers.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

CITIZENS

SAILORS: Followers of Columbus.

VIKING

NATIVE AMERICAN

**SCENE 8 - WAR AND PEACE**

PLAID ARMY

POLKA DOT ARMY

STRIPE ARMY

PEACE CHILD

MYSTERIOUS VOICES

**Scene 1  
IN THE BEGINNING**

*(AT RISE: The CAST appears on a bare stage. Each of the following lines is a fragment of a tale of creation of the universe. The lines do not belong to specific characters; they should come randomly from all parts of the stage. The scene can be staged with creative movement, with the actors each holding a small flashlight to illuminate their faces when they speak, or in any other way the director feels is appropriate. The scene should be mysterious and full of chaotic energy. "VOICE" lines can be distributed to as many or as few actors as you have.)*

ALL: In the beginning.

VOICE 1: There was light.

ALL: In the beginning.

VOICE 2: There was darkness.

ALL: In the beginning.

VOICE 3: There was nothing.

VOICE 4: Chaos, void.

VOICE 5: There was only water and the creatures that live  
in it.

VOICE 6: The universe was the shape of a hen's egg.

VOICE 7: The great god Ulgen saw mud floating on the  
waters.

VOICE 8: Karora lay asleep.

VOICE 9: Wulbari was heaven spread five feet above the  
Earth.

VOICE 10: In the beginning, Elohim ...

VOICE 11: In the beginning, Yahweh ...

VOICE 12: In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.

VOICE 13: Old Man traveled and made things.

VOICE 14: Ulgen gave the mud a spirit.

VOICE 15: The raven created the first man, who lay within a  
pea pod.

VOICE 16: Under the light was a huge stone named Quat  
goro.

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