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The Imagineknights: An Experiment in Imagination

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THE IMAGINEKNIGHTS:
AN EXPERIMENT IN IMAGINATION

A Thesis
by
RACHEL SALDANA

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2012

Major Subject: Theatre

THE IMAGINEKNIGHTS:
AN EXPERIMENT IN IMAGINATION

A Thesis
by
RACHEL SALDANA

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May 2012

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ABSTRACT

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I planned to write an experimental children's play that would entertain an audience of children and promote the importance of imagination. The final draft starts out immersed in imaginative design elements to grab the audience's attention from the start. The Witch sets the mood, entering in an elaborate costume, casting a spell that will carry throughout the play.

As far as whether my play will entertain, I did not produce this play to get concrete results. Instead, I utilized some techniques that have been consistently successful in other children's plays. I have done much research and shown my play to some colleagues. I have received only positive feedback, and my research strongly indicates that children should enjoy this play. It has adventure, a great battle, audience participation, and above all, imagination.

DEDICATION

To my niece, Rebekka Ayala who never failed to ask me about my progress, even though she knew she would get an earful from me, thank you for caring so much. A heartfelt thank you to my sister, Stephanie Ayala and my brother-in-law, Rene Ayala, who told me they were proud of me. To my niece, Lyndsey Ayala, thank you for being you. Much of my gratitude is owed to Neil Shuford, who tirelessly motivated me to continue my efforts in this project, and was there for me each time I began to lose faith in myself. Thank you for not giving up on me, or growing tired of my antics. To my dad, Joseph Saldaña, thank you for believing in me and making sure I knew that. To my mom, Helen Rhodes-Saldaña, thank you for your painfully honest critiques of my writings. You made me strive for the best. To both of my parents, you kept me sane when the stress became overwhelming. Thank you for always putting things into perspective for me. My family, you were the driving force that kept me moving forward. I love you all.

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I would like to thank Dr. Brian Warren, who served as my advisor and committee member, as well as Dr. Marian Monta, my committee chair, who devoted much of their free time to assisting me. Without their guidance, I may have given up. To the rest of my committee: Dr. Professor David Carren, and Professor Amy Cummins, thank you for taking the time to be on my committee. Your confidence to do so provided me with the strength I needed to continue on when things became difficult. To the UTPA Theatre Department professors, you have each played a part in inspiring me to complete this project. By treating your students with respect and giving us opportunities to experience the theatre hands-on, you helped me believe in myself. To everyone I have mentioned above, not only have you prepared me for this project, but have ensured that I followed through. For this, I am forever grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER I. THE BEGINNINGS	1
CHAPTER II. THE PURPOSE & HOW IT SHOULD SUCCEED	3
CHAPTER III. <i>THE IMAGINEKNIGHTS</i> : FIRST DRAFT	14
CHAPTER IV. REVISIONS TO EXPECT	45
CHAPTER V. <i>THE IMAGINEKNIGHTS</i> : FINAL DRAFT	47
CHAPTER VI. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN PRODUCTION	93
CHAPTER VII. WRITING PROCESSES	105
CHAPTER VIII. FUTURE, LIMITATIONS, AND FURTHER EXPLORATION	122
CHAPTER IX. TO CONCLUDE	132
REFERENCES	134
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	136

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS

I planned to write an experimental family-gearèd play using common techniques as well as less common ones. The play would entail many mainstream children's theatre innovations, as well as experimental innovations, such as the use of "invisible" props and actors. The play would start out as visually striking as possible and have a minimalistic style toward the end. Each of the four main characters would also be cast twice: as an adult and a child, which will take turns throughout the play. The children will be shown when they have a disagreement about the direction of their "play" and the adults will be shown when in character. The intended effect is to entertain the audience and show them the power and importance of imagination.

It seems in the past several years, people have been overlooking the beauty and power of a child's imagination ó even discouraging it by cutting out recess and play time in schools. When I was a child, the air conditioning unit in my parent's room was a "magical food dispenser", my sister had the gift of speaking to animals, I could tell the future, and all it took was links of construction paper hanging from the spinning ceiling fan to turn an ordinary room into wonderland. Today, children have many amazing toys, games, and video games to keep them occupied; thus their imagination is not utilized, or needed, as much. Studies highlighted in the next chapters prove that this has had somewhat of a negative impact on today's youth. I would like to help others to be appreciative and respectful of a child's imagination, as well as spark the imaginations in today's children. I would like to find out if my experimental play will hold the

attention of families and potentially have an effect on the viewers. My qualifications include plenty of experience in children's theatre with Dr. Warren, such as several classes in children's theatre workshop and children's theatre theory, and summer children's theatre camps. I have also experienced working on a children's TV show pilot episode, with a cast of twelve children. I was an actor and assistant director, as well as an acting coach to the two main child characters. My writing experience includes collaboration on at least three different children's plays: "Simple Simon" which won first place in Dr. Warren's Children's Theatre Theory class competition, "The Great Race" in Children's Theatre Workshop, and "The Happy Scarecrow" in Children's Theatre Workshop; I have written many short sketches for the Afterhours comedy troupe, some of which have been aired on local television, as well as learned and utilized writing techniques in Mr. Carren's screenwriting class.

These qualifications and experiences offer knowledge of children's theatre and writing skills. While I am by no means an expert, the knowledge I have gained through hands-on activities should help guide me through this experiment in imagination.

CHAPTER II

THE PURPOSE AND HOW IT SHOULD SUCCEED

Purpose

The purpose of *The Imagineknights* is to entertain children and adults by encouraging exploration and reconnection with their imagination.

The Imagineknights concerns a small group of children playing make-believe. The story is about a princess who is put under a curse by a witch out to destroy the kingdom. Characters and props transition into less-imaginative versions of themselves, eventually "disappearing," or rather appearing invisible, and the children realize that their imagination is fading away. They recruit the help of the audience in order to bring their imagination back to life, defeat the witch, and save the kingdom. *The Imagineknights* opens with two children playing make-believe. The intent is to show the children in the action of playing, and adult actors portraying the imagined characters to show what happens when children make-believe. The central lesson of *The Imagineknights* deals with imagination to encourage children to think creatively. This is achieved by both traditional and non-traditional methods, the former being more structured and controlled by the actors. Traditional methods involve segments in which the characters ask the audience a question, to which there is only one right answer. Oftentimes the answer is obvious and the audience is guided into the correct answer, a forced answer, so to speak. For example, Steve in "Blue Clues" will happen upon a clue marked by a blue paw print, and not see it. The children

have already been asked to let Steve know if they see a clue, so this is the point when the audience calls out to Steve. He then asks them where the clue is, and the audience points it out. There is not as much imagination involved in a forced answer, but it has been shown to entertain children. The non-traditional methods used in *The Imagineknights* involve questions to the audience, to which there are many answers. The characters ask the audience for a suggestion, pick their favorite one, and continue the play improvising to suit the chosen answer. This encourages a large amount of imagining, as the audience does not have a concrete answer in front of them.

The mind is a powerful thing; this is evident when children play make-believe. They can imagine an entire world around them; they can become completely immersed in the fantastical worlds they have created. Many times, children are so absorbed in their imaginations that it takes several attempts to get their attention. I first realized the power of imagination as a child, while reading a book in class. My imagination absorbed every detail of the story and projected those details into vivid images, almost as if I were literally watching the story unfold. When the chapter ended, the spell was broken. I looked up and was surprised to see the entire class waiting to recite the "Pledge of Allegiance", all staring at me because the teacher had been trying to get my attention. It is this level of complete absorption *The Imagineknights* will strive to achieve with the audience.

The children in *The Imagineknights* demonstrate that same total immersion into imagination; they create a fantastical world, and in their imagining it into "reality", they coax the audience into believing it as well; they engage the other children in the story, manipulating the imaginations of the audience into a suspension of disbelief. A similar display of imagination – and one of my inspirations to encourage imagination in children – can be seen in the Peter Pan-

based movie, *Hook* directed by Steven Spielberg. Peter Pan is all grown up and has been brought back to Never Land, but he does not remember a thing about his past. In one scene, he gets into an argument with Rufio, the new head-honcho at the dinner table, which consists of completely empty dishes; Peter gets caught up in the heat of the moment and in pretending to throw food at Rufio by making a flinging motion of an empty spoon, imagines into reality an entire feast. As if by magic, as Peter flings the empty spoon, food appears in midair and lands on Rufio's face. The lost boys are astounded. One of them says in awe, "You're doing it, Peter. You're imagining," as the others look at all of the different elaborate dishes of food on the table. Peter uses his imagination to manipulate the lost boys into believing there is really food in front of them; he captures their suspension of disbelief, and they all enjoy a grand feast. Acknowledging that some of the effects achieved in *Hook* are far beyond the scope of the theatre, with the encouragement of imagination this is the kind of powerful impact *The Imagineknights* aims to display. While being entertained and immersed in a suspension of disbelief, the audience is also absorbing a strong message about the wonders and importance of imagination.

Not only is imagination an important part of children's play from a creativity aspect, many studies (AATE) are now proving that imagination is an important part of a child's development process, and hindering it could harm them. Sadly, play-time and imagination are under attack. Other evidence of the neglect of care for a child's imagination exists all around us. In many schools, recess, a time of play where children can run around and imagine they are anything they want, is no longer a part of the day. A strong focus is being placed on academics only, excluding extra-curricular activities. Academics are extremely crucial; however children also need time to play make-believe because it builds their sense of imagination. A study by Alix

Spiegel highlighting the importance of play-time indicated that having a strong imagination is good for a child's development. It turns out that all that time spent playing make-believe actually helped children develop a critical cognitive skill called executive function. Executive function has a number of different elements, but a central one is the ability to self-regulate. Kids with good self-regulation are able to control their emotions and behaviors, resist impulses, and exert self-control, and discipline (Spiegel, 2008). This is even more reason to show the importance of imagination. Spiegel's article also pointed out that good executive function has a high correlation with children who do well in school. Educational Director Jacqueline Harding states, "From a neurological perspective, when children engage in imagination and creativity, their brains are signal processing at a higher level: they are literally seeing, sensing, hearing and feeling more of the world" (Grown Ups).

With knowledge like this, you would think schools would be emphasizing play time. On the contrary, schools are doing the opposite. With such importance placed on grades students achieve on tests, schools are sacrificing play time to squeeze in more lessons and teachings. While it is very important for children to learn academically, some of the methods being utilized are stifling creativity. Children can learn and play at the same time. It is time we understood that imagination is a wonderful learning tool.

With the decrease of attention given to play-time and imagination, where can children find the outlet they need to unleash their imaginations? They can go see a play. Theatre is one of the few places children are invited to use their imagination. They are allowed to let themselves become a part of a story and are drawn into a world of possibilities. "The thing that stands out most strongly in my mind about playing to an audience only of children is the belief they have in

the story and the situation. Children can project their imaginings into reality (Duncan, "Theatre for Children," 1999, p. 18).

The Imagineknights carries a message aimed at promoting the importance and the power of imagination. It is intended to encourage children to use their imaginations more often, as well as inspire adults to value the importance and recognize the benefits of play-time for children. In addition to encouraging the use of imagination, *The Imagineknights* is a creative experience that will provide children with an outlet to exercise their minds, even if it is just for one evening.

How it will Succeed

The Imagineknights is an experiment in imagination and creativity; it encompasses some things many children have probably never seen in a play before. There is the idea that characters are on stage that cannot be seen by the audience, the miming of certain props that are also only visible at some points in time, the horse used by Frarenjack that starts to look like it is only a stick, and is also used as his sword. Despite all of the experimental elements, *The Imagineknights* should prove to be successful in influencing the audience and delivering its message about the importance of imagination. *The Imagineknights* intends to draw the audience into the fantasy world created by the two children at the start, and should demonstrate how powerful imagination can be. In essence, the play is selling the message of the importance of imagination, and the audience must "buy into" it. Of course, this will not work if the audience is not entertained and immersed in the story of *The Imagineknights*. The success of *The Imagineknights* will be accomplished through the utilization of certain traditional children's theatre techniques exercised in many successful children's plays. These techniques, also referred to as innovations by David Wood, experienced director and author of "Theatre for Children," have been proven to increase

the entertainment value in plays, helping to keep the attention of an audience full of children, which will in turn aid in delivering the message of *The Imagineknights*.

The traditional children's theatre methods utilized in *The Imagineknights* are *visual stimulation, breaking the fourth wall, audience participation, suddenlies, physical humor, the rule of three, and the use of puppets. Pop culture references*, though not necessarily classified as an innovation in children's theatre, are also present because they have been successful in providing several different aspects to plays that serve to add to the volume of entertainment. In addition, *The Imagineknights* is a fairy-tale and encompasses inspiration from a variety of traditional fairy tales, such as *Hansel and Gretel*. According to David Wood, an experienced director and writer of children's theatre, "the most universal theme for children's entertainment is the fairy-tale; they appeal so directly to our emotions. They appeal to our most basic instincts" (1999, p. 37).

Visual Stimulation

The Imagineknights should instantly captivate the audience with visual stimulation by way of colorful and elaborate sets, costumes, and props. Wood advises, "Children love colour; a bold and bright use of colour works well in the theatre. Colourful sets, props, and costumes can provide instant appeal and focus" (1999, p. 52). The use of visual stimulation in *The Imagineknights* will not only benefit by capturing the audience's interest and attention, it will also create a more dramatic contrast when imagination begins to fade in the story and the sets, costumes, and props become dull and less elaborate.

Breaking the Fourth Wall

The 'fourth wall' in theatre is an imaginary wall separating the actors and the audience, through which the audience watches the action. In 'breaking the fourth wall', a character in a play acknowledges the audience's presence. The acknowledgement can be a simple wink or a nod, a bit of dialogue spoken directly to the audience such as asking a question, or acknowledging something the audience says aloud pertaining to the play. In children's theatre, the latter happens often, as children are vocal and do not shy from speaking to the characters throughout the play. Children love being a part of the play, rather than just a silent spectator. 'Most children actively enjoy vocal and physical participation, giving advice or warnings or helping achieve a goal' (Wood, 1999, p. 20). In *The Imagineknights* there are a few moments where the children are asked questions by the characters, for example when Frarenjack goes to the Witch's house and knocks on the door, he reacts to silence and says to the audience, 'Did you hear that?' There are also moments children may see as opportunities to chip in, such as when the characters have a disagreement and have brief debates.

Audience Participation

Audience participation is a step further in breaking the fourth wall. The characters are not only speaking directly to the audience, but now they are asking for help. Of course, the task the audience is asked to participate in should be of high importance in the play. Olivia Mitchell, while not a children's theatre expert, is knowledgeable of presenting and audience participation. Some advice she offers can be applied to audience participation in plays: 'Audience participation should never be just for the sake of it - people will see right through this and turn-off' (2009). This is true for children as well. The dilemma in *The Imagineknights* certainly is a big one.

During the great battle against the witch, the audience is asked to participate in imagining, and believing in the fantastical world the characters have created; in doing this, they revive imagination and all the main characters. The audience also has a hand in helping to defeat the witch, by offering up suggestions to the characters. The characters take a suggestion, and work it in to the action of the scene. Thus, the audience and the characters work together to win the battle. This brings the audience into the play and makes them a part of the action. The audience should feel that they directly influenced the outcome because of their suggestions, taken and used by the characters.

Suddenlies

The Imagineknights has many moments of "suddenlies". A suddenly, as explained by Wood, is "anything that, by shifting gear with a logical jolt, helps to hold the attention of the audience" (1999, p. 38). In *The Imagineknights*, this ranges from a character quickly running on stage, to a sudden sound of thunder and a witch's cackle sounding the start of a battle. In one scene, the King is worried that Frarenjack might not succeed in destroying the witch. Princess Mindali is comforting the King and reassuring him that "Frarenjack will not fail", when Frarenjack himself runs onstage screaming, and proclaims he has failed. Suddenlies are strategically placed throughout *The Imagineknights* to prevent it from becoming dull, as well as to keep up an energetic pace.

Physical Humor

Physical humor employs the use of the body to create laughter, and it works really well in children's theatre. Physical humor entails a character falling down in a silly and exaggerated manner, characters getting bonked on the head, and other imaginative and silly ways in which

characters bump into each other, bump into objects, or slip and fall. Physical humor is present in *The Imagineknights* because it makes children laugh and will make for a more enjoyable and entertaining experience. For instance, there is an object called *the stone of forgetting*, which is a big stone that is used to erase Frarenjack's memories. The introduction of it is a big production, as the guards talk about its mystical powers and they bring it out. They begin to chant a spell as they hold up the stone, giving the appearance that it is magical. Suddenly, the guards comically bonk Frarenjack over the head with it, an unexpected action that sends Frarenjack to the ground. In a showing of a movie adaptation of Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, physical humor was heavily included. Each time a bird flew into a tree trunk, a bear smacked another bear, or anything of the sort happened, the children in the movie theatre were delighted and exploded with laughter. The physical humor in *The Imagineknights* will serve to entertain and appeal to an audience of children.

The Rule of Three

Wood states, "Whereas repetition of something funny may dilute the joke for adults, it often enhances the joke for children. The familiar 'rule-of-three' where an identical bit of business is repeated three times can develop a child's initial giggle into a huge, unleashed roar of sheer delight" (1999, p. 40). This can be seen in *The Imagineknights* with the repeated use of *the stone of forgetting*. It is first used in great detail, with the knights chanting the magic verse to make the magic of the stone work to wipe Frarenjack's memories, and then bonking him over the head. It is seen again later when the knights have accidentally used it on Princess Mindali; and a third time when it is used against the witch. Using *the rule of three* not only provides a greater chance of audience laughter, but it also brings familiarity to *the stone of forgetting*, which is

useful near the end of the play when the audience must tell the characters to use the stone against the witch.

The Use of Puppets

According to Wood, "Children like puppets" Children accept them as extensions of themselves, as friends" (1999, pp. 49-50). Puppets certainly were successful in "Sesame Street" as well as "The Muppets". Mister Rogers, or Fred Rogers, employed the use of puppets in his show, and they proved to be a wonderful tool in educating children. In *The Imagineknights*, puppets will come into play as imagination begins to fade away. As the characters are slowly transitioning into nothingness, one of the stages of de-evolution is becoming a puppet. The purpose of including puppets in *The Imagineknights* is to add to visual stimulation, as well as to keep the audience interested. As imagination fades away in the play, visual stimulation will go down as the sets and costumes become less colorful. Having puppets as one of the stages will help to pick up the energy and hold the audience's attention.

Pop Culture References

While watching a play, the audience is constantly absorbing many unfamiliar things and taking in new information. Pop culture references provide a break from the absorption of new information to recognition of familiar territory. In bringing familiarity to the play, pop culture references can excite an audience of children in that they are familiar with what is being said, and can relate to the material presented. Pop culture references have also been successful in bringing humor to many plays. The simple fact that a child recognizes a reference can be enough to spark a chuckle. A couple of the references made in *The Imagineknights* include a Selena Gomez song and Justin Bieber. One disadvantage of using pop culture references is the

possibility of infringing on copy-writes. In *The Imagineknights*, the references are made to some famous names and a few quotes are used in parody, steering clear of any product placement which can cause copy-write problems. Another downside is that pop culture references can date a play. Justin Bieber is extremely popular now, but he may not be in five years. Keeping this in consideration, the pop culture references found in *The Imagineknights* can be easily substituted for more recent references as time passes. All of the references can easily be changed without interfering with the flow of the play.

In addition to the children's theatre innovations that have been utilized to boost the entertainment factor in *The Imagineknights*, children will enjoy this play because they will be able to identify with the two main characters: Frarenjack and Mindali. Frarenjack is a knight who wants to prove himself, but he is a bit of a coward. Mindali is a princess who pretends to enjoy her time spent cooped up in the castle, but she really just wants to go off on adventures. Both characters are portrayed by two children playing make-believe, as well as two adult actors who are the "real" characters. Children in the audience will be able to identify with the two child actors because they are simply playing, like any child would, and even arguing a little about which direction the story should take. The audience will also identify with the "actual" characters because Frarenjack and Mindali are the protagonists. They both end up succeeding in their dreams, and make good role-models for the children in that they are kind-hearted, they stand up for what is right, and they do not give up. This play involves plenty of action, humor, and audience participation; it is meant to be fun and powerful. This is more than just a play; it is an experience in which the audience will partake.

CHAPTER III

THE IMAGINEKNIGHTS: FIRST DRAFT

ACT I

SCENE 1

Mindali is sitting downstage right. Enter Frarenjack, 20's, waving a stick like he's sword fighting.

FRARENJACK

Ha ha! Take that, you fiend! Give me back the royal king's jewels!

After a few more thrusts and twirls, Frarenjack lunges, then slowly draws back his sword and pretends to pick something up. Frarenjack addresses the audience.

FRARENJACK

My people, I am Sir Frarenjack. This is my sword. I have just slain a thief who stole the royal King's jewels.

MINDALI

Don't you think that's a little too violent?

FRARENJACK

I have just wounded a thief who stole the royal King's jewels. Rest-assured, he is alive and should recover in a day or so. Let's see, I am Sir Frarenjack, told you that part...ah yes, I am a wandering knight. I search for adventure, fight wrong-doers, and am just an all-around great guy. Above all I long to find a fair maiden worthy of being my wife.

MINDALI

Don't forget the royal King's jewels. The King is here now. He's asking for them.

FRARENJACK

Ah, yes. The jewels. Your Royal Highness, I present, your jewels.

(Frarenjack gets down on one knee, holding an empty hand up.)

MINDALI

He's behind you.

FRARENJACK

My apologies, Your Highness. I am weary from chasing down your jewels and slaying the thief.

MINDALI

Wounding.

FRARENJACK

That's what I meant. He's not dead. Just a small flesh wound.

MINDALI

Uck!

FRARENJACK

Are you going to wait your turn or what?

Mindali motions for Frarenjack to continue.

FRARENJACK

What's that, Your Highness? An evil witch is mad at you? You want me to destroy her? I accept this brave quest! I shall ride my beautiful white horse to the witch's cottage at once!

Frarenjack's sword is now his horse. He rides away, shouting commands at his horse.

SCENE 2

Mindali stands, lights out on her, and lights on adult Mindali, who enters and runs to center stage.

MINDALI

Father! You're home! Did Sir Frarenjack retrieve your royal jewels? I'm so happy! You go rest now, father. (To Audience, lights back on child Mindali) That's right, I'm the royal princess Mindali. I love being a princess. I get to knit scarfs for knights, and cheer for them when they return from a successful quest. Best of all I get to tell people what to do. Though I guess it would be nice to finally meet my match.

(She puts her hand to her ear as if listening. Lights back on adult Mindali making the same motion.)

Yes, Father? I'm coming!

Mindali runs off stage. Enter Frarenjack on his horse. He speaks partly to himself, partly to the audience.

SCENE 3

FRARENJACK

There it is! The witch's cottage. Don't let her see you.

Frarenjack creeps up to where the cottage should be. His horse becomes his sword.

FRARENJACK

Knock, knock! Ah! (To audience) She said, "Who's there?", Oh, her voice is so dreadful! Did you hear it? No? Let's try again. Ahem. Knock, knock!

WITCH

(Offstage)

I said, who's there? What are ya, hard of hearing? I outta put you in my stew and gobble you up!

FRARENJACK

I know the king sent me to destroy the witch, but... forget this!

Frarenjack runs off stage.

SCENE 4

As lights come up, we see the princess in a slightly better costume standing with an old man in an elaborate royal wardrobe and crown.

MINDALI

Oh, say it again, Father. I don't think the audience heard you.

ROYAL KING

All right dear. The evil Witch is mad at me. The reason is insignificant. But she intends to storm the castle tonight to destroy me and put a curse on you, Mindali.

MINDALI

But how do you know?

ROYAL KING

She told me. She said, "I intend to storm the castle tonight to destroy you and put a curse on your daughter!" Oh, let us hope that Frarenjack has done what I asked and destroyed the witch.

MINDALI

Of course he has, father. Frarenjack, loathsome as he is, will not fail you.

ROYAL KING

Mindali likes Frarenjack...

ROYAL KING

(child)

Mindali likes Frarenjack, Mindali likes Frarenjack!

MINDALI

(child)

Stop it! I do not!

MINDALI

I do not, have not, nor will I ever have feelings for Frarenjack!

Enter Frarenjack on horseback. His horse now has a few details, such as a head, and he has a sword tied at his waist.

FRARENJACK

Your highness! Your highness, I have failed you!

ROYAL KING

Oh!

FRARENJACK

I'm sorry, your highness. I was too scared to face the witch.

MINDALI

You coward! Now the whole kingdom is in danger.

FRARENJACK

Yes, thank you Princess, I wasn't quite sure.

ROYAL KING

Frarenjack, you have indeed failed me. You are henceforth banished from the kingdom! You will be forced to wander the forest for all your days.

FRARENJACK

I...

ROYAL KING

Not a word, Frarenjack. Guards!

No one enters.

ROYAL KING

(motioning to an empty space)

Escort this man to the forest. (to Frarenjack) The guards are surrounding you.

FRARENJACK

Oh.

Frarenjack begins to struggle as if someone were pulling him back.

FRARENJACK

No! Please, don't banish me!

Frarenjack is escorted out by the invisible guards.

ROYAL KING

Mindali, there's not much time. I'm sure the evil witch is already on her way to destroy me. You must hide! Guards!

MINDALI

You sent the guards off with Frarenjack.

ROYAL KING

No, I have more guards. See? Here they are. Guards, take Mindali to the cottage.

MINDALI

When will I see you again?

ROYAL KING

One can't be sure, Mindali. I will send for you as soon as it's safe again. Now, go!

Mindali exits with the invisible guards. There is a loud rumble, a shadow covers the castle. A witch's cackle is heard. There is a puff of smoke (preferably purple-ish black) and the evil witch appears in full costume.

WITCH

Well, well, well. Your Royal Highness. It looks like it's just you and-

ROYAL KING

Guards!

WITCH

Ah-ah. You already sent all your guards with the other two.

ROYAL KING

No, I still have more guards.

WITCH

(child)

No, I don't think so. You can only have so many guards.

ROYAL KING

(child)

I'm a king, I have lots and lots of guards. Now here they come.

WITCH

(child)

Uh-uh. Play fair. You can't have more guards.

ROYAL KING

(child)

Fiiiiine.

WITCH

As I was saying, it's just me and you now. Hya!

The witch waves her staff and points it at the Royal King.

WITCH

(child)

Zap! I win!

ROYAL KING

(child)

Nuh-uh! I have a magic shield.

WITCH

(child)

You can't make stuff up on the spot just so you won't lose. That's cheating.

ROYAL KING

(child)

I didn't make it up! I've had this shield for a while.

WITCH

(child)

Since when?

ROYAL KING

(child)

It was given to me by my father when I became king.

WITCH

(child)

Uh, fine.

ROYAL KING

Haaaaaaaah!

The Royal King jabs at the Witch with his sword.

ROYAL KING

Got ya!

WITCH

Nooo, I'm immune to swords.

ROYAL KING

(child)

What?

WITCH

(child)

Well, you have a magic shield. I'm just making this a fair fight.

ROYAL KING

(child)

You just said we can't make stuff up on the spot!

WITCH

(child)

I didn't. I cast an immunity spell just before you tried to jab me.

ROYAL KING

(child)

I didn't hear you casting any spells.

WITCH

(child)

I cast it in my mind.

ROYAL KING

(child)

Ok, then. I have a magic shield and you're immune to swords, fine. But no more new powers.

WITCH

(child)

Agreed.

WITCH

I will destroy you and curse your daughter!

ROYAL KING

Never! My daughter is in hiding as we speak.

WITCH

Ha! I don't have to know where she is. I only have to say her name and the spell will find her.

ROYAL KING

But that's not fair!

WITCH

That's magic. Now, say good-bye to everything you love!

WITCH & ROYAL KING

Hyyyaaaaa!!! Haaaaaaahhhhh!!!!

A thick purple-ish and greenish black haze surrounds them as they begin to battle. Lights out.

SCENE 5

Frarenjack is being escorted by 4 guards. They reach a spot and stop.

GUARD 1

Sir Frarenjack, this is where we leave you.

FRARENJACK

I can't believe I'll never see the kingdom again. How I'll miss it.

GUARD 2

Actually, you won't miss it.

GUARD 1

The Royal King has ordered us to use the "stone of forgetting" on you.

Guard 1 comically hits Frarenjack over the head with the "stone of forgetting". Frarenjack passes out.

GUARD 2

I always wondered how it worked.

GUARD 1

Good work, men. Let us return to the kingdom. Our Royal King needs protecting!

Exit Guards talking, laughing, etc. Lights out.

SCENE 6

In front of a small cottage in the forest, Mindali is lying asleep on the ground with 4 guards around her. One of them is holding a "stone of forgetting".

GUARD 5

You sure the Royal King wanted us to use the stone on the princess?

GUARD 6

I...um..hrm...ph... (mumbling) don't really remember.

GUARD 5

Say again?

GUARD 6

I don't really remember.

GUARD 5

Great! We'll be sent to the dungeons!

GUARD 6

I have a note explaining what happened to her...

GUARD 7

Isn't there a way to bring her memories back?

GUARD 5

Not by our will. If - If her memories return it can only be by some sort of miracle.

GUARD 8

So, we can bring back her memories?

GUARD 5

No, you dunce. Something huge would have to jog her memory.

GUARD 6

The stone is pretty big.

GUARD 5

Not the stone. An event. Something will have to happen to her. Like her saving the royal king's life for example, might bring back her love for her father and her memories would come flooding back.

GUARD 7

The Royal King! We should be guarding him!

GUARD 5

Right! The witch could be at the kingdom now! Hurry!

The Guards run off shouting battle cries, Guard 6 leaves the note in Mindali's hand and joins the others. Loud rumbles, battle shouts, and clanging swords are heard. There is one last rumble and a flash of purple light, and a purple spotlight on Mindali for a few seconds, then silence, broken by the witch's far-off cackle.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Mindali is sobbing in the cottage. She has the note the Guard left her, unfolded and a little crinkled.

MINDALI

Woe is me! All I can remember is my name is Mindali and I like to knit scarfs. And this note tells me an evil witch was going to destroy my father - who happens to be a royal king - and put a curse on me.

Mindali quickly reaches for a mirror and looks at herself.

MINDALI

I seem to look normal enough. Perhaps the witch did not succeed.

Mindali makes a funny face, and seems startled.

MINDALI

Why did my face do that?

Mindali makes another face. And another. Meanwhile Frarenjack wanders around just outside, seeming a little confused.

MINDALI

Is that the curse? I cannot control my facial expressions! Oh, woe is me! No wonder those children ran away from me this morning. The witch did succeed! I am distressed!

FRARENJACK

Did someone say "distressed"?

MINDALI

Oh! You startled me!

Mindali finds a scarf and covers her face from the nose down.

FRARENJACK

Also, who were you talking to?

MINDALI

I was talking to no one. For, I am all alone here and no one loves me.

FRARENJACK

Do not say such things. How can a lady with such a beautiful voice be alone and unloved?

MINDALI

My voice may be beautiful, but my face is not! It is my treacherous face which drives people away, the reason I am alone.

FRARENJACK

Madam, I refuse to believe you are treacherous, just because you say so. For, every beautiful lady I have seen has thought herself ugly, and every ugly woman I have met has thought herself the beauty queen of the kingdom.

Mina laughs in a shrill, high-pitched manner.

FRARENJACK

And what a lovely laugh you have. Come, I must see your lovely face.

MINDALI

(playfully at first)

Oh, stop. You are making a fool of yourself. (a little more seriously) For, once you see me, you too will leave.

FRARENJACK

(child Frarenjack)

This is getting kind of cheesy, don't you think?

MINDALI

(child Mindali)

No, this is how grown-ups talk.

FRARENJACK

But it's not even comical. Can we at least add some humor to entertain the audience? Even I'm getting bored.

MINDALI

Fine. Let's go back a little.

Mindali clears her throat. Lights back up on adult Mindali.

MINDALI

Oh, stop. You are making a fool of yourself. For, once you see me, you too will leave.

While Mindali is speaking, Frarenjack steps in dragon poop. He makes grossed-out facial gestures.

FRARENJACK

Ugh! Never again will I wander about while wearing my good shoes. I stepped in dragon poop.

MINDALI

(child)

That's your idea of comical?

FRARENJACK

(child)

Yeah. Trust me, the audience eats this up.

Child Mindali sighs, lights back up on the adults.

FRARENJACK

(very pleased with himself)

I stepped in dragon poop!

MINDALI

Well, itâs getting late. I guess you have to be going soon.

FRARENJACK

No!

MINDALI

No?

FRARENJACK

I got dragon poop on my nice pants!

Mindali appears to be struggling through the scene. She takes a towel out to Frarenjack.

MINDALI

Here, use this.

FRARENJACK

Thanks.

Frarenjack wipes the dragon poop off his pants and shoe as he speaks.

FRARENJACK

Anyway, you're right. It is getting late. And for a wandering knight, I haven't wandered much today.

Frarenjack tosses the soiled towel at Mindali. She reacts.

FRARENJACK

I will come back and see you tomorrow - that is, if you'll have me.

MINDALI

As if! You invade my privacy, refuse to leave me alone when I ask nicely, and throw a dragon poop towel in my face? What in the world would make you think I'd want to see you again?

FRARENJACK

(Child)

Mindali, you're supposed to say "yes".

MINDALI

(child)

Well, you didn't give me much motivation.

FRARENJACK

(child)

That's the way the story goes. The princess says "yes" to the wandering knight. You're ruining the story.

MINDALI

(child)

Okay, I'll say "yes".

FRARENJACK

You are a shy lady, but I am a patient knight. Maybe tomorrow I will get to lay eyes on your face. And if I don't get to, well, that is okay, because I am a patient knight! 'Til tomorrow, Fair Lady!

MINDALI

My name is Mindali.

FRARENJACK

Yeah, I know.

MINDALI

(child)

No, you don't. The guards used the "stone of forgetting" on you, don't you remember?

FRARENJACK

(child)

Now, that's just a silly question.

MINDALI

(child)

Point is, you don't know who I am. We're meeting as if for the first time.

FRARENJACK

Ah, Mindali. What a lovely name. Farewell!

MINDALI

Wait, what is your name?

FRARENJACK

My name is Sir Frarenjack.

Adult Frarenjack exits.

FRARENJACK

(child)

I so could have said my name was something crazy like, "Merlin" or "Elvis".

MINDALI

(child, unenthusiastic)

Yes. Yes you could have.

Adult Mindali removes her scarf. Her facial expressions do not always match her feelings.

MINDALI

Oh, Frarenjack. Once you see my face, you'll run away. Would you even believe the story about my father, the royal king, and the evil witch who cursed me? I'm not even sure if I would believe it, were it not for my face's sore muscles. Oh, horrid curse! If only I could somehow break this spell and regain control of my facial expressions.

Mindali goes back inside her cottage.

SCENE 2

Enter Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK

Mindali, I have come back to see you. Just as I promised!

Mindali quickly covers her face and comes outside.

MINDALI

Frarenjack, you came back! My, how quickly the morning came... I don't even remember going to sleep.

FRARENJACK

Mindali, it isn't morning. it's still the same day.

MINDALI

Oh.

FRARENJACK

I just couldn't wait until tomorrow to see you again - to see your face. I'm shaking from anticipation; I've waited long enough - too long! Please, let me see your face!

Frarenjack drops to his knees.

FRARENJACK

I wanna see it! I wanna, I wanna!

MINDALI

Frarenjack, I thought you said you are a patient knight.

FRARENJACK

Yes...yes, I did say that. Oh, Mindali, please! I am not like other knights! I will not leave you!

MINDALI

Okay, just please stop begging.

Mindali removes her scarf, but her face looks normal; no strange expressions at all.

FRARENJACK

(child)

Do I have to do this next part?

MINDALI

(child)

Yes! It establishes the romance.

FRARENJACK

You are beautiful. I can't imagine why you are alone.

Mindali looks at herself in her mirror and sees everything is normal.

MINDALI

Oh, I am quite lovely aren't I?

FRARENJACK

I think I stepped in dragon poop again.

MINDALI

(child)

Frarenjack!

FRARENJACK

(child)

I'm sorry, I need some comic relief. This romantic stuff makes me feel queasy.

MINDALI

(child)

Okay, but don't go overboard.

Mindali hands Frarenjack a towel. As he's wiping the poop off his shoe, Mindali starts making funny faces.

FRARENJACK

Thank you, fair maiden. I shall buy you new towels tomorrow.

MINDALI

That sounds fair.

Frarenjack looks up at Mindali just as her face goes back to normal. He hands her the towel.

FRARENJACK

Careful, it's completely soiled. Oooh, look! A dragon scale. How odd...

Any time Frarenjack becomes distracted, Mindali's face decides to act up. Once he looks back at her, she goes back to normal just in time. There is some question as to whether he catches small glimpses of her facial episodes.

MINDALI

What's odd?

FRARENJACK

There are fresh traces of dragons all around these woods, but I have yet to see or hear any at all.

MINDALI

(child)

What are you doing?

FRARENJACK

(child)

I'm adding a subplot. It involves invisible dragons and a royal scandal!

MINDALI

(child)

We never agreed to that. We don't need a subplot. The plot is thick enough without adding mysterious dragon poop.

FRARENJACK

(child)

Sheesh, okay.

MINDALI

Speaking of "odd", Frarenjack, I need to tell you something.

FRARENJACK

Is it about the dragons?

MINDALI

No. Not about the dragons. About me.

Frarenjack notices his shoe is untied and bends down to tie it. Mindali's face begins to act up.

FRARENJACK

Don't mind me, just an untied shoelace. Please continue.

MINDALI

It has to do with an evil witch...a royal king... and, oh I can't say it! I'm afraid you won't believe me!

Frarenjack stands to face Mindali, as her face goes back to normal.

FRARENJACK

Mindali, I think I know what you're trying to say.

MINDALI

You do?

FRARENJACK

And I understand completely.

MINDALI

No, Frarenjack, I don't think you d-

FRARENJACK

Shhh... I know you're scared. I'm scared, too. But it is time for the truth to be revealed. And the truth is, Mindali, I love you, too!

MINDALI

What?

Mindali's face begins to act up in front of Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK

Isn't that what you were trying to tell me?

MINDALI

No.

FRARENJACK

I am shattered... and heartbroken. And a really wimpy wimp.

MINDALI

(child)

Really?

FRARENJACK

(child)

I told you, these emotional scenes make me uncomfortable.

MINDALI

(child)

Well it's almost over, so quit interrupting.

FRARENJACK

(child)

Deep breaths.

FRARENJACK

I was a fool to let myself believe you loved me.

Mindali has been involuntarily smiling.

MINDALI

Frarenjack, let me explain. I...do love you.

FRARENJACK

Oh?

MINDALI

Yes. But I was trying to tell you something else. You may think me crazy.

FRARENJACK

Never! Just let it all out.

MINDALI

I have no memories before today. I woke up and found a note explaining that I'm a princess, and an evil witch was out to destroy my father, the royal king, and curse me.

FRARENJACK

I have no memories before today, either. Could that be the witch's curse?

MINDALI

I don't think so. The note was signed by a royal guard who tried to hide me, and they used some kind of "stone of forgetting" on me to erase my memories. But somehow that jealous witch found me and cursed my face!

FRARENJACK

She was jealous of you?

MINDALI

Well, I assume. I mean, look at me. But now... I can't control my facial expressions.

Enter Guard 6, Guard 5, and Guard 1.

GUARD 6

My lady, oh good you're safe!

GUARD 1

Sir Frarenjack! The Royal King needs you! He has henceforth lifted your banishment.

FRARENJACK

I was banished?

GUARD 1

Oh, right. The "stone of forgetting". Well we don't have time to explain everything, just follow us.

GUARD 5

Princess Mindali, you must stay here. We must keep you safe from the witch.

MINDALI

Can't you see? The witch's curse has already reached me.

GUARD 6

Is that why your face is, uh...

FRARENJACK

Uh, ahem...shhhh...

GUARD 6

Yeah.

MINDALI

I'm going with you. I have a father I would very much like to get to know - again.

GUARD 1

Absolutely not!

GUARD 5

Wait, this could be just the event to bring back her memories. Let her come. (to Guard 6) She will be in your care.

FRARENJACK

Nay, I will watch over Princess Mindali.

GUARD 5

Fine. We fight!

FRARENJACK

With what?

GUARD 1

Our swords, of course.

FRARENJACK

Right. Do I know how to swordfight?

Lights out as they exit.

SCENE 3

The witch and the Royal King are at battle, staff against sword. A few guards are trying to fight her back. Guards 6, 5, and 1 enter on horseback, Mindali is riding with one of them. Frarenjack enters as well, sitting backwards on his horse.

FRARENJACK

This creature is spectacular! What's it called again?

MINDALI

A horse, Frarenjack. The stone of forgetting didn't wipe out all of our knowledge...

FRARENJACK

(child)

You really don't get this "comedy" thing, do you?

MINDALI

(child)

Moving on! We're at the palace about to help the Royal King defeat the witch. And remember, not too violent.

WITCH

Why, Mindali, nice to see you.

ROYAL KING

Mindali! What are you doing here? You're supposed to be safe in hiding!

MINDALI

Father?

ROYAL KING

Well, of course, dear. (pause) Oh no...

Guards 5, 6, 7, and 8 are trying to act natural, hide, avoid eye contact, etc.

ROYAL KING

Guards! You used the stone of forgetting on my little Mindali?!

GUARD 5

It's okay, its reversable!

GUARD 7

It might be.

GUARD 6

Probably.

MINDALI

Don't be mad father. I'm just glad to see you... for the first time.

The Royal King and Mindali share a hug.

WITCH

Ugh!! Hello? Remember me? I'm the evil witch. I have cursed the precious Mindali, and will now destroy you, you royal pain!

Frarenjack and the guards help the king fight back the witch, but her immunity to swords makes things very difficult. Frarenjack lunges at the witch with his sword.

FRARENJACK

Ha! Got ya!

WITCH

(sighs)

I'm immune to swords. Catch up.

FRARENJACK

Immune to swords? You're joking, that's like cheating.

ROYAL KING

She's immune to swords.

FRARENJACK

But all we have is swords!

MINDALI

You can do it! She's got to have a weakness.

WITCH

Ha! I'm too powerful for you pests! Oh, by the way, Mindali...How's the face? Hahahaha!!

Everyone but the Witch gasps.

MINDALI

You... you witch!

Everyone but Mindali gasps. Mindali looks around for something as the others continue fighting the witch.

FRARENJACK

You will pay for hurting Mindali!

Mindali picks up a stone.

MINDALI

I know I don't like violence, but... Hey, Miss "immune to swords"!

WITCH

Whatdaya want?!

MINDALI

Say goodbye!

Mindali bonks the witch on the head with the Stone of Forgetting. The witch promptly passes out and they all cheer.

ROYAL KING

Mindali, you've defeated the witch!

FRARENJACK

Does this mean your curse is gone?

Mindali feels her face.

MINDALI

I guess so!

ROYAL KING

Guards, take this garbage out of my palace!

GUARDS

Yes, your majesty!

The guards begin tidying up and picking up trash.

ROYAL KING

Guards... I meant the witch.

GUARDS

Oh, Oh yeah, Yes, your majesty!

The guards help the witch to her feet. She is now very loopy.

WITCH

My, what a lovely home.

GUARD 1

This way, madam.

WITCH

What a lovely uniform. What a lovely princess...

Exit guards and witch.

WITCH (OFF STAGE)

What lovely trees!

ROYAL KING

I don't think the witch will be bothering us for a while.

FRARENJACK

Your highness, I've been meaning to ask you something.

ROYAL KING

You're a hero in my book! You can ask me anything.

Frarenjack turns to Mindali and kneels down as he speaks to the king.

FRARENJACK

May I have your daughter's hand in marriage?

MINDALI

You mean it?

ROYAL KING

Is this what you want, Mindali? (she nods) Then it is done. Frarenjack, you may have her hand.

Mindali and Frarenjack cheer and as they hug each other, they both get dizzy. They hold hands to steady each other.

FRARENJACK AND MINDALI

Whoa...

ROYAL KING

Is everything all right?

MINDALI

I think I'm...remembering.

FRARENJACK

Me, too. My memories are all coming back to me.

ROYAL KING

What a wonderful day, indeed!

As the king speaks, Frarenjack and Mindali simultaneously notice they are holding hands and become disgusted.

MINDALI

Yuck!!!! Father, you told him he could marry me?!

ROYAL KING

Well-

FRARENJACK

Yeah, right! I don't want to get married!

ROYAL KING

But-

MINDALI

Good, because I don't either!

ROYAL KING

Why-

FRARENJACK

Fine. Now I'm free to wander the forest looking for adventure!

MINDALI

Good for you!

FRARENJACK

Well, I'm off! To the forest, to adventure!

Frarenjack mounts his horse as it rears its body.

MINDALI

Sounds like fun.

FRARENJACK

It is. But I suppose it would be more fun with a friend to join me.

MINDALI

You mean-

FRARENJACK

Come with me. We'll have so much fun and see all the wonders of the world!

MINDALI

May I, father?

ROYAL KING

Hopeless! The two of you are hopeless! Just go, dear.

MINDALI

Thank you!

She kisses her father goodbye and mounts her own horse.

FRARENJACK

(child)

When did you get a horse?

MINDALI

(child)

All princesses have a pony.

MINDALI

Let's go, Frarenjack!

As they ride off, the Royal King shouts warnings and advice after them.

ROYAL KING

Watch out for invisible dragons. They poop everywhere! And be careful not to upset the forest gnomes! Oh, and if you see a fairy, get a sprinkle of fairydust for me! (pause) Oh, what am I doing? Wait for me!

The Royal King mounts his horse and rides after them.

SCENE 4

All the children are on stage. They gather their initial props (the stick, etc.) and walk out as they talk.

MINDALI

(child)

Good ending.

FRARENJACK

(child)

Yeah, I had fun.

WITCH

(child)

Next time, I get to be the princess.

ROYAL KING

(child)

I call dibs on the king!

MINDALI

(child)

But you're always the princess! This was the first time I got to do it.

ROYAL KING

(child)

But you're so good at being the witch.

MINDALI

(child)

Hey!

FRARENJACK

(child)

What if you let us boys decide what to play next time?

WITCH

(child)

You'll just choose video games!

Continue until they are off stage and fade out.

THE END.

CHAPTER IV

REVISIONS TO EXPECT

The final draft of *The Imagineknights* notes many differences from the first draft. In revising *The Imagineknights*, I focused more on the plot progression and how it strengthens the message. I used the original outline as a foundation for my revisions. From there, it was easier to change the direction of *The Imagineknights* and have the story start out immersed in the power of imagination, and then have the imagination fade out. The most notable differences in the revised draft are the shift in direction of the imagination levels, the presence of the witch, and the level of audience participation.

The shift in the levels of imagination, you will see in the final draft, strengthens the message of the importance of imagination and will earn children's interest from the start. Now, the play starts out full of imagination, and imagination fades throughout. The initial blast of visuals will catch audience attention, as well as give the audience a point of reference for when the imagination begins to fade.

In the final draft the witch plays a bigger part in the story. As a villain, her character is more developed. Her increased presence serves to strike feelings in the audience, encourage the audience to root for the main characters, and explain the fading of imagination. The final draft also boasts more audience participation.

With the changes in the direction of imagination levels, and the witch, adding audience participation became easy. The characters, once realizing that the witch is syphoning imagination to gain power enlist the help of the audience to imagine everything back. This part in the play has a "Peter Pan" feel, akin to the scene in which Tinker Bell dies. Peter Pan has the audience prove that they believe in fairies by chanting it out loud to save Tinkerbell's life. In the final draft *The Imagineknights*, the audience will get to save the characters by believing in them. In addition, the audience will also give the characters suggestions, which the characters will then mime into the action. For instance, the witch is chasing Frarenjack. The child actors call on the audience for ideas to help Frarenjack escape. The child actors pick their favorite suggestion, for example a jet pack. Frarenjack must then mime using a jet pack to get away from the witch. The audience is not only participating, but influencing the characters and controlling the outcome with imaginative ideas.

CHAPTER V

THE IMAGINEKNIGHTS: FINAL DRAFT

ACT I

SCENE 1

A witch, adult, enters. She sizes up the audience.

WITCH

Oh, goody. Children! I've been waiting for you. I'm the witch. Hi, how ya doin? I'm the most powerful being in this land. But lately, my powers have been fading. Want to know why? It's because of children, like you! You use your imagination for good, to create fairies and nice things, yuck! Well that's going to change. I'm going to steal your imagination and use it to become even more powerful!

The Witch waves her hands around.

WITCH

Shh. Imaginatio, manum ad me. Dare me owerpay eyondbay ymay reamsday. Imagination, manifest yourself my way, whilst all else fades away.

With a cackle, a crackle, and a puff of smoke, the Witch is gone.

SCENE 2

Enter two children, a boy and a girl, ages 8-10. They are wearing Halloween-like costumes. From this point on, Frarenjack, Mindali, the Royal King, and the Witch are cast twice, as adults and children. Unless otherwise noted, the children will follow their adult counterparts.

MINDALI CHILD

Ok, this time I get to be the princess. Sandy will be the witch, and Martin called dibbs on king again.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Can't we just play video games?

MINDALI CHILD

I'm tired of video games!

FRARENJACK CHILD

That's because you always lose!

MINDALI CHILD

Don't you think it's time we exercise our minds?

FRARENJACK CHILD

I prefer to excersize my thumbs.

Frarenjack child mimics playing with a video game controller. Mindali hands him a stick.

FRARENJACK CHILD

I'm not supposed to fetch, am I?

MINDALI CHILD

No. That's your sword.

FRARENJACK CHILD

This is supposed to be a sword? It looks more like Harry Potter's wand.

MINDALI CHILD

And it's also your horse.

FRARENJACK CHILD

But it's just a stick.

MINDALI CHILD

Use your imagination.

Frarenjack child waves the stick like he's sword fighting.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Ha ha! Take that, you fiend! Give me back the royal king's jewels!

MINDALI CHILD

Good! You can be the knight, Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK CHILD

That's Sir Frarenjack. Don't forget!

After a few more thrusts and twirls, Frarenjack lunges, then slowly draws back his sword and pretends to pick something up. Lights fade on children and come up on an adult, 20's, dressed in similar, but more authentic-looking attire and holding a shiny, detailed sword, and a bag of jewels. An adult Mindali is also present. So is the thief, lying on the floor. The adult Frarenjack addresses the audience.

FRARENJACK

My people, I am Sir Frarenjack. This is my sword. I have just slain a thief who stole the royal King's jewels.

MINDALI CHILD

Don't you think that's a little too violent?

MINDALI

Yes, I think so, too.

FRARENJACK

Of course you agree, you're her.

THIEF

Well I'm not her, and I agree, too.

FRARENJACK

I have just wounded -

THIEF

Thank you.

FRARENJACK

- a thief who stole the royal King's jewels.
Rest-assured, he is alive and should recover in a day
or so. Let's see, I am Sir Frarenjack, told you that
part...ah yes, I am a wandering knight. I search for
adventure, fight wrong-doers, and am just an all-around
great guy.

(pause)

MINDALI CHILD

What are you waiting for?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Do I have to say the next part?

MINDALI CHILD

Yes.

FRARENJACK CHILD AND FRARENJACK

And above all ...

FRARENJACK

I long to find a fair maiden worthy of being my wife.

Enter a boy, age 9, wearing a makeshift king
costume, followed closely by an adult King, 40's
or 50's. The boy joins the other children. The
adult joins the other adults.

ROYAL KING CHILD

My jewels!

ROYAL KING

My jewels! Where are my jewels?

FRARENJACK

Ah, yes. The jewels. Your Royal Highness, I present,
your jewels.

(Frarenjack gets down on one knee,
holding up the jewels.)

ROYAL KING

Ah, thank goodness! Now I must ask another favor of
you.

FRARENJACK

What's that, Your Highness?

ROYAL KING

The w...

FRARENJACK

The wha-?

ROYAL KING

The Witch...

FRARENJACK

The Wicked Witch?

ROYAL KING

Yes, the Wicked Witch. Will you stop interrupting?

FRARENJACK

Sorry!

The ROYAL KING opens his mouth to speak.

FRARENJACK

What about the Wicked Witch, Your Highness?

The Royal King gives Frarenjack a stern look,
Frarenjack clams up.

ROYAL KING

The Wicked Witch is mad at me. She caught me walking my
horse in her yard.

FRARENJACK AND MINDALI

And?

ROYAL KING

My horse went potty.

FRARENJACK

Well that doesn't seem so bad.

ROYAL KING

Well...my horse... let me just say he did number two.

MINDALI

Oh, no!

ROYAL KING

Oh, yes! She has threatened to curse the kingdom, and even worse, curse my daughter, Princess Mindali.

MINDALI

Oh, no!

ROYAL KING

Oh, yes! She plans to attack the kingdom soon!

FRARENJACK

All because of a little number two?

ROYAL KING

For crying out loud, it's a horse-sized number two!

FRARENJACK

Even still...

ROYAL KING

And, it happened to land on the Witch's prized petunias.

FRARENJACK

No! Not her petunias!

Mindali faints, Frarenjack catches her. The Royal King grabs Mindali and shakes her.

ROYAL KING

Now, do you understand?!

Mindali awakens. There is a low rumble and a purple tint for a moment.

ROYAL KING

That could be her magic already in motion. You must seek out the witch, Frarenjack. You must destroy her before it is too late!

Frarenjack, adult and child, has curled up into a ball.

MINDALI

Frarenjack...

MINDALI CHILD

What are you doing?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Being scared.

MINDALI CHILD

Don't make it so obvious.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Kay...

The child Frarenjack stands. The adult Frarenjack, uncurls himself and tries to play it off, though he is still very nervous.

FRARENJACK

Excuse me, I was just doing my stretches.

ROYAL KING

So, the Wicked Witch...

FRARENJACK

Ah. Yes!..erm.. Yes, Your Highness. I accept this terrifying...ly awesome quest! I shall ride my valiant steed to the witch's cottage at once!

Frarenjack does not move.

ROYAL KING

Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK

Yes, my Highness! I mean, your Hiney! I mean, uhm. My Royal-

ROYAL KING

Go!

FRARENJACK

Yes, my Liege!

Frarenjack (child and adult) rides away, shouting commands at his horse. There is a rumble and purple tint.

SCENE 3

MINDALI

Father! I'm so happy that Frarenjack retrieved -

Frarenjack Child pops back in to say:

FRARENJACK CHILD

Sir Frarenjack!

MINDALI

That Sir Frarenjack retrieved your royal jewels! You go rest now, father.

ROYAL KING

All right, my Princess Mindali. I am quite pooped.

Royal King (child and adult) exits.

MINDALI CHILD

That's right, I'm the royal princess Mindali. I love being a princess. I get to knit scarfs for knights, and cheer for them when they return from a successful quest. Best of all -

MINDALI

I get to tell people what to do. Though I guess it would be nice to do some adventuring myself.

ROYAL KING (OFFSTAGE)

Mindali!

MINDALI

Yes, Father? I'm coming!

Mindali (child and adult) runs off stage.

SCENE 4

Enter adult Frarenjack on horseback. Frarenjack child does not enter this scene. Frarenjack speaks to the audience.

FRARENJACK

There it is! The witch's cottage. Don't let her see me!
I mean, don't let her see you.

Frarenjack struts up to the cottage. He draws his sword.

FRARENJACK

I don't care if she sees me. I'm not afraid of the witch. When I see her I'm gonna let her know who's boss! I'm gonna tell her like it is. "Witch, this kingdom ain't big enough for the two of us!"

The adult Witch enters from a different direction, carrying a basket of huge assorted candies, slowly walking closer to Frarenjack. The audience will likely react, calling out "The Witch!" and pointing. Frarenjack may respond: "The witch? oh yeah, she'll be all like..." and carry through to the next line. The Witch child does not enter during this scene.

FRARENJACK

Â And the witch will be all like, "Mr. Sir Frarenjack, please have mercy!" And I'll whisper, "No!" Yeah. The witch should be scared of me! Ok I'm going to see if she's home. Shhhh... I don't want her to know I'm here yet.

Frarenjack, like a macho man, goes up to the door of the cottage. The witch is right behind Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK

Knock, knock!

WITCH

Who's there?

Frarenjack screams and jumps around!

FRARENJACK
Armageddon!

WITCH
Armageddon who?

FRARENJACK
Armageddon out of here!

Frarenjack runs off stage.

WITCH
I've heard better knock knock jokes on TV commercials!
(To the audience)
I'll tell you a knock knock joke. Knock, knock!

AUDIENCE
Who's there?

WITCH
Children.

AUDIENCE
Children who?

WITCH
Children: it's what's for dinner! Ah, anyway! That
noodle of a knight, Fraren-whatever is just lucky I'm
too busy to deal with him today.

The witch takes some candies out of her basket.

WITCH
I'm expecting someone...for dinner!

The witch begins putting candy decorations up on
her cottage. Lights fade.

SCENE 5

Lights up. Princess Mindali and the King are
sitting together. Mindali Child and Royal King
Child are also present, but out of the main focus.
There is a low rumble and a tint of purple for a
moment.

MINDALI

Father, what's wrong?

ROYAL KING

I feel strange. As if the witch's evil plan has already begun. Oh, let us hope that Frarenjack has destroyed the witch.

MINDALI

Frarenjack will not fail you.

ROYAL KING

Mindali likes Frarenjack...

ROYAL KING CHILD

Mindali likes Frarenjack, Mindali likes Frarenjack!

MINDALI

Stop it!

MINDALI CHILD

Stop it! I do not!

MINDALI

I do not, have not, nor will I ever have feelings for Frarenjack! I simply said he will not fail you.

Enter Frarenjack on horseback. Frarenjack child enters, as well, riding his imaginary horse (the stick).

FRARENJACK

Your Highness! Your Highness, I have failed you!

ROYAL KING

Oh!

MINDALI

You coward! Now the whole kingdom is in danger.

FRARENJACK

Yes, thank you Princess Mindali, I didn't realize the Witch was dangerous.

ROYAL KING

Frarenjack, you have indeed failed me. You are henceforth banished from the kingdom!

FRARENJACK

Banished?

MINDALI

Exiled!

FRARENJACK

You mean...

ROYAL KING

We're kicking you out! Guards!

Guards 1, 2, 3, and 4 enter.

ROYAL KING

Escort this man to the forest.

Frarenjack begins to struggle as the guards grab him. A low rumble, a purple tint.

FRARENJACK

No! Please, don't send me to the forest! There's a witch out there!

Frarenjack is escorted out by the guards.
Frarenjack child exits, pretending to be pulled out by guards.

ROYAL KING

Mindali, there's not much time. I'm sure the wicked witch is already on her way to destroy me. You must go into hiding! Guards!

MINDALI

You just sent the guards off with Frarenjack.

ROYAL KING

No, I have more guards.

Guards 1, 2, 3, and 4 enter.

ROYAL KING

See? Here they are. Guards, take Mindali to the cottage.

MINDALI

Father, when will I see you again?

ROYAL KING

I will send for you as soon as it's safe. Now, go!

Mindali exits with the guards. Mindali child also exits. There is a loud rumble, a shadow covers the castle. A witch's cackle is heard. There is a puff of smoke and the witch appears. Witch child enters as well.

WITCH

Well, well, well. Your Royal Highness. It looks like it's just you and-

ROYAL KING

Guards!

WITCH

Ah-ah. You already sent all your guards with the other two.

ROYAL KING

No, I still have more guards.

WITCH CHILD

No, I don't think so. You can only have so many guards.

ROYAL KING CHILD

I'm a king, I have lots and lots of guards. Now here they come.

A group of 4 guards begins to enter.

WITCH CHILD

Uh-uh. Play fair. You can't have more guards.

The guards pause awkwardly and look from the witch to the king.

ROYAL KING CHILD

Fiiiiine.

The guards leave.

WITCH

As I was saying, it's just you and me now. Hya!

The witch waves her staff and points it at the Royal King.

WITCH CHILD

Zap! I win!

ROYAL KING CHILD

Nuh-uh! I have a magic shield.

WITCH CHILD

You can't make stuff up on the spot just so you won't lose. That's cheating.

ROYAL KING CHILD

I didn't make it up! I've had this shield for a while.

WITCH CHILD

Since when?

ROYAL KING

It was given to me by my father when I became king.

WITCH CHILD

Ugh, fine.

ROYAL KING

Haaaaaaaah!

The Royal King jabs at the Witch with his sword.

ROYAL KING

Got ya!

WITCH

Nooo, I'm immune to swords.

ROYAL KING CHILD

What?

WITCH CHILD

Well, you have a magic shield. I'm just making this a fair fight.

ROYAL KING CHILD

You just said we can't make stuff up on the spot!

WITCH CHILD

I didn't. I cast an immunity spell just before you tried to jab me.

ROYAL KING CHILD

I didn't hear you casting any spells.

WITCH CHILD

I cast it in my mind.

ROYAL KING CHILD

Ok. I have a magic shield and you're immune to swords. Fine, but no more new powers.

WITCH CHILD

(with a mock bow)

Yes, your Highness.

WITCH

I have already cursed this land. Now I will destroy you and your little Mindali, too!

ROYAL KING

Never! My daughter is in hiding as we speak.

WITCH

Ha! I don't have to know where she is. I only have to say her name and the spell will find her.

ROYAL KING

But that's not fair!

WITCH

That's magic. Now, say good-bye to everything you love!

WITCH & ROYAL KING

Hyyyaaaaa!!! Haaaaaaahhhhh!!!!

A thick haze surrounds them as they begin to battle. Lights out.

SCENE 6

Frarenjack is being escorted by 4 guards. They reach a spot and stop. Frarenjack Child is not present during this scene.

GUARD 1

Sir Frarenjack, this is where we leave you.

FRARENJACK

I can't believe I'll never see the kingdom again. How I'll miss it.

GUARD 2

Actually, you won't miss it.

GUARD 1

The Royal King has ordered us to use the "stone of forgetting" on you.

FRARENJACK

"Stone of forgetting"?

GUARD 3

The "stone of forgetting" erases all your memories, except for your name and favorite hobbies of course.

FRARENJACK

Very well. I suppose I shall be happier that way.

GUARD 1

Bring me the "stone of forgetting".

GUARD 4

Aye.

Guard 4 takes a large, heavy looking stone out of his satchel and gives it to Guard 1. After struggling for a bit, Guard 1 hands it back to Guard 4.

SCENE 7

The Witch and the Royal King are at battle. The Royal King appears exhausted, his costume looks dull or has less detail, such as a simpler crown and removable costume laces. The Witch seems more energetic. The kingdom around them looks less detailed, there are fewer nice things (jewels, furniture, etc.) Royal King Child and Witch Child are not present during this scene.

ROYAL KING

Can we call a time out?

WITCH

Hah, I could do this all day! I feel great!

ROYAL KING

What is happening to me? What have you done?

WITCH

I'm just keeping my promise, Your Highness! I will destroy this land!

ROYAL KING

Oh, I hope the guards are on their way back!

WITCH

If they make it in one piece, anyway.

ROYAL KING

What?

WITCH

Oh, you'll see!

WITCH & ROYAL KING

Hyaaa!! Haaaaah!

Lights out.

SCENE 8

In front of a small cottage in the forest, Mindali is lying asleep on the ground with 3 guards around her. One of them is holding a "stone of forgetting". There are fewer trees and they don't look as detailed. Mindali's costume is dull. Mindali child is not present during this scene.

GUARD 1

You sure the Royal King wanted us to use the stone on the princess?

GUARD 2

I...um..hrm...ph... (mumbling) don't really remember.

GUARD 1

Say again?

GUARD 2

I don't really remember.

GUARD 1

Great! We'll be sent to the dungeons!

GUARD 2

I have a nice note explaining what happened to her...

GUARD 1

Oh, well that solves everything!

GUARD 3

Isn't there a way to bring her memories back?

GUARD 1

If - If her memories return it can only be by some sort of miracle.

GUARD 3

So, we can bring back her memories?

GUARD 1

No, you dunce. Do you think miracles happen every day? She would need to experience something big.

GUARD 2

The stone is pretty big.

GUARD 1

Not the stone. An event. Something life-changing will have to happen to her. Like her saving the royal king's life for example, might bring back her love for her father and her memories would come flooding back.

GUARD 3

The Royal King! We should be guarding him!

GUARD 1

Right! The witch could be at the kingdom now! Hurry!

The Guards run off shouting battle cries, Guard 2 leaves the note in Mindali's hand and joins the others. Loud rumbles, battle shouts, and clanging swords are heard. There is one last rumble and a flash of purple light, and a purple spotlight on Mindali for a few seconds, then silence, broken by the witch's far-off cackle.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Mindali is sobbing in the cottage. The cottage has fewer details now. She has the note the Guard left her, unfolded and a little crinkled. Mindali child is present.

MINDALI

Woe is me! All I can remember is my name is Mindali and I like to knit scarfs. And this note tells me a witch was going to destroy my father - who happens to be a royal king - and put a curse on me.

Mindali quickly reaches for a mirror and looks at herself.

MINDALI

I seem to look normal enough. Perhaps the witch did not succeed.

Mindali makes a funny face, and seems startled.

MINDALI

Why did my face do that?

Mindali makes another face. And another. Meanwhile Frarenjack wanders around just outside, seeming a little confused.

MINDALI

Is that the curse? I cannot control my facial expressions! Oh, woe is me! No wonder those children laughed at me this morning. The witch did succeed! I am distressed!

Enter Frarenjack. His costume is dull, and instead of a sword, he carries a stick. Frarenjack child enters.

FRARENJACK

Did someone say "distressed"?

MINDALI

Oh! You startled me!

Mindali finds a scarf and keeps her face hidden from Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK

Sorry. Also, who were you talking to?

MINDALI

I was talking to no one. For, I am all alone here and no one loves me.

FRARENJACK

Do not say such things. How can a lady with such a beautiful voice be alone and unloved?

MINDALI

My voice may be beautiful, but my face is not! It is my treacherous face which drives people away, the reason I am alone.

FRARENJACK

Madam... this is getting kind of cheesy, don't you think?

MINDALI CHILD

No, this is how grown-ups talk.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Can we at least add some humor to entertain the audience? Even I'm getting bored.

MINDALI CHILD

Fine. Let's go back a little.

Mindali clears her throat. Lights back up on adult Mindali.

MINDALI

My face is the reason I am alone.

While Mindali is speaking, Frarenjack steps in dragon poop. He makes grossed-out facial gestures.

FRARENJACK

Ugh! Never again will I wander about while wearing my good shoes. I stepped in dragon poop.

MINDALI CHILD

That's your idea of comical?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Yeah. Trust me, the audience eats this up.

MINDALI CHILD

The audience eats poop?!

FRARENJACK CHILD

That's not what I meant. Just trust me, this is good stuff!

Child Mindali sighs, lights back up on the adults.

FRARENJACK

(very pleased with himself)

I stepped in dragon poop!

MINDALI

Well, itâs getting late. I guess you have to be going soon.

FRARENJACK

No!

MINDALI

No?

FRARENJACK

I got dragon poop on my nice pants!

Mindali appears to be struggling through the scene. She takes a towel out to Frarenjack.

MINDALI

Here, use this.

FRARENJACK

Thanks.

Frarenjack wipes the dragon poop off his pants and shoe as he speaks.

FRARENJACK

Anyway, you're right. It is getting late. And for a wandering knight, I haven't wandered much today.

Frarenjack tosses the soiled towel at Mindali. She reacts.

FRARENJACK

I will come back and see you tomorrow - that is, if you'll have me.

MINDALI

As if! You invade my privacy, refuse to leave me alone when I ask nicely, and throw a dragon poop towel in my face? What in the world would make you think I'd want to see you again?

FRARENJACK CHILD

I thought you were supposed to say "yes".

MINDALI CHILD

Well, you didn't give me much motivation.

FRARENJACK CHILD

But that's the way the story goes. The princess says "yes" to the wandering knight. You're ruining the story.

MINDALI CHILD

Now you care. Fine, I'll play along.

FRARENJACK

'Til tomorrow, Fair Lady!

MINDALI

My name is Mindali.

FRARENJACK

Yeah, I know.

MINDALI CHILD

No, you don't know. The guards used the "stone of forgetting" on you, don't you remember?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Now, that's just a silly question.

MINDALI CHILD

Point is, you don't know who I am. We're meeting as if for the first time.

FRARENJACK

Ah, Mindali. What a lovely name that I have never heard before. Farewell!

MINDALI

Wait, what is your name?

FRARENJACK

My name is Sir Frarenjack.

Adult Frarenjack exits. Frarenjack child remains on stage.

FRARENJACK CHILD

I so could have said my name was something crazy like, "Merlin" or "Elvis".

MINDALI CHILD

(unenthusiastic)

Yes. Yes you could have.

Adult Mindali removes her scarf. Her facial expressions do not always match her feelings.

MINDALI

Oh, Frarenjack. Once you see my face, you'll run away. Would you even believe the story about my father, the royal king, and the evil witch who cursed me? I'm not even sure if I would believe it, were it not for my face's sore muscles. If only I could somehow break this spell and regain control of my facial expressions.

Mindali goes back inside her cottage. Mindali child remains on stage.

SCENE 2

Enter Frarenjack. His costume looks more like the costume the child is wearing.

FRARENJACK

Mindali, I have come back to see you. Just as I promised!

Mindali quickly covers her face and comes outside.

MINDALI

Frarenjack, you came back! My, how quickly the morning came... I don't even remember going to sleep.

FRARENJACK

Mindali, it isn't morning. it's still the same day.

MINDALI

Oh.

FRARENJACK

I just couldn't wait until tomorrow to see you again. Please, let me see your face.

MINDALI

I don't know...

FRARENJACK

Maybe this will make you feel better. I don't remember where I heard it, but someone once said, "Who says you're not perfect? Who says you're not worth it?" Da da dum da dum...hmm hm hmm da dum... "I'm no beauty queen. I'm just beautiful me."

MINDALI

Okay, just please stop ruining my favorite song.

Mindali removes her scarf, but her face looks normal; no strange expressions at all.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Do I have to do this next part?

MINDALI CHILD

Yes! It establishes the romance.

FRARENJACK

You are beautiful. I can't imagine why you are alone.

MINDALI

Where's my mirror?

Mindali looks at herself in her mirror, now invisible, and sees everything is normal.

MINDALI

Oh, I am quite lovely aren't I?

FRARENJACK

I think I stepped in dragon poop again.

MINDALI CHILD

Frarenjack!

FRARENJACK CHILD

I'm sorry. This romantic stuff makes me feel queasy.

MINDALI CHILD

Okay, but don't go overboard.

Mindali hands Frarenjack an invisible towel. As he's wiping the poop off his shoe, Mindali starts making funny faces.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Is it me or is the quality here really going downhill?
Where's the towel?

MINDALI CHILD

I was wondering the same thing. I'm having trouble
imagining all the details.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Me too, and I'm actually trying.

MINDALI CHILD

Maybe we just need to try harder.

The children close their eyes and concentrate.

FRARENJACK

Thank you, fair maiden. I shall buy you new towels
tomorrow.

MINDALI

That sounds fair.

Frarenjack looks up at Mindali just as her face
goes back to normal. He hands her the invisible
towel.

FRARENJACK

Careful, it's completely soiled. Oooh, look! A dragon
scale. How odd...

Any time Frarenjack becomes distracted, Mindali's
face decides to act up. Once he looks back at her,
she goes back to normal just in time. There is
some question as to whether he catches small
glimpses of her facial episodes.

MINDALI

What's odd?

FRARENJACK

There are fresh traces of dragons all around these
woods, but I have yet to see or hear any dragons at
all.

MINDALI CHILD

What are you doing?

FRARENJACK CHILD

I'm adding a subplot. You know, a story within the story. It involves invisible dragons and a royal scandal!

MINDALI CHILD

We never agreed to that. We don't need a subplot. The plot is thick enough without adding mysterious dragon poop.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Sheesh, okay.

MINDALI

Speaking of "odd", Frarenjack, I need to tell you something.

FRARENJACK

Is it about the dragons?

MINDALI

No. Not about the dragons. About me.

Frarenjack notices his shoe is untied and bends down to tie it. Mindali's face begins to act up.

FRARENJACK

Don't mind me, just an untied shoelace. Please continue.

MINDALI

It has to do with a wicked witch...a royal king... and, oh I can't say it! I'm afraid you won't believe me!

Frarenjack stands to face Mindali, as her face goes back to normal.

FRARENJACK

Mindali, I think I know what you're trying to say.

MINDALI

You do?

FRARENJACK

And I understand completely.

MINDALI

No, Frarenjack, I don't think you d-

FRARENJACK

Shhh... I know you're scared. I'm scared, too. But it is time for the truth to be revealed. And the truth is, Mindali, I love you, too!

MINDALI

What?

Mindali's face begins to act up in front of Frarenjack.

FRARENJACK

Isn't that what you were trying to tell me?

MINDALI

No.

FRARENJACK

I am shattered... and heartbroken. And a real wimpy wimp.

MINDALI CHILD

Really?

FRARENJACK CHILD

I told you, these emotional scenes make me uncomfortable.

MINDALI CHILD

Well it's almost over, so quit interrupting. No wonder we're having trouble concentrating!

FRARENJACK CHILD

Deep breaths. It'll all be over soon.

FRARENJACK

I was a fool to let myself believe you loved me.

MINDALI

Frarenjack, let me explain. I...do love you.

FRARENJACK

Oh?

MINDALI

Yes. But I was trying to tell you something else. You may think me crazy.

FRARENJACK

Never! Just let it all out.

MINDALI

I have no memories before today. I woke up and found a note explaining that I'm a princess, and a wicked witch was out to destroy my father, the royal king, and curse me.

FRARENJACK

I have no memories before today, either. Could that be the witch's curse?

Mindali unfolds the invisible note.

MINDALI

I don't think so. The note was signed by a royal guard who tried to hide me, and they used some kind of "stone of forgetting" on me to erase my memories. But somehow that jealous witch found me and cursed my face!

FRARENJACK

She was jealous of you?

MINDALI

Well, I assume. I mean, look at me. But now... I can't control my facial expressions.

Enter Guard 1 and Guard 2. They are puppets, brought in and voiced by the actors who play Guard 1 and Guard 2. The actors can be dressed in black. Their swords are sticks.

GUARD 2

My lady, oh good you're safe!

GUARD 1

Sir Frarenjack! The Royal King needs you! He has henceforth lifted your banishment.

FRARENJACK

I was banished?

GUARD 1

Oh, right. The "stone of forgetting". Well we don't have time to explain everything, just follow us.

GUARD 2

Princess Mindali, you must stay here. We must keep you safe from the witch.

MINDALI

Can't you see? The witch's curse has already reached me.

GUARD 1

Is that why your face is, uh...

FRARENJACK

Ahem...shhhh...

MINDALI

I'm going with you. I have a father I would very much like to get to know - again.

GUARD 2

Absolutely not!

GUARD 1

Wait, this could be just the event to bring back her memories. Let her come. (to Guard 2) She will be in your care.

FRARENJACK

Nay, I will watch over Princess Mindali.

GUARD 1

Fine. We fight!

FRARENJACK

With what?

GUARD 1

Our swords, of course.

FRARENJACK

Right. What's a sword?

Lights out as they exit.

SCENE 3

The witch and the Royal King are at battle, staff against sword. The Royal King is a puppet, manned and voiced by the adult Royal King actor, his sword is now a stick. There are almost no details of a set behind them. Guards 1 and 2 enter on horseback (sticks), Mindali is riding with one of them. Frarenjack enters as well, sitting backwards on his horse (stick). Enter Mindali Child and Frarenjack Child. Royal King Child and Witch Child are already on stage.

FRARENJACK

This creature is spectacular! What's it called again?

MINDALI

A horse, Frarenjack. The stone of forgetting only erased our memories, not our basic knowledge...

FRARENJACK CHILD

You really don't get this "comedy" thing, do you?

MINDALI CHILD

Moving on! We're at the palace about to help the Royal King defeat the witch. And remember, not too violent.

WITCH

Why, Mindali, nice to see you.

ROYAL KING

Mindali! What are you doing here? You're supposed to be safe in hiding!

MINDALI

Father?

ROYAL KING

Well, of course, dear. (pause) Oh no...

Guards are trying to act natural, hide, avoid eye contact, etc.

ROYAL KING

Guards! You used the stone of forgetting on my little Mindali, didn't you?!

GUARD 2

It's okay, its reversible!

GUARD 1

It might be.

GUARD 2

Probably.

MINDALI

Don't be mad father. I'm just glad to see you... for the first time.

The Royal King and Mindali share a hug. Royal King Child and Witch Child join the other two children. With focus on the children, The guards and King become invisible, while Frarenjack and Mindali turn into puppets, manned and voiced by the adult actors playing Frarenjack and Mindali.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Ok, something is definitely wrong.

WITCH CHILD

It's like we can't control our imaginations.

ROYAL KING CHILD

What's happening to everyone?

MINDALI CHILD

They're all disappearing.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Not all of them...

WITCH

Uh!! Hello? Remember me? I'm the witch. I have cursed the land, and will now destroy you, you royal pains!

ALL CHILDREN

The Witch!

WITCH CHILD

It's not me! I'm not controlling her anymore!

ROYAL KING CHILD

But if you're not controlling the Witch...

FRARENJACK CHILD

You mean, the Witch is real?

MINDALI CHILD

She must have cast some sort of spell to use our imaginations against us. She's taking it all for herself!

WITCH

That's right, kiddos!

ROYAL KING CHILD

She's looking right at us!

WITCH CHILD

How is this happening?

FRARENJACK CHILD

You know, I really am afraid of the witch!

MINDALI CHILD

Quick, get her while she's distracted!

FRARENJACK CHILD

How?

The Adult Witch mimes the action as Mindali Child speaks. The invisible guards help the invisible king fight back the witch, but her immunity to swords makes things very difficult.

MINDALI CHILD

Imagine!! The guards surround the witch, the Royal King lunges! Now you, Frarenjack!

Frarenjack Puppet lunges at the Witch with his stick.

FRARENJACK PUPPET

Ha! Got ya!

WITCH

(sighs)

I'm immune to swords. Catch up.

FRARENJACK PUPPET

Immune to swords? You're joking, that's like cheating.

The Royal King's voice can be heard, but it is muffled.

MINDALI PUPPET

What's that, Father?

Royal King mumbles again.

MINDALI PUPPET

He says she's immune to swords.

FRARENJACK PUPPET

But all we have is swords!

MINDALI PUPPET

You can do it! She's got to have a weakness.

WITCH

Ha! I'm too powerful for you pests!

MINDALI CHILD

She's right. We can't beat her.

FRARENJACK CHILD

But the good guys always win.

MINDALI CHILD

I said we can't beat her. This is a job for the Imagineknights!

FRARENJACK CHILD

Who?

MINDALI CHILD

The Imagineknights: guardians of imagination. They're creative individuals who have powerful imaginations. You know, them.

The children turn to the audience.

MINDALI CHILD

Calling all Imagineknights! How many of you have a strong imagination?

FRARENJACK CHILD

How many of you have dreams?

WITCH CHILD

Daydreams?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Will you help us save everybody?

MINDALI CHILD

Everyone, please think hard. Imagine the way this magical land used to look. Think of all the characters. Imagine. Imagine them back!

FRARENJACK CHILD

Imagine. Exercise your mind!

WITCH

Hah! You'll never succeed!

ROYAL KING CHILD

Imagine everything the way it was!

WITCH CHILD

Concentrate!

MINDALI CHILD

Now, let's bring everything back! Repeat after me. Everyone can see you're as real as can be!

The Witch begins to feel the effects of imagination leaving her, and says her next lines during the chanting.

ALL CHILDREN

Everyone can see you! You're as real as can be! Everyone can see you! You're as real as can be!

WITCH

No! Stop! Stop! My powers, my beautiful powers! What a world, indeed.

The set comes back, the props come back, and lastly the characters come back in full costume.

MINDALI CHILD

You did it!

FRARENJACK CHILD

You brought everyone back!

ROYAL KING

Great imagining, everyone!

WITCH CHILD

We couldn't have done it without you, Imagineknights!

MINDALI CHILD

Let's see what happens next!

ROYAL KING

You can't defeat us that easily, Wicked Witch!

WITCH

Oh, but you forget. I'm still immune to your pathetic swords!

FRARENJACK

We'll see about that!

WITCH

Oh, the scaredy-cat. I remember you! Come here!

FRARENJACK

Ah!

The witch begins to chase Frarenjack. The children address the audience.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Oh, no! The witch is gaining on Frarenjack.

MINDALI CHILD

What can make him move faster?

The children take suggestions from the audience.

MINDALI CHILD

He can use a (jetpack)?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Why not! Frarenjack, use a (jetpack)!

Frarenjack mimes putting on a (jetpack) and uses it to get away from the Witch. The Witch moves toward the children.

WITCH

Bud out, kiddos! I'll put a spell on you!

The Witch begins to hum and wave her arms. The children address the audience.

ROYAL KING CHILD

Ah! She's putting a spell on us!

WITCH CHILD

What can we use to block the spell?

The children take suggestions from the audience.

WITCH CHILD

We can use an (umbrella)?

ROYAL KING CHILD

Good idea! Everyone, use the (umbrella)!

The children mime (opening an umbrella) and use it to block the spell.

WITCH CHILD

It worked!

WITCH

Curses! I'll deal with you later!

The witch turns her attention on the Royal King.

WITCH

Hey, Royal Pain! No more Mr. Nice Guy!

The Witch runs toward the Royal King. Mindali tries to jump in, but the others stop her, as a knight blocks the witch off from the king.

ROYAL KING

Mindali, no!

MINDALI

But you need help!

ROYAL KING

This is no place for a princess.

GUARD 1

I'll escort her into hiding, Your Highness! Not to worry, I'll use the "Stone of Forgetting" so she won't come back!

Guard 1 picks up the "Stone of Forgetting" and begins to escort Mindali.

MINDALI

No! Not the "Stone of Forgetting"!

FRARENJACK

It's no use! We can't break through her shield!

WITCH

Told ya so! Bye, bye, Mindali...Oh, by the way, how's the face? Hahahaha!!

Everyone but the Witch gasps.

MINDALI

You... you witch!

Everyone but Mindali gasps.

MINDALI CHILD

(to audience)

She needs to find something big and heavy to break through the Witch's shield. What's big and heavy?

Guard 1 drops the "Stone of Forgetting".

GUARD 1

Whew!

FRARENJACK CHILD

(to audience)

What's big and heavy?

The children guide the audience to answer "The Stone of Forgetting" or any variation that refers to the stone.

MINDALI CHILD

Great idea! Use the "Stone of Forgetting"!

Mindali breaks away from the guard, she looks around for something as the others continue fighting the witch.

FRARENJACK

You bully! You will pay for hurting Mindali!

Mindali picks up the "Stone of Forgetting".

MINDALI

I know I don't like violence, but... Hey, Miss "immune to swords"!

WITCH

Whatdaya want?!

MINDALI

Say goodbye!

Mindali bonks the witch on the head with the "Stone of Forgetting". The witch promptly passes out and they all cheer.

MINDALI CHILD

(to audience)

You helped us defeat the witch!

ALL CHILDREN

(to audience)

Yay! Good team work! Thank you!

ROYAL KING

Mindali, you've defeated the witch!

FRARENJACK

Does this mean your curse is gone?

Mindali feels her face.

MINDALI

I guess so!

ROYAL KING

Guards, take this garbage out of my palace!

GUARDS

Yes, your majesty!

The guards begin tidying up and picking up trash.

ROYAL KING

Guards... I meant the witch.

GUARDS

Oh, Oh yeah, Yes, your majesty!

The guards help the witch to her feet. She is now very loopy.

WITCH

My, what a lovely home.

GUARD 1

This way, madam.

WITCH

What a lovely uniform. What a lovely princess...

Exit guards and witch. Witch Child remains on stage.

WITCH (OFF STAGE)

What lovely trees!

ROYAL KING

I don't think the witch will be bothering us for a while.

FRARENJACK

Your highness, I've been meaning to ask you something.

ROYAL KING

You helped save the kingdom! You can ask me anything.

Frarenjack turns to Mindali and kneels down as he speaks to the king.

FRARENJACK

May I have your daughter's hand in marriage?

MINDALI

You mean it?

ROYAL KING

Is this what you want, Mindali? (she nods) Then it is done. Frarenjack, you may have her hand.

Mindali and Frarenjack cheer and as they hug each other, they both get dizzy. They hold hands to steady each other.

FRARENJACK AND MINDALI

Whoa...

ROYAL KING

Is everything all right?

MINDALI

I think I'm...remembering.

FRARENJACK

Me, too. My memories are all coming back to me.

ROYAL KING

What a wonderful day, indeed!

As the king speaks, Frarenjack and Mindali simultaneously notice they are holding hands and become disgusted.

MINDALI

Yuck!!!! Father, you told him he could marry me?!

ROYAL KING

Well-

FRARENJACK

Yeah, right! I don't want to get married!

ROYAL KING

But-

MINDALI

Good, because I don't either!

ROYAL KING

Why-

FRARENJACK

Fine. Now I'm free to wander the forest looking for adventures!

MINDALI

Good for you!

ROYAL KING

Ok, if that's what you want.

FRARENJACK

Well, I'm off! To the forest, to adventure!

Frarenjack mounts his horse as it rears its body.

MINDALI

Sounds like fun.

FRARENJACK

It is. But I suppose it would be more fun with a friend to join me.

MINDALI

You mean-

FRARENJACK

Come with me. We'll have so much fun and see all the wonders of the world!

MINDALI

May I, father?

ROYAL KING

Hopeless! The two of you are hopeless! Just go, dear.

MINDALI

Thank you!

She kisses her father goodbye and mounts her own horse.

FRARENJACK CHILD

When did you get a horse?

MINDALI CHILD

All princesses have a pony.

MINDALI

Let's go, Sir Frarenjack!

As they ride off, the Royal King shouts warnings and advice after them.

ROYAL KING

Watch out for invisible dragons. They poop everywhere! And be careful not to upset the forest gnomes! Oh, and if you see a fairy, get a sprinkle of fairydust for me! (pause) Oh, what am I doing? Wait for me!

The Royal King mounts his horse and rides after them.

SCENE 4

All the children are on stage. They gather their initial props (the stick, etc.) and gather as they talk.

MINDALI CHILD

And they all lived happily ever-

FRARENJACK CHILD

Happily ever after? That's it?

MINDALI CHILD

That's the way it ends.

FRARENJACK CHILD

But every fairy tale ends that way. Come on, use some imagination.

WITCH CHILD

Look who suddenly cares so much!

ROYAL KING CHILD

Yeah, you didn't even want to play this. You wanted to play video games.

FRARENJACK CHILD

Well... this was fun, too.

All children except Frarenjack Child gasp.

MINDALI CHILD

You had fun playing something other than video games?
Do you have a fever?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Don't get me wrong, I still like video games. It's just... video games are ok sometimes. But I've learned it's good to take a break from that and exercise my mind.

WITCH CHILD

Yeah, just like I need to take a break from watching T.V. sometimes!

ROYAL KING CHILD

Oh, me too! The cartoon channel? Don't get me started.

MINDALI CHILD

And I guess I do spend too much time on the phone. Talking, texting, downloading cool new apps!

FRARENJACK CHILD

Hey, can we play again?

ROYAL KING CHILD

I call dibs on the king!

FRARENJACK CHILD

Dibs on king! Aw, man.

MINDALI CHILD

Let's make up a different story. About a princess and her prince, and a jealous stepsister!

WITCH CHILD

Ooh, can the prince be Justin Bieber?!

MINDALI CHILD

Only if I'm the princess!

FRARENJACK CHILD

What if you let us boys decide what to play?

WITCH CHILD

You'll just choose video games!

FRARENJACK CHILD

Not this time.

ROYAL KING CHILD

What do you have in mind?

FRARENJACK CHILD

Ok, this story will be about a wandering knight and his sidekick, Pancho. It involves invisible dragons and a royal scandal!

Lights out.

THE END.

CHAPTER VI

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN PRODUCTION

Having had some directing experience, something that weighs heavily on my mind when writing a play, is the looming worry of encountering problems during the actual production of the play. I've talked to a few directors-turned-writers in the past who get "stuck" on a certain scene because it is very difficult to stage and they begin to try to write with the set and the director and the lights and the staging in mind – but all of this leads to drawing more blanks and the writers become too concerned with technicalities to write their play. My advice to them has always been, "You're the writer. You only worry about the writing. Whoever produces your play will have the task of figuring out all the details." I have trouble following my own advice. While writing *The Imagineknights*, concerns with the staging, the lights, the costumes, and other technical aspects of production arose on several occasions. This can be a distraction from the content of the play itself, but in a way, this is also a good thing. The worry of how it will all turn out on a performance day allows one to glimpse ahead and project what kind of troubles one might run into if producing this play, which in turn gives one the chance to come up with a few preemptive solutions.

The Script: Interpretation and Clarity

As this is an experimental play, it is quite possible that the message may not be clear to the audience – particularly an audience of children. Each character is double cast with an adult

and a child, the children being the ones driving the story through their on-stage playing. There are many moments when the adult actors are in the middle of an action, and the children interrupt because they disagree with what just happened. Frarenjack's horse, which looks nice and detailed in the beginning slowly transforms into a stick ó then Frarenjack uses the stick as his sword. It is my job as the playwright to ensure that my play is written as clearly and logically as possible so that others may understand exactly what they are reading. If I have done my job correctly, I now pass the duty of properly portraying my play to the director. Wood states in his book, "Part of the director's job is to ensure that the meaning of every line, movement and action is clearly understood by a young audience witnessing the performance for the first and only time" (1999, p. 177). One of the challenges a director would face is the shift in focus from the adult actors in the middle of an action, to the child actors interrupting the story with a disagreement. The director would have to lead the actors in practicing these parts more than others to get the timing just right, and to help the actors understand what is going on.

Another difficulty would be helping the child actors understand the play. As in any play, it is crucial that the actors understand what they are saying, and why they are saying it. This is even more crucial in children's plays, especially one as experimental as *The Imagineknights*. An actor who does not fully understand the scene can come across as insincere and robotic. Any audience member can easily spot the difference between an actor who understands what he is doing, and an actor who is simply faking his way through. A great example is when actors misunderstand and perform Shakespeare. I have seen some really wonderful movie adaptations in which the actors have studied the meaning of their lines. When the actors know what they are saying, no matter how complex the language, the audience also tends to understand what is being said. Conversely, I have seen not so good movie adaptations of Shakespeare's works in which

the actors simply memorized the words they are to say in the correct order. However, since they do not understand what they are saying, they speak in a very artificial tone, not knowing when to emphasize a word, or even what to feel; in those adaptations, it is nearly impossible for the audience to understand what is being said. Even adult actors who try to fake their way through a scene have a difficult time fooling the audience; therefore it is especially important that the children who act in this play understand it. This refers to the shifting of focus from one actor to another, the disappearing of characters who are really still there, the transformation of extravagant props to simple ones to invisible ones, and the change of costumes from realistic to "Halloween-quality". The director must ensure that the reason for each of these moments is understood by every actor. For adults, a few read-throughs and discussion sessions should easily do the trick. For children, it will take more than just reading the play and talking about it. Perhaps a few games with the theme of imagination could help. The director might also choose to tell the children the story of the play in the form of a fairy-tale, or act out a very simplified version with sock puppets. Helping the child actors to understand and interpret the play may be a challenge, but there are many options that would help get the message across.

If the director has done his job correctly, the audience should be able to understand the play. All of the more complex pieces of the play will have been carefully rehearsed, and all of the actors should fully comprehend the play.

Language

When first writing *The Imagineknights*, a key concern was whether children would understand the language. So, the first draft of the play used very simple words and sentences. Realizing how boring the dialogue became, I had to make changes to heighten the language and

make it sound interesting, trusting that the audience would still understand. Wood writes, "A child's vocabulary and use of language is more limited than that of most adults, but this does not mean that the playwright has to use the simplest words" (1999, p. 42). Revising some of the text and taking Wood's advice made the dialogue more dynamic and fun. Wood points out that if the phrase is used in the correct context, and expressed well by the character, children can easily understand the meaning. "It is quite acceptable to use difficult or challenging words as long as the sense within the context is clear" (Wood, 1999, p. 43). I do remember watching television shows as a child, and though I had not heard certain words or phrases the characters would say, I found myself understanding what the characters meant by it. Although it is generally acceptable to use challenging words and phrases, one thing I must be careful of is making sure everything makes sense in context. If it does not make sense, I lose the audience.

Another concern is *The Imagineknights* contains a large amount of dialogue, but Wood advises that conversations should be kept short and to a minimum. In *The Imagineknights*, some of the conversations are essential because that is where a lot of the conflict lies between the children playing make-believe. Conflict is not only interesting, it is indispensable. So while the amount of dialogue is a small concern, it should provide conflict, as well as laughter for the audience.

Humor

Wood says, "Humour is a vital ingredient in children's plays" (1999, p.39). When I was a very young child, my mother would try to get me to watch a movie I hadn't heard of, and I would complain and argue that it was probably boring and I had no interest. She would start the movie anyway, and there I would sit, pouting with my arms crossed because I just knew it was

going to be boring. But the second something funny would happen, I was won over. The main character would slip and fall in a lake or hit their head on a low ceiling, and I would crack up in laughter and exclaim how I loved that movie. It happened just like this every time.

Wood makes a strong point that humor is necessary in a children's play. However, all playwrights must recognize that children's humor is different from that of adults. Now, as a member of a comedy group, I have written many comedic sketches; these are geared toward an adult audience. Therefore I have grown accustomed to writing jokes that appeal only to adults, such as plays on words or references to things that only adults would remember. The kinds of jokes I am used to writing are not suitable for children because many children simply will not get it. Appropriate jokes for most children include: physical comedy, like someone falling or a harmless bonk on the nose; silly comedy such as funny-sounding words and silly voices; and "rude" humor, for example a loud, unexpected burp. "Rude" humor describes what some also deem "crude" humor. "People who fall down, who get paint or mud splashed on them, or who get chased are the funniest things in the world" (Davis & Larson-Watkins, 1960, p. 26).

With the kinds of humor that most appeal to children in mind, many comedic moments are included in *The Imagineknights*. Something that is prominent in many children's plays, and Wood discusses in *Theatre for Children*, is the idea that a joke can be used up to three times, and it gets funnier each time it is used. This is called "the rule of three". It is incorporated with an object in *The Imagineknights* called *the stone of forgetting*, a big stone used to wipe one's memories by bonking them over the head in a comedic way. I have also included bits of silly humor, more physical humor, and a little rude humor. For example, Frarenjack steps in dragon poop at two different points in the play.

Characters

There are quite a few characters in *The Imagineknights*: the Royal King, Princess Mindali, Sir Frarenjack, the Witch, and eight guards. One challenge was giving all characters their own distinct voice. The Royal King is somewhat childlike, Princess Mindali is tough and speaks her mind, Sir Frarenjack is a scaredy-cat, but his heart is in the right place, and the Witch is sarcastic and somewhat playful. The guards were not each given a distinct voice because they may all be wearing a uniform, making it difficult to distinguish the difference since there are four of them. Instead, they were given a balance of characteristics. One of them precisely follows orders, one of them is more compassionate and caring about the other characters, and the others are just a little silly and not so smart.

With so many characters, it is hard to find which one with whom to identify. The intention is for the audience to identify with Frarenjack and Mindali. They will be the first to be seen on stage, as children playing make-believe, and then as the actual grown-up characters. This, along with their characteristics, should set them apart as the protagonists. Seeing these characters as the protagonists will drive the audience to identify with them. ðí girls seem to be more interested in í stories containing central girl characters. Boysí will be much more interested in stories of í boys much like themselves who are capable of doing clever deeds to save the sayö (Davis & Larson-Watkins, 1960, p. 29). Most of the action follows them, and they are the ones who have gone through the most change in the end. Frarenjack starts out as a kind-hearted scaredy-cat, but proves himself by overcoming his fear in the end. Mindali is a bored princess at first, but speaks up for herself and goes against tradition by helping to defeat the witch, then leaving on an adventure with Frarenjack. While a potential problem may be that there are too many characters, they are well-defined.

Costumes & Sets: Design

Set design tends to be a challenge in any play; but it can be even more challenging in children's plays. For example, *The Imagineknights* takes place in several different locations: a regular house, a castle, in the woods, in front of a cottage, and in front of the witch's house. Some of these location changes happen rapidly. Many creative options can be used, especially since this is a children's play and it deals with make-believe, imagination, and magic. Wood's advice on set design is, "Understanding what will be acceptable to a child's imagination is necessary. A large, yellow disc can become an island; a piece of material wafted by the actors can become the sea" (1999, p. 158). Creativity like the examples Wood gave would fit well in *The Imagineknights*, and would help solve any potential problems one might run into when dealing with all the set changes.

Another bit of advice Wood gives that I particularly appreciate is, "Sometimes ideas can be taken from the way in which children play. For example, a cardboard box can become a boat; turned on its side, it can become a car or a wall. A table can become a house. Children enjoy such inventiveness on stage, as long as it is clear what is happening" (1999, p. 158). *The Imagineknights* features the idea of playing make-believe and using imagination. The two children who drive the story are simply playing. It is fitting that the set designer employs the method of drawing ideas from children's play and incorporates them in the set design. This could add an element of childlike fun that the audience may appreciate.

In *The Imagineknights*, the most complicated thing in costuming is that there should be detachable embellishments the actors can easily remove to symbolize the fading of imagination, and replace once imagination returns. The costumes can be a challenge because there must be a

good balance of believable, and make-believe. The big issue that must be dealt with in designing the set and costumes is the flexibility each will need in order to accomplish the effect of "imagination fading away" as it starts to happen in *The Imagineknights*. The set must become less elaborate, and maybe even look duller in color. The costumes must also become less elaborate and colorful. Conversely, it must be easy to have the sets and costumes once again become as elaborate as they were in the beginning, maybe even more so. This must convey the image of imagination being revived. The sets and the costumes must be flexible and convertible, and it will require much imagination in the designing process to achieve this.

Props

The Imagineknights requires the same of props as it does of the set and costume design: they must be flexible and convertible. Frarenjack's riding horse is detailed and believable at first, then begins to slowly morph into a simple stick. Things that must be considered are: is the color of materials consistent from one horse prop to the next? Are the stages of transition evenly spaced? Will the audience believe that the simple stick was once a valiant horse? It is vital that the audience understands what is happening to the horse. Otherwise, the prop transition may be seen as an inconsistency or a goof. The children might get distracted by it and begin to ignore the actors as they deliberate amongst each other, "What is happening to his horse?" Of course, the dialogue will help explain what is going on, as the children realize their imagination is fading away, but consistency is still crucial. There must be a fantastical and beautiful version of each prop, some props will require stages of "evolution" into a dull and unimaginative version, and some will simply need to jump from one extreme to the other. The prop master must comb through this script more thoroughly than any other in order to identify what is needed.

Puppets

It is important to note that the puppets in *The Imagineknights* are utilized to represent one of the stages of de-evolution of imagination into nothingness, so they should not be too elaborate. Even still, the use of puppets can be tricky. The likelihood of the actors having experience with puppets is slim. Potential problems may include a puppet being damaged just before the performance, or during the performance, puppets being too small to be seen clearly by the audience, and an actor who is not a good puppeteer. Actors must learn how to move the puppet to convincingly show different emotions and expressions, and practice synching the mouth movements with the dialogue. It is more intricate than the simple flapping of the fingers to create the illusion of a puppet speaking. There should be at least two of each puppet in case of an accident, and to keep one puppet from getting worn out from overuse. It is advisable to have yet a third version of each puppet to be used in rehearsals only. Be sure the size of each puppet is appropriate for the size of the stage and auditorium. If done well, puppets add an element of fun to children's theatre and can turn out to be worth the extra effort to ensure the risk of potential problems arising is low.

Actors/Casting

Casting is perhaps one of the most distressing stages of producing a play. Wood states in his book that he looks for "big and brave performers," (1999, p. 169). In much of children's theatre, the actors must be bigger than life. It is essentially their job to entertain the audience, so it is imperative that the actors bring energy and excitement to the stage. I myself have had the opportunity of acting in several children's plays, and I have always found it more challenging and demanding than adult's plays. Children's plays are where I found the courage to make bold

and creative acting choices that I may have been afraid to try beforehand. Wood discusses his ideal children's theatre actors. "They are brave enough to experiment and are aware that communication with the audience is all-important" (1999, p. 169).

On the note of communication, actors in children's theatre must be aware of the audience at all times. They must be able to gauge the audience, know when to bring up the energy or calm things down. Actors should know where their characters stand with the audience. Are they the hero, the bad guy, a side character? In one performance of "The Great Race: Tortoise vs. Hare", the protagonist, Tortoise, made a misstep and ended up in an argument with the children in the audience. A truck comes on stage and "drives" down the road Tortoise is supposed to cross. When Tortoise asked the audience, "What is that thing?" one child shouted "car", and all the others followed suit. Instead of going along with it, or kindly saying something akin to, "Good, it can also be called a truck", the actor opted for a more argumentative line. "No, it's a truck", the actor said with a snappy tone. Immediately the children became defensive and started chanting "car, car, car", as the actor proceeded to give them the tongue. The actor's initial rude tone made the children see Tortoise as the bad guy, because the good guy is never unkind. The tongue did nothing to help either, but rather caused the children to continue chanting even louder. That particular actor was not experienced, so they are not completely to blame. The actor simply panicked when the children shouted an answer that was inconsistent with the script.

In short, actors in children's theatre should be experienced not only in acting, but in improvisation and with keeping their poise. Improvisation skills are helpful in dealing with a wrong turn from audience participation, as well as adjusting the energy levels if the audience seems bored. Had the actor mentioned above practiced improvisation, he may have made better choices in dealing with the audience, instead of accidentally getting them to turn against the

protagonist. The biggest thing that can go wrong in casting is selecting an actor who lacks the experience necessary to drive a children's play. Less experienced actors can be unpredictable once on stage and, though their intentions are good, cause the unintended outcome of taking away from the message of the play, or minimizing the experience the audience has.

Audience Participation

In any play, children or adult, audience participation has the potential to go wrong. It is wonderful to interact with an audience of children and make them feel like they are a part of the play. But one must be careful of the timing, and know how to bring the audience back down to a listening state. Wood warns of children becoming overly excited. "The actors' skills may be stretched to the limit to retain control" (Wood, 1999, p. 18). In a performance of *The Great Race: Tortoise vs. Hare*, the Hare ran through the aisles in the audience during the race. This would have been fine, except for the fact that another actor and I were on stage and had very important lines at this point. The children did not care about us whatsoever; the Hare was so close to them; it was exciting! The other actor and I tried in vain to shout the lines, but the children did not hear us; we then repeated the lines louder. They still did not hear us. We tried cheering and jumping and waving our hands in the air, but the children were still more interested in the Hare who was playfully running around them. It is never acceptable to sacrifice the clarity of a scene in favor of audience interaction. Audience interaction is strongly encouraged in children's theatre, but one must find a balance and make sure the interaction does not distract from the story.

The Imagineknights has moments where audience participation, such as asking them questions, is possible, and one moment where it is necessary in order to propel the plot. Wood

points out that not all children react to things the same way. While this is a practical thought, it is important to consider. Some children would be thrilled to be invited to join the actors on stage; others may initially volunteer, but become frightened or nervous when put on the spot. Some children are natural-born clowns and will purposely give an incorrect answer. This can mislead other children into calling out that incorrect answer, making it difficult to continue in the direction the script is meant to take. One method I have seen employed is the crew will sit in as a pretend audience and try their best to react as children would. This means they participate when asked, and in anticipation of what children may do, they participate even if not asked. This is helpful in training the actors to think quickly and stay in character even if the audience participation is unexpected.

“No two audiences of children will react in exactly the same way” (Wood, 1999, p. 201). This simple fact does make things more difficult for the actors. There is no norm to get used to, no constant to rely on. This can be intimidating, trying to anticipate anything or expect the unexpected. No amount of rehearsing can prepare the actors for every possible outcome. Actors should feel they can trust in each other if things get out of control. One thing everyone involved in a children’s play should keep in mind is, do not worry if things do not turn out as planned, or if the audience gets so out of control you have to ignore them and continue with the scene. Chances are the children are so thrilled to participate that they won’t mind or even realize if they miss a few lines. By the end of the play, all of the excitement of helping the protagonist and being a part of the play will have in itself made it a worthwhile experience.

CHAPTER VII

WRITING PROCESSES

The Idea

Since the first children's play with which I was involved, a UTPA Children's Theatre Workshop production of *The Great Race: Tortoise vs. Hare*, I have had a strong appreciation for children's theatre. That appreciation has steadily grown into a passion; no theatre seems quite as fulfilling as children's theatre. Not only does it entertain the audience, but it teaches valuable and memorable lessons, which the children can take with them once the play is over. A play can influence the decisions children make in their future. For example, after many performances of children's plays, some children in the audience would approach the actors – usually referring to us as the characters they just saw on stage – and say things like, “You learned how not to be shy. I am going to try not to be shy now,” following the examples set by the protagonists of the plays. It is through entertainment that children most easily retain information. In choosing a topic for my thesis, I knew I wanted to do something centered on emphasizing the importance of children's theatre. On coming up with an idea for a play, Paddy Chayefsky declares that he begins a play “with a feeling – something inside” (“You Can Write a Play,” 2002, p. 41). My feeling is children should be strongly encouraged to use their imagination. I decided to write a play for children in which imagination would play a big part, highlighting the importance of imagination, and by extension the importance of children's theatre, during which time children are allowed to freely become immersed in imagination. “Outside of play there are few

places where children can contribute to the world in which they find themselves. Their world, controlled by adults who tell them what to do and when to do it, offers them little opportunity to act or to accept community responsibility (Spolin, 1986, p. 3). Theatre offers children that opportunity. This became my foremost intention to let the audience feel that their imagination was controlling the actors and actions in the play.

The final draft of *The Imagineknights* strongly encompasses the message of the importance of imagination, and is a grander experience for the audience. For these reasons, most of what is discussed in this section will pertain to the final draft. To avoid confusion, the first draft will simply be referred to as "first draft", while the final draft will be referred to as such or as *The Imagineknights*.

The Story and Characters

Devising a story that meets the challenge of conveying my message was a long process and involved several steps. Comedy was a good choice for *The Imagineknights*, as this play should be a light and fun experience, making the seriousness of the characters' dilemma stand out. As defined by Dr. Milton Polsky, comedy is "A humorous play with light or serious themes whose central characters succeed in overcoming all obstacles" (2002, p. 21). Comedy is usually more interesting to children than other genres, as laughter adds entertainment value. Since the message is dealing with imagination, the concept utilized is the idea of playing with the levels of imagination the audience sees on stage. In developing the first draft of the play the entire setting starts out in a simplistic style. As the play progresses, everything from sets, props, costumes, characters becomes more elaborate and colorful. The initial idea was to show the importance of imagination by giving the audience the feeling of delving into a child's imagination, gradually

seeing more and more bits of the imagined world. When beginning the revision process, the intention was not to deviate from this template. But then I wondered why I was trying to give the audience the feeling of delving into a child's imagination. After all, the target audience is children, and they already know this feeling first-hand. In addition, if children walk into a theatre and see a drab set with little color, and no effort of imagination put into anything, they are surely not going to get excited or even be interested in what they are about to see. It became evident that drastic changes were needed.

In the revised version of *The Imagineknights*, the play starts off as imaginative as possible, with many colors and elaborate sets, costumes, and props. "Children love colour! Colourful sets, props, and costumes can provide instant appeal and focus" (Wood, 1999, p. 52). Then, gradually, everything would begin to look less elaborate. Sets and costumes would look slightly duller, even characters would start to fade, symbolizing that imagination is growing weak and soon the characters' entire world will fade away. The crisis the characters are in propels the story. "In fact, a major crisis, or turning point, is indispensable to your plot because it provides the greatest amount of suspense regarding the outcome" (Polsky, 2002, p. 70). The characters then get the audience to concentrate and believe as hard as they can, and imagine everything back the way it was. The audience succeeds, and everything goes back to normal, thus resulting in a happy ending. The urgency of the situation the characters are in makes it crucial that the audience members use their imaginations to save everyone, supporting the theme of the importance of using your imagination. These changes add power to the message and even give *The Imagineknights* a more solid and exciting plot than that of the original draft.

An interesting thought came to me in brainstorming how to make imagination a bigger and more prominent feature of the play. What if the story was an imaginative creation of a few

children at play? It was then concluded that children would drive the story playing make-believe together and choosing what should happen next. At the start of *The Imagineknights*, two children enter the stage in makeshift or Halloween costumes. They are dressed as the two main characters the audience will see in a few moments. They begin to play make-believe, and the story comes to life, with the lights fading on the children, and focusing on the "imagined" characters, which are in elaborate and convincing costumes. The children break into the action several times as they disagree on certain events that transpire. The best way to describe this is by referencing "The Princess Bride". A grandfather is reading a book to his grandson, and the action focuses on the story and the characters in the book. The grandson continuously interrupts the action, drawing focus to himself, as he asks questions or disagrees with the outcome of the story. This roots the story in realism, and also gives children a character with whom to identify. In many cases, the grandson is saying aloud what most children may be thinking during moments of the story. In the *Imagineknights*, once the children are finished interjecting, they begin to play again and the imagination continues, as does the story. In the wake of destruction, as imagination fades from the protagonists and is being siphoned by the witch, the characters are nearly gone and all appears to be lost. But the children who initiated the play realize their imagination is fading and get the audience to join in and imagine. The children drive the story in that they are the reason it is happening, and they are the ones to get help and save the characters. This is reminiscent of "The Neverending Story", in which Sebastian has been reading a book he believed to be a fictitious story. Near the end, the Child-like Empress calls out to him and asks for his help in saving her world, by giving her a name. In *The Imagineknights*, the child actors call on the audience to save their imagined world by imagining together.

It was clear that a fairy-tale would be the best choice in promoting and encouraging children to imagine, be creative, and participate in make-believe. Fairy-tales are highly imaginative; they involve mystical and mythical creatures, magic, epic battles, creative storylines, and so much more. Wood declares, "Perhaps the most universal theme for children's entertainment is the fairy-tale" (1999, p. 37). Once deciding to convey the theme through a fairy-tale, it was easy to come up with the identities of the main characters: a princess and a knight in shining armor. Princess Mindali is written as a closet tomboy, pretending to be happy as a princess, but wanting adventure. On the other hand, Sir Frarenjack, the knight in shining armor is a not-so-subtle coward, out to prove himself.

Much thought was given to the two main characters and their personalities, attributes, vices and but, the plot itself was too simple. There was nothing interesting for the characters to do and nothing driving the story. Polsky states, "Complications serve to keep your play building in a steady line of development and suspense" (2002, p. 67). The story lacked conflict, so I opted to add a physical villain that the children in the audience could all band against: the witch. The witch adds a dynamic energy to the story in that *she* is the one behind the weakening of imagination. Even though the children playing make-believe are in control of their imagination at the start, the witch's spell overpowers the children's efforts and takes control. Now, instead of the characters' world just fading away, all of the imagination that was once used to bring it to creation is being stolen by the witch, who plans to use it to gain more power. The children have no choice but to ask for help from the audience. By concentrating and imagining, the audience helps the characters gain back their world and defeat the witch. The audience now has a higher stake in saving imagination because if they do not succeed, the witch wins. And as many experts in children's theatre and parents agree, children want justice. "I believe that children are born

with an innate sense of justice. This has nothing to do with morality, or knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is to do with fairnessö (Wood, 1999, p. 21). Children will not settle for a bad guy winning. A child identifies with the hero naturally and fairness dictates that he should be the victor over the villain. öWhen you identify with the characters in a book or on stage or screen, you have a vicarious chance to take sides and get caught up in the dramaö (Polsky, 2002, p. 70).

It became necessary to add a king, Princess Mindali's father. This character helps the plot move forward more logically. Instead of Mindali performing actions that are contrary to her nature, the king is the driving force behind her uncharacteristic actions. For instance, when the witch begins to execute her plans, Mindali goes into hiding. Because her character is spunky and thirsts for adventure, it is more likely that Mindali would seek out the witch and confront her. It makes more sense that she has a protective father who sends her into hiding, rather than it being Mindali's choice. The added guards play a part in moving the plot forward because they must carry out the act of escorting Frarenjack out of the castle and using the *stone of forgetting* to wipe his memories. Guards are also utilized to escort Mindali to her hiding place when the witch strikes. These two groups of guards can easily be played by the same four actors, as the guards will likely be in uniform, and no major costume changes would be needed.

Children have an affinity for knowing how a name can help the imaginative process. I wanted to reflect this in the name choices of my characters. Other than the two main characters, the names of the other characters simply reflect their role in the play. There is the King, the Witch, and the Guards. Their names are also their jobs. Since they are not the main characters, in a child's mind, they are not as important and do not need specific names. As for Princess Mindali and Sir Frarenjack, I decided on the unusual names because in the play, these characters are

created by the children playing make-believe. Strange and unusual names are a staple of children's make-believe stories. Thinking back to when I was a child and creating a character to role-play, I remembered that I always wanted my name to be something different and original, to make my character special. Instead of opting for the common names of the time, I would make up new names. In naming a family pet, I usually find it is more difficult for adults to come up with a name. Children, however, take three seconds to think, and then blurt out the perfect moniker that captures the personality of the animal much more successfully than the predictable "Spot" or "Fluffy".

The name "Mindali" is an extension of the original "Mina". "Frarenjack" is a play on the initial choice, "Frances". While "Mina" and "Frances" are perfectly acceptable names for two characters, they sound almost boring. The names "Mina" and "Frances" are not exciting, and even take away from the playfulness of *The Imagineknights*. "Mindali" and "Frarenjack" are much more imaginative and fun. Because they are less realistic, the sillier versions of the names fit in well with the theme of the play, as well as enhance the idea that these are imaginary people in an imaginary world created by children.

Writing an Outline and Synopsis

With the story and characters in mind, it was time to begin constructing the play. Melanie Marnich and David Wood suggest writing a synopsis of the play you intend to write. While many creative writers may argue against this, writing a good and detailed outline before beginning to write the play can help in creating a clear and organized synopsis. One of the main purposes of a synopsis is to condense a long story into a short document for the writer's reference. Wood believes a synopsis is necessary when writing a children's play. "I believe the

structure of the play is so important that it is essential to have the whole thing mapped out first, in the form of a synopsis (Wood, 1999, p. 65). Wood suggests a much more in depth synopsis than Marnich, suggesting it may run fifteen to twenty pages long, while Marnich's idea of a synopsis is a shorter summary. Marnich says of a synopsis she wrote, "In these three pages, the theme crystallized, the characters became clear, and the main character took focus" ("The Playwright's Workout," 2009, p. 117). For these reasons, the first step to begin turning the story in my head into a play on paper was to create an outline for the synopsis. An outline helps keep the story on track and ensures that the writer does not go off on tangents and forget to address the main point; a synopsis is an easy guide through the story. Instead of trying to keep the entire story in mind while focusing on dialogue and action, only an outline and a synopsis needed to be referenced. The synopsis provided a valuable tool in putting each scene into perspective. Does this scene make sense in this point of the story? Is this scene necessary? Are there illogical jumps from point A to point B? Marnich says of her synopsis, "These three pages also showed me the many flaws, holes, and weak spots in what I was trying to accomplish." These problems only became clear to me when I wrote the synopsis ("The Playwright's Workout," 2009, p. 117). The detailed outline and synopsis of *The Imagineknights*, answered many questions about the story and played an important role in making the writing process an easier experience.

As I wrote the synopsis for my first draft of *The Imagineknights*, I noticed several scenes were in an awkward order and needed to be shifted around. I utilized the original outline and synopsis in the revision process of *The Imagineknights*, and it was extremely helpful in preventing me from getting confused with all the changes I was making. It was also useful in helping me decide what should change and how to make the play better. Referencing the outline ensured that I did not accidentally cut out something important during my revisions and forget to

put it back in somewhere else. In emphasizing how helpful the synopsis was to me, I cannot think of a better way to express it than Marnich. She stated, "I could go back into the play like a mechanic who actually knew what was wrong with the machine she had to fix" ("The Playwright's Workout," 2009, p. 117).

Writing *The Imagineknights*: Dialogue and Staging

While writing *The Imagineknights*, the synopsis and outline were kept close by to use as references. This allowed for dialogue to become the main concentration. Writing the first line of dialogue is not easy; how does one begin? I faced the problem of wanting to have the best opening line ever and drew a blank. It was quite a bit easier to summarize the story than to fill in the gaps with believable and interesting dialogue. Coming up with good dialogue that matches each character is a challenge in that it is difficult to think in a voice that is different than your own. As true in any play, not only must the dialogue be coherent and useful in fueling the story, but it must stay true to the character. This is especially crucial in *The Imagineknights*, since each of the four main characters is cast twice. For example, the child playing Princess Mindali must sound like a child, and the adult must be convincing as a princess. However, both actors should share a voice that links them as the same person. This was a challenge. After many accumulated hours of thinking and attempting dialogue, I started thinking more about how each character would act in certain situations, rather than what they would necessarily say. "David Mamet has correctly observed that the way people speak is interconnected with the way they act" (Polsky, 2002, p. 115). Now, the words did not suddenly and magically flow through once using this method, but it did become easier to think of dialogue that sounded authentic to each character. The knowledge of the qualities and personalities of each character, how each character *acts*, helped in making dialogue choices.

Authenticity, however, is not the only quality to keep in mind when writing dialogue. Good dialogue inherently has *universal* appeal, which can be *felt* by almost any individual in the audience. This means that even though the dialogue has its own distinctiveness and nuances in a dramatic context, it can also be emotionally understood by people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures (Polsky, 2002, p. 119). Being understood is not the same as being *emotionally* understood. This is especially important in children's theatre. The audience must know how the characters are feeling; otherwise there is no emotional investment in the story. Emotional investment is an important element in a play. Not only does it help to keep the audience from getting bored, it makes the experience stronger and more memorable. In *The Imagineknights*, for instance, Frarenjack is ordered by the king to confront the witch. Frarenjack's dialogue as he talks to himself outside the witch's cabin suggests he is brave, tough, and willing to challenge her. The manner in which it is said however, makes it clear that Frarenjack is scared out of his wits. The way the dialogue is structured has Frarenjack repeating aloud how brave he is, how he is going to go up to the witch and tell her off, how she will never know what hit her. The obviously over-confident language makes it evident to the audience that Frarenjack is desperately trying to convince himself that he is brave. Other moments of dialogue are clearer in expressing the intended emotion, a choice of simplicity that can be wise in children's plays.

It is sometimes a challenge to get to the point when writing dialogue. In real life, people may bounce around many words and sentences that do not necessarily contribute to the topic of conversation, though they can be interesting, before finally reaching the intended idea. In plays, this kind of speaking is usually mundane and useless. I began writing the dialogue in *The Imagineknights*, and after some time had passed, noticed the characters talked too much. In a

children's play, it is even more crucial to make the best of the dialogue and have as few and short conversations as possible. "It is advisable to keep sentences, speeches and conversations relatively short" (Wood, 1999, p. 43). I got caught up in trying to know what each character should say next, that I simply kept the conversation going for too long. Some questions to think of that are a big help in putting your dialogue into perspective are, "Does your dialogue: delineate your character's traits? Move the story forward? Obtain a laugh or help establish a mood when it's supposed to?" (Polsky, 2002, p. 121).

Not knowing how to efficiently communicate ideas also contributes to over-writing dialogue. "How can I make clear to the audience what the character is trying to say?" (Polsky, 2002, p. 121). One worry I had while writing was whether the audience would understand what my characters are trying to say. While writing the first draft of *The Imagineknights*, I wondered if my target audience would "get" what is happening in each scene. I made the mistake of having the characters over-explain themselves; a blunder that can make a scene cumbersome for the audience to follow while also insulting the audience's intelligence. I have sat through those scenes with the characters that over-explain. Instead of paying attention, all I can think is, "I get it already, please move on!" Polsky offers another wonderful question to ask yourself: "What if you had to pay a dollar for every unnecessary word appearing in the first drafts of your play?" (2002, p. 120). These questions were beneficial in my revision process, as I worked to clean up the dialogue and make way for more action. Keeping the dialogue simple and clear was perhaps the biggest challenge in revising *The Imagineknights*. I made it a priority because children get bored if the dialogue is too lengthy or unimportant to the story. The success of *The Imagineknights* is dependent on whether or not the audience finds it entertaining. If the dialogue drowns out the entertainment potential, the audience is likely to ignore the play altogether.

Staging is also a tricky task. Many questions must be answered when considering the staging of a play. From where should a character enter and exit? In the staging of *The Imagineknights*, where should the two children be in relation to the imaginary characters in the fairy-tale world? If the children are too close to where the action in the fairy-tale world is taking place, the audience will likely be distracted from the focus. While there should be a clear distinction between the children's world and the fairy-tale world, they should not be placed on extreme opposite sides of the stage, either. For instance, if something important is happening downstage left, be careful not to have a sudden entrance and bit of business upstage right. By the time the children's eyes have swung round, they may have missed something important (Wood, 1999, p. 174). Though a director may take *The Imagineknights* and choose to revise the stage direction completely, it is helpful to most directors and the playwright to include stage direction in the script. It can be hard to visualize your story until you come up with precise stage directions. The staging style that best matches *The Imagineknights* is referred to by Polsky as "theatricalism", and this is the style I used in including staging in my script. This style admits openly that theatre is theatre. Scenery changes in front of one's eyes. The tastefully artificial becomes a natural thing (Polsky, 2002, p. 125). I once saw a children's Christmas production in which the set crew dressed up as Christmas elves and, in character, changed the set, brought in or took away props, and prepared the stage for the next scene. This approach gave the play a magical feeling and made the set changes exciting for the children. Staring at a black curtain or watching people dressed in black shuffle the sets around breaks the momentum of the play and the emotions of the audience. The children got to watch a sort of extension of the play, and they really seemed to enjoy it. *The Imagineknights* would be an appropriate play in which to emulate this idea. Perhaps a group of gnomes, trolls, or fairies could perform the set changes.

Experimental Elements

The experimental elements found in *The Imagineknights* include the double-casting of children and adults to portray the same character and the de-evolving and re-evolving of the set, costumes, props, and characters. I did not go into writing *The Imagineknights* with the intent of purposely making it experimental just for the sake of it. I did have in mind the aforementioned experimental elements I believed would strengthen the message of the power of imagination. The characters are double-cast to clearly show the difference between the "real" world where the children are playing make-believe, and the imagined world where the characters come to life. In having a separate cast, the audience can see the characters the way they appear in the children's imaginations. This strengthens the message of imagination because it gives the audience a look into what children can create by simply playing make-believe. Having a second cast to act out what the children are playing separates reality from fantasy, thus immersing the audience in the fantastical world and making a clear distinction between the two worlds. It is important to keep the distinction because when imagination is affected, the symptoms must only be shown in the imagined fantasy world.

The de-evolution and re-evolution of the sets, costumes, props, and characters into nothingness only happens in the fantastical world. In the children's world, everything remains a constant throughout the play. After all, the de-evolution symbolizes the loss of imagination, and the re-evolution occurs when the audience is invited to join in on the game of make-believe to help the children re-imagine everything and everyone back. The purpose of everything in the imaginary world fading away is a strong way of showing what happens without an imagination — there is nothing. I suppose a simpler way to show the loss of imagination would have been to give the characters magical powers, and have the magic suddenly stop working. Then the

characters could come to the conclusion that children are not imagining enough, ask the audience for help, and regain their powers. But that is not nearly as creative as the experimental symbolization exhibited in *The Imagineknights*, nor does it create as powerful a message. I feel it is worth using an experimental idea if the end result is effective; plus the experimental choice appeals to the message of being imaginative.

An experimental aspect in *The Imagineknights* that, has rarely been done in children's theatre, takes place near the end of the play when the audience gets to influence the characters by dictating what action will happen next. For instance, the witch is chasing the adult Frarenjack at one point. The child actors ask the audience for suggestions of what the adult Frarenjack can use to get away from the witch. The child actors pick their favorite suggestion, and then call it out to the adult Frarenjack, who then mimes the action and successfully escapes the witch. This happens twice, and is powerful in encouraging the audience to use their imagination. Since there is not only one correct answer, the audience is urged to think creatively and come up with their own original ideas.

Children's Theatre Innovations

It was important to balance the experimental elements in *The Imagineknights* with the familiar elements, so that it is an enjoyable, rather than confusing experience for the audience. These familiar elements were drawn from seven successful innovations in children's theatre: visual stimulation, breaking the fourth wall, audience participation, "suddenlies", physical humor, the rule of three, and puppets, as well as the recently popular element of including pop culture references. The first draft of the play does not apply all of these elements, and the few that are included are not strategically placed, and not present in most of the play. In writing final

draft of *The Imagineknights*, I gave more attention to the innovations previously mentioned, and ensured that they fit in and flowed with the play, while also enhancing the audience's experience. In essence, I added theatricality. "Something theatrical keeps the audience in the theater; sharp suspense, keen interest, great fun, powerful importance, deep feeling. Something theatrical is good theater" (Ball, 1983, p. 35).

Visual stimulation is utilized in *The Imagineknights* by way of the colorful sets, elaborate costumes, and detailed props – anything that looks interesting and captures the attention of children. Breaking the fourth wall, simply put, is having the characters acknowledge the audience's presence, speaking directly to the audience, or sharing a wink with them, and so on. I worked the breaking of the fourth wall into *The Imagineknights* because it helps to gain children's attention and gives the audience a chance to be a part of the experience. Audience participation, an extension of the previous innovation, involves asking the audience to complete a physical or verbal action that will affect the outcome of the play. In *The Imagineknights*, the audience participation is crucial in order to defeat the witch and restore the fantasy world; the children feel a sense of importance and accomplishment because they have just rescued the characters. This makes for a really powerful experience for the audience. "Suddenlies" are exactly what the word says; something happens suddenly, causing a jolt in the action, preventing the pace from becoming slow and keeping the children's interest. "Suddenlies" are scattered throughout *The Imagineknights*. Not only do they keep up the pace, but they can be excellent opportunities for comedy, which brings us to the next innovation. Physical humor can involve silly slaps, falls, bumps, and more. As long as the physical action looks ridiculous, and the characters do not appear to be seriously hurt, children will laugh. Laughter is a great way to hold the audience's attention and bring fun to the story, and physical humor is used throughout *The*

Imagineknights. The rule of three is the idea that the same joke can be used up to three times in a play. With each execution, it becomes even funnier. The rule of three can be seen in *The Imagineknights* with the repeated use of the *stone of forgetting*, which also involves physical humor. Lastly, children love puppets; they are similar to dolls or toys and are interesting to look at. Puppets are utilized in *The Imagineknights* as the characters are de-evolving. They become puppets before disappearing. I incorporated puppets into that specific point in *The Imagineknights* because everything else is becoming dull, and looks less interesting. Puppets fit in with the de-evolution, while helping *The Imagineknights* to maintain the visual stimulation that holds audience attention. Pop culture references, while not technically an aspect of children's theatre, are a useful addition in that they bring familiarity to the play. My thinking was, *The Imagineknights* is experimental and the audience will be exposed to many unfamiliar elements. If the audience hears references to things they know, they are more likely to pay attention. Each element I added to *The Imagineknights* will serve to balance out the experimental aspects. The additions of these traditional techniques strengthen *The Imagineknights* with things that have been proven to work in children's theatre, and will aid in keeping the audience's attention so that they may become immersed in the story. Each innovation plays an important part in ensuring the success of *The Imagineknights*. These techniques add elements of humor, recognition, fun, and theatricality to *The Imagineknights*. If I had to choose one word to sum up all the elements that appeal to children, that word would be *theatrical*. Theatricality can lead to a magical experience (Wood, 1999, p. 61).

There are many processes involved in writing a play, and various paths a writer can take. In short, my process looks somewhat like this: An idea pops into my head. I think of characters to best execute the story, write an outline and synopsis of the story, and compose a first draft. I

make revisions ó some of them drastic ó and, once I am satisfied, I have my final draft. Even if choosing the same writing process each time, the experience is never the same. Sometimes the story is the easy part, while one struggles with the characters. This time around, the characters were the part that came to me the easiest, while the story was more difficult. As you see from the first draft to the final draft of *The Imagineknights*, the story changes the most.

CHAPTER VIII

FUTURE, LIMITATIONS, AND FURTHER EXPLORATION

Future of *The Imagineknights*

The intended purpose of *The Imagineknights* is to entertain the audience while promoting the importance of imagination. The objective is to see *The Imagineknights* produced on stage. It is one thing to speculate and draw up an educated conclusion, but to see the play on stage would let us witness the effect it has on the audience. In observing the play in action, in front of an audience, we can discover in fact what kind of impact *The Imagineknights* generates. The hope is that *The Imagineknights* will be a powerful and fun experience that will captivate and motivate its audience. Having taken much of the advice of professional playwrights and experienced directors, I have combed through *The Imagineknights* looking for ways to add to the entertainment value and relevancy to my purpose. The purpose of *The Imagineknights* should be successfully achieved if it ever is performed.

Audience reaction is something one must take into consideration, as the children in the audience will likely be accompanied by adults. Adults may not derive the level of pleasure and entertainment children will. However the joy children express gives off a powerful energy, and children's laughter is infectious, so adults may find themselves pulled into the imagination of *The Imagineknights* before they even realize it. Think about the scene in the movie "Finding Neverland". It is opening night of the play "Peter Pan". Jonny Depp's character invites a group of children to see it for free, and seats the children in scattered areas throughout the theatre. As

the play progresses, the children laugh at the jokes and participate in bringing Tinkerbell back to life. The adults begin to enjoy the play as well, seeing the humor that is pointed out by the children's laughter, and feeding off the energy the children are generating. I thoroughly enjoy seeing my nieces laugh at a program they are watching, even if I am not all that enthralled by the entertainment itself. The mere fact that they are having a good time leads me to delight in the moment.

Because the theme of *The Imagineknights* is the importance of imagination, I am also open to diverse interpretations of it. This play should have enough leeway for any director to produce it and come up with a different kind of experience. For instance, as imagination is fading away, the characters do not necessarily have to become puppets, and there are other effects that can be utilized to give the illusion of a character slowly fading. Characters may be portrayed in various ways. The way an actor plays the witch can range from scary to silly. As many directors take liberties with the plays they direct, *The Imagineknights* should provide directors with a malleable format which they can explore. It would interest me to watch various productions of *The Imagineknights* and see how each one creates a different experience for the audience.

No matter the interpretation, the conclusion of *The Imagineknights* is a constant. A director may make changes as far as stage direction and creativity are concerned, but it is essential that the message always express the importance of imagination. So long as a director acknowledges the significance of my message, he or she is more than welcome to put their own spin on *The Imagineknights*. The idea that my script might invoke others to practice using their imagination is exciting. If a director takes my play and is inspired to create his or her own original vision, being as imaginative as possible, that would make me an extremely happy playwright.

Limitations

Though I have explored various sources for my research, and have worked extensively to avoid any flaws, there are limitations in this study and in *The Imagineknights* that must be acknowledged. For instance, I can only speculate as to what the audience reaction will be. I am confident *The Imagineknights* will show the importance of imagination. But the only way to know for sure would be to observe live performances and survey the audience members. Despite my belief in its success, there is a chance that the audience will be confused or unprepared for the experimental level of *The Imagineknights*. Sometimes a good idea in theory is not so in reality. David Wood describes two instances in which this occurred in children's plays. In a production of *The Selfish Shellfish*, the lighting designer had the light of the lighthouse slowly fade, leaving only a single point of light in the background. Wood recalls, "It worked beautifully. In the dress rehearsal we were most impressed. But in performance this one tiny pin-prick of light became so interesting to the children that they commented on it and discussed it all through the important dialogue running through the scene" (1999, p. 210).

There are many difficulties that may arise with stage direction and the technicalities of *The Imagineknights*. Many of the stage directions included in *The Imagineknights* are very specific. A limitation can be a stage that is too small, or an inappropriate style for the play. There are many entrances and exits of characters, costume changes, there is puppetry involved. Can all of this be achieved successfully? Rather, would the challenges in producing *The Imagineknights* keep away potential directors? We are limited to the effects that can be convincingly performed live on stage, in front of an audience. One scene that may prove to be the most difficult to stage is after the two children ask the audience to help imagine everyone and everything back the way it was. In a film, it would be really easy to show everything transforming back into imaginative

and colorful scenery, costumes, and props. On stage, this transformation must be a creative illusion that produces the feeling of magic.

Yet another limitation is the uncertainty that my message of imagination will stick with the audience after the performance. If *The Imagineknights* turns out to be successful in entertaining the audience, the message will reach them. However, keeping in mind that the target audience is children, how long will the message resonate in their minds? Will this experience change the way they think about imagination in the long run? Magnús Scheving created the children's television show "Lazy Town" in an attempt to reach out to children, motivating them to become more active, and effectively stopping the growth of childhood obesity in Iceland. "Scheving says the health minister of Iceland singled out Lazy Town as one factor that has contributed to the decline in obesity among Icelandic children for the first time in 10 years" ("Icelandic kids program," 2006).

Children watched "Lazy Town" and saw super hero Sportacus eating healthy foods, going outside to play, and going to bed early "at 8:08" and as proven in Iceland, the children followed that example and actually began to eat healthy foods. They became more physically active, and go to bed early on their own. Scheving is quoted saying, "In Iceland people don't need to tell the kids to go to bed anymore, they just say it's almost 808 and the kids jump into bed" ("Icelandic kids program," 2006). There is strong evidence to believe the message of *The Imagineknights* will stay with the audience, even after the play is over. But to have proof the play must first be performed. Therein lies the limitation of having only educated assumptions to answer questions about audience retention.

We also cannot factor in the actors tasked with bringing the characters in *The Imagineknights* to life. Some may say having children as actors is a limitation. Many children

lack the discipline it takes to be in a play, especially a children's play which requires extra energy, confidence, and a willingness to work as a team. Wood's description of the qualities actors must have in order to successfully take part in a children's play is as true for children as it is for adults. "The actor must be willing to work hard to meet the challenge of grabbing and sustaining the audience's interest." Children's actors should have an openness and generosity of character which will give them the flexibility and commitment to work as part of a team" (Wood, 1999, p. 222). It is difficult to find an adult actor who encompasses the essential qualities for working in children's theatre. It can be quite a challenge to find a child actor who meets these standards. *The Imagineknights* is all about delving into imagination and being swept away by the story. One thing that is going to "sell it" to the audience is the enthusiasm of the children on stage playing make-believe. They must be strong actors and know how to work an audience of children. *The Imagineknights* is dependent on children to capture the audience's suspension of disbelief. Having worked with children in various plays and a pilot television show, I am confident that there are talented children who possess the necessary acting qualities to bring to life a children's show. Others may disagree; others may not have access to children with this level of talent and discipline.

In experimenting with the gradual transitioning and eventual disappearance of sets, props, and costumes, *The Imagineknights* may cause limitations for the adult actors. Many actors need to be in full costume and see every set piece and prop before they can fully get into character. The fact that all the anchors such actors hold on to go away may challenge the ability of the actors to stay in character. At some points in *The Imagineknights*, actors will be miming props, or talking to another character that has disappeared so they are essentially talking to themselves. Experiments like these will test the actor's abilities. One may wonder, if the actors'

performances do diminish due to the lack of visual cues, will that add to the intended effect of the fading of imagination? Or will it simply be a weakness in the performance that may lessen the experience for the audience?

This study encompasses writing an experimental play, utilizing the knowledge and advice of experts to revise and make the play more suitable for the audience, and using knowledge gained from my experiences as well as research to hypothesize the most likely effects *The Imagineknights* will have on its audience. The study would only be complete with an actual performance week and surveys of the audience. Only in that case would I be able to state, fact for fact, the impact of *The Imagineknights*. It is these circumstances which limit my study. However, this study is not completely flawed. Through plenty of research, experience, and educated reasoning, it is my understanding that *The Imagineknights* will be successful. The audience will be entertained, and will be inspired to get some use out of their imagination.

Further Exploration and Application

It would be exciting to see my method applied to other works, or taken to new levels. In the future, I plan to apply my study further. My suggestions to researchers as to what angle they may take for further exploration along my lines of study are: applying my experimental method to other children's plays, exploring the experimental method in different forms such as adult plays, or using it to promote a completely different message than that of imagination.

Applying the Method to Other Children's Plays

Many children's plays and stories are in public domain. They can be taken and made anew by writers or directors. What if the experimental aspects found in *The Imagineknights* were applied to other children's plays, such as "Cinderella" or "Alice in Wonderland"? Applying the experimental method highlighted in *The Imagineknights* would give these classics an unusual

and creative. Applying this method to existing stories is difficult. The storyline is already composed, and well-known by children. Changing the plot of a popular children's story is risky, as it may upset the audience. If one sets out to apply this method to a popular children's story, though the end result may be a wonderful success, it is wise to proceed with caution.

Incorporating this experimental method in "Cinderella" can yield many different outcomes. For instance, once opening the play in a completely immersed imaginative world, one could have the fading of imagination start as early as the entrance of the wicked stepsisters and stepmother, thus symbolizing that the wicked stepsisters and stepmother are responsible for stifling the beautiful creativity of Cinderella. One could even bring the levels of imagination back up once Cinderella is left alone with her mice, and keep with the theme of fading out the creativity upon the return of Cinderella's wicked stepfamily. As for the fading of creativity, the mice once real and lifelike could turn into simple sock puppets. The climax would happen when the prince finally finds Cinderella. This could bring back the creativity and imagination, overpowering the drab suppression of Cinderella's stepfamily. In this case, the Prince ó rather than the audience ó would bring back imagination. Though, the audience could play a part in helping the prince to realize Cinderella is right in front of him.

"Alice in Wonderland" seems a perfect story to incorporate experimental methods. In Wonderland, all the rules are different and anything can happen. The method used in *The Imagineknights* would probably mesh really well with the chaotic essence of "Alice in Wonderland". Though, it might make better sense to start out with few imaginative elements, and then explode into the creative and colorful Wonderland. An interesting message would be made if after Alice returns to the real world, everything that was once dull and boring is now visually stimulating and imaginative. Imagine Alice is in Wonderland, and immersed in the

creativity of this new world. As things become scary for Alice and she begins to miss home, Wonderland begins to fade into lifelessness. When she wakes up and is home, she now sees the real world as the interesting and exciting place to be.

The method of drastically changing the levels of creativity shown to the audience can be applied to a variety of children's stories. This would serve to refresh the tired and predictable stories that most children have heard multiple times, as well as add a new spin or a new message to the story. If one finds a children's story in which this method can be successfully applied, it is well worth the effort.

Exploration in Adult Plays and Other Forms

The Imagineknights is full of innovations proven to be successful in many children's plays. This is to ensure the children enjoy the play, even the experimental parts. Therefore, it is safe to assume an audience of children or a mixed audience of children and adults would enjoy *The Imagineknights*. But how would this method be received by an all-adult audience? It is not clear whether an experimental play using similar methods as *The Imagineknights* would be more successful, or less successful than when applied to a children's play.

In speculating the effect this kind of a play would have on an all-adult audience, we must think of what specific plays this could be applied to. A good example that comes to mind is "Hamlet". There is the age-old debate about Hamlet's sanity. The experimental method I used could be applied to argue the idea that Hamlet really is insane. If done well, one could gradually fade out the other characters and props. Hamlet is speaking to people in the flesh at the beginning of the play, later he could be speaking to sock puppets on his own hands that represent the same characters. Later still, he could end up speaking his own lines, and speaking back to himself in the other character's lines. This may give the effect that Hamlet has multiple personality

disorder, and can make for a creepy telling of *Hamlet*. The idea of applying this experiment to *Hamlet* is exciting and appealing. I believe an all-adult audience may appreciate this unique and creative approach to one of the most adapted plays of Shakespeare.

Using this Method to Promote a Different Message

The method I used in *The Imagineknights* is highly flexible and can be utilized to promote different messages, make other points. Anyone choosing to take this method further should consider how it can increase the power of a message. Visuals tend to resonate with the audience in a stronger capacity than words alone. In addition to using this method for entertainment, it can also be applied to lessons. Let us examine a couple of possibilities. This method can be used to make strong political statements, and to reinforce a lesson given to students.

Political statements in entertainment are quite common. Even plays not intended to be political can be seen as such according to the kind of conclusions audience members derive from watching them. *Rent* and *Hairspray* are just two of many examples. The experimental method I utilized could serve to make political statements as well. The disappearance of things to represent the fading of imagination could instead represent the loss of individual rights, or the loss of *The American Dream*. The visualization of this loss can be powerful, rather than listening to characters simply speaking about this loss.

It is exciting that the method used in *The Imagineknights* is flexible and can be applied to various situations. As mentioned earlier, this experimental method can be used to reinforce important lessons in school. Sometimes students are all taken to the school auditorium for an assembly. These assemblies are usually meant to inform students of certain dangerous behaviors and warn them against making the wrong choices. When I was in high school, my peers and I

saw multiple sketches about the dangers of drug use. But, they were simply talking about it, not showing how it can negatively affect someone's life. This experimental method could be instrumental in impacting some of the harder to reach students. In a sketch advocating the importance of being drug-free, the character that elects to use drugs could begin to lose everything. His friends start to fade away, his family, his possessions, all until he has nothing left. This sets up an eerie mood that shows how scary drug use or whatever message or can be.

Future researches wishing to explore this study have a huge variety of angles they can choose from. This method is as adaptable as it is imaginative. This method should be useful in adding creativity, power, and feeling to plays, sketches, or presentations.

CHAPTER IX

TO CONCLUDE

My intent was to create an entertaining experience for an audience of children that would also teach them to appreciate imagination.

Although it has not been produced yet, it is my educated understanding that the children's theatre innovations incorporated into the play, as well as the imaginative plot, and the fact that the audience decides what the actors will do next during their battle, should all do their part in helping to make *The Imagineknights* a success. The children's theatre innovations have been carefully worked in to the play, and have been proven to work in countless other children's plays. The plot is imaginative. I do not expect that audiences have heard this story before, so the freshness of the story should keep the audience's attention. Finally, what child hasn't wished they could talk to the actors and tell them what to do next? And see them actually do it? During the battle against the Witch, the actors call for ideas from the audience. That part in the script is loosely written to fit a wide variety of audience suggestions. Children in the audience shout out their ideas, the characters take them and say, "Great idea, let's try that!" This is sure to be an exciting experience for the children. They get to sway the story, and use their imaginations while doing it.

A performance is needed to see if my hypothesis that this play will entertain audiences and promote imagination is correct. However I have done extensive research and incorporated

many entertaining aspects to ensure the play is entertaining, and I have weaved the message of the importance of imagination throughout the plot of the play. Although it remains to be seen, evidence points to the success of my experiment in imagination.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel Saldana received her bachelor's degree in theatre at The University of Texas-Pan American in 2009. She thought the quality of learning was so high, she decided to stay at UTPA to earn her master's degree in theatre, which she earned in 2012. Rachel has an extensive background in children's theatre, ranging from classes to hands-on experience. She studied children's theatre with Dr. Brian Warren, enrolling in as many children's theatre courses as possible. These courses include: Children's Theatre Workshop, during which she had the opportunity to perform for children, and Children's Theatre Theory, in which she participated as an acting coach for children. Rachel has also gained experience in the field, participating in children's theatre summer camps, as well as a children's pilot television show. In the summer camps, Rachel was a children's acting coach, and assisted in preparing children for the stage. The children's pilot television show, "The Pirateers" was filmed on location at UTPA during the summer of 2011. Rachel acted as assistant director, producer, children's acting coach, and also played one of the villains. Rachel has a passion for children's theatre and is extremely excited and hopeful to one day produce *The Imagineknights*.

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