

Munsch

at

Play

Act 2

Eight More Stage Adaptations

Plays by Irene N. Watts

Original Stories by Robert Munsch

Illustrated by Michael Martchenko

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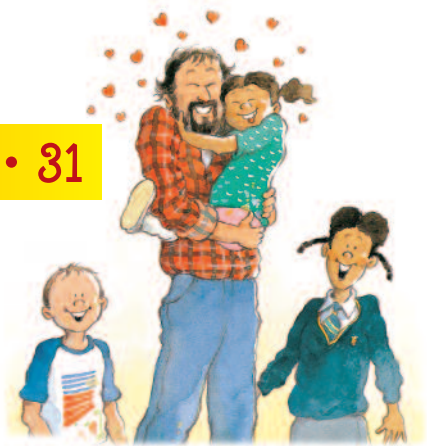
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Preface



How many ways are there to tell a story? How many ways can you dramatize Robert Munsch's well-loved tales? Like the first volume of *Munsch at Play*, this second volume offers a starting point for you and your cast's creativity. The ideas in *Act 2* are suggestions for you to build on and not intended to be cast in stone! As one reader wrote:

My children just love the idea of dramatizing—the enjoyment is not diminished by lack of spectators.

But I assume that for most groups the plays will be shared with an audience in class or elsewhere. There are no restrictions on where the plays can be presented: in the classroom, the library or gymnasium, or any suitable space, both indoors or outdoors. Groups have performed in community and senior centers, for other schools, at day camps, in public libraries, and at festivals.

The audience may surround the actors completely or sit in a horseshoe (U shape), observing the action from three sides, or in a long hallway watching from both sides of an alley. Spectators will, I hope, become participants too!

Actors may be in full sight of their audience at all times, changing character and costume without leaving the stage. Their exits and entrances can consist of a simple turn upstage or getting up



from their places on stage in full view of the audience to participate in the action. At other times, the conventional entrance and exit to and from the stage are used.

- For those new to drama, the following approach may provide a useful beginning: The story is read aloud by the teacher/leader and discussed as a class.
- In groups, the story is read again, talked through, cast, and improvised by students, who at first use their own words.
- Each group then presents its improvisation, and a discussion takes place about any new ideas that emerged in presentation. Was double or even triple casting used? Was the story shared in the telling so that everyone in the group took part?
- What sound effects were used? What kind of space was chosen? Did students find and use props, use mime, or a combination of both? Each group *hopefully* should open up a new way of looking, listening, and telling.
- Did groups interpret the story in an unusual way? In *From Far Away*, one group used tableaux to illustrate the idea of war.
- The artist's interpretation gives wonderful hints regarding character, costume, and set design! Why not encourage students to volunteer to be in charge of technical aspects, such as artwork, props to make or find, and costumes?
- *Optional:* A useful rehearsal strategy is to take the group on a

field trip to a fire station, police station, farm, or subway. If this is not a realistic option, invite a speaker to class to discuss his or her experiences, such as a recent resident to Canada (*From Far Away*) or someone in the moving business (*David's Father*). For each of the plays, a relevant talk or a field trip brings new insight to story research.

Rehearsal Reminders:

- Actors are responsible for and must check their own props.
- Actors must listen to the story no matter how familiar they are with it—one actor fidgeting or not listening will distract the audience. Let students demonstrate this to the class for maximum impact! In a row of attentive actors, when one turns his head, the audience is distracted.
- Most important is freshness. The actor tells his part of the story as if he was saying unrehearsed words. Each time the story is presented it needs to be discovered anew.
- A technical rehearsal for exits, entrances, costumes, and props is vital and may highlight a problem spot where the actors need more or less time. For casts that have decided to use mime, and as a fun warm-up activity, *What Am I Doing?* challenges students in several ways: It may be done solo, in twos, threes, or in groups. A few minutes are allowed to decide on the action—going upstairs, driving a car or truck,



climbing a mountain, eating dinner, getting ready for a party, or becoming lost! When the mime is complete, the performer asks, "What am I doing?" Three guesses are allowed before the challenger must repeat the actions using words.

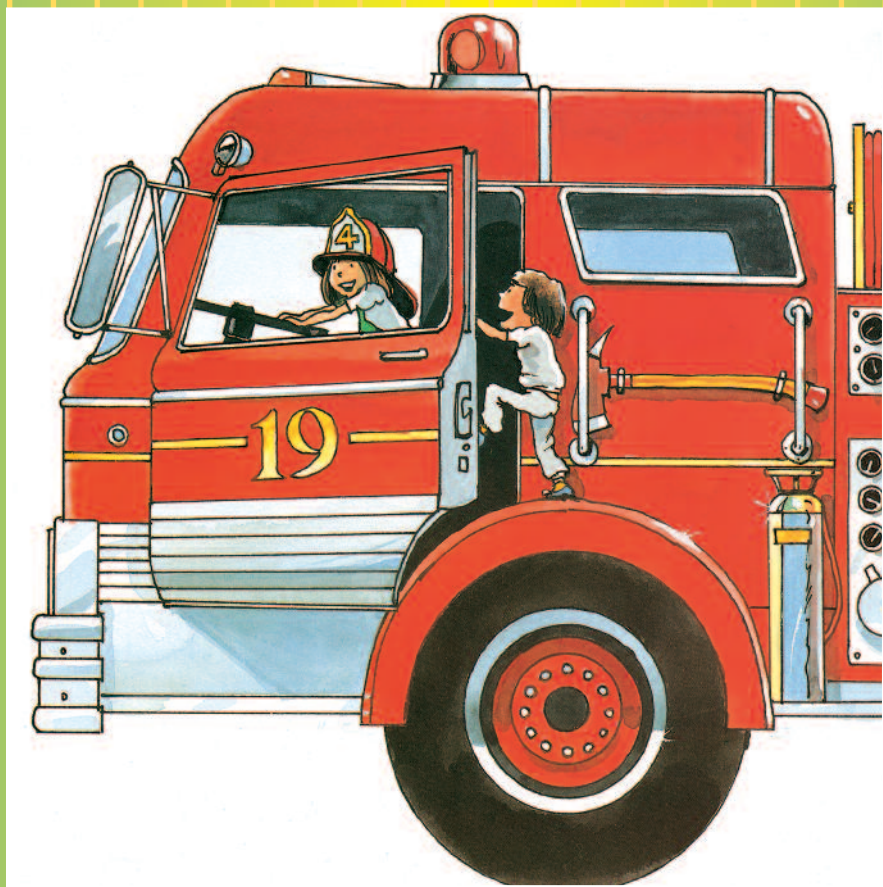
Running Time:

Each play takes about 10 minutes to perform, but depending on the size of cast, space, and amount of audience participation, extra time may be needed.

Enjoy!

Irene N. Watts

The Fire Station



CAST

- Narrators 1 and 2
- Michael
- Sheila
- Large Firefighter
- Firefighters (four to eight)
- Fire Chief
- Fire (created by Props Assistants and Cast not playing Firefighters)
- Michael's Mother
- Sheila's Father
- Police Officers (two)
- Prisoner
- Props Assistants (one for each Narrator)



STAGING

The play may be performed onstage or in any open space. ACTORS sit around a half-square or horseshoe (U shape), facing the audience. A center aisle between the playing space and the seated audience is helpful for SHEILA and MICHAEL's walks.

ACTORS may create an entrance or exit in different ways:

Audiences will accept a simple turn upstage. ACTORS may put on a costume piece in view of the audience and enter the playing area from their places onstage, returning to their seats when finished, or they may enter or exit from offstage—behind screens or from wings (on a conventional stage) or whatever masking device is used.

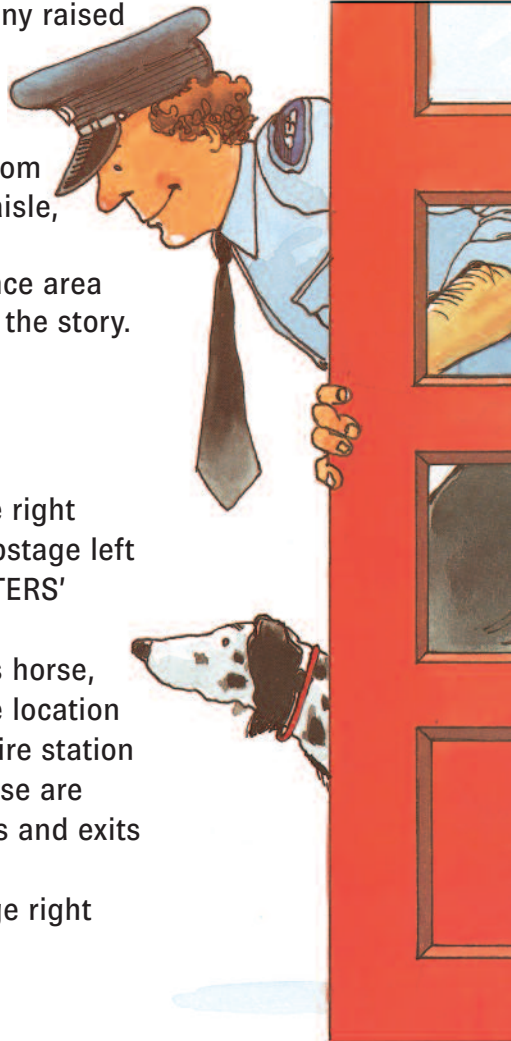
ACTORS seated in view of the audience sit as still as possible, with their attention on the NARRATORS and the action taking place in front of them.

At the start of the play, the NARRATORS are seated close to the audience at stage right or left across from each other. A PROPS ASSISTANT is seated on the floor beside each NARRATOR, or on a small bench, which can serve to hold props and to help create the large fire truck.

The NARRATORS may be seated on any raised level—a stool, chair, cube, or riser. NARRATORS and their ASSISTANTS take their places onstage before the audience comes in. ACTORS file in from behind the audience, up the center aisle, to go to their places. MICHAEL and SHEILA are at the back of the audience area waiting for the NARRATORS to begin the story.

SET DESIGN

- two sets of risers—preset upstage right
- one or two stepladders—preset upstage left
- a hat/coat stand for the FIREFIGHTERS' helmets
- A screen, an old-fashioned clothes horse, or rolling blackboard, to which the location names are pinned or murals of a fire station or police station are attached. These are also used to mask stage entrances and exits from upstage.
- seats for NARRATORS at downstage right and left



PROPS AND COSTUMES

Actors are responsible for their own props and must do a final check both onstage and offstage before the start of the play. It is also important to do a run-through only for exits, entrances, and props and costumes toward the end of the rehearsal period.

- a piece of doweling for each PROPS ASSISTANT
- two oversized tie-dyed T-shirts in fire colors for MICHAEL and SHEILA
- fire helmets for FIREFIGHTERS (with a special badge for the FIRE CHIEF)
- police hats (two)
- rubber boots
- hoses made from lengths of cloth, paper towel rolls, or papier-mâché
- bubble mixture
- toy fire trucks of different sizes (optional) that ACTORS hold up on cue
- notebooks and pens or pencils for the POLICE OFFICERS
- a cutout representing a large fire truck. Handgrips inside help CAST to hold it upright.
- fire streamers for PROPS ASSISTANTS and CAST who are not FIREFIGHTERS
- Optional: Instead of murals, a FIRE STATION sign and a POLICE STATION sign could be held up by either a NARRATOR or a PROPS ASSISTANT.



NARRATOR 1: This story is called *The Fire Station*.

(MICHAEL and SHEILA walk up the center aisle from back of the audience.)

NARRATOR 1: Michael and Sheila were walking down the street. When they passed the fire station, Sheila said:

SHEILA: Michael! Let's go ride a fire truck.

MICHAEL: Well, I think maybe I should ask my mother, and I think maybe ...

SHEILA: I think we should go in.

NARRATOR 1: Said Sheila, then she grabbed Michael's hand and pulled him up to the door of the fire station, Sheila knocked.

CAST: Blam-Blam-Blam-Blam-Blam.

(Sound made by voices, fists on floor, and dowels used by the PROPS ASSISTANTS. A LARGE FIREFIGHTER in a peaked hat appears from the upcenter "door.")

NARRATOR 1: A large firefighter came out and asked:

LARGE FIREFIGHTER: What can I do for you?

MICHAEL: Well, maybe you could show us a fire truck and hoses and rubber boots and ladders and all sorts of stuff like that.

LARGE FIREFIGHTER: Certainly.



NARRATOR 1: Said the firefighter.

SHEILA: And maybe you will let us drive a fire truck?

NARRATOR 1: Said Sheila.

LARGE FIREFIGHTER: Certainly not.

NARRATOR 1: Said the firefighter.

NARRATOR 2: They went in and looked at ladders and hoses and big rubber boots. Then they looked at little fire trucks and big fire trucks. *(Cue for seated CAST to stand and hold up toy trucks and sit again on the next line.)*

NARRATOR 2: And enormous fire trucks. *(A large cutout of a fire truck is held up by the PROPS ASSISTANTS, and ACTORS crouch upstage of this. Alternatively, the cast may create the truck with risers, ladders, and the bench as the back seat for MICHAEL and SHEILA—or the truck may be totally mimed.)*

NARRATOR 2: When they were done, Michael said:

MICHAEL: Let's go.

SHEILA: Right, let's go into the enormous truck.

NARRATOR 2: Said Sheila.