

# JONAH AND BIGFISH

*By Richard T. Young*

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

This is a somewhat zany retelling of the traditional story of Jonah. Although enhanced with some extra characters and scenes, the theme and overall message hold true to the Old Testament Scriptures. Included in the story is Herald, the angel who acts as God's voice and has the ability to turn up at unusual places and in unusual ways.

In the opening scene a handful of fun-loving woodland creatures discover Jonah asleep, and bring in the right blend of seriousness when they realize he must be the prophet. Along the way Jonah interacts with some sailors who eventually toss him overboard.

When Herald orders Bigfish to swallow Jonah, the creature protests saying he gags easily. Another underwater character, Squidly, adds even more humor with his habit of talking nonstop.

Then Jonah encounters the nasty Ninevites who try to play "prophet pinball" with him! The play climaxes in the desert where Jonah finally realizes the message of God's grace.

Filled with action, the play clearly emphasizes many Biblical ideas including God's omnipresence, the authority of His will, His grace, and His love. Intended for children, the play works well for a whole family audience.

About 45 minutes.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(22 characters, 12 with doubling)*

**JONAH:** A man.

**HERALD:** An angel.

**TORT:** A turtle.

**CHIP:** A chipmunk.

**MUNK:** A chipmunk.

**WINDOM:** An owl.

**CAPTAIN:** A sailor.

**POPEAR:** A sailor.

**BILLY BUBB:** A sailor.

**BIGFISH:** A big fish.

**SQUIDLY:** A squid.

**THE NINEVITES:** *Including*

**NASTY, MEANY, SCRUNGY, GRIMEY, CREEPY, ICKY**

**BUSH:** A bush.

**FISHBAIT:** A worm.

**WIND-WIND:** The wind. *(Two actors who speak in unison.)*

**SUN:** The sun.

### **NOTE ON CASTING**

The role of Jonah must be a male. In order for the play to work, Jonah must be portrayed as a real person, not a clown or a caricature. His frustration, celebration, fear, anger, joy, fatigue, and humor must all be real. The actor should also be capable of physical comedy.

Herald was written as a male, but there is no reason why he couldn't become Heraldine and be played by a female. Herald loves his work. He gets frustrated with Jonah, but never angry. Herald should not mock Jonah or do anything to belittle him. Herald is the loving guide. He has a deep respect and love of the "Boss" as well. He knows that God is...well...God and is secure in that fact.

All the other roles may be cast male or female. A suggestion would be to have a balance of gender (*half male, half females*) for the animals, and the Ninevites. Extra Ninevites and sailors could be added as desired, and Wind-Wind could be more than two.

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

Scene 3 is optional. It can be left out of the play without harming the action or the plot. Obviously the play is a bit shorter without it, but time may not be your only guide in choosing to keep or cut it. If you have the technical abilities to create a wonderful underwater effect, and a giant fish, then you may choose to leave it in for the fun of spectacle.

Scene 4, the fish's stomach, can be created in several ways. In the original production it was a giant hammock chairs as described in the stage directions. Other possibilities include a giant bean bag chair, or even just a narrowly focused lighting area.

If you discover that your scene changes are taking more than 45 seconds, it helps to keep audience attention to have two or more of the animals come on and recap what has happened and/or speculate as to further action. They might ask questions and solicit answers from the audience.

### **COSTUME NOTES**

Originally, Bigfish was created by stretching fabric over a lightweight frame. The frame was supported by two actors who wore pack frames attached to the Bigfish frame. This left the actors' hands free to work Bigfish like a giant puppet. The rear actor worked the fins, and the front actor worked the mouth.

One idea to help Squidly's costume work is to have multiple arms attached by invisible string to the actor's arms. Then when the actor moves his/her arm, several of Squidly's arms join the motion.

## Scene 1

*(AT RISE: JONAH is discovered sleeping on a blanket with a large book lying across him as though he were reading it when he drifted off. SFX: Lively music as CHIP and MUNK enter. They dance and scamper about in a frenetic game of tag. Their game takes them in and about the audience. Toward the end of their play they discover TORT, a turtle who, hidden under his shell, has looked like a rock. Tort is less than pleased by the antics of Chip and Munk. WINDOM, an owl, comes on not noticing the others. The game of tag ends when Chip and Munk run into Windom.)*

**WINDOM:** Watch out, watch out! What are you doing? Stop that!

*(In their play CHIP and MUNK knock WINDOM over.)*

**WINDOM:** *(Cont'd.)* Now see what you've done, see what you've done!

**CHIP:** What's the matter, Owly, don't you like to play?

**MUNK:** Someone put salt on your tail, Owly?

**WINDOM:** My name is Windom, not Owly, and I do like to play, but not now. I have to attend to business.

*(HE is looking about as if he expects someone to come along. He starts to climb up on TORT, who has retreated under his shell.)*

**WINDOM:** *(Cont'd.)* So why don't you take your playing somewhere else.

**TORT:** What are you doing?

**WINDOM:** Dear me, sorry. Didn't see you down there. I thought you were a rock. Terribly sorry.

**TORT:** That's the trouble with you high-flyers, you never look down! Thought I was a rock, huh? How would you like it if I thought you were a feather duster.

*Jonah and Bigfish*

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**WINDOM:** My Aunt Spooky was a feather duster, at least that's what she became. Regardless, I'm terribly sorry. Forgive me if I seem a bit distracted.... Well, I don't see anything that looks too unusual.

**MUNK:** Whatcha looking for, Owly?

**WINDOM:** My name is Windom, and I'm looking for...well, I am not sure actually.

**CHIP:** He's looking...but he doesn't know what for!

*(The CHIPMUNKS break into laughter.)*

**MUNK:** You're pretty strange Windmill.

**WINDOM:** That's Windom!

**MUNK:** How can you look for something if you don't know what it is?

*(Laughter.)*

**WINDOM:** I heard a rumor about some strange sort of things happening here, and I just thought I would come see for myself.

**CHIP:** What strange things?

**WINDOM:** You would just laugh if I told you.

**CHIP:** No we wouldn't, come on tell us what sort of strange things. Come on tell us.

*(MUNK joins in and THEY badger HIM until he relents.)*

**WINDOM:** I was told that if I came and stayed here long enough I would hear a...voice from the sky.

**MUNK:** A voice from the sky?

**WINDOM:** Yes!

*(CHIP and MUNK look at each other and then burst out laughing.)*

**MUNK:** A voice from the sky?

**CHIP:** There is no such thing as a voice from the sky.

**MUNK:** The sky can't talk.

## **End of Freeview**

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