



A PLAY IN 3 ACTS

Why Frogs and Snakes Never Play Together

A Pourquoi of Prejudice

By Jeff Sapp

The Plot

A chance meeting of a family of frogs and a family of snakes in the woods one day allows wonderful and fun new friendships to be made. Later, when the siblings tell their parents about their new friends, they are told to never play together again. Find out why in this easy-to-produce play that teaches about the serious topic of prejudice.

The Cast of Characters

Frog Siblings

Croaker

Warts

Tadpole

Mother Frog

Father Frog

Snake Siblings

Slithera

Hiss

Fang

Mother Snake

Father Snake

Sun

Moon

Wind

A Field of Flowers

A Grove of Trees

Narrator

Pourquoi Instructor

Understudies

There is no need for casting to become competitive. The casting can include various understudies who can take turns playing lead roles as well as participating in the group roles of trees and flowers. Also, the Narrator role may be shared by more than one student.

Costumes

Keep it simple. Green T-shirts for frogs, gray T-shirts for snakes, yellow for sun, blue for moon, brown for trees, bright colors for flowers, white for wind and black for the narrator and pourquoi instructor. To add art lessons to the production of this play, have students use poster board to make a sun face, moon face, wind face, flower and tree faces.

Props

Minimal. Father Frog needs a large newspaper with a heading The Daily Fly. Parent animals may be sitting watching television, playing cards or cooking. These activities may be pantomimed, without sets, or you may create simple sets to accompany the play.

Closing Song (optional)

The song You've Got To Be Carefully Taught is from Teaching Tolerance's free activity-and-song book, I Will Be Your Friend: Songs and Activities for Young Peacemakers. Order your copy at tolerance.org/teach/resources/your_friend.jsp. I Will Be Your Friend includes a 26-song CD and curriculum guide.

Suggested Uses of the Play

- Back-to-School night
- Parent-Teacher night
- As a traveling show where older classes perform for younger classes in the same school
- As a traveling show where one elementary, middle or high school travels to a local elementary school
- As a traveling show to perform for community groups

Options for Early Grades

This play works for preschool children and other young children if parents or guardians read the lines and the children pantomime. Children also may draw the characters, put them on sticks and perform the play as a puppet show.

Discussion Questions

- What did the frogs and snakes do when they met each other in the forest?
- What did they learn later that night from their parents?
- What do the youngest frog and snake do at the very end of the story that brings us hope? Why does it bring us hope?

Write an Alternative Ending

The story can have an alternative ending written by the children to express a more tolerant view. Lead questions for the students to begin rewriting the story can be:

- What would happen if the frogs and snakes continued to play together?
- What would the parents do if they met?
- What would happen if the two families got together at a park and got to know each other?

—ACT ONE—

POURQUOI INSTRUCTOR: The word “porquoi” — pronounced por-kwa — comes from the French word for “why.” A pourquoi is different from a folktale. A folktale tells about the origin of nature, like who will be the sun or how night came. A pourquoi tells about an explanation of nature that came later, like how the camel got its hump or how the leopard got its spots. Our tale is a pourquoi and we hope you enjoy it as much as we do...

NARRATOR:

This African pourquoi tale takes place a long, long time ago in the jungle, before there were people.

(The staging should look like a tropical rainforest and have a clearing in the middle for the actors. As the play begins, we see the Frog siblings leaving their parents to go play in the forest. The Snake siblings are already stage right, basking in the warmth provided by the Sun. After saying goodbye to their parents, the Frogs happen upon the Snakes, and this is where our tale begins.)

WARTS:

Mom, Dad! We’re going into the jungle to play and look for flies for snacks. Ribbit, ribbit.

TADPOLE:

Yeah, ribbit, we’ll be back before the Sun sets.

FROG SIBLINGS TOGETHER:

See you later, bye, ribbit, ribbit, ribbit.

(Frog siblings say all of this together and hop away from their parents. Father Frog is reading a newspaper called The Daily Fly.)

MOTHER FROG:

Now you kids stay away from the elephant paths for heaven’s sake. You saw what happened to that nice little frog across the pond. Oh my, ribbit! He was such a sweet tadpole, too.

(Mother Frog looks up at the ceiling and covers her face as if an elephant foot were about to crush her. Frog children exit the stage.)

—ACT TWO—

(Frog siblings come on stage, stop moving and get quiet. Snake siblings are lying on rocks, basking in the Sun who looks down upon them. The Snake siblings act as if they're snoring, but instead of snores each lets out a loud, long snake "Sssssssssssssssssss!" After a few moments of snake snoring, the Frogs continue to the center of the stage laughing and playing. Suddenly, all six of them freeze and gasp at the same time.)

CROAKER:

Ribbit.

SLITHERA:

Ssssss.

WARTS:

Ribbit, ribbit.

HISS:

Ssssss, ssssss.

TADPOLE:

Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit.

FANG:

Ssssss, ssssss, ssssss.

CROAKER:

(Introducing himself to Slithera) Hi, I'm Croaker. What's your name?

SLITHERA:

(Shaking Croaker's hand) Hi, Croaker. My name is Slithera. Nice to meet you.

(All other siblings shake hands and the audience hears them say their names all at once: Croaker, Warts, Tadpole, Slithera, Hiss, Fang.)

HISS:

Hey, would you want to play some gamesssssssss with usssssss?

ALL FROGS:

Sure! Yes! Absolutely! Ribbit, ribbit!

NARRATOR:

And so all day long the frog children and the snake children had the MOST fun they could have ever imagined! What wonderful games they played. First, all the frogs taught the snakes how to play leap frog and catch flies. And then all the snakes taught the frogs how to play "strike and hug" — which really was not supposed to be a game at all. The snakes learned how to hop, and the frogs learned how to slide.

The entire day was wonderful. The Wind blew a cool breeze over them. The Grove of Trees clapped their limbs in joy. And the Wildflowers in the forest giggled their pleasure at the fun play the children were all having together. They played happily together all day long until Sun went down and Moon began to rise.

(The Wind blows, the Grove of Trees claps their limbs and sways in the wind and the Flowers huddle together, point and giggle at the playful group.)

TADPOLE:

Let's meet again tomorrow and play some more,
OK? This was more fun than gnat-flavored ice cream
and shoo-fly pie!

ALL SIBLINGS:

Yes, yes! See you tomorrow then. Thanks! Yes, nice
to meet you, too. Bye now.

—ACT THREE—

(The children run into their homes excitedly telling their parents that they met the nicest new friends today. The parents are overjoyed that they have made new friends and listen intently.)

MOTHER SNAKE:

Well, it sounds like a sssssssensssssational day in
the forest for everyone!

FATHER SNAKE:

What kinds of games did you all play together?

FANG:

Oh! We played leap frog and fly-catch and we taught
them to play “strike and hug” and ...

(The snake parents gasp and look at each other in horror before interrupting Fang.)

MOTHER SNAKE:

Oh, no! My darling children, “strike and hug” is not a
game! This is how we get our food, not how we play.
And my goodness! We do not hop. Why, that's just
ssssssssscandoloussssss!

FATHER SNAKE:

I forbid you to play with those kind. You must
stick with your own. Eating flies! Well, I never!
Shamed, I tell you! We are abssssssssssolutely
ssssssssssssshamed by thissssssssss!

(The snake children all hang their heads and slither away. The same thing is happening at the frog house as well.)

FATHER FROG:

Ribbit, ribbit! Snakes are our enemies. You must NEVER play with snakes. Why it's a miracle you're not being digested at this very second. Ribbit, ribbit!

WARTS:

But, Dad! They're a really nice family. They even go to the same pond as us.

TADPOLE:

Ah, Mom, you can't be serious. (Tadpole acts like he sees a fly and sticks his tongue out, grabs the fly and begins eating it).

MOTHER FROG:

You watch your tongue, young frog!

(The frog children all hang their heads and hop sadly away.)

(The Moon goes away and the Sun comes up as the children go to the forest to play again. When they see each other, the snakes hiss and go into a striking pose and the frogs jump back in fear.)

CROAKER:

We're not allowed to play with you anymore.
You are our enemy.

SLITHERA:

We're not allowed to play with you anymore, either.
You are our food.

(As they sadly walk away from each other with their heads down, the two youngest children, Tadpole and Fang, turn, smile and wave at each other happily.)

(Tadpole and Fang come center stage and hold hands to recite the following poem.)

TADPOLE:

It's sad.

FANG:

It is.

TADPOLE:

It's really sad.

BOTH:

I liked you!

FANG:

So much fun we had.

(Tadpole and Fang drop hands and begin to move away from each other.)

TADPOLE:

But now we're told that we can't play.

FANG:

That from each other we must stay.

BOTH:

Away!

(The last refrain is read slower and with a great deal of sadness.)

TADPOLE:

It's sad.

FANG:

It is.

TADPOLE:

It's really sad.

BOTH:

I liked you!

FANG:

So much fun we had.

NARRATOR:

Now we know why the frog and the snake won't be found playing games together. They were taught not to be friends. But, often, you will see the snake sunning and the frog sitting quietly on a lily pad. And when you do, it is a sure thing that they are thinking of the one day of friendship they had together a long, long time ago.

Lyrics and music to the song, from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical South Pacific, also can be found multiple places on the Internet through a simple Google search. Or visit the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization online, www.rnh.com.