

*A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

adapted for a stage performance by Elizabeth Nicol

I have loved Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *A Little Princess* since I first read it at the age of ten. It gave me a vision of what it meant to live above one's circumstances. The core of the cast for this play will be girls ages 11 to 14 years old, with flexibility to include girls slightly older and younger. We also need actors to play adult men and women; these could be older teens, but I hope some of them will be parents acting the parts. I am also looking for musicians of any age, as we will do some scenes to instrumental music.

We will start with a two day book study/discussion prior to auditions. These will be 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 4, and Friday, December 6. On December 4 we'll discuss the first nine chapters and on December 6 the rest of the book. I want each participant to own a copy, so I will get them (mostly used hardcover books beautifully illustrated by Tasha Tudor, \$5 each, some paperbacks that don't include the color illustrations for \$2 each) for everyone who is registered by 1 November.

Auditions for speaking parts will be 1:00 - 2:30 Friday, December 13. Non-speaking parts don't need to audition for actors who have been in the book discussions. Those interested in non-speaking parts who have not been in the book discussions should arrange for another time to meet with me.

Rehearsals will begin with a complete read-through of the play 1 - 3 p.m. on Wednesday, January 8. Rehearsals thereafter for January - March will be planned around the schedules of the people involved, so it will be very important that schedule and conflict information be filled out fully at the time of auditions. Performances will be Friday, May 8, at Redeemer Church in Urbana.

Actors in non-speaking roles will likely be called only a single time between the read-through and the final month of rehearsals, but should expect to rehearse weekly during that final month and every morning of the final week. During that final week, actors are expected to prioritize these rehearsals over other activities, which may mean missing some of their usual co-ops, classes, and lessons.

## *A Little Princess* cast of characters

### Girls

Sara Crewe  
Lavinia  
Jessie  
Ermengarde  
Lottie, a young student at the school  
Becky, a servant  
other students  
(Marianne, Sara's French maid — girl or woman)  
Anne, a beggar, poor girl, "one of the populace"  
children in Large Family could be either girls or boys

### Boys

children in Large Family could be either girls or boys  
servants who are stage crew  
puppeteers for rat and monkey

### Adults or older teens

Captain Crewe  
Marianne, Sara's French maid  
Miss Minchin, headmistress of the school  
Miss Amelia, Miss Minchin's sister  
M. Dufarge (or Mlle. Dufarge), the French teacher  
parents in Large Family  
Indian Gentleman (an Englishman who had lived in India), Mr. Carrisford  
Ram Dass, Indian man-servant  
Mrs. Brown, a baker woman

There are a few roles for younger children - girls in Miss Minchin's school and girls and boys in the "Large Family". These roles will likely be played by children in the families who are otherwise participating in the play, with preference going to children of adults who are most involved. Some characters from the "Large Family" will be speaking parts. These will be of variable ages and can be boys as well as girls.

Sara's father will preferably be played by an adult, ideally by the real father of the girl playing Sara. A small part, speaking few lines, needing very little rehearsing, but vital for setting the tone of the play.

French teacher - Small part. Should be able to speak French or at least fake it. In the book this is a man, but in our play the character could be man, woman, or older teen.

In auditions, I'll be looking for actors' ability to express various personalities, attitudes, and emotions. I'll want to see actors portray being kind, haughty, happy, excited, curious, flustered, sad, distraught, extremely sad but self-controlled, angry, angry but self-controlled.

For speaking parts, actors should be able to speak clearly and expressively (see the list above). It will also be important that actors with speaking parts be able to project their voices so they can be heard in a large area without needing microphones. Everyone auditioning for a speaking part should memorize the poem "The Owl and the Pussycat."

Some characters (including the lead, Sara) will need to speak French. If you don't know French (that includes most of you), get someone to teach you a few sentences for the audition so you can demonstrate faking it. Being correct in what you say will not be as important as speaking confidently with a convincing accent.

In addition to acting abilities, there are some qualities important to the teamwork needed to put on a play. These include being reliable, working hard with a cheerful attitude, and being supportive of everyone else.

I will not be providing stage lighting for this performance. The lighting equipment I've been borrowing for the past ten years is no longer available. If someone steps forward to take on the responsibility of lighting - procuring lights and setting them up - I will gladly accept. If we would need to pay for rental, get information on the cost and talk to me about it. If no one volunteers for this, or if the cost would be too high, we will just perform the play with whatever lighting is available in our performance space.

I have ideas for simple set pieces. I would love to talk to people who would be interested in constructing them.

We could also use musicians in the performance.

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All those who would like to participate in *A Little Princess* should send me the following information by the end of October:

name and age

email (email for both actor and parent)

phone number(s) - please tell me whether each number is a family phone or a personal phone, and if a personal phone, whose it is.

home address

All participants ages 11 - 14 are expected to be part of the book discussions Dec 4 and 6. Those younger than 11 or older than 14 should tell me whether you plan to join us for those discussions. I will plan to provide books for \$5 each to all participants in the book discussions unless you tell me otherwise.

If you had a choice between a non-speaking part, a part with few lines, or a part with many lines, which would you prefer?

If you'd like to be involved in a non-acting capacity, what would you like to do?

Looking at the times I've outlined for rehearsals and performances, what conflicts do you have?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about yourself or anything else you'd like to say about what you'd like to do in the play?

Please email this information and any questions to [nicolfamily@gmail.com](mailto:nicolfamily@gmail.com).

Elizabeth Nicol