

ME
AND



A PLAY IN POETRY BY DAVID DANIEL

A half-hour, whimsical, audience participation
theatrical performance about marine debris.



A word from the playwright...

This script is here to assist you in doing what actors do best- interact and share passion. This script was generated with the understanding that the actors would feel quite comfortable working openly with and within an audience. It has been created with elements of Guerilla Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and Vaudeville. No fourth walls here.

This script is built from over three decades of professional experience in “getting the message across” to various groups- from kindergartners to retirees, from inmates to returning vets. The following few pages are a gathering of a few of the foundational ideas and values that were used in creating this play.

To help actors and readers of the script better engage with their audiences, I have included the guidelines I set down for myself when creating this project. My hope is that they can help you as they helped me.

PARTICULAR TO THIS SCRIPT

Jerry Bardo Apam Napat Sesquipedalian Cornelius Watershed Debry.

First, I’m sorry for making you say that a million times. Second, you’re welcome. Audiences will love the rhythm and song you find with it. Know it like you know your own name. They were created equal parts from the spirit of Professor Hill in *The Music Man* (Ya Got Trouble) and Bugs Bunny’s Foghorn Leghorn. They have lots of razzle-dazzle and should be larger than life.

Jerry was chosen for its non-gender affinity. **Bardo** is a name that was chosen to provide a rhythmic ‘lift off’ to the rest of the name. It was coined by me by chance, but it does appear in Buddhist teachings signifying “a place between existence and non-existence”, use that how you will. **Apam Napat** is a deity found in the Vedas. It translates to “child of the waters.”

Sesquipedalian is an English word meaning, “someone who uses long words or is long-winded.” **Watershed** is our topic at hand of course, “an area or ridge of land that separates waters flowing to different rivers, basins, or seas.” The last name on the list, **Debry** should rhyme with the American pronunciation of the word “debris”.

Beck was chosen in contrast to Jerry Bardo Apam Napat Sesquipedalian Cornelius Watershed Debry. This is an old vaudeville mechanism. Short, clipped, and non-binary.

Jerry and Beck play off of the standard vaudeville comic and straight-man duo. Beck will usually play the straight partner setting up the comic spike. Jerry is The Cat in the Hat and Beck is The Fish. If these roles and ideas are foreign to you, don’t worry about it at all. The mechanics are built into the writing. It is also built into the writing that Jerry has the largest line load. That is intentional. Jerry must be long-winded so that Beck is the one the audience turns to encapsulate and simplify the ideas. This also frees Beck up to work the logistics of the presentation (slides, hand outs, costumes, etc. especially if a stage manager is not available). If the lines are distributed equally, the characters turn into a Thing 1 and Thing 2 duo. This, of course, is doable but does not fit the mechanics of the verse. Keeping the roles as assigned (off balance as it may seem) keeps the characters and the play’s ideas at max efficiency.

Laying in new vocabulary words.

Within any audience, there will always be a varying understanding of vocabulary. I have attempted to create various opportunities for the audience to pick up new ideas or words from context. For instance, the word detritus will not be recognized by a typical fifth grader. However, the list before

(waste, refuse, litter, rubbish, scrap, crap, rubble, and trash) creates a context for the listener to create a connection to a new word. Repetition and reiteration are built into the dialogue between Actor A and Actor B. Lean into your lists. If a volunteer is struggling with vocabulary help, guide, and coach them as they need. When handing out the script to a volunteer it is always a good step to begin by reading lines for them and then asking if they need more assistance or have any concerns. Volunteers who are illiterate or dyslexic don't wear name tags. When asking a volunteer if they need help, look and listen to what they say and don't say. Be what they need in that moment.

What makes a good volunteer?

There is no definition of a 'good volunteer'. Finding someone that is easy to work with is easy. But that generally has more to do with a performer's sense of security than it does with providing people with new opportunities to be involved. There is no RIGHT WAY to choose a volunteer. But, there are a few wrong ones. There will always be a temptation to choose someone who feels safe and easy to work with. That usually translates into finding someone who looks, sounds, dresses, and moves like us. I encourage you to reach past what feels easy and convenient and reach for someone new. Will this ask for greater facilitation on the part of the performer? Yes. Dealing with a volunteer in a wheelchair or assisting a blind audience member with reading text will require the performer to adapt. Our neighbors who are confined to wheelchairs, who are deaf, speak another language, are blind, or have other needs and considerations that most of the other audience members do not, are still a vibrant and important part of our community. Remember, your volunteers aren't in the way of the performance, they *are* the performance. Reach out to everyone.

When do we choose the volunteers?

Volunteers can be chosen at any time. Some performers feel comfortable finding a few people who would be great for 'this role' or 'that role' before the performance starts. Some prefer to wait until the last minute, getting to know audience members before they choose. Some may choose to have a teacher select a number of students before the performance (good readers, charismatic, loudest, etc.) allowing them to prepare the text beforehand. There is so much that can be said about audience participation and choosing volunteers- far too much to be covered here. Suffice it to say, there is no right method. Speak with your partner and decide how you would like to handle the choosing of volunteers.

As a side note, it's not as much about 'asking for volunteers' as it is about 'looking for participants.'

"...ask them 'bout the biggest piece of rubbish or the smallest pool of sewage or maybe just the weirdest piece of waste they've ever seen."

Statements like this serve as audience prompts for discussion. If, as the performer, you feel the audience needs more prompting, please do so. What's important is two things: 1) continuing the conversation about debris, bringing attention to its many iterations and locations, and 2) providing time for the other group to prepare. Keep them talking on topic.

The kid, the kayaker, the fish, and the crane.

Encourage your speakers to have fun. Most will want to keep their eyes glued to the page. Encourage them and let them know that *fun* is what it is all about. You don't need to read the entire script to them but do read a portion of the text for them so that they can hear its rhythm and playfulness. Encourage a funny voice, goofy face, or a funny walk. Help them discover and explore what they can do.

Solo reader-

Jerry Bardo should be fast and loud. Bigger than life. Beck can be slow and easy. Use the two different rhythms to accentuate the points that are made throughout the script. If you are a solo performer, this playwright would never say no to a sock puppet partner.

GENERAL GUIDELINES AS I WROTE

1. **Imagination:** Use your imagination to create vivid depictions of the ideas and messages you want to portray. Describe what marine debris is and how it affects the environment in an understandable and engaging way.
2. **Interactivity:** Engage the audience with interactive exercises and activities that help reinforce the message of marine debris. Invite children to participate and help them gain a better understanding of the issue.
3. **Examples:** Use real-world examples to bring the concepts and ideas to life. Showcase stories of people and animals negatively impacted by marine debris, and explain what can be done to help reduce it.
4. **Impact:** Help the audience understand the long-term consequences and impact of marine debris on humans and their environment. Explain how the issue, if left unaddressed, will have serious consequences.
5. **Education:** Educate the audience on the different types of marine debris, where it comes from, and how it affects the environment.
6. **Solutions:** Offer practical solutions that can help reduce the amount of marine debris globally. Empower the audience to make a difference through conservation and action.
7. **Engagement:** Engage the audience throughout your performance. Ask questions and encourage them to participate.
8. **Interactive Media:** Incorporate interactive multimedia tools into the presentation. Use videos, graphics, and audio to bring the story to life.
9. **Discussion:** Create opportunities for discussion about marine debris. Ask the audience their thoughts and ideas about the issue and create a dialogue about it.
10. **Reinforcement:** Reinforce the message of marine debris by providing tangible items, like brochures and educational materials, that the audience can take home and further educate themselves on the issue.

The playwright believes, you, the actor, are:

Energized and enthusiastic about the process. You are the bridge for the audience to move from passive observers to active participants. You create an environment filled with energy and joy.

A good listener. The audience must feel you care about their thoughts, feelings, and what they have to say. They don't dictate the event, but when they are asked for their opinion, they want to feel that someone is listening and someone cares.

Nonjudgmental. You are working with the audience, completely trusting that these human beings in a safe creative environment will naturally explore responsible, healthy directions and possibilities. To do this you simply must be willing to *not judge*, or *throw away* responses that were not expected. An actor of this script must be very good with "Yes, and..."

Confident in your role as tone-setter and guide. If you are hesitant or nervous in your role as a guide, it's very hard for non-artists to be comfortable enough to come up and play. They need to trust your ability to keep the experience safe and moving forward. You are the motor and the captain of this boat. You have the map and you know where you're going. Trust yourself.

Aware of the dynamics in the room. Know who is anxious to participate, who is quiet, and who is in the middle. You can find ways to involve as many of these different types of people as they can. You work to nudge people, to engage those who often stay disengaged, and to keep a balance by not letting any one person or group dominate.

Flexible. Be prepared to adapt your performance based on the audience's response. If something is not working, don't be afraid to switch it up or take a different approach. React to what is happening in the moment and make adjustments as needed.

Asking every question truly wanting to hear the answer. Ask questions without an expectation of a 'right' answer. Often, you may have a good idea of what reaction you'll get at a particular moment in the script, but you must be prepared for, and interested in, answers you don't expect. Always move forward from the response you get, not the response you are prepared for or want. Listen to what your audience has to say. Trust yourself as a performer when the audience throws you a *curveball*. And trust your audience as they try to formulate their responses.

Values

Participation- We value people working together. We value the aches and pains that go hand in hand when a group works on something. We become better citizens, better humans.

Respect- We value others. Respect shows up through listening, encouraging, and acknowledging achievements. *Good job!* This helps put the civil in civilization. I have built all references to volunteers using the pronouns *they* and *them*. This is not a political statement, merely the experience of decades of work with a variety of groups. There will be a dozen things running through your brain during a performance- pace, sightlines, volume, THE CLOCK- building *they* and *them* makes it a bit easier to keep juggling those concerns while still moving the play forward.

Cooperation- We value the ability and the attempt to work *with* and *for* other people; sharing ideas, editing ideas, and creating new ideas together with others. From touchdowns to pyramids, being able to work with others can lead to great things.

Exploration- We value trying something new. Sometimes that newness is full of wonder and joy and other times it can be filled with trepidation and fear. But the mere act of stepping out into the new thing is valuable. All growth and learning begins by exploring. Some actors feel the need to take control of a performance. With a very interactive performance like this one, actors must be ready to explore where the audience takes them.

Courage- When working with audience members or students look for the quiet ways courage can show up- sometimes even a nod or a small lift of the arms can be a tremendous act of courage for someone. Acknowledge it wherever you see it. This goes for your acting partner as well. Performances that require the facilitation of a LOT of audience participation like this one, demand a *giving over* or *letting go* from the actors involved. That takes a lot of courage. After the performance, take a moment to acknowledge the courage of your partner.

Entertainment- Help your audience have a good time! We learn a lot as human beings when we are emotionally engaged. Yes, this is a job, but it certainly doesn't mean you can't have a little fun too!

Performance- We are actors. Our voices, bodies, and excitement, carry the story to our audience. Use every tool you have.

Encouragement- Your audience will have a thousand reasons not to participate. Your encouragement can go far. You can: pump up the audience as a whole; be physically beside them as they do their part; make eye contact and share a smile; give someone an excuse to do what they've always wanted to do anyway but were embarrassed to try- all this and more. Help them do something courageous!

In conclusion.

If you are a solo performer have fun and trust your audience.

If you are a duo, have fun and trust your partner and your audience.

If you are an actor who has had time to rehearse the script, trust your director.

If you are a director directing the actors, trust your script, your actors, and your audience.

Above all, trust that everyone wants to help make the world better. Trust that everyone likes to laugh and smile.

David Daniel
Playwright