

Story Adaptation: getting your book to the stage

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/adaptation-getting-your-book-to-the-stage/>

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If you wish for one of your stories (or all of them!) to be adapted into another media, my best advice is that you decide upon it and make it happen. It's hard work, but you will dive into it with no regrets... maybe some new strange habits, but no regrets.

One side-effect of a theatre adaptation is that it will **make you a better writer**. Another is that you'll be forced to **come out of your writer's shell**; and while there will be days when you want to pull out all your hair, you will undoubtedly have a **great deal of fun** being in the thickest thick of this special brand of chaos.

Artwork by Ryan McGuire.

This is why I'm so excited that we have [Christi's articles](#) just on this topic in particular. She's directed several plays and has put on some pretty amazing [productions with limited funds](#). Definitely check-out her articles on the subject.

We most often think about movie adaptations when we hear the words "story adaptation," but there is another option that is perhaps more relevant to what we do: the stage.

Live theatre performances of your story really engage children on a whole new level and it's very exciting to see. Children delve into stories more completely than adults generally do, and if you can fill a room with kids and have others perform the story – it's magical.

For the writer, there's another (really valuable) advantage to a stage adaptation. If you first test the characters and story on a cast of child actors, you will quickly realize where dialogue might be stiff or action might lag.

A valuable writing tip!

If I'm not sure about the dialogue in my story, I ask a child to read it aloud to me. If anything is cringe-worthy, it pops-out right away.

If your readers are around ages 6-12, then your performers can be too. I've never worked with any professional child actors, but I do provide the kids (if they can read) with a copy of the genuine script – all of it. I think it's important for the kids to see the proper format and to learn how a script is different from a storybook. Anyway, it's more exciting that way.

The Child Actor may not be able to read. That's ok.

If a child performer cannot read (6 year olds are typically still learning), then learning the lines is a matter of memorization by rote. Don't doubt a child's ability to do this.

Because children are willing to make mistakes, they can fearlessly learn whatever you tell them to learn. They just do it, and because they have buckets of energy, they can do it over and over. I've worked with shy kids and wild kids. If they want to be there at all, they're successful. The kids don't have to be superstar mini-Meryl-Streeps in the making. They just need to know their lines and look adorable. (This is a perk of live theatre over film.)

Some kids are smarter, sure. But all kids can learn anything with enough practice. Because theatre is fun and exciting, it's a type of learning kids will work extra hard to get down right. I work primarily with kids who are learning English as a second language, and so they're learning English in the rehearsals. It's fun. It's hard work sometimes, but once you're chin-deep in theatre kids, the possibility of giving it up for something easier and quieter just sounds incredibly boring. This is theatre! Passions live right there.

Sharing your story with kids who are going to perform it on stage in front of their families, friends and teachers – and strangers, too – is the defining moment. It defines you, the writer, as the director of a story. You're pretty much invisible, but there are at least a few people who somewhere in the back of their minds realize that you made this stuff up for them.

Sure, it's no picnic. But still... it's theatre.

In the process, there's groaning. There's chaos. There's never enough time – never, ever no matter how well you plan it out, I promise you will have crazy nights where you get almost no sleep at all because you have to make up for lost time. How that time got lost in the first place I'll never know and neither

will you.

But it's all worth it.

Somehow, it's really worth it. On the big day of a performance, the kids put on their costumes (crazily, hopping all over the place because they're so excited and nervous), the audience takes their seats (trying to keep the happy energy all inside and failing), and I am swelling with so much anxiety I feel I might pop.

Then the story is told in words, in song and in funny little dances. Everyone applauds. They laugh when they're supposed to. They are stunned when something actually sad happens. I'm just glad the kids are delivering their lines.

Then it's done. The kids are exhausted – genuinely. The parents are happy – genuinely. I'm ready for a drink – seriously. It's fabulous.

What the writer does when it's all done.

Then you can go home, take the script with all your scribbles, and rewrite it into a storybook form. You may well have started with a storybook that you adapted into a play... or the other way around. If the book isn't yet on the market, I guarantee you'll do some rewriting to the original story.

Your ideal test audience is probably a group of kids looking to perform a good story on stage. Not every story can be brought to the theatre. [Concept books](#) won't work at all (because they don't have any [story structure](#)), and some stories are too simple. But if the age group works and the story complexity fits a three-act play format, it's something you might want to consider.

Once you have a solid story and it's on the market, you can bring it again to the stage – and afterward have a Book Signing. Make it a theatrical, exciting event.

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