

DRAMA IMPORTANT IN CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SAYS USCA PROFESSOR

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By

Staff Reporter

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"Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest all by himself..."

He lives there yet, in the hearts of "Poohapils" both young and old, and Milne fans will be treated to "A Visit with Christopher Robin" to be presented by the Augusta Children's Theater on Mar. 14, 15 and 16.

The material was adapted for stage by Peter Haiman of Aiken who teaches Early Childhood Education at the University of South Carolina, Aiken Campus.

Haiman is co-directing the program with June Stewart of WRDW-TV. "Drama is very important in childhood development' Haiman said. " That's why children love to play 'dress up.' They learn to be adults by acting out adult roles." Theater groups build a child's self-confidence and bring a youngster into contact with good literature. However, according to Haiman, a child should not be forced to perform if he is not inclined to do so. "There are plenty of other things he can do to contribute to a theater group working on lights, props or making posters." Haiman advised.

Haiman became interested in dramatic literature early, since his father and aunt were founders of the Cleveland Playhouse. "In fact, my aunt became quite a famous puppeteer and collected puppets from all over the world." Haiman said. Despite family theater ties, Haiman wasn't interested in performing, admitting that he was the last student in school to volunteer for oral assignments.

Haiman feels that live theater has an immediacy that cannot be equaled in movies or television. "It's the difference between listening to a recording and hearing a real, live orchestra.

The program offered by the Children's Theater will include excerpts from Winnie-the-Pooh, plus a number of A. A. Milne's poems.

What is the secret of the Milne mystique and the ageless Pooh stories? Various theories have been compiled in a book called "The Pooh Perplex" in which the stories are analyzed for hidden meanings and messages. Haiman takes a less complicated view: "The book teaches us cooperation." Haiman points out that all of the characters in the stories with the possible exception of Christopher Robin, have weaknesses and imperfections: Pooh is a "bear of very little brain", Piglet is timid and easily frightened, Owl is pompous, and so on down the line. "Yet they love each other despite the imperfections and help each other out whenever they can. They all contain a certain amount of bumbling optimism," Haiman explained.

The Augusta Children's Theater includes children from ages 8 through 16. They have been divided into two groups for the March performance to be held at the Augusta College Chateau. One will present a children's play; the other will give the Milne material interspersed with music written by Haiman for the occasion. "Our group started working on a play, but neither the children nor I like it," said codirector June Stewart, thus, Haiman, was called upon for his adaptation. "As far as I know, this is the first time anything like this has been done", Haiman added.

Selections will include such poems as "Forgiven", "Halfway Down", and "Sneezles".

"Teddy Bear" and "Vespers". "The `Vespers' number is done with candid and is very beautiful," Haiman added.

The program starts with "The End", a poem about a child describing himself at age one, two and so on. The finish is a favorite Milne line, "But now I'm six, I'm clever as clever; I think I'll be six for ever and ever".



"SAY 'AH' "

Peter Haiman watches as "doctor" Kelly Jarrell of North Augusta examines a patient played by her sister Gaffney in rehearsals for "A Visit with Christopher Robin." (Staff Photo by Lynne Katonak)