

Spooky Classics

FOR
CHILDREN

AS TOLD BY JIM WEISS



A Companion Reader

With Dramatizations by Chris Bauer





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— A Companion Reader —

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Preface

This illustrated Companion Reader is an exact transcript of Jim Weiss's award-winning storytelling performance, *Spooky Classics for Children*.

For decades, Jim Weiss has entertained his many listeners with gripping plots, vivid characters, and beautiful words. But his performances are much more than mere entertainment. Jim's stories build language skills by filling young minds with wonderful vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and rich images.

Now, our Companion Readers bring these language-learning benefits to a new level. Language, both written and oral, is most easily and thoroughly learned when *heard, read, and spoken*.

Listen to the Jim Weiss performance on CD or MP3. (See welltrainedmind.com for a full listing and instantly downloadable digital versions!)

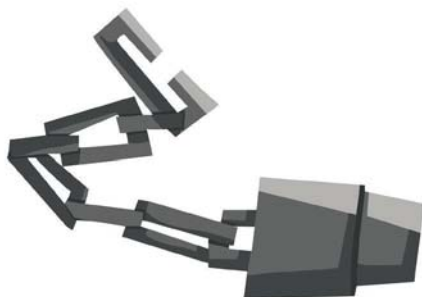
Read along with the performance. The first half of this book is a word-for-word transcript of Jim Weiss's performance. Students can improve their reading fluency, vocabulary, and their understanding of punctuation, sentence structure, and grammar by following along as Jim performs these words. Even students who are not reading at the level represented in this book can be moved forward in reading competency by reading along as Jim speaks the words.

Note: To help you follow along with the audio performance, we've placed Track Numbers into the text wherever a new track begins on the CD or MP3 recording. They look like this:



Say the words. The final element in language learning is to speak great words and sentences out loud. Each one of these performances has been turned into a short, accessible dramatic version that can be performed by two or more actors. The plays can be memorized or read from the scripts; either way, students will begin to gain confidence in their own language use and in their ability to speak in front of others.

Each play has a slightly different emphasis. The first, *The Canterville Ghost*, gives students an opportunity to practice different kinds of simple special effects. The second, *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, focuses on physical acting: walking and moving as characters of different ages, as well as “pretend” stage fighting. The third, *The Sending of Dana Da*, guides young actors in interacting with a live audience.



Oscar Wilde's
The Canterville Ghost
As Told by Jim Weiss



There's something about a spooky story that draws us in, and holds us for the most startling developments. Here, from three masters of literature, are three spooky classics.

The author of *The Canterville Ghost*, Oscar Wilde, grew up in Ireland and then later made his name as a writer in London, England. There, Wilde created plays, essays, poems, short stories, and a famous novel, all filled with sparkling wit. Beneath the entertainment, however, lay a first-rate mind seeking real meaning in existence and human relationships.

The Canterville Ghost is one of a collection of stories in which Oscar Wilde blended fantasy and the supernatural with his brilliant comments on human nature.



The Canterville Ghost
by Oscar Wilde

Everyone told Hiram B. Otis that he was making the mistake of his life, and they meant what they said. Mr. Otis, the self-made millionaire businessman, had been appointed the new American ambassador to Great Britain, and although he had no use for what he considered the fancy airs of British aristocrats, he told his wife, “We shall have to live in such a manner that they will respect my position. And so, my dear, we need a house.”

And that’s how Mr. and Mrs. Otis came to buy that famous old ancestral castle, Canterville Chase.

There was just one problem: Canterville Chase was haunted.





Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

Dramatized by Chris Bauer

After the original performance by Jim Weiss

You are about to put on a play called “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment.” It is based on Jim Weiss’s version of the story. But you don’t have to do it in exactly the same way it was read! The fun of plays is that the same story can be told in many different ways. You get to bring your own imagination and tell this story your own way.

Below you will find some suggestions about how to put the play on, but they are only just suggestions to make it easier for you. You should use your imagination and add your own ideas to this play whenever you think it would make it more fun for you to perform or for your audience to watch!

Cast

First, you need a “Cast.” The Cast are the people who play the different characters. Unlike some other plays, you can’t have people playing more than one role, since all five actors are onstage the whole time.

Depending on who you have as actors, you can do “gender-blind” casting. This means that boys can play girls’ parts and girls can play boys’ parts. A lot of theaters do this when they have a role that was written specifically for a man or woman, but one is not available.

List of Characters

Dr. Heidegger

Mr. Medbourne

Colonel Killigrew

Mr. Gascoigne

Widow Wycherly

Costumes and Props

You should try to find some clothes that look like they could be from America in the 1830s, because that is when the story is set. You can do some research in books or on the internet to see what people dressed like back then.

“Props” are anything the characters use. These are the props you will need:

1. Leather book
2. Pressed rose (you can cut one out of paper if you don't have a real one)
3. Vase full of water (use a PLASTIC vase, because it gets knocked over and we don't want it to break and hurt anybody!)
4. Four champagne glasses (regular cups are OK too)
5. Paper and pencil (whoever plays Mr. Medbourne should have these in his pocket)
6. Full red rose. To change the shriveled rose into a full red rose, you could try having two vases of water, one with a red rose already in it. When it comes time for the brown rose to change into a red one, you can cover the vase with a cloth, put it on the ground behind the table, put the cloth over the vase with

the red rose in it, bring it back up to the table, and then take the cloth away. If you can think of a more clever way to do it, then go for it!

Any props or costumes you don't have, you can just mime. Miming is when you move your hands like you're holding or using something, but there's actually nothing there.

Set

The "Set" of a play is where it takes place, its "setting." This play takes place in Dr. Heidegger's house. You can do it anywhere in your house. This is a very easy set because all you need is a table and some chairs. But you can do anything else you can think of to make your house look like what you think Dr. Heidegger's house would look like. If you want to, you can do some research and find out what houses in America looked like in the 1830s.

One thing you especially need is a picture of Sylvia somewhere on the wall. This can be a portrait or a picture of a woman in old-fashioned clothing, or even something you draw.

Sound

Sounds should be made by helpers who are not onstage and are hidden from the audience, but are close enough to be heard.

The Play

When you perform the play, you will see each character's name followed by a colon, like this:

DR HEIDEGGER:

After the colon will be some words. These are the character's lines. When you play that character, you say whatever comes after the colon. So if you saw this;

DR HEIDEGGER: The Fountain of Youth.

and you were playing Dr. Heidegger, you would say "The Fountain of Youth."

If you see more than one character's names, like this:

COLONEL KILLIGREW and WIDOW WYCHERLY:

it means both characters say the line at the same time.

One more thing; if you see something in parentheses after the name, it's an instruction that tells you how the line should be read. For example,

DR HEIDEGGER: (Angrily)

that means that whatever he says, he should say ANGRILY!

If you want to memorize your lines and perform it that way, that's great! If you want to read them off the paper, that's fine, too.

Staging

There are some theater terms you should know.

The most important ones are "Stage Left," "Stage Right," and "Center Stage." If the play says a character should stand Stage Left, it means that if you are playing that character and you are standing and facing your audience, you should be to the left of the stage. The reason it's called "Stage Left" is that for the audience, who is facing you, it's the right! It can be a little confusing, but just remember,

when you are facing the audience, Stage Left is *your* left and Stage Right is *your* right. Center Stage means, very simply, that you move to the center of the stage.

It's also important to remember that you don't have to be on an actual stage to use these terms. If you're doing a play in your living room, you can still say you are "Stage Left" or "Stage Right" or "Center Stage" depending on where you stand in the space you are using to perform.

Another term you should know is "Stage Directions." In the play, you will see some sentences in parentheses. These are your Stage Directions. They tell you where the characters should be standing, and sometimes what they should be doing.

Finally, you will see some Stage Directions that say "Lights Up" or "Lights Down." This means, simply, that you turn the lights on or off to begin and end your play.

Physical Acting

Dr. Heidegger's experiment is a special play because it lets you explore **acting physically**.

When we act, we do a lot of it with our **voices** and our **facial expressions**. In this story, four old people grow younger and younger, and then suddenly grow old again. You will have to show this happening by using your bodies.

In the beginning you are old; when you drink the water, you grow younger. Watch older people, and look carefully at how they move. You should copy their movements when you play the older versions of the characters, and then as your characters get younger you can move more freely. Think of it like this; you start the play as your grandparents, then you become your parents, then you become you,

and finally you become your grandparents again! So watch how your parents and grandparents move, and see if you can move and use your body differently for each age you are playing.

There is also a fight in this play, where three of the characters start fighting and knock over a vase.

When you fight on stage, it is very important that you not *actually* wrestle or punch. You have to make it *look* like you are fighting, but the most important thing is that everybody is in control all the time. Practice the fight several times and make sure you do it exactly the same way every time. Do *not* do anything that might get somebody hurt! You don't have to throw each other into things or knock each other on the ground. Instead, grab each other's shoulders and lean back and forth, then bump into the table so the vase falls off. BE CAREFUL. DO NOT HURT EACH OTHER!

One Last Thing

Remember, the most important part of this play is that you have fun!

If you don't have all the props, or if somebody stands someplace different from where the instructions say, or if you decide you want to change everything and do it your own way, all those things are not only fine, they are wonderful! Mistakes in theater can be the most fun part of the whole show as long as you just keep going along and enjoying yourself.



Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

(Lights up. Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, Mr. Gascoigne, and Widow Wycherly are sitting around a table Center Stage. Dr. Heidegger is standing next to them.)

DR. HEIDEGGER: My dear old friends, I've asked you here today in hope that you will assist me in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study. I have something to show you.

(Dr. Heidegger puts the vase on the table, then gets the leather book and takes out the dead brown rose.)

DR. HEIDEGGER: (Sadly) This rose blossomed 55 years ago. It was given to me by Sylvia, whose portrait hangs there.

(Dr. Heidegger points to the picture of Sylvia.)

DR. HEIDEGGER: For 55 years it has rested between the pages of this book. Now looking at it, would you think it possible that this rose should ever bloom again?

WIDOW WYCHERLY: Nonsense. You might as well ask if an old woman's wrinkled face could bloom again.

DR. HEIDEGGER: Look.

(Dr. Heidegger drops the rose into the vase. See the "Props" section for a suggestion about how to switch out the rose.)