

Fifty Plays for Junior Actors

*A collection of royalty-free,
one-act plays for young people*

Edited by

SYLVIA E. KAMERMAN



67556

Publishers

PLAYS, INC.

Boston

PN 6120

A4K28

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Reprinted 1967

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 66-17944

The Court of King Arithmetic

by *Gwen Chaloner*

Characters

ROMAN NUMERALS, *two guards*

KING ARITHMETIC

PRINCESS ADDITION

PRINCESS DIVISION

PRINCESS SUBTRACTION

PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION

} *his four daughters*

SIR PROBLEM, *the Court Ambassador*

TIMOTHY SCHOOLBOY

LORD CALCULATION, *the Court Magician*

TEN NUMBERS (ZERO through NINE), *Lords and Ladies of
the Court*

DOLLARS and CENTS, *two more guards*

SETTING: *The throne room of King Arithmetic's palace.*

AT RISE: KING is seated on his throne, and his four daughters—PRINCESS ADDITION, PRINCESS DIVISION, PRINCESS SUBTRACTION, and PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION—are seated around him. TEN NUMBERS—ZERO through NINE—the Lords and Ladies of the Court, stand behind the throne, five on each side. ROMAN NUMERALS stand guard at the door, left; DOLLARS and CENTS stand guard at door, right.

1ST ROMAN NUMERAL (*Taking a few steps toward KING and standing at attention*): Your Majesty, Sir Problem has arrived.

KING: Tell my ambassador to come in. He may have some interesting news to give us.

1ST ROMAN NUMERAL: Yes, Your Majesty. (*Exits left*)

PRINCESS ADDITION: I like Sir Problem.

PRINCESS DIVISION: I find him hard to understand, sometimes.

KING: So do I, but he's a very useful fellow, for all that.

PRINCESS SUBTRACTION: And very important!

PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION: And . . . and handsome, too, don't you think?

KING: Tut, tut, daughters. Stop the chatter. Here comes Sir Problem, himself. (*1ST ROMAN NUMERAL enters.*)

1ST ROMAN NUMERAL (*Proclaiming loudly*): Sir Problem, Ambassador of the Court of King Arithmetic! (*Takes stand at left door*)

SIR PROBLEM (*Enters from left side and bows with a flourish before KING*): Your Majesty, King Arithmetic! (*SIR PROBLEM bows graciously to each PRINCESS, naming them in turn.*) Princess Addition. Princess Subtraction. Princess Multiplication. Princess Division. (*The four PRINCESSES smile and curtsy to SIR PROBLEM.*)

KING: Welcome home again, Sir Problem. What news do you bring us this time?

SIR PROBLEM (*Dramatically*): Bad news, Your Majesty, sad news, Your Majesty.

KING (*Sternly*): Out with it, then.

SIR PROBLEM: Timothy Schoolboy has renounced—oh, I find it difficult to say it, Your Majesty. . . .

KING: Go on! Go on!

PRINCESSES (*Ad lib*): Yes, do! Please do! (*Etc.*)

SIR PROBLEM: Timothy Schoolboy has renounced arithmetic! He has given it up.

KING (*Shouting*): What!

PRINCESSES (*Ad lib*): Oh, no! How dreadful! How could he! Impossible! (*Etc.*)

SIR PROBLEM: I know how you must feel. But that is the case.

KING (*Sternly*): The facts, Sir Problem. Give us the facts.

SIR PROBLEM: Well, Your Majesty, Timothy threw his arithmetic book into the river. (*PRINCESSES scream and put their hands over their faces.*) And he put his arithmetic homework assignment into—into the trash can! (*PRINCESSES scream again.*)

DOLLARS (*Shouting*): Scalp him!

ROMAN NUMERALS (*Together*): Put him in chains!

CENTS: Boil him in oil!

KING: Silence! Silence, all of you! (*To SIR PROBLEM*) Where is this—this schoolboy?

SIR PROBLEM: In the guardhouse, Your Majesty.

KING: Send for him at once.

SIR PROBLEM: Yes, Your Majesty. (*Turning to 2ND ROMAN NUMERAL*) Guard, bring in Timothy Schoolboy. (*2ND ROMAN NUMERAL exits left and returns with TIMOTHY SCHOOLBOY, holding him by the collar and pushing him before him. SIR PROBLEM points to TIMOTHY*) This is Timothy Schoolboy.

KING (*Glaring at TIMOTHY*): So! I understand you have been making trouble.

PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION: He doesn't *look* bad.

PRINCESS ADDITION: He doesn't look stupid!

PRINCESS DIVISION: Nor even dull!

PRINCESS SUBTRACTION: I think he's cute!

KING: Silence, daughters, silence! (*To TIMOTHY*) Well, Timothy, what have you to say for yourself?

TIMOTHY: Nothing.

SIR PROBLEM (*Indignantly*): Bow, and say, "Your Majesty."

TIMOTHY (*Bowing*): Your Majesty.

KING: What did you do with your arithmetic book?

TIMOTHY: I threw it into the river.

SIR PROBLEM: Bow, and say "Your Majesty."

TIMOTHY (*Bowing*): Your Majesty.

KING: Why did you do that, Timothy?

TIMOTHY: I hate arithmetic. I don't like numbers. I'm no good at addition. I can't do subtraction. I don't understand multiplication. And division scares me.

PRINCESSES: Oh-h-h! Oh-h-h!

SIR PROBLEM: That is no way to speak of the King's daughters!

TIMOTHY: But it's true. I don't want to learn any arithmetic. Ever!

DOLLARS: Let me take care of him, Your Majesty.

KING: No. This case must be solved according to the rules. Send for Lord Calculation, the Court Magician.

SIR PROBLEM (*To 1ST ROMAN NUMERAL*): Bring in Lord Calculation. (*1ST ROMAN NUMERAL exits left and returns with LORD CALCULATION.*)

LORD CALCULATION (*Bowing with dignity*): At your service, Your Majesty.

KING: Lord Calculation, Sir Problem has a problem.

SIR PROBLEM: A very serious problem.

LORD CALCULATION: What are the facts, Your Majesty? I will give them my most profound attention.

KING: Of course, of course. Proceed, Sir Problem.

SIR PROBLEM: Here is the culprit—Timothy Schoolboy.

LORD CALCULATION (*After looking TIMOTHY over*): He looks harmless.

PRINCESS SUBTRACTION: He threw away his arithmetic book.

LORD CALCULATION: Oh, dear!

PRINCESS ADDITION: Into the river.

LORD CALCULATION: Oh, no!

PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION: And threw his homework papers—

PRINCESS DIVISION: Into the trash can!

LORD CALCULATION: What a monstrous boy, to be sure!

TIMOTHY: But I don't *like* arithmetic.

SIR PROBLEM: You see what I mean?

KING: Lord Calculation, what is your advice?

LORD CALCULATION (*After a moment of deep thought*): Bring me volume seven of my latest book, *Multadd-subtravision for the Billions*. (*CENTS exits and returns with a huge book. DOLLARS helps him hold it up.*) Look up chapter 93, page 827, section 34, paragraph 6, line 2, first answer.

ZERO (*Comes forward and looks through book as DOLLARS and CENTS continue to hold it*): Here it is, Your Lordship.

KING (*Eagerly*): What does it say?

PRINCESSES: What is it? Tell us.

LORD CALCULATION (*Puts on very big eyeglasses, which hang on a cord around his neck*): Just as I thought. Hm-m-m-m.

KING: Well, what does it say?

LORD CALCULATION: It says, "Subtract the product of the evidence from the sum of the facts, and divide by the difference of opinion." (*DOLLARS and CENTS close book and set it down.*)

SIR PROBLEM (*Stroking his chin*): How extraordinary! Exactly what I thought myself. Exactly!

LORD CALCULATION (*Snubbing SIR PROBLEM*): But *I* prefer my *short version*. (*He takes a very tiny book from his pocket and looks at it through a huge magnifying glass.*)

KING (*Watching as LORD CALCULATION peers into his little book*): What does *that* one say?

LORD CALCULATION: It says, "Check results before going on."

KING: That sounds reasonable. How do we do it?

LORD CALCULATION: With Your Majesty's permission, we will give this boy his greatest wish. We will take arithmetic out of his life. He will not be able to use numbers in any way.

TIMOTHY: Oh, good! I like that!

KING: Must the punishment be so severe?

LORD CALCULATION: We will give Timothy just *one* chance to change his mind.

TIMOTHY: I don't need any chances. This is too good to be true. No multiplication tables. No addition. No subtraction. No division ever again. Oh, boy! What fun!

LORD CALCULATION: Wait, boy! We will proceed in an orderly manner. The book says, "Check results before going on." (*To the Court*) Your Royal Highnesses, Lords and Ladies of the Court, let us show Timothy School-boy what this punishment would mean. (*To KING*) With your permission, Your Majesty?

KING (*Impatiently*): Proceed, proceed.

LORD CALCULATION (*Turning his attention to TIMOTHY*): When is your birthday, Timothy?

TIMOTHY: January 12th.

ONE: No more birthdays, Timothy. You may not use days or months, for they are counted by numbers. They are dates.

PRINCESS ADDITION: And they add up, too.

TWO: No birthday cakes, no cookies, no pies any more. You need numbers and tables and fractions to measure what goes into them.

TIMOTHY: I'll buy them at the store.

THREE: You cannot buy anything, Timothy. To buy, you must figure—add and subtract.

DOLLARS: And use dollars—

CENTS: And cents.

TIMOTHY: I don't care about the cakes. I'm going to have a bicycle. I'll ride my bike.

FOUR: Bikes cost money. Money means numbers, too. And bicycles have many parts—two wheels, two handles, many spokes. It is the same with toy trains and planes and cars.

TIMOTHY: We-e-ell, I just like playing games.

FIVE: No. You cannot keep score without numbers. You cannot choose teams without dividing.

TIMOTHY: I—I—could read a book.

SIX: A book has pages and chapters, all numbered. You won't be able to use numbers at all.

TIMOTHY: I would travel.

DOLLARS: But you'd need to know how to count to pay fares on buses, trains, and boats.

CENTS: Yes, indeed.

SEVEN: And you'd have to use numbers to read timetables and schedules and the distances between places.

EIGHT: Without numbers, there would be no minutes or hours.

1ST ROMAN NUMERAL: And no numbers on clocks to tell the time.

TIMOTHY: I'd get a job and work all day.

NINE: There'd be no dollars or cents to pay you with.

DOLLARS *and* CENTS: Certainly not!

ZERO: And so, Timothy, you would be nothing, a little round nothing.

TIMOTHY: *You* are nothing. It is written right on you.

ZERO (*Smiling*): Oh, no, Timothy. I am *Zero*. I am nothing when I am alone, as you would be, Timothy; but when I belong to the group, I am very important. See, like this. (ZERO *puts his arm around shoulders of* NINE.)

I can change *Nine* into *Ninety*. You can't make numbers. (*Pats NINE on shoulder*) See?

TIMOTHY: I—I—I want to go home!

ONE: Mustn't ask directions.

TWO: Mustn't count streets.

THREE: Mustn't have numbers on the door.

TIMOTHY: I'll phone.

FOUR (*Warningly*): Phone numbers!

TIMOTHY: Oh, I wish—I wish—

KING: What do you wish, Timothy Schoolboy?

TIMOTHY: I wish I'd never said those horrid, mean things about arithmetic.

FOUR: Nor thrown us all away in the river?

TIMOTHY: Yes.

FIVE: Nor thrown us in the trash can?

TIMOTHY: Yes, yes—I mean, *No!* No, I wish I hadn't.

KING: Timothy, perhaps we could solve this problem. We'll erase the errors and begin all over again. We'll be friends instead of enemies.

TIMOTHY: Oh, could we, Your Majesty? Could we?

KING: What do you say, Sir Problem?

SIR PROBLEM: I'd say that was a sensible answer to the problem, Your Majesty.

KING: And you, Lord Calculation?

LORD CALCULATION: Check, and double check, Your Majesty.

TIMOTHY: Oh, thank you, sir. Thank you.

KING: And now, Timothy, let my four daughters give you some good advice.

TIMOTHY: Yes, Your Majesty.

KING: Princess Addition.

PRINCESS ADDITION (*Stands*): Make your figures carefully. Add from the top down; check from the bottom up. Always keep your columns straight, Timothy. Then the *addends* will give you the right sum.

TIMOTHY: I will, I will, Princess Addition. (PRINCESS ADDITION returns to her seat. Each PRINCESS follows the same procedure.)

KING: Princess Subtraction.

PRINCESS SUBTRACTION: The minus sign tells you to take away. Copy carefully. Keep your work neat, Timothy. And remember, you subtract the *subtrahend* from the *minuend* to find the *difference*.

TIMOTHY: Yes, yes. I will remember.

KING: Princess Multiplication.

PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION: When you have learned to add and know all your times tables, you will like to multiply. You will see numbers grow and grow. Remember to keep your figures in straight lines, then the *multiplier* times the *multiplicand* will give you the *product*.

TIMOTHY: Yes, Princess Multiplication.

KING: And now Princess Division.

PRINCESS DIVISION: You probably know more about division than you think, Timothy. You see—you divide whenever you share things—candy or cookies or toys. You must learn to subtract and multiply and study your times tables thoroughly, then you will be ready to divide larger numbers. You will divide the *dividend* by the *divisor*, and the answer will be called the *quotient*. Promise you will try hard, Timothy.

TIMOTHY: I promise, I promise. I didn't know arithmetic was so important. I'm not going to fight it ever again. I'm going to make arithmetic one of my best friends.

PRINCESS ADDITION: I *knew* he was a nice boy.

PRINCESS MULTIPLICATION: Yes, so did I.

KING: You will find that arithmetic will work for you every day of your life, Timothy.

TIMOTHY: Thank you, Your Majesty. Thank you, everyone. But now I must hurry. I don't want to be late for school.

KING: One moment, boy. (*Turning to LORD CALCULATION*) Lord Calculation, you are the Court Magician. Can you bring his books and papers back?

LORD CALCULATION: Certainly. Certainly. (*To ROMAN NUMERALS*) Stand at the gates while I work my magic. (*Guards exit. LORD CALCULATION makes elaborate magic signs with wand while he chants.*)

Three plus four makes seven,
Nine take away five leaves four.
Book, rise out of the river,
And come to the castle door!

(1ST ROMAN NUMERAL *re-enters with book.*)

1ST ROMAN NUMERAL (*Handing book to TIMOTHY*): Here it is, Timothy. A trifle damp, but almost as good as new.

TIMOTHY (*Taking book*): Oh, thank you.

LORD CALCULATION (*Making more magic signs*):

Four times two makes eight,
Six divided by two makes three.
Papers rise out of the trash can,
And return to Timothy!

(2ND ROMAN NUMERAL *re-enters with papers.*)

2ND ROMAN NUMERAL (*Handing papers to TIMOTHY*):
The papers, Timothy.

TIMOTHY: Thank you. Thank you very much.

KING: Our problem has been solved. (*He extends his sceptre toward TIMOTHY.*) Timothy is a real schoolboy once more. (*KING stands ceremoniously, holding his sceptre aloft.*) Case dismissed. (*Curtain*)

THE END