

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

a play in one act

based on the Grimm fairy tale

by Dean Feldmeyer

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STORY OF THE PLAY

An infestation of rats plagues the beautiful, perfect town of Hamelin, and the angry townspeople give the mayor and town council one last chance to solve the problem. A curiously dressed piper arrives just in time to save the day. He promises to lead the rats out of town for a fee of \$1000. The town agrees and the rat problem is solved, but the people, arguing that the price was too high, refuse to pay. The angry piper takes all the children with him instead, leaving the town unhappy and without a future. But wait! The storyteller runs on stage to offer an "alternative" ending.

Adults and children will be entertained by this adaptation of Robert Browning's classic narrative poem. The references have been updated and the rhyming charm of the original story has been preserved.

Setting

The Town Square of Hamelin, anywhere, any time.

Running time

40 minutes

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 men, 6 women, children, extras)

(flexible casting possible)

ROBERT BROWNING: Rumpled, contemporary writer and storyteller.

THE PIED PIPER: Dressed in contemporary clothing with long coat and striped scarf or in traditional Piper costume with plumed hat and cape. Self confident with good reason.

BETTY THE BAKER: Chef's hat and baker's whites. She is robust and opinionated. (flexible)

TERRY THE TINKER: Wears a tool belt, blue jeans and ball cap. Serious and self important. (flexible)

BOB THE BUTCHER: Apron and sausages. Maybe a rubber chicken. He is hail fellow well met, always with a joke and a good word for the shoppers. (flexible)

FRANCES THE FABRIC LADY: Overdressed, overly made up, and a bit ditz. Measuring tape draped around her neck, glasses on her head, pin cushion on her wrist, she constantly measures everyone.

BART THE BEGGAR: Dressed in an old army coat, unkempt but not repugnant. Is always polite when he begs, which is constantly. (flexible)

DELORES THE DOCTOR: Wears a lab coat and stethoscope. Takes pulses and feels foreheads for temperatures when she is talking to people. (flexible)

BILL THE BARBER: Carries scissors and has a small sheet draped over his arm. He talks expansively and loud. (flexible)

TOM THE LAME BOY: On crutches, ankle in a cast or ace bandage. Active but always a little behind the others. (flexible)

THE MAYOR: Tux or suit with a purple sash. Very self important and arrogant. Full of hot air and little else. (flexible)

2 COUNCILMEN AND 2 COUNCILWOMEN: Also dressed formally with red or pink sashes. The Mayor's toadies.

CHILDREN: 2-8 children who scamper and play and follow the Piper.

TOWNSPEOPLE: 3-8 adults who interact with the named characters in the town scenes.

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(AT RISE: THE BAKER, TINKER, BUTCHER, FABRIC LADY, DOCTOR, and BARBER are plying their wares in the town square as TOWNSPEOPLE and CHILDREN bustle about. They are arguing, playing, talking, laughing, etc. As ROBERT BROWNING begins to speak, all of the action on the stage freezes.)

BROWNING: Hello. Welcome to lovely Hamelin town. My name is Robert Browning, and I am the author of the story you are about to see. Please allow me to introduce you to some of the characters.

(HE walks about as he introduces the characters, but THEY do not acknowledge him as he is invisible. As he says their names, the characters come alive and continue as they were before, only in pantomime.)

BROWNING: This is Betty the Baker. She makes wonderful bread and delightful pastries. Here is Terry the Tinker who sells metal goods and repairs them as well. Over there is Bob the Butcher. Bob sells only the best chickens and sausages. Frances weaves the fabric with which we make our clothing. Delores is our town doctor. Her potions keep us healthy. Bill the barber cuts our hair and shaves us and keeps us looking our best. Even our town beggar, Bart, is a nice fellow who is never pushy and always grateful.

(MAYOR and CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS enter and, as they pass by, each PERSON stops to shake their hand and greet them in pantomime.)

BROWNING: We are very proud of our Mayor and our city council members because they keep our taxes low and still give us all of the things we want.

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MAYOR: *(Stepping up to deliver speech.)* Good people of Hamelin town. Four score ...

(The PEOPLE all turn away and go back to their business; only the COUNCIL MEMBERS continue to listen.)

MAYOR: Yes ... well, maybe another time ... *(HE continues to shake hands.)*

(CHILDREN come to life and begin scampering about.)

BROWNING: Our children are healthy and respectful and always get along with each other. In short, Hamelin is a conservative, comfortable community – the kind of town every person wants to live in. Good businesses, good people, good schools, and good times. It's almost perfect. And, it would be perfectly perfect ... except for one ... little ... problem ...

(A BOY runs onstage, steps DC, turns to audience and yells.)

BOY: Rats!!

(Immediately EVERYONE on stage, including BROWNING, climbs onto something to get themselves off the floor and a herd of 10,000 invisible rats runs across the stage as the PEOPLE squeal, swat, shiver, scream, and yell. Only Browning maintains his composure looking almost bored. When the rats have passed, Browning climbs down and walks DC.)

BROWNING: *(Matter-of-factly.)* Rats. *(HE exits.)*

ALL: Rats! *(THEY shiver.)*

BETTY: They fight the dogs

TERRY: And kill the cats,

BOB: And bite the babies in the cradles,

FRANCES: And eat the cheese out of the vats,

BART: And lick the soup from the cook's own ladles,

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DELORES: Split open the kegs of salted sprats
BILL: Make nests inside men's Sunday hats,
BETTY: And even spoil the ladies' chats,
CHILD 1: By drowning their speaking
CHILD 2: With shrieking and squeaking
MAYOR: In fifty different sharps and flats.
ALL: Ye-e-e-ew! (*ALL shiver again.*)
BILL: Why doesn't someone do something about this rat
problem.
BETTY: It's disgraceful.
TERRY: What do we pay them for, anyway?
FRANCES: It's the Mayor's fault.
BART: And the city council. Don't forget the city council.
DELORES: We pay taxes. We should be getting more for
our money.
TERRY: They're getting fat on our tax money and they're
not doing anything for us.
BOB: Except the roads.
TERRY: Well, of course, the roads.
BART: And the fire department.
TERRY: Yes, yes, the fire department and the roads.
BETTY: And the parks and the library.
TERRY: Well of course, the parks and the library go without
saying, along with the fire departments and the roads. It's
just that ...
FRANCES: And the police ...
BART: And the homeless shelter ...
BILL: And the trash service ...

*(ALL talk to one another about the good things the city
council is doing.)*

TERRY: But they haven't done anything about the rats!
BILL: Yes! That's right! The rats!
BART: They're stealing our tax money – well, your tax
money – and getting fat.
FRANCES: And doing nothing about the rats!
ALL: And doing nothing about the rats!
BETTY: Scoundrels!

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BOB: Crooks!
TERRY: Thieves!
DELORES: Let's get 'em!

(The TOWNSPEOPLE close in on the MAYOR and COUNCIL, forcing them back and up onto the benches and boxes so they can be seen over the heads of the townspeople. The Mayor puts his hands in the air to signal that he has something to say and ALL become silent.)

MAYOR: Please, please! Hear me! Good people of Hamelin town. *(Pause.)* Four score ...

(PEOPLE angrily turn and leave, exiting stage, shouting as they go.)

BETTY: You'd better come up with something fast
TERRY: For a wrong solution will be your last.
BOB: If you enjoy your office and its attendant power
ALL: Solve the rat problem.
BILL: We'll give you an hour.

(Last TOWNSPERSON leaves. MAYOR and COUNCIL MEMBERS walk DC and form a semi-circle with the Mayor in the middle.)

MAYOR: Never in my entire life of public service have I seen such anger in the people of this town. You'd think this rat problem was my fault.
COUNCILMAN 1 (CM1): Fault or not, if we want to be reelected in the fall we'd better solve this thing.
COUNCILWOMAN 1 (CW1): And soon, I'd say.
COUNCILMAN 2(CM2): We've tried! We've done everything we can think of and nothing works.
COUNCILWOMAN2 (CW2): We tried poison, they rejected it.
MAYOR: We tried traps, they avoided them.
CM 1: We brought in cats and the rats killed them.
CW 1: We offered a bounty and they became aggressive.

End of Freeview

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