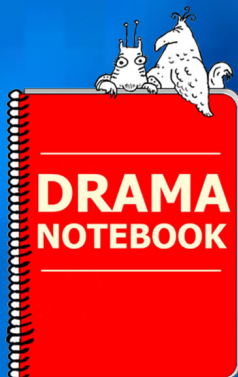


# THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL

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By Jennifer Reif



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## About the Author...

**Jennifer Reif** has been teaching, directing, and performing around the Pacific Northwest for decades. Her shelves are lined with children's books and her happy place is in the woods. She loves devising creative theatre projects with kids, and sharing ideas with teachers. Jennifer holds her BA in Theatre from Morningside College and also studied at Oxford University in England.



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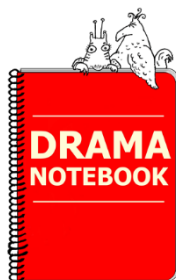
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## About the play...



*The Little Match Girl* is a touching adaptation of the classic Hans Christian Anderson story. Afraid to go home before she sells all her matches, a young girl huddles on a street corner. In an attempt to stay warm she lights a match, which sparks a vision for a better life. Match after match she hopes to keep the comforting images coming. Pantomime and music set the tone for this sad but meaningful tale. While the original story was written in 1845, this play can easily be set long ago or in our world today.



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## CHARACTERS

6-10

**POLLY (THE LITTLE MATCHGIRL)** — a young girl who needs to sell matches to help make money for her family.

**SHOPKEEPER** — the owner of a shop whose actions speak louder than their words.

**MRS. ANDERSON** — a happy woman who is enjoying the holidays with her family. Doesn't take notice of Polly.

**LOUIE** — a young boy who is not very kind to Polly.

**LUCY** — a young girl who is not very kind to Polly.

**GRANDMOTHER** — Polly's grandmother who died years ago, and has appeared to guide Polly to Heaven.

\*Flexible casting. Feel free to change the genders or add more ensemble characters.

**ENSEMBLE** — These performers cross the stage at the opening and closing to establish the scene. They should make specific choices about who they are and where they are going. They should be enjoying the holiday season. They also create the pantomimed scenes that are Polly's visions. Mrs. Anderson, Louie and Lucy can also join in the pantomimes.

**NOTES ON PANTOMIME:** The vision scenes are an opportunity to tell a story through movement. Instrumental music can help set the tone and provide structure for each vision. Just as if you were creating a tableau, encourage actors to use different levels and expression. They should also know where the focus is: on the warm fire, the table set with delicious food, or on the Christmas tree. Each ensemble member should have a specific character and show that through movement. Each vision should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. You can choose to use simple props if you like, or it can all be in pantomime. You do not need a real fire, table, or tree, but perhaps symbolic things like blankets, a serving tray, or garland for a tree if you choose. Actors should enter and exit the visions in character.

# The Little Match Girl

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*(A busy street corner on New Years Eve. People are bustling by. It is growing dark, but the glow of streetlights and shop windows light the area. It is snowing. Instrumental music sets the scene. Take your time with this opening scene, allowing ensemble characters to emerge and to feel the joy of New Years. This will help juxtapose Polly. No set is necessary, but you could add elements to suggest storefronts or a streetlight. The pantomimed visions are created around Polly as if her imagination is coming to life. This play can easily be set long ago, or in current times.)*

*(Mrs. Anderson and children exit a shop. She carries a bag of food. The Shopkeeper stands at door sending them off with season's greetings. It's almost time to close the store.)*

## **SHOPKEEPER**

Thank you for stopping in. I hope you enjoy your New Year's meal.

## **MRS. ANDERSON**

Meal? This is going to be a feast. Once again your shop has everything we need.

## **SHOPKEEPER**

My pleasure. Look at this snow! Such a beautiful time of year isn't it?

## **MRS. ANDERSON**

It is indeed. This snow makes me so grateful for our warm home. Thank you again for all the trimmings.

## **LUCY**

And for the candy!

## **LOUIE**

And for the cookies!

## **MRS. ANDERSON**

...And for your friendship. *(Correcting and coaching children to say the same.)*

## **LUCY and LOUIE**

...And for your friendship.

## **MRS. ANDERSON**

Why don't you two run along?

## **LUCY**

Thank you mother. We are going to listen to the carolers over by the church.

**LOUIE**

And have a snowball fight in the schoolyard.

**MRS. ANDERSON**

Al right. Just be home before dinner. *(Children run off laughing and adlibs.)* Thank you again, and Happy New Year!

*(As they exit, Polly enters and sets up at the corner. Depending on whether you set your production in current times, or long ago, you might consider giving her a handwritten sign that says 'matches for sale'. She is wearing shoes that are much too large for her and clothes not suitable for snowy weather. She needs a large coat, blanket, or shawl she can leave behind later in the play.)*

**SHOPKEEPER**

*(To Mrs. Anderson)* Happy New Year to you! *(Noticing Polly and quickly changing tone.)* What are you doing there child? You can't just sit on this street corner.

**POLLY**

I won't be long. I promise.

**SHOPKEEPER**

Well I hope not. I don't need someone begging outside of my shop. And it's cold outside. You should be going home.

**POLLY**

Yes Ma'am. I'll head home soon. Happy New Year!

**SHOPKEEPER**

Hmph. Happy New Year. *(Not happy about this, but heads back inside shop.)*

*(Polly settles in. People continue passing by not taking notice of Polly, or perhaps they are saying things under their breath. These are the same ensemble members we saw at the top of the scene, but now they are heading a new direction. Perhaps heading home. Soon Lucy and Louie enter again playfully and then begin antagonizing Polly.)*

**LOUIE**

*(Grabbing one of Polly's shoes off her feet, which are way too big for her, and tossing it to Lucy. A sort of monkey in the middle happens with the shoe.)* Hey Lucy, catch!

**LUCY**

This shoe is so big!

**POLLY**

Please give it back.

**LOUIE**

But it doesn't even fit you.

**POLLY**

Please give me back my shoe.

**LUCY**

Your shoe? This is far too big to be your shoe! *(Tosses to Louie)*

**POLLY**

Please, these were my mother's shoes. They're all I've got.

**LOUIE**

Fine. Take your big old shoe. *(But instead tosses again to Lucy.)*

**LUCY**

Maybe I'll keep it for a baby cradle. *(They laugh and run off with the shoe leaving Polly all alone.)*

**LOUIE**

Come on Lucy, we've got to get home for dinner.

**SHOPKEEPER**

*(Enters as they are locking up shop for the night)* You're still here? Listen child, you need to go home.

**POLLY**

I will. But I need to sell these matches first.

**SHOPKEEPER**

Matches?

**POLLY**

Yes. I have to make some money to help my family. Every little bit counts right?

**SHOPKEEPER**

Who is going to buy matches on New Years Eve?

**POLLY**

Well, hopefully you will. *(With a bit of hope and cheer.)* These are the very best matches. In fact, they are almost magical.

**SHOPKEEPER**

Magical?

**POLLY**

Yes, when you strike them you can see the most beautiful images in the light.

**SHOPKEEPER**

Magic indeed! Go home child. You'll catch your death of cold. *(Exits)*

**POLLY**

*(It's growing colder. Take time with this line. )* I can't go home empty handed. I just can't. Won't somebody buy these matches? I am so cold. Maybe I can warm up with just one match. *(Lights one match and is delighted by the glow and picture she sees.)*

**STOVE PANTOMIME** *(Ensemble creates a pantomimed scene of warmth, fire, gathering and safety. This can be done with props or without. Consider using instrumental music to set the mood. Take your time as actors create the scene making Polly feel as if she is really there. She feels cozy, happy and safe. Then they slowly disappear leaving her alone once again.)*

**POLLY**

*(Realizing the scene has vanished)* Oh how warm that stove was. So safe. I wish I could be there again. Just one more match. *(She lights another match.)*

**DINNER PANTOMIME** *(Ensemble creates a pantomime of a dinner feast. It can be done with props or without. Consider using instrumental music to set the mood. Take your time. The silent story should be of family, warmth, food, love, laughter, and gathering. They create the scene around Polly. Then it fades away leaving her alone once again with another burnt out match.)*

**POLLY**

Oh dear. I could almost taste that food. I'm so very hungry. Maybe one more match.

**CHRISTMAS TREE PANTOMIME** *(Same idea as above revealing a pantomime of a Christmas tree. Perhaps the family members are decorating a tree, pretending to sing carols, or opening gifts. Silent scene should be of gathering, celebrating, family, and gifts. Some focus should be towards the top of the tree where a star would be. A real tree is not necessary. Scene fades off and Polly is left alone again but pointing to the star on the tree.)*

**POLLY**

What a beautiful star on that Christmas tree! Grandmother always told me "When a star falls, someone is dying and going to heaven." *(Music cue or magical sound cue. Shift focuses to Grandmother who has entered.)* Grandmother? Is that you? Oh do take me with you. I know you will vanish when the match goes out. You will vanish like the stove, the dinner table and the Christmas tree. *(She hastily strikes the last match, or a bunch of matches.)*

**GRANDMOTHER**

*(Reaching out hand.)* Come with me child.

**POLLY**

Where are we going? I didn't sell the matches.

**GRANDMOTHER**

Come with me to a place where there is no hunger or cold. A place filled with joy and happiness. *(Takes Polly's hand and exits. Polly leaves behind the blanket, coat, or shawl she was wrapped in, along with any props used. It should look as if she is still there wrapped underneath.)*



*(Sound and light change to show passage of time. It is now morning, New Years Day. People bustle by again just as in the opening. All ignore Polly, until Shopkeeper enters to open store. Noticing Polly, Shopkeeper kneels down. 2 Ensemble members say the final lines.)*

**ENSEMBLE 1**

She must have tried to warm herself.

**ENSEMBLE 2**

Poor child.

*(All ensemble start to gather around and simply ponder the Little Match Girl lying dead on the ground. Perhaps they recognize her, perhaps they don't. Consider music to set the tone. Only the Shopkeeper is kneeling. Stillness. )*

**CURTAIN**

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