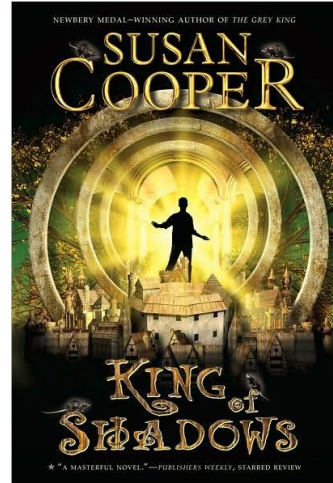


READERS THEATER

King of Shadows by Susan Cooper

This Readers Theater script of *King of Shadows* by Susan Cooper was written by Susan Cooper for the Children's Literary Lights Readers Theater performance at the 2013 Library of Congress National Book Festival in Washington, D.C. The performance was created and presented by The National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance (NCBLA), in partnership with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress.



Readers: Six readers. Fewer readers can be used by sharing roles.

Length: Approximately 10 minutes.

Roles: In order of appearance: Voice 1, Voice 2, Nat Field, Harry, Richard Burbage, William Shakespeare.

Notes: This script has been double-spaced and formatted in a larger size font to facilitate easy reading when printed.

For additional Readers Theater scripts, visit: thencbla.org and click on Readers Theater under the EDUCATION menu.

To learn more about the NCBLA, visit their website: thencbla.org

To learn more about the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, visit their website: Read.gov

[VOICE 1]: His name is Nat Field, and he's eleven years old. He's the youngest of 20 young American actors chosen to go to Britain, to spend a summer in London, acting Shakespeare's plays at the Globe Theatre.

[Voice 2]: That's a modern copy of the Globe Theatre where Shakespeare's own company used to act his plays 400 years ago. Nat is going to be Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He was chosen because he's a good acrobat, as well as a good actor.

[NAT]: I loved being in London. I stayed with an English family. And the Globe Theatre was awesome. But then there was a weird day in rehearsal – suddenly I felt really giddy, and I heard the noise of a crowd that wasn't there. I had a fever that night, and they made me go to bed early.

[VOICE 1]: Nat Field has a dream that night, a dream of flying. He flies high, high up in the dream, out into dark space. He slows down, and below him he sees the planet Earth, spinning like a blue ball.

[VOICE 2]: He hangs there for a moment, in his dream, and then he feels a hand take his own. There's nobody there, just the feel of the hand. It pulls him down, down toward the blue planet, down -

[VOICE 1]: The hand draws him on, into the next day.

[HARRY]: Nat! Nat! Wake up!

[NAT]: So I did wake up. It was a boy's voice. But he was a boy I'd never seen before. And I was lying on a different bed – really hard, and crackly.

[HARRY]: Nat! Wake up? Are you better?

[NAT]: He had long dark hair down to his shoulders, and he looked worried. He put his hand on my forehead. I said, Who are you?

[HARRY]: Harry of course, Harry thy new fellow. You look . . . strange. Thinner. But better. You were so sick last night. Dear Lord, I was afraid you had the plague.

[NAT]: I stared at him. I thought: *the plague? Nobody's had the plague for centuries.* I was in a tiny room with plastered walls, and a bad smell in it, and one small open window. What was happening to me?

[HARRY]: Get up, Nat. It's past five.

[NAT]: I pulled back a rough blanket that hadn't been there the night before. I was wearing a long shirt instead of my pajamas. I thought suddenly: I have to go to the bathroom. So I got up - and I nearly fell down.

[HARRY]: Be careful. Here, give me thine arm.

[NAT]: I - I have to go -

[HARRY]: Good! Tha must be better if tha needs a piss.

[NAT]: And he drew me toward a corner of the room and took a flat wooden cover off a bucket - and the smell was so strong you could tell what the bucket was for. So I used it, while Harry folded up my blanket.

[HARRY]: Are you done with the bucket? Here, it's reached its end, I think –

[NAT]: And he did something that told me for sure that I had gone back in time. He picked up the bucket and he emptied it out the window. Can you imagine someone doing that in 2013?

I leaned against the wall and I said, Where am I?

And suddenly Harry said a line from the play, A Midsummer Night's Dream.

[HARRY]: “Art thou he they call Robin Goodfellow?”

[NAT]: That's a cue for Puck, in the play. So without even thinking I said the next line: “I am that merry wanderer of the night.”

[HARRY]: Thank the good Lord, at least tha know'st thy lines. Listen to me, now. (slowly, patiently) Th'art Nathan Field. Th'art come to our new Globe Theatre for a week, from St Paul's Boys School across the river, since we needed a Puck. Th'art a wonderful actor, they do say, though it seems to me too much learning at that school has addled thy wits. Come now, get dressed, I'll help thee.

[NAT]: Our new Globe Theatre, he'd said. Shakespeare's Globe had been built in 1599. Was I suddenly a different Nathan Field? *Had I been taken back 400 years?*

[VOICE 1]: Yes, he has. 414 years, to be exact.

And in 2013, in the home of Nat's host family in London, there is a different boy lying in the bed where our Nat went to sleep. He has a terrible fever; he's delirious, with strange swellings on his neck. They call for an ambulance and he's taken to hospital.

[VOICE 2] The nurses in the emergency room can't figure out what's wrong with him, they've never seen anything like it. A doctor comes; he stares at the boy, orders blood tests and antibiotics, and has him moved to an isolation ward. Then he takes out his cellphone.

[VOICE 1]: He dials a number, even though it's three in the morning, and he says, "You aren't going to believe this, but I think we have a case of bubonic plague."

[VOICE 2] In the London of 400 years ago, Harry helps our Nat Field into some strange clothes – tights, and puffy little shorts, and a jacket that he calls a doublet. And they go down to have breakfast with the actor-manager Richard Burbage and his wife.

[NAT]: We ate bread and cheese, and drank mugs of what turned out to be very weak beer. Everybody drank that instead of water, because the water was so bad. I guess the whole population of Elizabethan London was a little bit buzzed all day long.

[BURBAGE]: Hurry, lads - we must get to rehearsal.

[NAT]: Burbage was a chunky, good-looking man with a rather big nose. He rushed us through the streets of London, cobbled streets, full of horses and carts and shouting people, past some tall poles with lumps on top. There were crows pecking at the lumps, and when I looked – oh, no – what were they?

[HARRY]: Keep up, Nat – we shall be late!

[NAT]: What are those, up there?

[HARRY]: Heads, of course.

[NAT]: (appalled) Human heads?

[HARRY]: Beheaded traitors, enemies of the Queen. Do they teach you nothing at St Paul's School?

[VOICE 2]: Things are very, very different in 1599. And when they reach the Globe Theatre there are no towering modern buildings around it, but trees and fields instead.

On the stage, a man with dark hair, and a neat beard, is sitting on a stool, staring at a sheaf of papers. He looks up at Burbage, and he groans.

[SHAKESPEARE]: Oh, Dick. This is a mighty task, and we have so little time. To bring back a piece we last played two years ago, and all for one performance only.

[BURBAGE]: But a very special performance.

[SHAKESPEARE]: Very special, indeed. We have enough boys for the women's parts – and, praise be, we have Richard Burbage as Bottom the Weaver.

[BURBAGE]: And the biggest problem of all is solved – I have brought thee thy Puck.

[NAT]: The man with the beard looked over at me. He had a nice face, with lines from laughing. He had a little gold hoop in one ear.

[SHAKESPEARE]: Is this the boy?

[BURBAGE]: Nathan Field, lent to us by St Paul's School.

[NAT]: And Master Burbage poked me in the back–

[BURBAGE]: Stir thyself, boy – go and greet Master Shakespeare.

[NAT]: Shakespeare. *William Shakespeare!*

It was as if he'd said, go say hallo to God.

So I did what I'd been taught to do on my first entrance as Puck 400 years later – I did a cartwheel across the stage and came up right next to him. And Shakespeare laughed.

[SHAKESPEARE]: Very nice. I have a tumbling Puck. So you are Nathan Field.

[NAT]: Uh..... They call me Nat.

[SHAKESPEARE]: Well, Nat, welcome to our company. We are lucky to have you, for this performance that we did not expect.

[NAT]: And Master Burbage came over and spoke to me very softly.

[BURBAGE]: Since th'art living in my house, boy, we will tell thee one thing, in great confidence. This play is revived so suddenly not by choice but by command. The Queen wishes to see our sweet new theatre, and she will have us play nothing but her favorite - Will's Midsummer Night's Dream.

[SHAKESPEARE]: But she will come in secret, and this must not be breathed to a soul. The Queen has enemies, and these are dangerous times.

[NAT]: And Master Burbage took hold of my left ear.

[BURBAGE]: Mention this to anyone and I will cut off thine ear. Very slowly, inch by inch.

[NAT]: I thought of those chopped-off heads up on poles, and I decided he might mean it. So I said, "I promise."

[SHAKESPEARE]: And now we must rehearse. Here we are, Nat, together for this one performance. Nat Field as Puck, and Will Shakespeare as Oberon.

[Harry]: And if you want to find out what happens at this play, in the dangerous past, and to the sick boy in the present; if you want to find out the amazing reason why Nat Field has been carried back in Time – you’ll have to read a book called *King of Shadows*, by Susan Cooper.

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