

READY-to-GO SCRIPTURE SKITS

...that teach serious stuff

saint mary's press



By Michael Theisen

Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits

(That Teach Serious Stuff)

For David Jourdan Theisen,
actor, musician, singer, poet,
and one amazing and dramatic son!

In deep gratitude for the patience and support
of my wife, Mary,
and our children, Chris, David, and Rachel,
whose presence in my life brings me such joy and hope!

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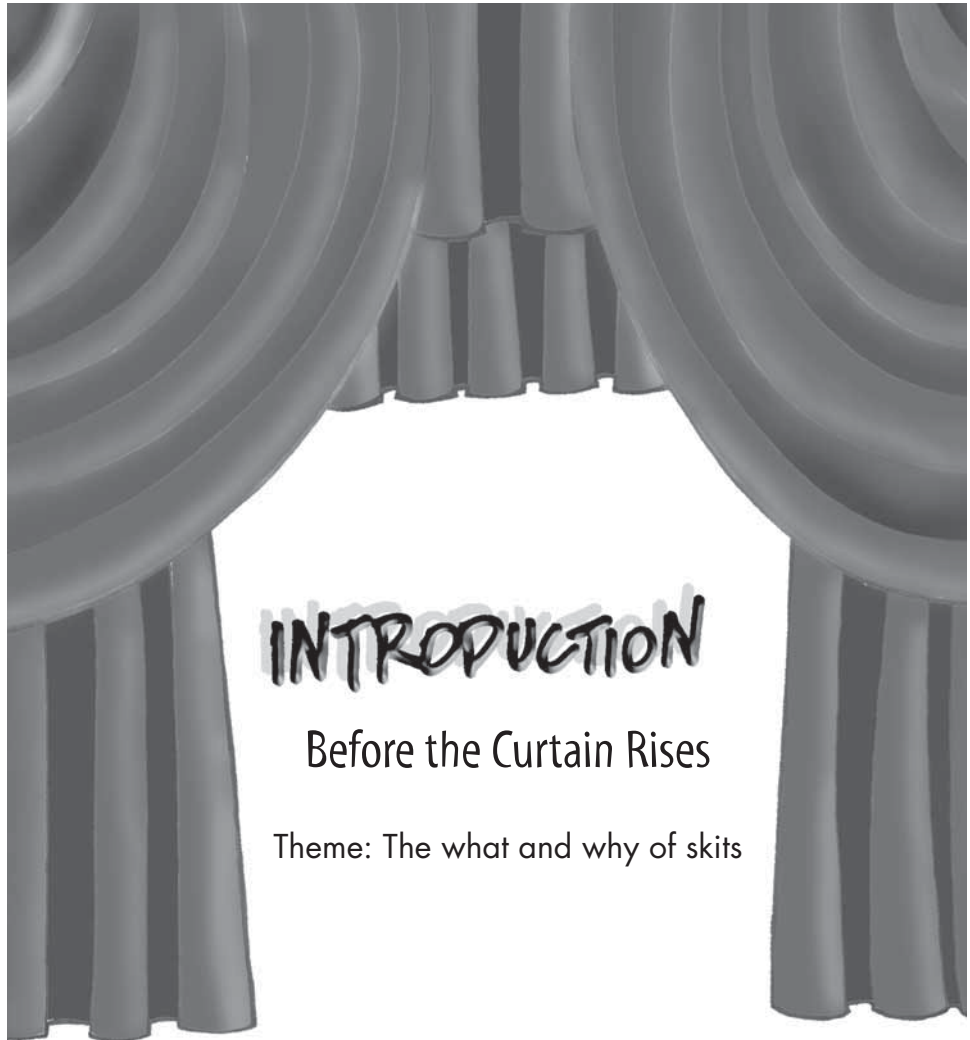
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Are You Ready for a Completely Different Way of Teaching?

Welcome to *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits (That Teach Serious Stuff)*, the book that will help you to engage young people in examining and exploring the Scriptures in a way that will have parents and neighbors wondering, “Is it legal to have so much fun at church?” The answer, of course, is absolutely, positively, *we hope so*.

By now, you are probably wondering, along with those suspicious neighbors and quizzical parents: *Why skits?* Don't our young people act up enough already?!

Let's answer that question with a little memory test:

1. Do you remember reading your high school text on Church history?
2. Do you remember the lecture on the synoptic Gospels?

3. How about the seven deadly sins?
4. The corporal works of mercy?
5. The Ninety-five Theses?
6. What did you get from your true love on the eleventh day of Christmas?

Now try to answer these questions:

1. Would you characterize your first role in a play as that of an animal, a vegetable, or a mineral?
2. Can you still recall the one line you were assigned in the fifth-grade production?
3. Do you secretly crave reliving those silly retreat and camp skits, even as an adult?

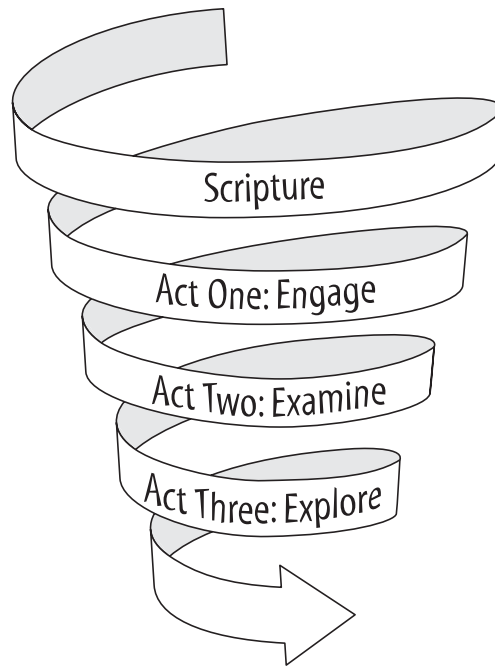
If you are like most people . . . uh, scratch that, because if you *were* like most people, you'd be playing golf or taking a nap instead of reading this intro. The point is, people remember and recall what they *experience* much more easily than what they are told or what they read. If you doubt that, spend 5 minutes listening to any teenager in the universe talk about what he or she remembers from two years ago. Most likely it's *not* going to fit under the category "All-Time Favorite Lecture" or "The Textbook I Continue to Read Each Night." Experience-based learning is a technique we learning theorists refer to as active learning, and for many reasons, it works with young people (it actually works with old people too, but they don't readily admit that).

The fact that you can remember your starring role in your second-grade Christmas pageant—when you got out every line even after tripping and falling on the way to the manger—has a lot to do with the fact that you were actively engaged in that experience. Even though you continue to confuse "starring role" with "being a star," that shining moment is still perched at the top of your memory list, actually beating out your reading of chapter 6 of your Church history text. To a large extent, that is because drama utilizes just about all your senses and puts you "out there," taking a risk onstage, entertaining a crowd, and possibly even teaching a lesson.

To put it simply, *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits* engages the participants in an active form of learning that is hard to beat. It achieves MLP (maximum learning potential) through FLP (full laugh potential). And the skits are so off-the-wall that you will have no problem involving just about everybody in your group one way or another (actually most of the participants will have no choice in the matter!). Best of all, the Ready-to-Go

Scripture skits are just that: ready-to-go. Few props are used, no lines need to be memorized, and no characters have to be developed. In fact, producing them is the closest you'll come, once again, to that memorable experience of your second-grade Christmas pageant—only this time, you are specifically told to fall down!

Behind the Scenes: The Three E's of Learning



There are three acts, or movements, to each session in *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits*. Each act is part of a continuous learning process designed to take the audience to a deeper level, until, by the end of act 3, they are completely hypnotized and under your total control. Before you wake them from that hypnotic state, I recommend that you inform each of them about a different gift you'd like to receive next Christmas. And while you are contemplating your Christmas list, read on to find out a little more about the three E's that make up each session.



Most moments of learning start here, at the point of engaging the learner. Unfortunately many end here as well because we dismiss some of the more creative ideas that grab young people's attention these days, like bungee jumping and Splatball. Act 1 is all about grabbing their attention and holding on to it, but unlike those over-the-top methods, it does not risk their lives (their reputations might be another matter).

Each session begins with the director (a.k.a. you) asking for volunteers from the audience, and quickly moves into the director grabbing volunteers from the audience and assigning them the various roles that are called for in the Scripture skit. The director then tells the actors to wait offstage until their parts are announced, which is just a nice way of telling them to get out of the way until they are needed. Next the director (a.k.a. the one smart enough to be reading the script rather than acting it out) instructs the actors *and* the audience members that each must do *exactly what is read, when it is read*. The director will know when someone is supposed to act because in the script, the action statements are followed by ellipsis points (a.k.a. three dots that look like this: . . .).

Whenever there are ellipsis points, the director pauses—and in some cases needs to repeat the action statement . . . and in some cases needs to repeat the action statement—to signal that the action must be performed before the show can go on. For example, the director might read, “They froze in their tracks . . . ,” and while pausing notice that the actors are still moving. In that case, the director might need to say again, loudly, “*I said, ‘FROZE in their tracks . . . ,’*” while giving them the evil director's eye that literally does freeze them in their tracks.

Because each Scripture skit is a bit different from the biblical story most of us hear at church (okay, okay, *a lot* different), it will not only *keep* the actors paying attention, it will *require* them to pay attention in order to keep up with what is going on and what is being asked of them. The same holds true for the unsuspecting audience members who mistakenly think they are safe because they are not onstage [*insert diabolical laugh here*]. The director knows that *no one is safe* from a Scripture skit, especially the audience. That is because many of the skits require the audience to be fully, consciously, and actively involved and on their best behavior, ready to be called on at any moment to do something really important (kind of like being in church on Sunday!).

Another feature of the Scripture skits is the cue card. This is a set of lines that a specific actor must say out loud, usually in the voice of someone else, such as a famous actor or cartoon character. You might find it helpful, when twisting someone's arm to get her or him to volunteer for a cue card role, to make sure that the person is able and willing to speak in the required voice. On the other hand, it can be really funny to watch a junior high girl discover at the last second that she must speak like Darth Vader. No matter which strategy you choose for maintaining your FLP, when it comes time for a cue card, simply hold the book in front of the actor who must read it and point to the box that the lines appear in. Because these Scripture skits are ready-to-go, they give no time for line memorization or character development—it's improv or bust!



The point of act 1 is to grab the attention of the audience and of the actors. The point of act 2 is to help them continue their star trek, to take them to new frontiers, where no one has gone before. All bad metaphors aside, the real point is to take them to another level of insight regarding the Scripture story they just acted out and its application for life today.

First the audience is asked to hear the story one more time, as it actually appears in the Scriptures. I suggest that, if possible, you use the New American Bible translation. It's always a good idea to have a young person read the passage, and it's always a better idea to make sure that that person *can* read it (as well as pronounce all the words in it). So when you first gather the group together, even before recruiting your actors, ask for someone who would like to do a Scripture reading a little later on, and give that person a Bible with the reading marked, to look over while you recruit the actors. That will do two things: it will give the young person time to familiarize himself or herself with the reading, and it will give you a free hand for holding the *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits* book!

After the proclamation of the reading, a series of commentaries give some important background and insights into the historical origins of the story as well as its meaning for us today. This is the part of the session where the robot from *Lost in Space* would yell mechanically: "*Danger, Will Robinson. Danger.*" Why? Because you may be tempted to begin lecturing your audience back to la-la land. To avoid falling into that old trap, try to spice up these important points a little by *keeping your audience involved*. Each commentary is a little "byte" that is

easily swallowed. Each “byte” is highlighted with a boldfaced subhead. You are strongly encouraged to type or write each of those boldfaced subheads on a separate 8½-by-11-inch sheet of paper and hand the sheets to various actors to hold up for the audience as you briefly describe the commentaries that go with them.

That will accomplish three things: First it will make you appear really well prepared and smart—and, let’s face it, when was the last time someone accused you of being that? Second it will keep the audience involved and offer them a visual image highlighting what you are talking about, thereby increasing the FLP of all those within a 3-mile radius of where you stand. Finally it will provide the entire group with the ideal opportunity to make helpful mental notes that they can refer back to when they go exploring in act 3.



Act 3 brings the audience back to life—theirs! Its purpose is to help them relate the Scripture story and its themes to their lives today. That will enable them to appropriate the meaning of the Scripture story so that they can discover, as Dr. Frankenstein did after creating his monster, that “it’s alive!” For that to happen, the director must help the young people make sense of the powerful story that is unfolding before them. Act 3 provides two phases, or scenes, that you can use to achieve that goal.

The first scene, called “Reflection and Discussion,” usually involves a breakup or two, or three. That is, the large group breaks up into individuals or, most often, small groups of four to six people. (Why four to six? Because five to seven was already taken and six to eight is simply too large a group to go exploring in.) This small-group dynamic is designed to offer everyone an opportunity to speak up about what they have heard and experienced, in order to reflect on what it means for their lives and the world today.

The second scene, or phase, is named “Curtain Call.” This is when the whole large group gather back together to share their thoughts and ideas about the entire experience and the themes that were touched on and what the Scripture passage may be asking of young people today. Each curtain call ends with a moment of reflection and prayer. During this time, it might be a good idea to play some reflective music or a popular song that speaks to the themes covered in the session. Not only can reflective music help the young people to focus internally

on what God may be asking of them, but it could help you to justify purchasing that new CD player you've been eyeing.

A General Warning

The Scripture General has warned that Ready-to-Go products may be harmful to your mental health. Please do not use this book while operating heavy machinery or if you lack a sense of humor. Consistent users are strongly encouraged to take frequent breaks from these skits in order to discover the other half of the secret of life. If you find yourself constantly thinking of new and tricky ways you can use these skits at staff luncheons or at the family dinner table, then please seek professional help immediately—in the form of an acting career.

Here are some other reminders and warnings that you might find helpful as you sink deeper and deeper into the dangerous and dark world of *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits*:

There are three acts for a reason. It might be tempting to enjoy the laughter of a Scripture skit and then pull the curtain closed after act 1. Don't give in to that temptation (Jesus didn't!). The Scripture skits are means to an end, and laughs are not that end. The process is designed to spiral inward, so that each act takes the learner to a deeper, more meaningful level. Most sessions, if all three acts are done, will take 60 to 75 minutes to complete, depending on group size. If you must cut out a section owing to time constraints, cut out the activity portion of act 3 and go immediately to the curtain call. You can also change or skip some of the curtain call questions to suit your group, but please be faithful to concluding each session in prayer and sharing.

Stop and smell the roses. Which is simply an elegant way of saying, "Take . . . your . . . time . . . ," while reading the skit in act 1. Be sure to pause for the action (and laughs) to unfold, so that you can reach that coveted FLP. The best way to do that is to read the skit to yourself out loud (and out of earshot of curious neighbors) *before* using it with a live, and potentially unpredictable, audience. That will give you time to get a feel for the action movements and really funny parts. It will also give you time and space to see if any quick script changes need to be made owing to your group's age or size, members who haven't taken a bath lately, or other special concerns.

Don't forget to KISS. That's right, KISS (Keep it short, silly). This is especially true when you are in the middle of act 2, examining the meaning of the Scripture reading. Make your mantra the same as that of the casting director for the Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*: "The shorter, the better." Trust that the participants will get the point if you keep the point short and sharp.

It's the action, not the actor. The ham. Every group has at least one, and you'll find out who they are in your group soon after you start using these Scripture skits. Hams love to hog the stage—but offering them opportunities to do so is not the purpose of *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits*. The point is not to see who can become the best actor, but to engage as many people as possible in telling and understanding the Scriptures. This means that the hams in your group should not be selected for the leading roles every time, even though they are the ones who will arrive early . . . with chocolate for you . . . when they sense a Scripture skit coming on. To avoid favoritism and give everyone an equal chance to be onstage, you may want to put every person's name into a box, then call out a Scripture skit role and randomly pull a name from the box.

Forget the gender. Unfortunately women are not represented as frequently as men in many of the Scripture stories, so there are more roles for men. In the words of my sixteen-year-old, "IT DOESN'T MATTER!" If Shakespeare could have his male actors play female parts, then, by golly, why can't the director of these skits have female actors play male parts?! Don't worry if a woman is chosen to play Moses or a guy is cast as Delilah (unless he insists on continuing in that role after the skit ends). Some of the best laughs might just occur when the gender roles are purposely switched or drawn at random.

Learn to just say no. No is not a word that we like to use, but it's better if we begin to face the hard truth now: No, we can't act up every moment of every day. Your young people are going to love doing Scripture skits, and you'll become addicted to their screams and cheers to learn more about the Scriptures. At some point, however, you are going to have to convey to the young people that there is more to life than acts 1, 2, and 3. When you reach that point, tell them it's time to stop acting and start playing (and then introduce them to *Ready-to-Go Game Shows!*).

Create your own. Once you have the gist of all this, why not get really creative and assign some other Scripture stories to small groups and lead them in creating their own Ready-to-Go Scripture skits? While some small groups are writing the scripts, have others use Bible commentaries to look up and summarize the important points of the Scripture story, creating a few questions that will invite the whole group to reflect on how the story applies to their lives. Then take turns presenting the skits to the large group over the course of several weeks. Not only will your young people learn 3 trillion percent more this way, you may just inspire someone to become the Cecil B. DeMille of the twenty-first century!

Consider the Possibilities

There are ten sessions in *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits*, each highlighting a different Scripture story and focusing on one or more themes that you can connect with the young people's lives today. Besides using these Scripture skits as sessions unto themselves, think about using them in one or more of the following settings:

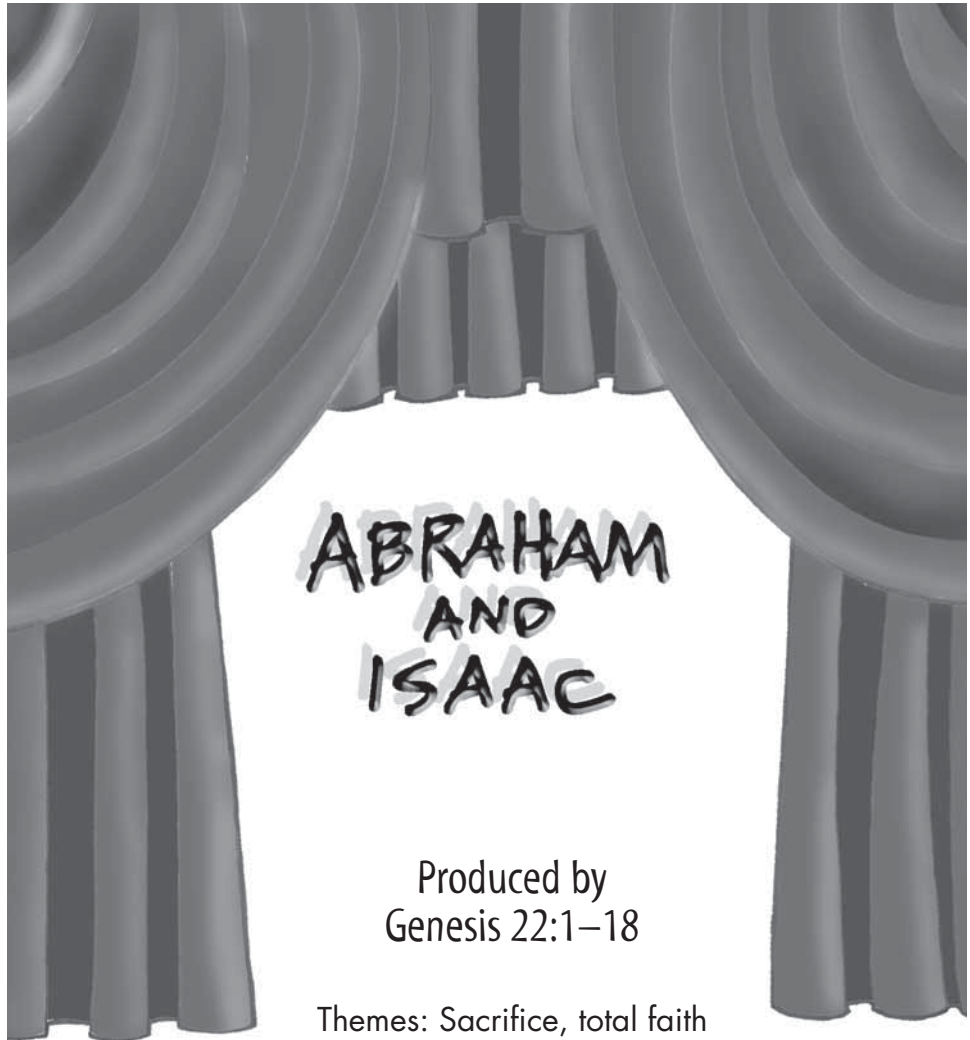
Retreats and lock-ins. What's a retreat without an opportunity to act out? Use *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits* as a creative way to spice up your next retreat or lock-in, and as a strategy for introducing a talk or activity on a theme such as forgiveness, radical faith, or giftedness.

Prayer services. If you want to really pray the message of the reading, use acts 1 and 2 of a Scripture skit to get the group's attention and focus it on the meaning of the Scripture passage. That way, you've got the reading and the sermon all rolled up in a user-friendly experience that will focus the young people powerfully and attentively on prayer.

Parent-teen events. Want to get put on your teens' electronic buddy lists? Then make their parents star in a Ready-to-Go Scripture skit! That's a terrific generation breaker, allowing youth and adults alike to laugh and learn at the same time. There's nothing that breaks down those generational walls quicker than giving teens the chance to watch a parent

impersonate the devil as Elvis Presley or play the star role of the pig in the story of the prodigal son.

Catechist and volunteer training. The best way to show those who teach our young people another way to teach is to, well . . . *show them!* Why not begin your next training session or youth advisory board meeting with one of these skits, and give your youth ministry leaders a firsthand experience of how learning is not only fun but an outrageous act of faith!



Synopsis

This Scripture story invites the audience to consider the extreme risk of faith, the nature of sacrifice, and God's promise to give us fullness of life if we dare to take a risk and follow him.



Cast (11–12 people)

- Abraham
- God
- Isaac
- an altar (two or three people)
- a messenger
- a ram
- two thickets
- two able-bodied servants (see director's note)



The two able-bodied servants will be recruited from the audience during the skit. This should *not* be announced beforehand.

If this is the first skit the group has done . . .

Explain that the characters selected are to do *exactly* what they hear the director read and are to be sure to face the audience during the performance. You should pause at each ellipsis (. . .) to give the characters time to do what you just read. When you come across a cue card, hold the book in front of the character who must read it, and point to the box containing the lines while emphasizing the voice in which it is to be read. Take your time and let the laughs roll!

Every time the name Isaac is read, Abraham must jump up and down. Be sure to wait for Abraham to do that before continuing with the story.

Skit

One day, as Abraham was outside attempting to stand on his head, . . . he heard a voice that sounded like the Godfather's say: . . .



Cue: God

Abraham, get off the ground, find your son, your only son—
The one for whom you jump up and down and shout “
Hallelujah” every time you
Hear his name spoken.
The one named Isaac! . . . Yes, Isaac! . . .
I want you to offer him to me as a sacrifice.

Abe was a little distressed. . . . Okay, incredibly distressed. He looked defeated, . . . felt dejected, . . . and became delirious with grief. . . . But Abe loved God . . . and went to get his son, his only son, Isaac. . . . Abe found Isaac . . . as the boy was attempting a cartwheel. . . . Abe told Isaac . . . to pack his bags because they were going on a father-son outing, . . . and reminded him to bring a knife . . . —no, not that one, the BIG knife! . . .

Abe grabbed two able-bodied servants from the audience. . . . They were twins and always argued over who was cuter. . . . Abe and his son and the servants journeyed for a long time, walking in circles. . . . Then they began walking in squares, . . . and finally a parallelogram. . . .

When they arrived at the foot of a mountain, Abraham pointed to the top and told Isaac . . . to run in place to prepare for their difficult hike. . . . Isaac . . . ran fast, . . . faster, . . . and faster, . . . until he tripped over his feet and fell. . . .

Abe told the two able-bodied servants, who were now arguing over who smelled better, . . . to begin chopping wood to make a fire. While one chopped, . . . the other hopped. . . . Then the other one chopped, . . . while the first one hopped. . . . Chop, . . . hop, . . . hop, . . . chop, . . . chop, . . . hop, . . . chop, . . . hop faster, . . . and faster, . . . until they both fell over from exhaustion. . . .

Abe went over to Isaac, . . . who was still trying to get up off the ground, and helped him up. . . . Abe looked Isaac . . . in the eye . . . —no, the other one— . . . and pointed to the top of the mountain. . . . As Isaac . . . was looking, Abe quickly took off his very smelly shoe . . . —no, the other one— . . . and held it under Isaac's . . . nose. . . . Immediately Isaac . . . passed out and fell into Abe's arms. . . . Abe lifted him high, . . . over his ankles, . . . all the way up to his knees. Then Abe placed him upon the altar, which was now moving into view at center stage. . . .

Abe went to get the knife, . . . the really BIG knife, . . . and dragged it over to Isaac. . . . He raised it up over his head, . . . but it was so heavy, it toppled Abraham over backward. . . . He jumped up, flexed his biceps, . . . and let out a loud roar. . . . Then, using every ounce of his strength, he raised the knife up, and he was ready to thrust it into Isaac, . . . his beloved son, Isaac, . . . whom he adored, . . . when a messenger's voice came from over his shoulder . . . —the other shoulder. . . . The voice said: . . .