

Adapted by Y York - Based on the book by  
Janet Taylor Lisle - Directed by Linda Hartzell  
Ages 8 and up/Grades 3 and up  
February 9 - March 25, 2007

# Afternoon Of the Elves

## SYNOPSIS

Hillary, Alison, and Jane are three best friends who do everything together and everything the same. As the girls plan their next way to become famous, Sara Kate Connelly says she needs to talk to Hillary, in private. Sara Kate is weird. She doesn't dress right, and she doesn't do her hair right. But Sara Kate is Hillary's backyard neighbor and really needs to tell her something. Hillary agrees to talk with her because at least that will make her go away. She isn't prepared for Sara Kate's big news, though. Sara Kate tells her that she has elves living in her backyard. She's seen their village, and she wants to show it to Hillary. Of course, Hillary's parents, being fastidious suburbanites, worry about the state of Sara Kate's house and yard. Hillary is determined to visit the village. And there, in the midst of the mess of the Connelly backyard is an orderly, tidy little elf village with houses, lanes, and even a well. It's a real neighborhood! At first, Hillary is skeptical, how does she know elves really built all this? But Sara Kate makes a lot of sense with her explanations, and Hillary begins to feel the presence of the elves around her. The girls laugh and play, until Hillary notices a figure in an upstairs window.

Even after Alison and Jane make fun of her for believing in elves, Hillary still returns to help Sara Kate keep the village in order. It is on one such afternoon that Hillary gets a glimpse of Sara Kate's real life—Sara Kate has to go all the way into the city by herself to run errands for her mother. Hillary's parents would never let her do that. The lessons Hillary learns from Sara Kate—how to keep your electricity turned on, where to get free water, how to get phone service—make Hillary's parents uncomfortable, and they ask her to stop spending time with the neighbor girl. But Hillary realizes how lucky she is, not having to worry about things like grocery shopping, getting medicine, or fixing stopped up toilets. She realizes that not all little girls are as lucky as she is. And this dawning insight makes her see Alison and Jane in a new, and unflattering, light.

After Sara Kate misses a few days of school, Hillary becomes worried and goes to check on things. This is the first time she's been inside the Connelly home, and the first time she sees Sara Kate with her sick mother. Sara Kate throws Hillary out, after exacting a promise of silence; Hillary can't even tell her parents what's going on. With the weight of this secret on her young shoulders, Hillary finally really gets it—Sara Kate has to take care of herself and her mother, all alone. When Hillary's mom comes looking for her, she too sees what has been happening in the Connelly house and takes control of the situation. With Sara Kate being shipped off to her father and her mother sent to a hospital, all that Sara Kate feared, all that she worked so hard to prevent, is coming true. These two brave, young girls learn that every child needs an adult to look after them, and they all deserve the comfort and safety of home.

## BOOKLIST

Prepared by  
Ann Dalton,  
The Seattle Public Library

### For Children

*Nell's Elf*

Jane Cowen-Fletcher

*The Hundred Dresses*

Eleanor Estes

*The Secret Life of Fairies*

Penelope Larkspur

*Bridge to Terabithia*

Katherine Paterson

*Michael Rosen's Sad Book*

Michael Rosen

### Spotlight

*Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry*

Bebe Moore Campbell

Children who live with a parent experiencing mental illness need compassion and understanding from family and friends. This picture book shows how one young girl learns to cope with the embarrassment and pain her mother's sickness causes.

### For Adults

*The Complete Guide to Faeries and Magical Beings: Explore the Mystical Realm of the Little People*

Cassandra Eason

### Spotlight

*The Glass Castle: A Memoir*

Jeanette Walls

In this harrowing memoir, the author describes her childhood with parents only marginally capable of caring for her and her siblings.



# ELFLORE

People of all cultures and times have sought answers to difficult questions through legend and fantasy. Elves have been part of human mythology since the earliest European civilizations. These fantastical creatures are enduring for the universal human truths they can help us discover.

The earliest elves, from Norse and Scandinavian folklore, are full size human beings that possess a strange beauty and magical powers. Originally, they were considered minor gods of nature and fertility. In early Germanic folklore they were pranksters, and according to legend, they would cause diseases and give people bad dreams. In fact, one German word for nightmare is *alpdrucken* (ALF-droo-ken), which means "elf-pressure." These legends serve to help explain the awesome power and influence of the natural world over human life.

English folktales of the early modern period typically portray elves as small, elusive people with mischievous personalities. In Victorian literature, elves usually appeared as tiny men and women with pointed ears and stocking caps. And modern fantasy literature has revived elves as a race of semi-divine beings of human stature.

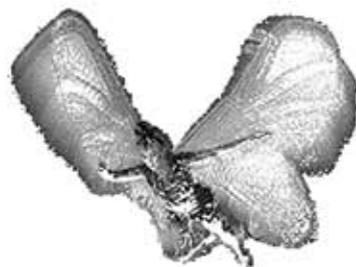
The intense Norse-style elves of human size, reused in Poul Anderson's fantasy novel *The Broken Sword* published in 1954, were the vanguard of the modern fantasy elves. Anderson's creations were overshadowed by the much more famous elves of J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien had little use for Shakespearean fairy portrayals or for Victorian diminutive fairy prettiness and whimsy. His elves were also god-like and human-sized, like those of the Norse legends. Tolkien conceived a race of beings similar to humans but fairer, wiser, with greater spiritual powers, keener senses, and a closer empathy with nature. Perhaps they were what Tolkien felt humans should aspire to be, a kind of role model for us all.

The 1960s we began to see elves used in a whole new way. Advertisers use elves to sell cookies and other products of domestic bliss. Although we may not "believe" in their existence the way people once did, there is still something appealing about a race of little people secretly working and living in the small empty spaces all around us. The diligent, hard-working version of the self we believe we, too, should be.

In *Afternoon of the Elves*, Sara Kate has created a whole world of elves in her imagination. Her elves are better than she is and can follow the rules she wants to follow herself, not those she knows deep down she must abide. "Human rules don't work for elves," she tells Hillary. She wants to explain the unexplainable, to bring order to the chaos of her life. Sara Kate uses her elf world to find a friend and to try and cope with an impossible situation. Humans, with the help of the elves, have been doing the same thing for thousands of years.



*A depiction of a Norse elf, with its human-sized stature and appearance.*



*A British elf - small, winged, and believed to be mischievous.*

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## DISCUSSION QUESTION/ ACTIVITY:

Ask your class if they believe in elves. What are their elves like? Do they look human? Do they play tricks on people or try to help them? Have them draw a picture of their elf and write a description of how their elf lives. Does it live in the forest or around people? Does it eat food like people do or something special, like dew drops? Post the drawings in your room to create your own elf village.

# SCT AND WINDMILL PERFORMING ARTS



Rebecca Ann Rothstein and Annette Tontonghi from Seattle Children's Theatre's 1993 production of *Afternoon of the Elves*.

The production of *Afternoon of the Elves* at Seattle Children's Theatre is an exciting cultural exchange between Windmill Performing Arts from Adelaide, Australia, and SCT—it is a testament to the breadth and universality of the themes in the play.

In 2000, a group of business and government leaders from Adelaide, were visiting Seattle on a cultural exchange. Naturally, they visited Seattle Center and took a tour of SCT's facilities. The entire group was astounded that such an amazing place existed for the sole purpose of producing theatre for young audiences.

Once back in Australia, inspired by what they had seen and learned, two key leaders of the South Australia government went to work to create Australia's first theatre dedicated to creating work for young audiences. The norm in Australia is for smaller theatre companies to tour around the country,

visiting existing theatre halls. In most cases, these halls do not produce their own work. In 2001, these same government leaders secured the approval of 1.5 million dollars from the South Australian state budget for the establishment of Windmill Performing Arts.

The next step was to find an artistic director to lead the company. That search led them to Kate Fowler. Kate had been very successful producing festivals of all kinds, especially children's arts festivals. In 2003, Fowler visited SCT and met artistic director Linda Hartzell. Seeing the work produced at SCT, Kate realized that back home they were expert in using clowning and physicality, a wonderful means of communicating diverse themes, but it would only take them so far. She wanted to see her company tackle a two-act "well-made" dramatic script.

A perfect collaboration, Hartzell and Fowler decided, was the play with which SCT opened their Charlotte Martin Theatre in 1993, *Afternoon of the Elves* by Y York. The script is a classic well-made play, tackling difficult issues with compelling characters, and has always been one of Linda's favorites. Hartzell even flew to Adelaide to direct the first Windmill production of it in July 2004.

It was incredibly well received. Since that time, two different adult theaters in Australia have booked in Windmill's production. The first was the State Theatre's in Adelaide, and the latest was the Sydney Theatre Company's, easily the largest and most prestigious theatre in all of Australia. This latter production now comes across the ocean to you here at SCT.

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## ACTIVITY:

A theatre for young people was something the people of Australia never thought would work. Once they saw SCT, they realized that maybe they were missing out on something. But before creating Windmill Performing Arts, the government officials in Australia had to make sure that the people in their city really wanted a theatre especially for young people. Write a letter to Windmill Performing Arts telling them why you think a theatre like Seattle Children's Theatre is a smart investment for their community. Feel free to send those letters to us here at SCT: Attn: Torrie McDonald, 201 Thomas St, Seattle, WA 98109

## CHILD NEGLECT

At 64%, child neglect is the most frequently identified type of child maltreatment in the United States. It is estimated at 917,200 cases or an estimated incidence rate of 14.6 per 1,000 children.

### Definition

A condition in which a caretaker responsible for the child, either deliberately or by extraordinary inattentiveness, permits the child to experience avoidable present suffering and/or fails to provide one or more of the ingredients generally deemed essential for developing a person's physical, intellectual, and emotional capacities

### Types of Neglect

**Physical neglect** – accounts for the majority of cases of maltreatment. The definition includes the refusal of or extreme delay in seeking necessary health care; child abandonment; inadequate supervision; rejection of a child leading to expulsion from the home; and failing to adequately provide for the child's safety and physical and emotional needs. Physical neglect can severely impact a child's development by causing failure to thrive; malnutrition; serious illnesses; physical harm in the form of cuts, bruises, and burns due to lack of supervision and a lifetime of low self-esteem.

**Educational neglect** – occurs when a child is allowed to engage in chronic truancy, or is of mandatory school age but not enrolled in school or receiving needed special educational training. Educational neglect can lead to underachievement in acquiring necessary basic skills, dropping out of school, and/or continually disruptive behavior.

**Emotional neglect** – includes such actions as chronic or extreme spousal abuse in the child's presence, allowing a child to use drugs or alcohol, refusal or failure to provide needed psychological care, or constant belittling and withholding of affection. This pattern of behavior can lead to poor self-image, alcohol or drug abuse, destructive behavior, and even suicide. Severe neglect of infants can result in the infant failing to grow and thrive and may even lead to infant death.

**Medical neglect** – is the failure to provide appropriate health care for a child although financially able to do so. In some cases, a parent or caretaker will withhold traditional medical care during the practice of religious beliefs. These cases generally do not fall under the definition of medical neglect, however, some states will obtain a court order forcing medical treatment of a child in order to save a child's life or prevent life-threatening injury resulting from the lack of treatment. Medical neglect can result in poor overall health and compounded medical problems.

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43 percent of identified child neglect is physical neglect, which includes children living in unsafe housing, not being fed nutritionally adequate meals, being consistently without adequate clothing, and receiving grossly inadequate care for personal hygiene. The second largest category of neglect is inadequate supervision of children (36.6 percent) and failure or delay in providing health care (20.8 percent).

## Causes and Characteristics

- **Depression**  
Depressed mothers are more likely than non-depressed mothers to be hostile, rejecting, and indifferent toward their children and to be neglectful, especially with respect to feeding and supervision. 60 percent of neglectful mothers versus only 33 percent of a comparison group of low-income non-neglecting mothers had a "clinically significant" problem with depression.
- **Substance Abuse**  
Abuse of alcohol or drugs is often present in cases of child neglect. 80 - 90 percent of the children removed from their homes for severe child abuse or neglect had at least one parent with a history of alcoholism.
- **Family Composition**  
Most neglectful families are single-parent families. The absence of the father, in the majority of neglectful families, means lower income and less tangible resources to provide for children's needs.
- **Family Size**  
Chronic neglectful families tend to be *large* families with fewer resources to meet basic needs than other families. Numerous studies have discovered that neglectful families on the average have more children than non-neglecting families.
- **Family Interaction Patterns**  
Patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication between neglectful parents and children have been characterized as infrequent and predominantly negative.

Unemployment, which causes psychological and economic stress, is frequent in neglectful families. Neglectful families are less likely to be involved in church or other formal organizations that might be sources of tangible or psychological support. Neglectful families tend to live in impoverished neighborhoods and view their neighborhoods as less helpful and less supportive than do non-neglectful parents. Chronically neglecting families are viewed as deviant, even by their similarly impoverished neighbors, who avoid social contact with them. Families of color, who are over-represented in child neglect statistics, must also cope with the stress of racial prejudice in many communities.

Interestingly, the ethnic and cultural differences in child maltreatment are small or nonexistent when families have adequate economic and social resources, but the combination of racial discrimination and poverty places unusual stress on families of color, frequently overwhelming their coping resources.

## Impact

Child victims of neglect fail to develop secure psychological attachments as infants, and this seriously handicaps their subsequent development. Neglected preschool children demonstrate lack of readiness for learning, behavior problems, and less active interaction with peers. School-aged neglected children do poorly in school, but the connection between delinquency and abuse is less clear. Neglected children under age 3 are at high risk for child fatalities.

## What Adults Can Do For Kids

Children and young adults often share their problems and troubles with same-age friends. This type of support is crucial to a child's sense of well-being and acceptance. As caring adults, we have an opportunity to create a space where children feel safe enough to share their troubles with us, so we can provide additional support and resources for them.

One of the most important things we can do to help create a safe space for children to share is to accept them—just as they are. We can show this by how we listen and talk with them. Children who feel we truly accept them as individuals are more likely to share their feelings and problems with us. It is important to remember that children are looking for our acceptance, even if we may not always perceive this or remember this. Below are some suggestions on how to create this safe space for children to begin to share their troubles.

### Creating a safe space for Children to Speak

**Children May Need Help Expressing Themselves** Children may have a hard time expressing their feelings through words. We can help them by listening, paraphrasing, and clarifying how they feel. Example: "I think I hear you saying you are confused. Everyone feels confused at times; it's normal. When we feel more than one thing at a time, we often feel confused. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

**Children Need to Tell Their Stories** Let children tell you about their adventures without interruption. They need practice talking about themselves and receiving praise when they finish. Listening to them and praising them will build self-esteem. Interruptions and criticism close the door to communication.

**Communicate Acceptance** While we may not approve of a child's behavior, it is important we communicate acceptance. We accept Haley, but don't accept her pushing another student in line or teasing another child. Focus on the **behavior** you seek to improve or change, and not the child.

**Speak at Their Level** Eye contact improves communication. Adults don't always realize how we look to children. Bend or sit down to be at their eye level when you speak with children.

**Listen Attentively** Children often want our attention to share their excitement—but maybe only for 30 seconds. If you are too busy at the moment, schedule a time to talk later and follow through on it.

**Use Door Openers** Use open-ended statements to invite children to share more with you. This ensures children know you are listening and that you care about them. Examples include: I see. Oh, really? Tell me more! Say that again, I want to be sure I understand you. How about that!

**Use "You" Messages** By helping children express bad feelings openly, we acknowledge and encourage them to express their problems. Often this is all a child wants—to know that their hurt has been heard. Examples include: You're sad because your dog died. You're feeling upset because you can't stay out longer for recess. You must be feeling mad, and it's okay to feel mad sometimes.