

The H2O Project

a short play by Rebecca McDonald

Characters:

NARRATOR

PERSON 1 – a woman in a developing country

PERSON 2 – a child in a developing country

PERSON 3 – a child in a developing country

PERSON 4 – a person in the United States, acting as a student in scene 2 and as a parent in scene 4

PERSON 5 – a student in the United States

BELL RINGER – could be a volunteer from audience

Scene 1

If using a volunteer as bell ringer, choose and instruct them just prior to rise. Bell ringer stands or sits downstage left. The narrator stands downstage center, reading from a black folder. Persons 1, 2, 3 are stage right. Persons 4 and 5 are stage left. All except the narrator and bell ringer face upstage.

When ready to begin, BELL RINGER rings the bell and starts timing. BELL RINGER watches the timer and rings the bell once every 15 seconds throughout the play, keeping track of number of rings.

NARRATOR: Every 15 seconds, a child dies due to a lack of clean water. Every time you hear the bell, another child will have died from not having clean water.

One billion people in the world don't have clean water to drink. One billion. If you sat down to count from one to one billion, you would be counting for 95 years. One billion very important people in the world don't have clean water to drink.

(PERSON 1, 2, 3 turn to face audience. In this scene, PERSON 1 must be a female.)

PERSON 2: *(acting as a child)* I am so thirsty! I really need something to drink.

PERSON 1: *(acting as a mom)* I'm sorry, we have nothing to drink. I'll have to go get us some water.

PERSON 3: *(acting as a child)* But you are gone for such a long time when you get water. I'm thirsty now!

PERSON 1: Hush, child. I'll be back in five or six hours. You can play with your sister [brother] until I get back.

PERSON 2: But we don't want to stay here. We want something to drink! Let us come with you!

PERSON 1: You know that you can't. It is a long and dangerous walk. What happens when you walk for so many hours?

PERSON 3: *(sheepishly)* We get tired of walking.

PERSON 1: Yes, and then you'll want me to carry you. *(Picks up water container.)* Do you know how much this weighs when it's full of water?

PERSON 2: I know, it's over 40 pounds.

PERSON 1: That's right, so if you get tired, I couldn't carry you and the water, too.

PERSON 3: But Mama, why do you have to walk so far just for water?

PERSON 1: I'm sorry, but the only place we can find water is several miles away. I'll walk as fast as I can, I promise.

PERSON 3: OK, but that water tastes terrible anyway.

PERSON 2: *(shushing PERSON 3)* I know it tastes bad, but at least it's water. Now listen to Mama. It will be OK; she'll be back later.

PERSON 3: I am so thirsty! How are we supposed to wait six hours just for a drink of water?

ALL on stage right turn to face upstage and freeze.

Scene 2

NARRATOR: People in the United States drink more carbonated soft drinks than people in any other country in the world. Last year Americans spent 74 billion dollars buying soft drinks alone. Seventy-four billion dollars...in one year... on sodas.

(PERSON 4, 5 turn to face audience.)

PERSON 4: *(acting as a student)* I am so thirsty! I really need something to drink.

PERSON 5: *(acting same age)* Well, go get us something from the soda machine.

PERSON 4: I don't want to walk all the way downstairs just to go to the soda machine. You go.

PERSON 5: I don't wanna go. There's a water fountain across the hall, you know.

PERSON 4: Nah, I don't want plain old water. C'mon, let's both go the soda machine. You got some money?

PERSON 5: *(pulling money out of pocket)* Geez, I only have a ten dollar bill. Do you have change?

PERSON 4: *(pulling money out of pocket)* Yeah, yeah, here's a 5 and 5 ones. Now come on. I'm dying for a drink! *(They walk to imaginary soda machine. Several beats as they walk.)*

PERSON 4: *(Pantomimes putting dollar into machine.)* Oh, come on! It won't take my dollar! What a pain. *(Pantomimes again.)* OK, there it goes. Let's see, what kind of soda do I want? *(Gets soda.)*

PERSON 5: *(Pantomimes getting soda. Opens bottle or can and it sprays out. Sips soda frantically.)* Geez! It sprayed all over me. I hate it when that happens. These stupid machines are a pain, huh?

PERSON 4: Yeah, a real pain.

ALL on stage left turn to face upstage and freeze.

Scene 3

NARRATOR: In developing countries, a lack of clean water often prevents adults from working, because they spend most of their day walking to find water. 40 billion working hours are spent carrying water each year in Africa. Often, the only water they can find and carry back is dirty and contaminated.

(PERSON 2, 3 turn to face audience. PERSON 3 sits on ground. PERSON 1 is just offstage.)

PERSON 3: It's been almost five hours! I'm so thirsty... when is Mama coming back?

PERSON 2: I don't know. Just sit still and try not to think about it.

PERSON 3: I can't help it. We haven't had anything to drink all day long, and it's so hot.

PERSON 2: You won't be so hot if you stop complaining! Now let's sit here and think about drinking the water Mama will bring us.

PERSON 1: *(a beat, then entering from stage right with container)* I'm back!

PERSON 2 and 3: Hooray! Water!

PERSON 1:*(very tired)* I walked as fast as I could, children. Now here, have a drink.

PERSON 1 pantomimes pouring water into smaller water containers of PERSON 2 and 3.

PERSON 3: Eewww! Look at this water – it's so dirty. *(takes a sip)* I told you it would taste bad.

PERSON 2: Yeah, it's brown and dirty, but at least it's water. Let's just be glad we got some water today.

(PERSON 2 and 3 pantomime drinking, making faces as they drink. PERSON 1 watches sadly.)

NARRATOR: A human can survive for a month or more without eating food, but only a week or so without drinking water.

ALL on stage right turn to face upstage and freeze.

Scene 4

NARRATOR: The United States spends eighteen billion dollars a year on coffee. 54% of American adults drink coffee every day, and 30 million of them drink specialty coffee beverages every day, which cost an average of about \$3 each.

(PERSON 4 turns to face audience. PERSON 5 is just offstage.)

PERSON 4: *(as a parent)* Hurry up, we're going to be late for school!

PERSON 5: *(as a student)* All right, I'm coming in a minute!

PERSON 4: If you don't hurry, we won't have time to drive through The Coffee Shop on the way.

PERSON 5: *(stepping on to stage)* Enough said – here I am!

PERSON 4: Thank you for hurrying. You know how I am if I don't have my morning coffee.

PERSON 5: *(rolling eyes)* Believe me, I know! Can't live without your iced double venti mocha, huh?

PERSON 4: Speak for yourself, "Miss-Gotta-Have-My-Grande-Caramel-Mochadoodle".

PERSON 5: Yeah, yeah, OK. Let's just get going.

(Pantomime getting in car, getting coffee cups from drive-thru.)

PERSON 4: You know, maybe our morning trip to The Coffee Shop might not be such a good idea after all.

PERSON 5: Whaddya mean? Why not? Worried about the calories?

PERSON 4: Well, no, not exactly.

PERSON 5: Then what?

PERSON 4: Well, I was just thinking that maybe we could save some money by drinking coffee at home instead.

PERSON 5: Well, my coffee is \$3 and yours is only \$2. That's only \$5 a day. Which is, umm, \$25 a week. So that's... \$100 a month?!

PERSON 4: Wow! We spend \$100 a month on coffee? I didn't even realize it was that much!

PERSON 5: Hmm, maybe you're right. Maybe we shouldn't buy coffee every day.

PERSON 4: But then what could we do with all the money we'd save?

ALL on stage left turn to face upstage and freeze.

Scene 5

NARRATOR: At any given time, half of the people in the developing world are in the hospital with diseases that came from drinking contaminated water. Because of the poor sanitation, the water contains bacteria which can causes illnesses such as cholera.

(PERSON 1 turns to face audience.)

PERSON 1: Ooo, my stomach hurts so much. I think I'm going to throw up again. The doctor said that if I stop having diarrhea, and if my fever goes down, then I might be OK. He said that I got this sickness – this cholera – from drinking bad water. I hope my cholera goes away soon... *(lies down and curls up, clutching stomach; freeze)*

NARRATOR: Sometimes contaminated water has a worm in it called the Guinea worm. The larva of the worm goes into the stomach, where it becomes an adult worm that can grow up to 3 feet long. About a year after the person is infected, the worm starts to come out of the skin through a very painful blister. It can take weeks for the worm to leave the body.

(PERSON 2 turns to face audience.)

PERSON 2: This horrible worm! It hurts more than anything has ever hurt me before! *(Screams in pain.)* My leg feels like it's on fire. I must go try to cool it off by getting in the water of the river. *(Pantomimes going to water, soaking leg.)*

NARRATOR: When people with an emerging worm go into the water, more larvae are released and the water is contaminated all over again. Guinea worm disease could be stopped with water hygiene education and with access to clean water.

(PERSON 2 freezes in position of pain.)

NARRATOR: Contaminated water can also cause trachoma, an eye infection that can cause blindness. A person can get trachoma over and over, and each time the infection worsens. In the later stages, the eyelids turn inward and the eyelashes rub on the eye, which leads to scarring and blindness. In the industrialized world, trachoma had disappeared by the 1950's. In developing countries today, 41 million people have an active infection and 8 million people have been blinded.

(PERSON 3 turns to face audience.)

PERSON 3: My eyes hurt so much. I don't understand what is happening. I can hardly see. My eyes have gotten infected before, and every time they would get better. Now I've come to this doctor, and he said I might go blind. He said my son has the same eye disease, too. *(pause)* I pray that my son doesn't go blind. The doctor also said we might not have this disease if we had been able to wash our hands and faces with clean water.

I don't remember the last time I saw clean water.

(PERSON 3 freezes with hands over eyes.)

Scene 6

NARRATOR: The average American uses 50 to 100 gallons of water a day, not only for drinking, but also for bathing and showering, washing clothes and dishes, and using toilets. The average person in the developing world has to live on less than 5 gallons a day.

(PERSON 4 and 5 turn to face audience.)

PERSON 4: Hey, the movie starts in 5 minutes.

PERSON 5: Yeah, but I want some snacks.

PERSON 4: OK, I guess I'll get something to drink.

(Pantomime getting in line, looking at menu boards.)

PERSON 4: Man, it costs \$5 for a large soda!

PERSON 5: Well, then get a bottle of water – it's only \$2.

PERSON 4: \$2 for a bottle of water?! I think I'll just ask for a cup of ice water – that's free.

PERSON 5: Yeah, but your mom gave you money for a drink. What are you going to do with that money now?

(PERSON 4 and 5 freeze, both looking at money in hand while NARRATOR speaks.)

NARRATOR: In the United States, a bottle of water costs an average of \$1 per bottle. The same amount of tap water costs less than a penny. In 2008, people in the United States bought 8.6 billion gallons worth of bottled water.

(PERSON 4 and 5 stay facing front and immediately start next scene.)

Scene 7

PERSON 5: So at school today we learned about something called The H2O Project.

PERSON 4: What's that?

PERSON 5: Well, for two weeks we only drink water. Any money we would have spent on sodas, coffee, energy drinks and all that stuff we give to the H2O Project.

PERSON 4: Hey, someone at my office was talking about that project. They use that money to build wells in developing countries, right?

PERSON 5: Yeah, and then a whole village can have clean water to drink.

PERSON 4: So for only two weeks we just drink water?

PERSON 5: Yup. And we keep track of how much we would have normally spent on other drinks.

PERSON 4: Hmm, I guess I can just fill up a container of water to take to work each day, instead of buying bottles from the machine.

PERSON 5: Right. And I can take a container of water to basketball practice, instead of buying a soda or Gatorade.

PERSON 4: This will be great – I bet we can save a lot of money in two weeks!

(PERSON 4 and 5 turn around and freeze. Or, if using water well prop, they go get well and place it stage right, then return to their places stage left.)

Scene 8

NARRATOR: All of the money raised by The H2O Project is used to provide clean water in developing countries. Sometimes as little as one dollar gives someone clean water for a whole year!

(ALL on stage turn to face audience. All speak directly to audience.)

PERSON 5: Wow, I saved \$30 for The H2O Project in two weeks.

PERSON 4: That's enough money to give three people clean water for life.

PERSON 1: Oh, this is so exciting! They are building a well right here in our village!

PERSON 2: That means we can have clean water to drink every day!

PERSON 3: And the water will taste good and not make us horribly sick.

PERSON 1: And I won't have to spend all day walking to get water.

NARRATOR: *(to bell ringer)* How many times did you ring the bell?

BELL RINGER: *(Announce number of rings.)* While you were watching this play, _____ children died from a lack of clean water.

PERSON 4, 5: Take two weeks and impact the world.

PERSON 1, 2, 3: Take two weeks and impact the world.

NARRATOR: In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, "Jesus said to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father...for I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, even as you did it to one of these brothers and sisters of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' "

ALL IN UNISON: "Give it up so you can give it away. Drink water. Build wells. Save lives. The H2O Project."

ALL FREEZE

Props:

hand bell or chime
timer or watch with second hand

If desired:

dollar bills
soda bottles or cans
prop soda machine
large plastic water container
2 smaller water containers
2 coffee shop coffee cups
prop water well

Production Notes:

The only props truly necessary are a bell or chime, and a timer or watch. If using a volunteer bell-ringer, be sure they know how to correctly strike the bell or chime; they should let it resonate in between strikes. You can also make a note card with their line for them to read aloud at the end of the play: "While you were watching this play, ____ children died from a lack of clean water."

All other props are optional and can be pantomimed if desired. If performing where permissible, water can be placed in the container and actually poured into the actor's hands. Food coloring or mud can be added for effect.

The soda of Person 5 can be shaken just prior to the play for effect, again if liquids are permissible on stage.

Sets and costumes are not necessary but can be added if desired. Costume suggestions include jeans and plain T-shirts, or solid black attire.

Statistics obtained in 2011 from the websites of The H2O Project, the World Health Organization, Wikipedia, the EPA, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, and others.