

CAMPFIRE

A Conjure Play experience for wee-ones and not-so-wee-ones

By: Brendon Allen

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Note to the reader/performer & talking points for families

This play is best performed as a story time or weekend play experience. The performance is meant to inspire discussions, activities and fun on a fall day when maybe you do not have any plans yet or maybe it's a rainy day experience. It is packed with suggested meals, and snacks to cook over an open fire or a barbecue. This play tries to give you a chance to conjure outside, even if you are in the city.

If you do not have access to a laptop or tablet that all the actors can read from, you can print as many copies of the script as you may need. This play works best with a cast of three, but can be done in any way you choose. Each scene does not go beyond three characters speaking, so you can share all the parts, including reading stage directions. All roles are open to any gender.

This play presents the opportunity for the actors to engage in exploring discussions on getting outside, privilege, homelessness issues during the pandemic and beyond, the complicated history of Scouting and how people can get involved in tangible change in the face of systemic problems. It is a story about admitting that you do not know everything and often we need to rethink how we see things to help out those who need us the most.

For parents and teachers, there are some discussions in this play about a few topics that benefit from some greater context. There are discussions on homelessness, addiction, racism, homophobia and how we commemorate people such as Robert Baden-Powell, when perhaps we should not.

Here are some links to help inform and expand these conversations:

[Challenges with homelessness during the pandemic](#)

[Tangible ways to help those in need during a pandemic](#)

[How to discuss addiction with kids](#)

[The complicated past of Robert Baden-Powell](#)

[The Jungle Books racist foundations and what conversations come from reading](#)

This is not a play about individual kids solving homelessness. This is a play about kids seeing need in their community and doing what they can in the moment. It is a play about courageously having those conversations that we often shy away from or ignore. When a child sees a collection of tents in a park, the issue is right there and often discussions about why people may be homeless and moreover what the citizenry and the system should be doing to help are avoided. Children have the capacity to understand these problems, and it is in exposing them that we all can work towards more humane next steps.

Campfire is a play about sparking systemic change, while encouraging communities to include young people in this journey. This is not just about donating things to a food bank, but that can be a first step. *Campfire* encourages adults to connect at a municipal level and bring their children in on these discussions. This work of building new solutions, especially when it comes to accessible housing is complex, but it is essential. At the same time, there is the work of dismantling old systems and ideas. This play strives to show that it is possible and often our children are more adept at it than grown ups. This is not a “saviour-complex” play, it is a “talk to your kids about the problems” play.

Whether we like it or not, our young people inherit the choices and systems we put in place. If they are not involved in understanding it and challenging it, they will develop apathy and disconnection. I think it is fair to say, we have enough of that already.

I hope this piece offers one way of thinking about how much our kids are paying attention to what's happening around them, how much they want to help, and how much grown-ups should be paying more attention to all of this.

Enjoy this Conjure Play and break a leg!

CASTING

Spark: Is a kindergarten aged camper who loves adventures, scootering and animals. Spark is not their given name, it is just a nickname given during this camping adventure, in honour of The Sparks, which is a group connected to Scouting. Spark can be played by an actor of any gender.

Scout: Scout is in grade 8 and is quite focussed on their device, despite the household rules. They often sneak to the washroom to use it unmonitored. Scout is not their given name either. They can be played by any gender.

Akela: Is the parent of Spark and Scout. Recently they have been looking back on their youth as a kid involved in scouting with a great deal of nostalgia. They are attempting to revive this spirit amidst a pandemic. Akela is one of the names taken on by a leader in a Cub Scout troop, it is not their given name. Akela can be played by any gender.

The voices of neighbours: These are just add-libbed background voices, they do not require further casting.

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SCENE 1:

A tent can be seen in the early hours of the morning. Slowly, movement is seen. Spark comes out of the tent holding 2 sleep snuggle blankets, one with a cow's head attached and the other a unicorn. Spark uses them as stuffies to sleep with. Spark is groggy and stumbly, and they'd probably want you to know that they're "6 years old minus a week." The camping was a treat for a successful finish to the first week back at school since the longest March Break in history, also known as a global pandemic.

Spark: *(lets out a big yawn)* You tried to scare me, racoons, but I was brave, I was tough, I was *(mumbles the word for fear)*-less and I slept like a baby! I mean, I am a baby. But, I won! You hear me?

Scout: *(from inside the tent)* I finally have proof that you're still a baby! I heard you admit it to the racoons.

Spark: Hey, I thought you were still asleep.

Scout: Justice never sleeps. Justice also wants waffles and the washroom.

Spark: Stop calling yourself Justice. I thought we were gonna have a campfire breakfast.

Scout: But Justice really wants waffles.

Akela: *(off)* Rise and shine campers! How did you sleep?

Scout: *(groans and starts to get out of the tent, pushing past Spark)* Look out...nature is calling.

Scout shifts past Spark and we can hear the sliding door of the house opening and Scout passes Akela.

Akela: *(to Scout)* Well good morning to you too. *(to Spark)* You guys still gonna cook on the campfire?

Spark: Yup.

Akela: What meal did you end up packing in your bear proof bucket?

Spark: Well, we had a lot of [ideas for camp breakfast](#), but I think we settled on [scrambled eggs](#).

Akela: *(approaches Spark)* Oh, I see you opted to use the clothesline to stash your [bear keg](#).

Spark: It's more of a racoon keg in the city.

Akela: Well, whatever you call it, it was pretty cool to see you repurpose a plastic paint tube to do it. *(Akela takes the container down)* Looks like it survived the night and your [homemade ice packs](#) did the trick.

Spark: Where are we gonna set up the fire?

(Silence)

Spark: Akela, where are we going to set up the fire? Should it be on the grass or...

Scout: *(voice from up above, most likely from the washroom window, Scout is eavesdropping)* Just say it already!

Akela: *(Off to Scout)* Would you just! *(Back to Spark)* Well, I was meaning to talk to you about that. See, in the city, there are some... limitations to what we can do with fire. And sometimes we have to accept a current thing, knowing that later, maybe when we can get out of the city and camp in nature, then we can have a big fire with the whole cooking set up. But unfortunately for now it's gonna have to happen on the barbecue.

Spark: On the barbecue? But that isn't camping!

Akela: You know kiddo, some houses can't have barbecues, some houses don't even have backyards, so, I think we're lucky to be able to do what we're doing. Sometimes we need to remember what we do have and not focus on what we don't.

Scout: *(voice from up above, most likely from the washroom window)* Fire up the BBQ! Maybe roast up some hot dogs. I mean in the spirit of making due, right? We didn't pack any sausages in the racoon bucket, but I know we have hot dogs in the fridge!

Akela: *(up to the window)* How long do you plan to spend in the washroom today?

Scout: *(from the window)* Do you want me to answer that honestly?

Akela: Just get down here and help with our BBQ scramble eggstravaganza!

SCENE 2:

Akela, Spark and Scout stand at the top of the hill with scooters, helmets and pads. Akela's scooter is significantly bigger, with larger wheels. There are also ironic streamers coming from Akela's handles. Scout does not seem to be confident on a scooter, although you couldn't tell by the amount of stickers that are decorating their scooter and helmet. Spark uses a trick scooter and seems very confident on it.

Akela: Team, you seem quiet. Are you intimidated by this hill?

Both Spark and Scout stand silent looking down the hill.

Akela: Well, this is a busy bike path, so we're gonna have to make some quick decisions here. I guess our options are we can get off the path and take a break, we can muster our courage and scoot down this behemoth, or we can head backwards on the path and go back the way we came. What do you say?

Scout: I don't think I'm in a rush to go down the hill.

Akela: Ok, I hear what you're saying. Time for a break, right?

Scout: I'm not scared...just a break. I mean, look at this one (*pointing to Spark*), that's what fear looks like.

Akela: (*to Spark*) You ok kiddo?

Scout: Frozen with fear!

Spark: Can I ask a question?

Akela: Of course. You feeling scared about the big hill?

Spark: No, this is nothing. I was wondering about all the campers we just passed.

Akela: What campers?

Spark: All those tents and the plastic and the stuff. Can they have campfires, cause they aren't in a backyard?

Akela: All the tents? Oh, you mean the group of...right. Umm, well, the people in the tents there are not really camping, they're living there.

Spark: So, if they're living there, they can cook all they want, right?

Akela: Well, these people, ugh...no, I shouldn't say "these people"...the people living there are homeless, and they're there because they don't have anywhere else to live, or maybe because of the virus, they don't feel comfortable or safe in other spaces that the city might have available for them.

Spark: What spaces?

Akela: I think we might have to move our conversation from the middle of the trail. I do want to continue this chat, but maybe this isn't the best place for it.

Spark: I say we go down the hill.

Scout: I vote we go back.

Akela: Well, I think I'm ready for the challenge of the hill. *(To Scout)* You can do it!

Spark: Here we go!! *(scoots down the hill with a blissful scream)*

Akela: *(to Scout)* You want me to wait or go ahead?

Scout: *(playing it cool)* Go ahead.

Akela: Ok, here, I goooooo! *(scoots down the hill)*

(long pause)

Scout: Now or neverrrrrr! *(scoots down the hill screaming)*

SCENE 3:

Spark sits inside the tent counting out marshmallows, looks quickly to see if anyone is watching and then stuffs two marshmallows into their mouth.

Akela: *(exiting the house)* Team, the barbecue is ready for camp dinner cooking.

Spark: *(with mouthful)* Ok!

Akela: Hey, how is the supply inventory going?

Spark: *(mouthful)* Good.

Akela: Sorry, I didn't catch that.

Spark: *(repeating with mouthful)* Good.

Akela: Say “Chubby Bunny.”

Spark: *(mouthful)* Chhhhubbwy Buunnyy.

Akela: I knew it! It’s not the raccoons we need to worry about getting into the food keg! This little Chubby Bunny is making quick work of our [Smores](#) supply even before dinner.

Scout: *(from up in the washroom, yet again)* Save the chocolate!!

Akela: *(looking up to the washroom to Scout)* Have you taken over the washroom again?!

Spark: *(swallows the evidence)* I had just forgotten how they tasted. I wanted to remember. I’m sorry.

Akela: Hey, I’m just joking. It’s ok. Those things just have a lot of sugar and we haven’t even had dinner yet.

Spark: *(quietly)* Can you tell me more about the tents we saw today? The homeless people.

Akela: Yeah, kiddo. I’m glad you remembered. *(Takes a big breath)* You know how I told you about how we can’t have an open fire pit here so I’m cooking on the barbecue as a way of making do?

Spark: Yes. Is that what they’re doing?

Akela: Not really, the situations that lead to people being without a home are complicated. People who live on the streets or in tents like you saw are usually doing it because they have no choice or their other choices seem worse.

Spark: But the weather is starting to change, it’s gonna be Halloween soon. Won’t it get too cold to live outside?

Akela: So, the making do I was talking about was from the city. You see everyone who lives here has a responsibility to help our most vulnerable people. Even before the pandemic, we were doing a terrible job at helping out those in need. Then the pandemic came, and things are getting so much worse. The reality is that we have many people in our city who cannot access a home or even a resting place of any sort to call their home. We “make do” by cooking on the barbecue because we can’t start a campfire. We are so lucky. A person who cannot access a home needs help and right now there is a lot of ignoring going on.

Spark: But we had to stay in our homes because of Covid. Everyone was supposed to stay inside.

Akela: Yes, so we have to think about the choices are for people who may not have a home to isolate in, or maybe that person needs some extra help because they are sick or struggling with-

Spark: They're sick?

Akela: Not sick like Covid sick.

Spark: What kind of sick?

Akela: I don't think I mean sick, I think I meant to say that there are all sorts of challenges that can lead to someone being homeless. Many of them are not within their control.

Spark: Like what?

Akela: Sometimes people need to get away from a home that is unsafe, sometimes people lose their jobs, there can be mental health needs that aren't being supported properly, some people are struggling with addiction-

Spark: Oh, I've heard that word before! Wait, what does addiction mean?

Akela: Addiction is a big word that covers a lot of things, but it means when your use of something is becoming unhealthy.

Spark: Like spending too much time in the washroom.

Akela: *(speaking at a higher level so Scout can hear)* That is most likely because someone is sneaking time on their phone in the washroom and they think I don't know it.

Spark: Addicted!

Akela: Addiction can also be about things like alcohol and drugs. Serious stuff. It's important to remember that not everyone experiencing homeless has an addiction, and not everyone with an addiction is homeless. People who are homeless are not there because of one simple problem or challenge. Many challenges lead people to live on the street or together in tents like we saw. Our city thinks it's been making do, but we're really dropping the ball. These times have a way of exposing these kinds of problems so vividly.

Spark: Isn't there something more that can be done?

Scout: *(From the washroom)* The food bank that's 5 blocks from here has put out a call for "hygiene products for all genders, sleeping bags, tents, laundry detergent, toilet paper and sponges. Non perishable food is still being accepted but these items are desperately needed to support the population staying indoors at shelters or living outdoors."

Akela: You can hear us from up there?

Spark: I feel weird, we're about to make a [campfire pizza](#) on the barbecue but people, the ones we saw in the tents today, they need help.

Akela: Team, I think it means that tomorrow we do some research and maybe even some email writing, but it sounds like *(throwing their voice up to the washroom)* with a little help on the research front, there are lots of things we can do or push the city to do.

Scout: *(entering the backyard)* There is an online municipal debate on the City's Housing Strategy next week, that might help.

Akela: *(looking to Scout, amazed)* Yea, that does sound helpful, thanks.

The three of them start to get the meal organized.

SCENE 4:

From the back of their hatchback as Akela drives down the street, different people from the neighbourhood come out holding plastic bags full of donations, they wear masks. Scout and Spark receive the donations, Scouts shows Spark something on their device.

Scout: See, they're taking down the statue, they say not forever, but because people were protesting and spray painting it and stuff.

Spark: Why were they doing that?

Someone drops off a donation bag and shares some pleasantries.

Scout: *(to that person)* Thank you so much!

Spark: *(to that person)* Thank you for your generosity!

Scout: Because he was very racist and homophobic. You remember we talk about how people can be very judgy about people's identities, who they're attracted to, a person's gender or the colour of their skin.

Spark: But we talked about Scouting being about adventure and pushing yourself as a part of a supportive group, you're supposed to support everyone. This seems weird.

Scout: I think it's how we deal with the weird feeling, you know. You can't un-know something once you know...and then what do you do with that?

Spark: I was kind of getting used to our Scout-names and...

Someone drops off a donation bag and shares some pleasantries.

Scout: (to that person) A tent and 4 bags! Thank you!

Spark: (to that person) This will be so helpful! Thank you!

Scout: It's ok, the names are still fun and we can use them. I mean, I think they were all borrowed from *The Jungle Book* anyway. You know that movie we watched with the bear and the boy and the orangutan.

Spark: Can I still like that movie?!

Scout: Of course you can! Actually, thinking about it, I'm sure there are things in it that are racist too, and...come to think of it...maybe we should come up with nicknames that are all our own.

Spark: This is tough.

Scout: That's why people get angry at the statue, because it holds up the words of Baden-Powell, instead of the spirit of Scouting. Having the statue there feels like a public way of saying what he said and believed are ok. Or even worth remembering and celebrating.

Akela: (calling back from the driver's seat) What are you talking about back there?

Scout: Oh, just the spirit of imperialism that makes up *The Jungle Book*.

Spark: Yeah.

Akela: Oh, ok. Do you know what imperialism is?

Spark: No.

Scout: Not really, but give us a few minutes.

Someone else drops off a donation bag and shares some pleasantries.

Spark: *(to that person)* Thank you Mrs. Stintz. Oh, you have more? We can help get those bags from your front steps. Thank you.

Scout goes off to help Mrs. Stintz with her donations.

Akela: This is quite the outpouring of support from our neighbourhood.

Spark: What does that mean?

Akela: Sometimes we show love and care in what we do for others and how we treat people we don't know.

Spark: Like the email we were writing to our councilor last night?

Akela: Yes, we don't know the people who can benefit from that housing initiative, but I want them to know that as a city we need to care more for people who do not have the privilege of housing. Some rights are basic rights, meaning everyone should have them as a starting point, before anything else. I care about our voices being heard on that.

Spark: I liked that you wrote that letter with us.

Akela: Good, because I imagine that there will be many more.

Spark: *(indicating the hatch full of donations)* Look at all this!

Akela: It's amazing, isn't it. This came from your questions and your curiosity. I hope you know that. You were the spark that got all of us to start thinking about helping in the ways we could.

Spark: *(laughing to themselves)* Spark...

Akela: It's a good Scout name for you. It fits.

Spark: But Scout says we should change our names.

Akela: Why is that?

Spark: Because of the "spirit of imperialism" and ideas that Baden-Powell had.

Akela: *(correcting)* Baden-Powell.

Spark: Yeah, him!

Akela: Well, there is something to that. I don't think I will keep calling myself Akela and I think Scout as a name has had its fair share of controversy because of Scouting and, you know, actually, because of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but we can discuss that another time. But Spark is just a noun. It's the name for the thing that starts a fire. That's kind of what I think you're these days.

Spark: I'm a spark.

Akela: You are. And the world needs more sparks in it.

Spark: But no more "Scout" and "Akela."

Akela: Yeah, I think those names can be retired.

Spark: Maybe Scout can be....

Akela: The Toilet Thinker!

Spark: Sounds a bit long.

Akela: We'll keep working on it.

Spark: I'm gonna go help with Mrs. Stintz's bags.

Spark goes to leave the car.

Akela: Ok Spark. Oh, hey!

Spark: Yeah.

Akela: Thank you. You're teaching me a lot. I appreciate it so much.

Spark: Just wait till I figure out what the "spirit of imperialism" is...

Akela: I can't wait.

Spark goes to help Mrs. Stintz.

The End