

# **Please Bring Balloons**

*A Play for the Very Young*

Based on the book by Lindsay Ward

Conceived for the stage by  
David Kilpatrick © January 2017

Commissioned by  
New York City Children's Theater  
New York, NY

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Washington, DC

# Original Production

The first workshop of *Please Bring Balloons* took place in New York, NY on October 6 & 7, 2016 as produced by New York City Children's Theater and directed by Sara Morgulis. The cast was as follows:

EMMA  
PUPPETEER/POLAR BEAR  
STAGE MANAGER

Alison Mahoney  
Robert Stevenson  
Ally Ricarte

The first production of *Please Bring Balloons* took place in New York, NY in February/March 2017 as produced by New York City Children's Theater and directed by Sara Morgulis. The cast was as follows:

EMMA  
CAROUSEL OPERATOR/POLAR BEAR  
STAGE MANAGER

Claire Simba  
Brandon Schraml  
Gabrielle Weinstein

## **PRE-SHOW**

Audience members enter the theater, which is dressed to look like a park, and are encouraged to sit on the grass (floor), in the middle of the space. They face two upstage backdrops. On the stage is a sign that says: "Closed." The polar bear is covered by blue curtain fabric and the closed sign is attached.

As each audience member enters the space, they are given a "ticket" to ride the carousel by the CAROUSEL OPERATOR. He welcomes audience members into the space and enjoys these individual and personal interactions, genuinely sharing how happy he is that they have come to the park today. *Nice weather today, isn't it? Have you been to this park before? Oh, it's beautiful – you'll love it. Why don't you take a seat over there and wait for the carousel to open.* Etc.

## **SCENE 1 – THE BEGINNING**

*The park soundscape increases in volume, with sounds of birds and children playing. Music creeps in to create a simple, soft soundscape of outdoor playfulness. Spring.*

CAROUSEL OPERATOR takes center stage as the lights dim and shift at the designated start time of the play.

OPERATOR: Welcome everyone! I am so glad you are here! Before the carousel opens, there are some park rules I should cover. Here goes:

- #1 – Please take a moment to silence your cell phones or any other electronic devices that might make noise. They distract our park rangers and mess up their radios!
- #2 – There is no eating in this park. We are trying to control our squirrel population.
- #3 – There is no flash photography or video allowed during the adventure. But be assured that afterwards, there will be a meet and greet where photos are encouraged!
- #4 – Last rule...and this is the most important one: please....bring....your imaginations! This adventure needs YOU, OK?

OK, seems like we're all ready! Great! I just need to go crank up the carousel, get it started. (*Points offstage.*) Won't take but a second.

CAROUSEL OPERATOR winks and exits to start up the carousel. There is an offstage sound cue of the winding up/cranking up of a carousel. For a few seconds, the audience hears beautiful carousel music, but then there is a loud mechanic CLUNK, and the music begins to slow down, and gasp, and ultimately stop with a few more WHIRS and DINGS added in for good measure.

CAROUSEL OPERATOR reenters for the start of the play.

OPERATOR: I'm sorry to say that we're having some trouble with the carousel this morning! Mechanical problems. Bound to happen with a beauty as old as it is. Needs some maintenance every so often to keep running. *(Leans in to the audience.)* And between us, it needs a little bit of love, too. Yup, a happy merry-go-round is a full merry-go-round, I always say. Full with kids. Full of love.

EMMA: *(Offstage. Counting.)* One. Two. Three. Four. *(Fades out.)*

OPERATOR: *(Hearing EMMA. Laughs with excitement. Points offstage.)* And I'll tell you what. No child loves this carousel as much as Emma over there. Have you met her before? *(Waits for audience response.)* No? Well, that doesn't surprise me. She keeps to herself.

I see Emma all the time, whether the carousel is open or closed. Every day. But she doesn't come to visit *me*. I'm lucky if I get two words out of her. Oh, no - she comes to see her polar bear.

Funny thing about this carousel - it could be chock full of kids sitting on horses, giraffes, hippos, and elephants, but that lone polar bear sits empty. Emma's the only kid that pays him any mind.

EMMA: *(Offstage. Continuing.)* Nine. Ten. Eleven.

Emma enters the stage from behind the backdrop. She wears a red backpack, red boots, and a blue hoodie that matches the illustration from the book. Her focus is completely on her feet. The audience learns that she is counting her steps. Emma steps towards the OPERATOR.

EMMA: *(Continuing.)* Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. *(She has reached the OPERATOR. Proudly - to herself.)* Eighteen steps. *(She looks back to see where she has come from.)* Eighteen steps from that bench over there to my carousel.

OPERATOR: Good morning, Emma.

EMMA: *(Noticing OPERATOR for the first time. Aloof.)* Oh, hello.

OPERATOR: We're not open yet. The carousel's having some mechanical problems.

EMMA: Oh.

OPERATOR: I have been talking to some of my new friends here. *(Points out to audience.)*

EMMA: *(Looks quickly out and then back down to her feet.)* Uh, huh.

OPERATOR: They're very nice. Don't you want to say "hello?"

Emma gives a half-hearted wave to the audience. And just as quickly turns her attention back to CAROUSEL OPERATOR.

EMMA: You're still opening the carousel today though, right?

OPERATOR: Oh, yes, I hope to. But it might take some time to warm it up. Get the old bugs out.

EMMA: *(Pointedly.)* Well, you'd better get moving then.

OPERATOR: *(Laughing. Not at all offended.)* Ha! OK then, Emma. I will. *(Starts to walk offstage towards the carousel gate. Turns back to Emma.)* Hey, I have an idea. Why don't you play with these other kids while you wait? *(No response.)* I'm serious, Emma. A seven year-old should have other friends besides a carousel polar bear. *(Sighs.)* I'll be back soon to update you, but it might take a while. I have to get tools from my truck first and *(looks offstage, defeated)* I couldn't get a parking spot close by this morning to save my life.

He exits. Once the CAROUSEL OPERATOR's gone, Emma looks out at the audience.

EMMA: *(To the audience.)* First of all, I'm eight. Not seven. And second of all, *my* polar bear is the greatest friend anyone could ask for. Period. Round dot. *(Launching into action.)* First step's first. *(Looking around to see if anyone else is listening.)*

## **SCENE 2 – PLEASE BRING A BALLOON**

Emma leans down and takes off her backpack. She rummages through the backpack, looking for something.

EMMA: *(Excitedly.)* Can you keep a secret? Yesterday, my polar bear left me a note. It's in here. I'll show you, so you'll believe me. I came to visit my polar bear, like I always do, and tucked under his saddle was a note with instructions. Meant for me, of course. Here it is!

She brings the folded over note out of her backpack and shows it to the audience. It looks like lined paper torn from a middle school notebook. Carefully, she unfolds the note and reads it thoughtfully, barely containing her excitement. She then turns the note around to show the audience. Handwritten on the notebook paper are the words "Please bring" and then a sketch of a single red balloon.

EMMA: The note says: Please bring... *(and then she waits for the audience to finish the phrase).*  
Yes, a balloon! I've never heard of polar bears writing notes before. Or asking for balloons. Have you? *(Waits for response.)*

Emma glances back to make sure the OPERATOR isn't watching, and then rummages through her backpack again, presetting something inside.

EMMA: *(Proudly.)* I followed his directions.

Emma releases a balloon from her backpack, and lets it float up, in full view of the audience. Emma holds the bottom of the string and stands up, leaving her open backpack on the floor.

EMMA: And it's red, just like in his drawing. Now, I just have to wait until the carousel opens to bring it to him.

Emma sits and waits for a beat. She stands and paces for a beat.

EMMA: Waiting is often the hardest part.

To pass the time, Emma begins counting out loud her steps across the stage. But then, realizing that maybe she *should* play with the audience, she veers out into the middle of the audience and back again. Somewhere in the middle of her "steps" she decides to have fun with it. She asks the audience to help her count to 5.

EMMA: Can you guys count to 5? 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 *(Etc, she repeats this action several times.)*  
*(Smiles genuinely, maybe for the first time to the audience.)*

*Lights shift, focusing on just Emma and her carousel. Something magical has happened because of her interaction with the audience.*

Almost in a trance, Emma puts her backpack on, loops her red balloon around her wrist, and then walks upstage to the gate/curtain covering the carousel. Emma takes down the "closed" sign and kicks it under a curtain. She pulls down the upstage curtain/gate backdrop revealing the polar bear.

Reinvigorated, Emma tries one final time and manipulates the upstage curtain/gate backdrop revealing part of a full-size two-dimensional cut-paper illustration of the carousel from the picture book. It is beautiful.

While offstage, the CAROUSEL OPERATOR has transformed. He has in a new vest with tufts of white. There are patches of white stuck to his pants. He wears a saddle on his back, nearly identical to the one in the illustration of the polar bear. And he wears the blue hat and feather found in the illustration, as

well. CAROUSEL OPERATOR has become POLAR BEAR, or – at least – the essence of the polar bear. He is frozen in the spot where the POLAR BEAR would “fit” in the illustration of the carousel.

Emma steps back and takes a moment to look at the polar bear affectionately, and to make sure the audience sees him in his full glory.

EMMA:           *(Pointing to the carousel and turning to the audience.)* And this is my polar bear! He’s friendly. Cuddly. Peaceful. And just....beautiful. Period. Round Dot.

Emma looks at her hand and sees the red balloon she has brought.

EMMA:           Oh, right! The balloon!

*Music crescendos* as Emma tiptoes around the carousel, deciding how best to tie the balloon onto the POLAR BEAR. She “ties” the balloon to POLAR BEAR’s paw, but in reality POLAR BEAR holds the balloon in his hand.

EMMA:           *(To polar bear, whispering.)* I hope, dear friend, you like red.

Emma steps back to audience, waiting...nothing happens. But...

EMMA:           *(Thoughtfully – to audience.)* Is it just me, or did he smile? *(She looks back at POLAR BEAR.)* Oh, I feel like this is the beginning of an adventure, don’t you? Not quite sure where to yet, but steps have certainly been...

And that’s when Emma she sees something that surprises her.

### **SCENE 3 – PLEASE BRING MORE BALLOONS**

*Music and lights shift – to something slightly more mysterious.*

EMMA:           *(Looking from POLAR BEAR to the audience - in utter astonishment. Whispering.)*  
Another note is tucked in his saddle.

She reaches in towards POLAR BEAR’s saddle to get this second note. As her hand connects, *the tempo of the music accelerates and the lights flicker*. She shows the folded over note to the audience, similar in size and style as the first. She unfolds the note and reads it to herself. She then turns it around to show the audience. Handwritten on the notebook paper are the words “Please bring more” and then a sketch of a bunch of balloons.

EMMA:           Please bring more.... *(She pauses, to let the audience finish the note together out loud.)*  
Exactly. More balloons! *(Looking back at the note.)* Lots of them by the look of it.

*(Looking at each audience member.) You are meant to be here, after all. I need your help! (She quickly unties the red balloon and runs over to tie it near the entrance/exit to the lobby to get bit out of the way. While she does so, she asks:) Do you know how to blow up a balloon?*

Emma waits for the audience to respond. Emma turns around and walks back to the polar bear, where she picks up his red balloon and asks,

EMMA: May I borrow this? Thank you very much *(She returns back to her spot in front of the audience.)* Imagine you have a balloon in front of you. Here, pick up your balloon and blow air into it. Like this. *(Emma mimes picking up an imaginary balloon from off the floor in front of her and makes a blowing sound. Audience follows her lead.)* It's getting bigger! Now, let's tie off our balloons. And now imagine there's a string in front of you. *(Emma mimes picking up an imaginary string from the same place off the floor in front of her. Audience follows.)* Tie this string to your balloons. Good! And now let go of your balloons and let them float upwards, but hold onto that string! Oh, beautiful! I don't need this old thing anymore *(She puts the real balloon and note offstage)*

Through this step-by-step group pantomime, there are dozens of imaginary balloons floating above every audience member. Emma stands back and admires their work and creativity. She then starts to head around the space and collect the balloons, quickly giving each audience member a compliment.

EMMA: I'll come around and collect the bunch. *(To one.)* Wow - that's a lovely pink balloon. *(To another.)* I have never seen a glow-in-the-dark balloon before! *(To another.)* Your balloon is three different shades of purple! *(Etc. until all of the balloons are collected above Emma's head. She pauses center stage and looks up at the bunch.)* I am so impressed. *(Looks out to the audience with joy and appreciation.)* And now, I'm going to tie them onto my polar bear and see what happens next.

Emma ties the imaginary balloon bunch onto POLAR BEAR's saddle.

Emma steps back to audience, waiting...nothing happens.

EMMA: *(Frustrated.)* Nothing is happening.

Emma walks over to POLAR BEAR for a closer look. She thinks she might have missed something and inspects her POLAR BEAR closely. She exhales deeply in frustration and almost by accident, causes some wind that moves the balloon slightly. This gives her an idea and she turns back to the audience with excitement.

EMMA:           *(To audience.)* You were so good at blowing up balloons, will you help me make some wind? Like this. *(She mimes blowing air)* Can we all practice? On the count of three. Ready? One. Two. Three!

Emma and the audience blow wind towards POLAR BEAR.

POLAR BEAR...comes to life.

#### **SCENE 4 - FLYING TO THE NORTH STAR**

*Lights and music shift.* The fulfillment of this second note's instructions, combined with the help from the audience, has created a little bit of extra magic.

POLAR BEAR yawns and stretches. Mid-stretch he sees Emma, and begins to mirror her slowly. It is a moment of discovery, yes - but also a moment of quiet connection. After a few seconds of mirroring, they end in a wave to each other. POLAR BEAR breaks eye contact with Emma and sees the audience for the first time and waves to them, as well.

POLAR BEAR then lifts one foot to step towards the audience, and that's when he notices he has a bunch of balloons above him, tied to his saddle. He acknowledges the balloons, and takes a moment to acknowledge their collective hard work in blowing them up and gifting them to him.

POLAR BEAR motions for Emma to come over. She does, and quite naturally, she hops on his back, as if riding in his saddle - something she has done countless times on this carousel. But this time it is different and she is ready for whatever adventures await.

She waits again. At first nothing happens, but then slowly POLAR BEAR breaks free and away from the carousel, out towards the audience. The polar bear extends his hand to Emma and gestures for her to come with him.

EMMA:           *(Excitedly.)* Are we going on an adventure? Would you like to join us?

Emma and POLAR BEAR "fly" around the space slowly....marvelously. *The music matches the speed and gracefulness of their flight.* At some point, Emma slips off POLAR BEAR's back to fly next to him, hand in hand.

POLAR BEAR then pulls out a large piece of black fabric hidden somewhere onstage, unfurls it, and holds one end while Emma takes the other. They quickly, and in a choreographed way, stretch the black fabric over and above the audience, circling them to the left, and then the right.

EMMA:           *(To audience.)* Reach up to the night sky and touch the stars. We are flying!

Audience reaches up to touch the black fabric and/or feels it as it glides over their heads and outstretched hands. Emma and POLAR BEAR rotate a few times around the audience, and then Emma releases the fabric and sits in the audience to catch her breath, laughing.

POLAR BEAR takes this moment to draw in black fabric (star drops!) to cover the stage right carousel backdrop and the stage left park backdrop, transforming the entire playing space into the night sky/outer space.

POLAR BEAR then returns center stage, turns away from Emma and the audience, and begins to demonstrate his flying techniques. It's a choreographed sequence of flying movements, *associated with the music*. POLAR BEAR repeats the sequence twice, and then Emma stands up and joins him, standing next to him and mirroring the sequence of movements twice. Together, they are flying higher and higher.

EMMA:           We are already so high. A girl, a polar bear, and a cloud of brightly colored balloons.

The polar bear brings a figure of a house onstage. As Emma and POLAR BEAR repeat their flying sequence one more time, they "drift over the rooftops" and Emma looks down.

EMMA:           *(Pointing.)* Look how small my house looks from up here.

When Emma says the word "house," one of the buildings in the cityscape is illuminated.

EMMA:           We must be thousands of steps above my family and your carousel. Let's see where the wind takes us!

Emma and POLAR BEAR repeat their flying sequence of movements a sixth and final time, quicker and with more urgency.

*Music shifts into something more ethereal, something perfect for star gazing.*

Emma grabs POLAR BEAR's hand as they continue to fly together, higher and higher.

POLAR BEAR smiles in agreement.

EMMA:           It looks like we are about to land on the North Star!

These are the last scripted words we hear Emma speak until she returns to the park at the end of the show. Everything else that happens on this adventure is without words - just performed with movement, gestures, lights, and music - unless directions for the audience is needed to help them on their North Star adventures. In those instances, POLAR BEAR remains silent, but EMMA can help gently guide them verbally.

## **SCENE 5 – LANDING AND...SNOWBALLS**

POLAR BEAR holds Emma's hand and flies "offstage" with her.

*The lights and music shift.*

POLAR BEAR returns with his hands full of fluffy white fabric and begins covering parts of the grass in white. The audience gets the idea and begins moving out of his way and then returning, sitting on the "snow."

The set has now transitioned completely from the park into a snow covered landscape - the North Star! The audience sits on snow and sees the night sky.

They glide onto the stage and land with a quiet thud on the North Star, amongst the snow.

*As soon as they land, the music stops. Silence. Maybe some wind.*

Emma slides down POLAR BEAR's back, sinking into the snow, which makes a satisfying crunch. It is clear that she has never seen anything like it.

Emma unties the imaginary balloons and begins to transfer them to the barber shop's pole. As she does so, POLAR BEAR sets off north (across the stage), his paws crunching with each step.

Emma trails after him, but catches up - as if to ask, "Where are we going?" The POLAR BEAR, however, remains quiet. They both do.

They continue to walk through the snow, around the audience. They are in silence except for the crunching of the snow beneath their feet and the wind whipping around them.

*Gentle music starts up again, the first heard since Emma and POLAR BEAR landed on the North Star.*

POLAR BEAR heads offstage and returns with two white fabric bags filled with fabric snowballs. He brings the bags over to Emma first, who touches the white cloth, and shivers - indicating that it's snow and cold. She takes one bag, while POLAR BEAR takes the other, and they walk around the audience letting them touch the snow fabric and correspondingly showing how cold they are with their bodies.

At a planned point, a snowball accidentally falls out of POLAR BEAR's bag! The audience and Emma see it first, and based on their response, POLAR BEAR looks down at the fallen snowball. He smiles with excitement. It's time to play in the snow! He begins passing out snowballs to the audience members from his bag; Emma follows his lead and passes her snowballs out. The audience holds and plays with their snowballs during this distribution.

POLAR BEAR then sits center stage; Emma sits amongst the audience. POLAR BEAR takes his original fallen snowball, gets the audience's attention, and then slides that snowball towards an audience member. He then nonverbally encourages that audience member to slide it to someone else. And pretty soon, Emma slides her snowball to someone and everyone in the audience is sliding snowballs around the space, laughing.

Just like with the balloons and the wind and the counting of steps, the audience's participation is necessary to provide that added magic to help move the story forward.

After a minute of snowball sliding, POLAR BEAR starts to collect and gather the snowballs center stage, grouping them into the white fabric bags. He encourages the audience to blow wind to help gather the snowballs back up, and there is a *sound cue of wind*, similar to earlier in the show.

Once all of the snowballs are collected, POLAR BEAR nuzzles his nose into the snow in delight, and then grabs three snowballs, stands up, and juggles. Emma leads the audience in applause.

#### **SCENE 6 - TRUDGING THROUGH SNOW**

*Sound cue of wind. Music and lights shift.*

POLAR BEAR loves the gusts of wind, opening his arms to embrace the cold. He is happy. And he remembers there is still farther to travel. He gives Emma a hand and encourages her to stand center stage.

He then takes the fabric bags with snowballs offstage and returns to take Emma's hand and begin to trudge through the knee-deep snow. Emma follows in awe. She is thankful she had worn her boots and acknowledges them in some way. It is long enough of a walk to give the sense of an epic journey across the snow-filled landscape. POLAR BEAR seems to know where they are headed; Emma does not, but trusts in her friend.

*Up-tempo 1940s big band swing music begins to be heard in the distance (Glenn Miller's In the Mood).*

#### **SCENE 7 – POLAR BEAR RUMPUS**

Emma is intrigued by the music and tugs POLAR BEAR's hand to walk towards the center of the black back-of-house wall. POLAR BEAR folds out from both ends a new, vibrant image. [This new image matches the four-page spread/illustration in the picture book, showing the polar bear rumpus. As the image opens/unfolds, the swing music becomes much louder, as if Emma and POLAR BEAR had turned a corner and come face to face with the party.

Emma steps back and gazes with absolute wonder. It is a polar bear rumpus!