

## THE MONKEY HOUSE

by Scott Crain

**GENRE:** Light Drama

**SYNOPSIS:** Three men in the monkey house of a local zoo discover the hidden danger of small compromises.

**TIME:** Under 5 minutes

**CAST BREAKDOWN:** 3

**TOPIC:** Christian Living

**SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:** Genesis 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, Galatians 5:1

**CHURCH YEAR SEASON:** Any

**SUGGESTED USE:** Sermon Starter

**CHARACTERS:**

PORTER  
SHAWN  
TYSON

**PROPS:** Wallet, paper money, ice cream cone, brochure

**COSTUMES:** Contemporary

**SOUND:** Three wireless mics

**LIGHTING:** General stage

**SETTING:** The monkey house of a local zoo

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### Director's Tip:

This script is so nicely concise that the director's challenge will be to find natural blocking choices that help tell the story in an interesting way without detracting from its simplicity and clarity.

**Staging Notes:** Because the ambiance comes from the sound effects and the smells that are described, not much is needed in terms of set pieces to create the environment. This is a blessing for the set designer and a challenge for the director! The actors will have to create believable responses to the sounds, sights, and smells of a monkey house. Another focus in rehearsals will need to be stage pictures (see definition). Typically in a real monkey house, people would naturally file in and stand in a line looking at the monkeys. But that's not very interesting onstage, so avoid the temptation to have the actors spend the scene in a line. After they file in, there are many different arrangements the three friends could be in. Porter could be separate from the other two characters while reading, or he could be between them. Shawn obviously wants to get out of this smelly place—how could that be reflected in his blocking? At what points might he start to leave, or stop, and why? Tyson also wants to leave, but for another reason: to return the money. Although this sketch is brief, there is tremendous potential for fun blocking to help tell the story of what the characters want. Finally, explore what Tyson and Shawn do while Porter is telling about the capture of the monkeys...hover over his shoulder? Possibly, but is that the most interesting choice? Too much activity would be distracting, but remember, one character has a melting ice cream cone while another is aware of the smelly room, plus that cage full of invisible monkeys they're watching....more potential there for some interesting activity rather than just standing still in a line.

**Definition: Stage Picture:** If you froze the action and took a snapshot of the scene, what sort of interesting visual arrangement is there? Different directors have different primary concerns when they work: relationships, emotional authenticity, and physical or vocal technique. All these facets are important, but one will be your main concern as you direct, and that's part of finding your unique style. If you're a naturally visual person, your primary concern may be the stage pictures, or pictorial arrangement of bodies, levels, and furniture. Telling the story is always the bottom line, but how the story visually unfolds—and who is standing where in relation to whom at any given moment—is a big part of that.

**Acting Exercise:** Use an over-the-top movement game to help the actors find alternatives to the standing-still-in-a-line trap. Once they are firmly off book (early!) have Porter stand in the middle of the room. Let the other two go to extremes in their desire to get out of the room—for Shawn to escape the smell and Tyson to return the money. Run the scene several times as crazy and over-the-top as possible. Help them discover why they DON'T leave. Exercises like this help actors think outside the box in terms of their impulses to do or not do something, and how that can be reflected in their blocking. As the director, you'll already have some ideas about blocking, but collaborating with the actors will bring a natural, organic feel to how they move in the scene.