

# BIG FISH MELODRAMA

By Tim Gossett

## Characters

God

Jonah

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Captain

Sailor 1

Sailor 2

King

Crowd (everyone not assigned one of the other roles)

*Note: All characters and the crowd should act out the play in an improvisational style as they read and follow the lines.*



*Jonah is sitting in a chair, reading a novel.*

**CROWD:** *(birds chirping quietly)*

**GOD:** Jonah!

**JONAH:** *(looking around, a bit frightened)* Who said that?

**GOD:** Well, obviously since you're the only one in the room, it's me—God.

**JONAH:** Oh, you again. I suppose you want me to go preach your word to the Israelites again. What a fickle people they are . . .

**GOD:** Um, not exactly, Jonah. I have a message for the Ninevites, and I want you to deliver it. I've noticed that they've grown into a cruel and evil people, and you are to tell the king and the people that they have to change their ways—or else.

**JONAH:** *(curious)* Or else what?

**GOD:** Never mind that. Just go do it. *(pause)* NOW!

**JONAH:** *(exasperated)* Are you kidding? I'm not going to Nineveh. I've heard what those people are like, and they can't even make decent falafel there. And let's face it: The Ninevites aren't going to be sorry or change their ways. More likely, they'll kill me! Go ahead, smite 'em or something. They'll be getting what they deserve for the ways they mistreated our people when we were in captivity.

**NARRATOR 1:** So Jonah packed his spare pair of sandals and left for the coastal city of Joppa. There he boarded a ship that was headed for Tarshish, a city in the opposite direction from Nineveh. Jonah was worn out from the long walk to Joppa, so he grabbed a bunk bed and tried to catch some Zs.

**CROWD:** (*waves crashing, wind blowing; don't stop until you're told to!*)

**NARRATOR 2:** That's when things sorta got out of hand. When the boat was out at sea, a wind came out of nowhere and knocked the ship around. Huge waves crashed on the deck, and the passengers and crew were pretty freaked out.

**CAPTAIN:** Get those sails in! Drop the anchors!

**SAILOR 1:** It's too strong, Cap. This wind'll tear the ship apart! We gotta do something!

**CAPTAIN:** Lightening the load will help. Toss any extra cargo overboard—NOW!

**SAILOR 2:** Captain, it ain't enough. What do we do now?

**SAILOR 1:** (*to the waters*) Save us, water gods!

**SAILOR 2:** (*to the sky*) Have mercy on us, god of the winds! Don't let us die out here!

**NARRATOR 2:** The captain went below deck to see if there were any leftovers that could be thrown out, and he couldn't believe his eyes.

**CAPTAIN:** (*Outraged, shaking Jonah*) Hey you fool! Wake up! We're about to drown here. Pray to your god to see if he will save us!

**SAILOR 2:** Our prayers aren't working! The gods must be really angry at someone on this ship.

**SAILOR 1:** Let's roll the dice and find out who is to blame for all of this.

**SAILOR 2:** (*rolls the dice a few times as Sailor 1 looks on, watching carefully*) It's Jonah! (*pointing*) It's his fault!

**SAILOR 1:** Tell us what you did to bring this kind of punishment upon yourself and all of us. Who are you? Where are you from? Who's your god, anyway?

**JONAH:** I'm an Israelite; and I worship God, who made the heavens and the sea and the earth. I'm one of God's prophets . . . and I think I may have made God a little angry when I wouldn't do what God asked of me. I'm trying to run away from God.

**SAILOR 1:** (*terrified*) Dude, what were you thinking? Are you a complete idiot? You're going to kill us all! What can we do to keep this storm from killing us?

**JONAH:** Throw me overboard. Then the waters will become as calm as an old dog on a hot day.

**SAILOR 2:** We can't do that to you! You'll die, and there's no way I'm taking the blame for your death!

**JONAH:** (*urgently*) Just do it, already! There's no time to waste!

**SAILOR 1:** (*praying, looking up*) Hey, uh, Jonah's God, we're gonna throw this guy overboard, like he asked us to. Please don't be mad at us!

**NARRATOR 2:** So the sailors picked up Jonah and heaved him overboard. When he hit the water, the storm died down. Soon the sea was calm. The sailors were amazed and worshiped God by lifting their hands to heaven.

**CROWD:** (*noise stops*)

**NARRATOR 1:** Suddenly out of nowhere, a huge fish came out of the water and swallowed Jonah in one gulp.

**CROWD:** (*gulp, water sloshing around*)

**JONAH:** (*praying*) Ugh, it smells in here, God. Couldn't you have just tossed me a life raft or something? But hey, thanks, God, for saving me. I'm a terrible swimmer and surely would have drowned. (*pause*) I get it, God. I've rebelled against you, and I'm a lousy prophet. Will you give me another chance?

**NARRATOR 2:** God heard Jonah's prayer and whispered to the big fish to let Jonah go. The fish swam up close to shore and vomited Jonah out. Then, God spoke to Jonah again.

**GOD:** Now, get your smelly self over to Nineveh and deliver my message! OK?

**JONAH:** You've got it, God. (*starts walking*)

**NARRATOR 1:** So Jonah walked toward the huge city of Nineveh. And on his first day there, he proclaimed his message to all the people.

**JONAH:** (*shouting*) Hey, everybody! God says, "Forty more days and you'll be destroyed, you wicked Ninevites!"

**NARRATOR 2:** The Ninevites were stunned. "God's really going to get us?" they asked Jonah, who nodded and smiled. They believed him. And to demonstrate their repentance for all they had done, all the people went without food and wore itchy sackcloth clothes.

**CROWD:** (*mumbling, scratching their itches*)

**NARRATOR 1:** The king eventually got word of Jonah, and he called all the people together.

**KING:** Hear ye, hear ye! I am your king, and I hereby proclaim that all people—even all of your animals—shall immediately begin to fast.

**CROWD:** (*mumbling again*)

**KING:** That's right—no food and no water. And I want you to keep wearing the sackcloth, and make your animals wear it too. And ask God for mercy. You must give up your dishonesty, your unjust practices, and your violence. Then, maybe, God will forgive us and not destroy this great city.

**NARRATOR 2:** And indeed, that's exactly what happened. God saw that the Ninevites were indeed sincere, and God didn't destroy them. God forgave them. And Jonah was mad.

**JONAH:** (*ranting*) Now, wait just a handful of sand through the hourglass! I knew you'd try something like this, God! That's why I tried to go to Tarshish. But no! Instead, I get tossed overboard, swallowed by a stinkin' fish, puked onto shore—and let's not even mention the blisters on my feet from the walk over here. And what happens when I tell the people they're going to be destroyed, like *you* said? Not ... one ... darn ... thing! You show these ungracious, unclean, unholy people grace and mercy. (*huffs, sits down, pouts*) Just kill me now, God. I don't want to live any longer if this is what you're going to keep doing to me.

**GOD:** Who gave you the right to be angry with me?

**NARRATOR 1:** Jonah sat there and watched the city, waiting to see whether God would have a change of mind.

**CROWD:** (*play the roles of the bush, the sun, and the worm*)

**NARRATOR 2:** Meanwhile, God caused a bush to quickly grow up over Jonah so that he could rest in the shade.

**JONAH:** Ah . . . now you're talkin', God. Could you maybe bring me some lemonade too?

**NARRATOR 2:** But the next morning, God gave a worm the job of eating the bush, and it died. The sun beat its rays down on Jonah again, and he was hot!

**JONAH:** What is up with you, God? This heat is killing me! I really do wish I were dead.

**GOD:** Jonah, my friend, you need to get a clue. You see, you're concerned about a simple plant that grew without your help. It came, and it went. Well, don't you think I should be concerned about those 120,000 people of Nineveh, who barely knew their right hand from their left—not to mention all of their animals?

**NARRATOR 1:** The end.

**NARRATOR 2:** (*to Narrator 1*) Wait, what do you mean, "The end"? Surely there must be more to the story. Jonah doesn't say anything? What kind of book is this? It actually ends with a question?

**NARRATOR 1:** (*flips through the script, searching for another ending*) To answer your questions: Nope. Yep. It's one of the Minor Prophets. Got a problem with that?