

The Power of Children: Making a Difference

Script for Anne Frank: *Work and Hope*

Written by D.E. Ison, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Context: This scene takes place in August 1966 at the International Youth Conference at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Character Description: Otto Frank is 77 years old in this portrayal and shares his remembrances of life in the Secret Annex and life while returning to the space years later. The Annex in 1966 is a museum. Here, he discusses Anne's diary, his decision to publish it, and how through the book Anne and her ideals have been kept alive.

Materials/Props: coffee beans, bookcase, published version of Anne's diary

PROGRAM/ACTIVITY SCRIPT:

(Otto Frank enters the Annex. He sees three brown beans on the floor and picks them up. He stands with his eyes closed for several moments, then puts the beans in his pocket)

When I am very quiet, I can still hear their voices in this place. My wife, Edith, declaring in her precise manner, "Coffee, I want a cup of *real* coffee." And Mr. Van Pels "I want a hot bath, all the way up to my chin! And my dear, gentle Margot agreeing, "Yes, yes, me, too." Mrs. Van Pels "Cake, I must have cake." Humble Peter merely wanting to go downtown. *(Reaches into his pocket)* These beans fell out of a sack of supplies when Peter dragged the sack up from the office.

And Anne of course, so excited by the thought of freedom that she could barely contain herself, "I would be so overjoyed, I wouldn't know where to begin."

(He becomes somber.) There are other sounds that echo in this place that I long to forget. Those that came on August 4 of 1944, the day that the German soldiers took us all away. Mr. Pfeffer, the Van Pels', Edith, my daughters, and me. It was early morning and I was helping Peter with his schoolwork. I heard the stairs creak behind the bookcase *(he looks toward the bookcase)* and then the door opened and a man stood there, pointing a gun at us.

(His mood shifts.) Enough of unpleasant memories. I have always believed in choosing life over mourning. My name is Otto Frank; and I welcome you to this, my old office building. I have left this Annex where we stand in its original condition as much as possible. Look around you! This is where our family lived in hiding from the Nazis, along with the Van Pels family and Fritz Pfeffer, for two long years. This is where Anne grew from a girl to a young woman. And this is where Anne wrote much of her diary.

(Holding up the Diary) How many of you have read the published version of Anne's diary? *(Audience response)* She would be quite thrilled to know her words had reached you. Though, originally, she had no thought of her diary being printed for all the world to see. When she received it on her thirteenth birthday, she only intended it to be a friend, someone to confide in. She even named it Kitty. When we went in to hiding, it was one of the few possessions she brought with her. *(Reading from diary)* "I stuck the craziest things in my bag, but I am not sorry. Memories mean more to me than dresses." That was my Anne.

Once we were here, the diary became more and more important and she wrote in it almost daily. Sometimes she read us funny episodes and stories. Anne was a very animated girl. She even repeatedly asked Johannes Kleiman, one of the men who helped to hide us, if he wouldn't mind sending one of her made-up stories to a magazine. That's how badly she wanted to be published. Then one day, Anne heard a radio broadcast of how letters and diaries would be published after the war! *(Reading)* "Just imagine how interesting it would be if I were to publish a novel about the Secret Annex. Why the name alone would make people think it was a detective story. Seriously though, ten years after the war, people would find it very amusing to read how we lived, what we ate, and what we talked about as Jews in hiding."

Anne immediately started putting together passages she felt were worthy of publication, careful not to alter too much, even things that would embarrass her. She worked on it with such passion, making plans for her future as a writer.

But these plans ended when we were arrested. Her diary ended up scattered on the floor, and Anne didn't even glance at it. Perhaps she had a premonition.

First, we were imprisoned here in Amsterdam, then we were sent to the Dutch transit camp of Westerbork, and then on to Auschwitz. There, the men were separated from the women. I turned for a final glimpse of my wife and daughters among the crowd of terrified people being taken away. I shall remember the look in Margot's eyes all my life.

Peter and I and the other prisoners marched two miles in the darkness to the main camp, where we were stripped, shaved all over, and sent into cold showers. Then they

gave us striped prison uniforms and wooden clogs, and tattooed us. (*Touches his arm*)
My number is B-9174.

Six months later, Auschwitz was liberated by Soviet troops —we were free. I made my way back to Amsterdam in search of my family. It took me two months to find out that my wife Edith had died. My path led back here, to Miep Gies and her husband, who had helped us by bringing us supplies the entire time we were in hiding. I stayed with them and searched for Margot and Anne. I was desperate to have them returned to me. I placed advertisements in the paper and asked every survivor returning from the concentration camps, “Have you seen my girls?” I hoped and waited and waited and waited.

Finally, I learned that Margot and Anne had been taken from Auschwitz to Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp, and that their mother had been killed.

At first, I had high hopes for the girls. You see, Bergen Belsen was not a death camp. A survivor told me they had been seen, like little frozen birds, but alive. When she could no longer stand the fleas and lice, Anne threw all her clothes away and wrapped herself in a blanket. They both had typhus, a terrible disease that was common in the filthy camps. One day Margot fell from her bunk and the shock killed her. Without her sister, knowing her mother was dead, and with no idea that I was alive, Anne died just weeks before the camp was liberated.

My only comfort was that Miep had rescued Anne’s diary after the soldiers left that day. She’d kept it in her desk drawer, never opening it, just keeping it to give to Anne when she returned.

I didn't have the strength to read it at first. But when I did, I was amazed! A completely different Anne to the child that I had lost was revealed in these pages. I had no idea of the depths of her thoughts and feelings. Once I began, I could not put the diary down. In it, my Anne had written, “My greatest wish is to become a journalist someday and later on a famous writer. I want to go on living even after my death! And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift, this possibility of developing myself and of writing, of expressing all that is in me.”

It was then that I knew that I had to publish the diary, as her testament, in the spirit of her idea and ideals, because she could no longer do that. In most relationships, it is the child of a famous parent who has the honor of continuing their task. In my case the role is reversed.

Every year I receive hundreds of letters from young people who want to be like Anne. They compare their good, free lives with the situation that Anne was forced to live in, and they decide that they have the duty to achieve something in life.

What most moved me about Anne's book was the insight it gave me into her deepest being. Despite the good relationship that I had with her, she never made her innermost thoughts and feelings known to me. How could I have known how much it meant for her to see a patch of blue sky, or how important that chestnut tree was to her? I remember us reading a beautiful thought that someone once wrote - "If the end of the world were imminent, I would still plant a tree." How I love that line.

I not only learned *of* Anne through the diary, I learned much *from* her. I like to think that she also learned from me.

A few weeks before we were arrested, Anne wrote, "It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!"

We cannot change what happened. All we can do is learn from the past and realize what discrimination and persecution of innocent people means.

Once again, I welcome you to the Annex, and ask you to keep my Anne alive through your thoughts and actions. Work for unity and peace. And when given a choice, always choose acceptance over prejudice, kindness over persecution, and love over hatred.

Thank you for visiting me today.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- **Do any of you who have read Anne's diary remember Otto, or have you heard of him before?** Otto Frank's name might not be as famous as Anne's, but they went through many of the same experiences.
- **Can anyone tell me what Anne or Otto had to face that made their lives different from our lives today? What did Anne have to go through that – hopefully!—kids today haven't lived through?**
- As you heard during the performance, Otto Frank did survive the war—he was the only member of the eight hiding in the Annex to do so. After the war, Otto Frank decided to publish Anne's diary, so her message of hope and courage could be shared with the world. **Why do you think Anne's diary has meant so**

much to so many people? What do you think Otto meant when he said. “I ask you to keep my Anne alive through your thoughts and actions. Work for unity and peace. And when given a choice, always choose acceptance over prejudice, kindness over persecution, and love over hatred.” What does that mean to you?