



## All For Paisa

### Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes

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#### CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

MERCHANT

WIFE

SON

MAIDEN

*\*Performance notes can be found on the pages following the script*

## Scene 1 – The Merchant’s House

[**Stage Set:** The backdrop shows the interior of a merchant’s house in India. Beside the house, trees and fields of golden grasses.]

**NARRATOR:**

Greetings, everyone. This play is "All for a Paisa," (pronounce: PIE-sah), a folktale from India brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*. A paisa was an old coin, not worth much, maybe a few pennies.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

**NARRATOR:**

Long ago in India there lived a wealthy merchant. He and his wife were very happy. Well, except for one thing.

[MERCHANT and WIFE enter.]

**MERCHANT:**

You always make excuses for him!

**WIFE:**

He doesn’t think like you. Our son is a musician, not a businessman.

**MERCHANT:**

Bah! He says he’s a musician because he doesn’t want to put in the time and the work it takes to be in business!

**WIFE:**

He puts in PLENTY of time practicing his sitar.

**MERCHANT:**

Exactly! Avoiding the real work of life. He's not thinking this through, He'll grow up and what will he do? He'll have to support himself by playing weddings. You know he'll only get ignored by everyone. He's embarrassing himself, me, the whole family. When I try to talk sense into him, he won't listen!

**WIFE:**

You're not the best listener in the world either, you know.

**MERCHANT:**

*(not looking at her)* What did you say? No matter. And that's not the worst of it.

**WIFE:**

What are you talking about?

**MERCHANT:**

He'll never attract a decent match. The most eligible ladies of the village want a secure future. They way he's going, they won't even consider him.

**WIFE:**

Truly?

**MERCHANT:**

You know that's the way it is, and it's his own fault. Does he want to learn how to set up a shop? No. Does he want to learn how to track accounts? No. Does he want to learn how to keep inventory? NO!

**WIFE:**

Husband, listen. I know our son can prove himself. Can't we give him one more chance?

**MERCHANT:**

He's had too many chances as it is! (*rubs chin*) Though, maybe there IS a way.

[SON enters.]

**SON:**

Hello, Father. Hello, Mother. Lovely day, isn't it?

**MERCHANT:**

How would you know? You've been inside since dawn.

**WIFE:**

Husband, is that how you should--

**MERCHANT:**

(*waves her off*) Whatever. Fine, fine. Listen, son. There is something I'd like you to do for me.

**SON:**

Sure. What is it?

**MERCHANT:**

I am going to give you this paisa (pronounce: PAY-zah). This (*holds up a coin*) ONE paisa. I want you to go to the bazaar. With this coin, I want you to buy something to eat, something to drink, something for the cow to chew on, and something to plant in the garden.

**SON:**

What? It's not possible to buy all of that with only one paisa.

**MERCHANT:**

Did you hear me? That is what you must do.

**SON:**

But it's not fair!

**MERCHANT:**

LOTS OF THINGS IN LIFE AREN'T FAIR!

**WIFE:**

That much is true, son.

**SON:**

*(to audience)* When both my parents agree, there's no fighting it. *(to his parents)* All right, all right. *(takes the paisa)* I'll try to figure out something. *(to audience)* Somehow.

[MERCHANT, WIFE and SON exit.]

**NARRATOR:**

*(to audience)* Something to eat, something to drink, something for the cow to chew on, and something to plant in the garden. All for one paisa. About a dollar, in today's currency. Any ideas? *(looks to audience & takes suggestions, if any)* *(after few moments of suggestions, if any...)* It's a challenge, to say the least. Well, let's see how the merchant's son is getting on.

## Scene 2 – Outside The Bazaar

[**Stage set:** A new backdrop. This backdrop shows a few market stalls at one edge that offer goods for sale such as woolens, iron tools, jewelry, or baskets. The rest of the backdrop shows a path lined with bushes. Place two "rocks" (stools that are covered with cardboard) by the path.]

[SON enters. He is carrying his sitar.]

**SON:**

I went to every stall in the marketplace, every shop in town. To buy something to eat, that alone costs more than one paisa. And something to drink alone is more than one paisa. Not to mention something to plant in the garden, and – what was that other thing? – right! something for the cow to chew on. Augh!! (*sighs in exasperation and sits on the rock*) I'll get my mind off of this for a few minutes. (*gets out sitar*)

[SON starts to play the sitar, or pretends to play with sitar music playing from offstage.]

[MAIDEN enters. She walks by SON, stops, and turns back.]

**MAIDEN:**

That's nice music. Though maybe a little sad.

**SON:**

I'm having a tough day.

**MAIDEN:**

What's the matter?

**SON:**

My father gave me one paisa. ONE (*holds it up*) paisa.

**NARRATOR:**

*(steps forward to audience)* And he explained to the maiden all that he had to buy with

it. *(steps back)*

**MAIDEN:**

Why would your father ask you to do that?

**SON:**

I have no idea. To make me miserable? To get me out of the house? To prove I'll never meet his expectations?

**MAIDEN:**

That's a lot of purposes served by one little paisa.

**SON:**

He always loads it on.

**MAIDEN:**

Wait. Maybe there's something you can buy that does more than one thing, too.

**SON:**

Not likely. *(after a pause, wipes his brow)* It's so hot!

**MAIDEN:**

Here, do you want a slice of watermelon?

**SON:**

That would be great, thanks!

[MAIDEN sits on the rock next to SON. She takes out two slices of watermelon and hands him one.]

**SON:**

*(takes a bite)* Mmm. That hits the spot.

**MAIDEN:**

*(takes a bite)* I know, right?

[They eat for a moment, then look at each other.]

**SON:**

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

**MAIDEN:**

I think I'm thinking what you're thinking.



### Scene 3 – The Merchant’s House

[Stage set: Same as in Scene 1.]

[SON enters with MAIDEN. He is carrying a watermelon. He hands the watermelon to MERCHANT. MERCHANT leans forward, bent down by its weight.]

**SON:**

Here's a watermelon, father. Note that it's delicious to eat.

**MERCHANT:**

*(nods)* True. *(sets down watermelon)*

**SON:**

And the flesh is so juicy, it’s also something to drink.

**WIFE:**

Definitely! *(to audience)* I love watermelon juice.

**SON:**

Cows love to chew on the rind. And watermelon seeds can be planted in the garden. Can you guess what I paid for this watermelon?

**MERCHANT:**

Are we talking one paisa?

**SON:**

*(high-fives with Merchant)* That we are!

**MERCHANT:**

*(claps his Son on the back)* Congratulations, son! You did it – I’m impressed!

**WIFE:**

And who is this fine young lady you brought with you?

**SON:**

Actually, this maiden helped me with the idea.

**MERCHANT:**

*(to Maiden)* Is that right?

**MAIDEN:**

We pretty much figured it out together.

**WIFE:**

Collaboration! How very modern.

**MERCHANT:**

*(rubs chin with his hand)* Working together - an old-fashioned notion, but effective.

[MERCHANT takes WIFE's hand.]

**WIFE:**

I'm liking this better and better.

[SON takes MAIDEN's hand.]

**SON:**

So am I.

**MERCHANT:**

*(lets go of Wife's hand and steps forward to audience)* Young people! Just when you're ready to give up on them, they go and surprise you! Even if he's not a businessman, our son the MUSICIAN is clever enough to make his way in the world.

**NARRATOR:**

*(to Merchant)* Just to satisfy my curiosity - did you have a solution in mind to that riddle you gave your son?

**MERCHANT:**

*(shrugs)* No idea whatsoever. *(leans forward)* But don't tell him, okay?

**SON:**

*(to Maiden)* And to think my father was wise enough to come up with that riddle!

**MAIDEN:**

*(nods, impressed)* He's really something!

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

*(back to audience)* So this is one of the oldest kinds of stories. A young character feels unappreciated, but in the end comes through and surprises the older generation. And I must say, those two *(looks at Merchant and Wife, who are laughing and enjoying themselves with Son and Maiden)* seem just fine about it.

[If you have a curtain, close it now. If you do not, fade the lights. If you have no stage lights, all actors come on stage and bow to the audience.]

## Performance Notes for All for a Paisa

### THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY

1. Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
2. Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
3. Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



### COSTUMES

- NARRATOR or NARRATORS — Perhaps nice shirt(s) and slacks and/or a nice skirt(s) and blouse(s), or a nice dress(es).
- MERCHANT — plain, solid-colored loose pants such as plain pajama pants or plain nursing slacks and a plain, solid-colored shirt.



- WIFE — a sari. It can be a real sari, or she can wear a blouse with a long piece of fabric around her body with one end falling over a shoulder.
- SON — plain, solid-colored loose pants such as plain pajama pants or plain nursing slacks and a plain, solid-colored shirt.
- MAIDEN — a sari. It can be a real sari, or she can wear a blouse with a long piece of fabric around her body with one end falling over a shoulder.



## PROPS

- Scene 1 — A paisa. This can be made out of a circle cut out of yellow construction paper or a real quarter.
- Scene 2 — A sitar. This can be a real sitar or can be fashioned from a violin or similar instrument. Two slices of watermelon for SON and MAIDEN to eat. These can be real or made out of construction paper.
- Scene 3 — A watermelon. This can be a real or can be made out of a large oval cut out of green construction paper.



## SETS

- Scene 1 — A single backdrop that has a field of grass with a beautifully ornate house on one side painted on.
- Scene 2 — Backdrop showing a few market stalls at the edge, selling goods such as woolens, or iron tools, jewelry or baskets. The rest of the backdrop shows a path with bushes along it. Two stools to represent rocks for SON and MAIDEN to sit on.
- Scene 3 — The same as in Scene 1.