

CELL A CAUTIONARY TALE



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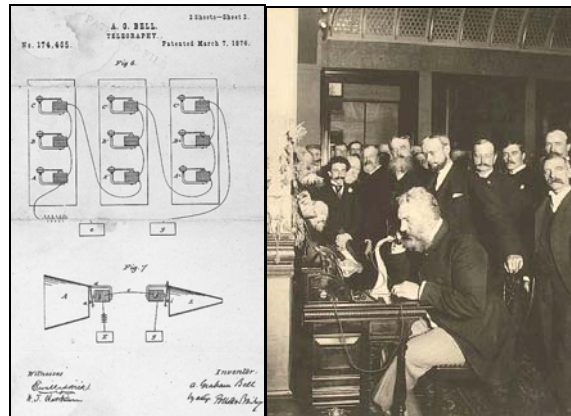
*Cell: A Cautionary Tale was first workshopped
at Etiwanda High School in 2014.*

*The playwright would like to thank
the drama students
for their talent, energy, and effort
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CELL
A CAUTIONARY TALE

FARCE. “Beware the dangers of technology.” In this satiric, absurd look at mankind’s attempt to communicate through the ages, follow the history and “evolution” of the telephone. How has Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone evolved into a payphone, a cell phone, and now a smartphone—the all-important, all-consuming device that we depend on for our daily needs? It begins with a caveman drawing on a rock, then a guy sending a message in a bottle, and ends with unintelligible teen text messages that require a translator for anyone 17 years and older. The smartphone may be able to do almost anything, but the ghost of Alexander Graham Bell shows us what happens when people grow too attached to technology. This witty, provocative play is perfect for competitions and can be performed on a bare stage.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.



Alexander Graham Bell's telephone patent drawing dated March 7, 1876. Alexander Graham Bell (center) at the 1892 opening of a long-distance line from New York to Chicago.

ABOUT THE STORY

Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) is best known as the inventor of the first telephone in 1875, but he also invented many other devices including an early metal detector and the photophone, a precursor to modern fiber optic communication systems. Bell was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and his first invention was a wheat dehusking device that he constructed when he was just 12 years old. Bell's mother was deaf and his father conducted work on speech and elocution. In 1870, Bell and his parents moved to a farm in Ontario, Canada, where he studied hearing and speech and conducted experiments with electricity and sound. Bell's experiments led to him patenting the first telephone in 1876, and just three days after the patent was issued, Bell transmitted the following sentence: "Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you." The Bell Telephone Company was created in 1877. Bell settled in Cambridge, MA, and became a naturalized US citizen. By 1886, 150,000 people in the US owned telephones.

CHARACTERS

(3 M, 5 F, 27 flexible)

(Doubling: 3 M, 4 F, 18 flexible. Tripling possible.)

- NARRATOR:** A cell phone historian; flexible.
- ACTOR 1-18:** Play various roles; flexible.
- GHOST OF ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL:** Inventor of the telephone who warns us of the dangers of technology; male.
- BOY:** Ignores Girl and spends all his time with his phone; male.
- GIRL:** Has a crush on Boy; female.
- CAVE PERSON:** Draws pictures on rocks; flexible.
- PTERODACTYL:** Early form of "airmail"; flexible.
- YOUNG MAN:** Inserts a message in a bottle and tosses it into the ocean to find his true love; male.
- YOUNG WOMAN:** Waits for a message from her true love to arrive via a bottle; female.
- OLD WOMAN:** Young Woman who receives the message in a bottle sixty years later; female.
- WATER:** Delivers messages in bottles; flexible.
- CITIZEN:** Attempts to use a payphone; flexible.
- MONSTER:** A payphone monster; wears a costume large enough so that Citizen can be pulled into the costume and disappear; flexible.
- CELLIE:** Boy's new smartphone; wears a smartphone costume; female. (Note: A voiceover may be used, if desired.)
- VICKY:** Teen texting interpreter; female.
- AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Cell phone salesperson who interrupts the play; wears a cell phone company shirt; flexible.
- MEDICAL ASSISTANT 1, 2:** Non-speaking; wear medical scrubs; flexible.

OPTIONS FOR DOUBLING

CELLIE/EMSEMBLE ACTOR (Female)
MEDICAL ASSISTANT 1/ENSEMBLE ACTOR (flexible)
MEDICAL ASSISTANT 2/ENSEMBLE ACTOR (flexible)

Note: There are several doubling options, including having Actors 1-18 each play another role. It would also work to combine the ensemble parts based on the number of actors you have in your cast. For example, with nine ensemble members, each actor could take on two numbered parts (one actor could take on parts 1 and 10, another 2 and 11, etc.).

OPTIONS FOR TRIPLING

ENSEMBLE 1/CAVE PERSON/MONSTER (flexible)
ENSEMBLE 2/PTERODACTYL/AUDIENCE MEMBER
(flexible)
ENSEMBLE 3/VICKY/MONSTER (female)
ENSEMBLE 4/YOUNG MAN (male)
ENSEMBLE 5/YOUNG WOMAN/OLD WOMAN (female)

SET

The events of the play move from one location and/or time period to another quickly, allowing for various set options to be used. Below are some suggestions. The set may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows. Feel free to have fun creating an imaginative set.

Telephone museum. There are various communication devices placed around the stage or in the lobby indicating the history of the telephone.

Cell phone store. Use a backdrop or props to suggest a cell phone store where Audience Member conducts business at the end of the show.

Bare stage. Costumes and props may be used to indicate changes in location and time periods.

PROPS

5 Cell phones
2 Cans connected with a string
Message written on a rock
Note
Plastic skeleton (bones, skull, etc.)
Note in a bottle
Oversized coins
New running shoes, for Boy
Assorted items (brick, chair, skateboard, pillow, etc.)
Cloak
Golden cell phone
Contract
Pen
Smartphone (opt.)
Something that looks like a spleen
Surgical gloves
Assorted power tools

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SOUND EFFECTS

Cell phone ringing
Sound of muffled cell phone ringing

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II

“WOE UNTO THEE
AND THY IGNORANCE.”

—GHOST OF ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

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(AT RISE: Narrator enters. Spotlight on Narrator.)

NARRATOR: *(Indicating cell phone.)* This thing that I hold in my hand is power, beauty, freedom. It is the ability to find out anything and everything that you could possibly want or desire. It gives you the capability to be independent beyond your wildest dreams. With this instrument of technology, you can play the notes of the symphony of life. I feel sorry for people from the past. They had to carve things onto cave walls, and write notes on papyrus, and lick stamps. Not now! Texting is one step away from mindreading. The words are getting shorter, we are more efficient, and we have more time...time to live in this new and exciting world of infinite space, power, and possibility. Can you feel them...the waves of communication? Listen. *(Slight pause.)* Touch them. They are all around you.

(Lights up. Actors 1-18 are standing around the stage in various positions talking on their cell phones.)

ACTOR 1: *(Into phone.)* Of course, I love you.

ACTOR 2: *(Into phone.)* I sent you a text—

ACTOR 3: *(Into phone.)* With a heart.

ACTOR 4: *(Into phone.)* I made it myself.

ACTOR 5: *(Into phone.)* With a less-than sign.

ACTOR 6: *(Into phone.)* And a three.

ACTOR 7: *(Into phone.)* That makes a heart.

ACTOR 8: *(Into phone.)* And it's environmentally conscious.

ACTOR 9: *(Into phone.)* No cutting hearts out of pink construction paper.

ACTOR 10: *(Into phone.)* How wasteful!

ACTOR 11: *(Into phone.)* Like cutting a hole in the ozone layer.

ACTOR 12: *(Into phone.)* With your unsafe safety scissors.

ACTOR 13: *(Into phone.)* Filling the landfill with—

ACTOR 14: *(Into phone.)* Tons of broken pink hearts.

ACTOR 15: *(Into phone.)* But a text lasts forever.

ACTOR 16: *(Into phone.)* Forever and ever.

ACTOR 17: *(Into phone.)* In the stars.

ACTOR 18: *(Into phone.)* In the heavens.

ACTORS 1-18: *(Into phone.)* Forever and ever and ever.

(Ghost of Alexander Graham Bell enters.)

GHOST OF ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL: Beware the dangers of technology.

(Ghost of Alexander Graham Bell exits. Actors 1-18 exit, repeating "forever and ever and ever." Boy and Girl enter. Each is holding a can. The cans are connected by string like a toy telephone.)

GIRL: Did you see it last night?

BOY: What?

GIRL: The shooting star.

BOY: I was playing videogames.

GIRL: What a waste.

BOY: [Alien Insurrection] is not a waste! *[Or insert the name of another videogame.]*

GIRL: It's interesting how technology is supposed to bring us closer together but actually pushes us apart.

BOY: I saw on T.V. that one day we will all own these high-tech sunglasses that will do everything for us. They will have maps and menus and voice commands that will control lightweight body armor that will be able to protect us from the sun, punches from hostile enemies, and strange diseases that don't even exist yet. These glasses will literally allow you to see and feel everything without actually seeing or feeling anything.

GIRL: *(Unimpressed.)* Oh.

BOY: (*Surprised.*) You don't sound excited.

GIRL: I'm not.

BOY: Well, when it happens, you can say you knew the guy who knew it would happen.

GIRL: Yeah.

(Boy and Girl exit.)

NARRATOR: (*To audience.*) In the old, old days, communication was limited to shouting until someone got the bright idea to have flying animals like Pterodactyls deliver messages.

(Cave Person enters, carrying a rock with a caveman drawing on it.)

CAVE PERSON: (*To himself, indicating rock.*) Ugh, I have important message to deliver across large block of land and don't want to carry myself. Ugh, ooga, ooga. What to do? (*Pterodactyl enters, pretending to fly.*) Hey, I have idea. Let flying donkey... (*Pterodactyl makes a disapproving grunt.*) ...carry important message. Less risk of message being eaten by large carnivorous predator and important message being digested and end up in animal droppings.

(Cave Person gives Pterodactyl the message, and Pterodactyl "flies" off with it. Cave Person exits.)

NARRATOR: (*To audience.*) And that was the invention of airmail.

(Girl and Boy enter. Girl hands Boy a note.)

BOY: (*Indicating note.*) What is this?

GIRL: A note. Read it.

BOY: (*Annoyed.*) Can't you just text me?

GIRL: I thought this was more, you know, personal.

BOY: I guess...

GIRL: Aren't you going to read it?

BOY: I'm afraid.

GIRL: Of what? Words?

BOY: Paper cuts.

GIRL: (*Irritated.*) Fine. Don't read it, then.

(Girl exits. Boy struggles with the prospect of opening the note. He opens it.)

BOY: (*Reads.*) "I really like you. Do you like me? Check one and only one of the following options: 1.) I like you to the moon and back; 2.) I like you to the moon but am having trouble getting back; 3.) I like you but to a celestial body a little closer to earth; 4.) I like you on the ground; 5.) I don't like you at all; 6.) I am going to bury this note so deep in the earth's surface that when I reach the liquid core—not the solid inner core, mind you—it will burn up in a celebration of my hatred for you and this silly note." (*To Narrator.*) You would never text that note. It's too long.

NARRATOR: Good point, young man.

BOY: Thanks.

NARRATOR: Why don't we look at that as a text message exchange rather than a wordy and highly confusing note with highly confusing words. To help us translate, we have invited Vicky to help us.

BOY: Sure!

(Girl enters with her cell phone. Boy and Girl assume their initial positions. During the following, as they text each other, they never look at each other. Vicky enters.)

GIRL: (*To cell phone, texting.*) "I heart you."

BOY: (*To cell phone, texting.*) "LOL!"

VICKY: (*To audience, translating.*) "Lots of laughs" ...sarcastically.

GIRL: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "What?"

BOY: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "JK, JK."

VICKY: *(To audience, translating.)* "Just kidding, just kidding."
The first "just kidding" undoes the second "just kidding." I am so not kidding.

GIRL: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "Question mark?"

BOY: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "WEG."

VICKY: *(To audience, translating.)* "Wicked evil grin."

GIRL: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "Help me understand you."

BOY: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "RBTL!"

VICKY: *(To audience, translating.)* "Read between the lines, a.k.a. you are an idiot for not understanding that I am blowing you off."

GIRL: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "What?"

BOY: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "NIMB."

VICKY: *(To audience, translating.)* "Not in my backyard." This could mean that he is literally in his backyard and does not want her there, or it could be understood metaphorically wherein the "backyard" is his phone and he doesn't want her text messages in his "backyard." Either way, she is getting seriously blown off and should stop now.

GIRL: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "I don't understand."

VICKY: *(To Girl.)* Stop now!

BOY: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "B4E."

GIRL: *(To Vicky.)* That's not good, is it?

VICKY: *(To audience, translating.)* "Bye forever!"

BOY: *(To cell phone, texting.)* "XSTVUHK!"

GIRL: *(To cell phone, confused.)* What?

VICKY: *(To audience, translating.)* Gibberish. *(To Girl.)* He's just messing with you now.

[END OF FREEVIEW]