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The Kids are Driving the Bus

A full-length play with elements of music and audience participation

By Kristin Lundberg

B.S. Theater Education, East Carolina University
2000

Presented in
Partial fulfillment of the requirement for
The degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Playwriting,
Concentration in New Play Directing

Hollins University
Roanoke, Virginia
May, 2022

Director of Thesis: *Neil David Seibel*

Neil David Seibel
Department: Theater

Second Reader: *Todd Ristau*

Todd Ristau
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*How do we break the viewpoint of the world and empower the voice of our youth
in the middle of a three-ringed circus spectacle?*

SYNOPSIS

Ms. McShizzle has to decide how far she will go to challenge the educational system and empower her students to pursue their dreams. When confronting her nemesis, an audacious Clown with a harmful neurosis, McShizzle struggles to build the school community for good.

SETTINGS

The play begins in November, 2019 on the day of midterms and ends in May, 2020. Directors are encouraged to match the below settings with performance locations within a circus. These are playwright's suggestions of circus locale.

- Bus Stops represents the ringmaster magician with the company of artists/acrobats/clown talent.
- McShizzle's Classroom represents the aerial acts such as the trapeze and trampoline.
- Faculty meetings represent grounded acrobatics such as clowns and jugglers.
- McShizzle's Living Room represents the lion tamer with her lions until the three ring circus in Lesson Nine when the parents (freak show acts of fire eaters, knife throwers, and sword swallows) disrupt the lesson.

PLAYWRIGHT'S BIO

Kristin Lundberg (she/her) is an M.F.A. playwright at Hollins University with a concentration in new play directing whose plays have been produced and performed in New York City, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and internationally in London, and in Shropshire, UK. She is in her 16th year of teaching performing arts in the public schools. Kristin is dancer, actress, and has served as the Artistic Director of the *Shakespeare's Sister Company*, an all-female theater company she founded in 2008 dedicated to producing plays by women. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild, SETC, American Alliance of Theatre & Education, League of Professional Theater Women and the International Thespian Society. She lives in Holly Springs, North Carolina with her dog, Grace Marie, a retired therapy dog.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Cast Size: min 6, max 19)

MS. MCSHIZZLE, female, late 20s-30s, Caucasian, Doubles as the show's ringmaster and lion tamer. The K-12 public school's intervention specialist who runs the in-school suspension "time out" like a structured recess and teaches troubled youth with a flair of spice and eternal optimism. The actress may also play CARTOON MCSHIZZLE (any age), unless a local guest celebrity artist is slated to play this part. Cartoon McShizzle should only appear on the projection screen in Act II.

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL GIGGLES, female, 30s/40s, open ethnicity. An audacious clown, a gifted trickster circus magician and the lead administrator/chosen leader at the K-12 Public School.

ACTOR 1: (plays the following roles)

MARCUS, male, 8, African American. Elementary School Student. The life of the party.

TRE, male, 18, African American. High School Student. Poet with a past. Sings.

MARCUS' DAD, male, late 20s, African American. School bus driver who is over-worked. A pressure-cooker.

MR. B, male, 25, African American. Teacher in the Upper Grades School. The peacemaker.

ACTOR 2: (plays the following roles)

ALISON, female, 6, BIPOC. Elementary School Student. Talkative, sociable and values her family.

CALEIGH, female, 18, BIPOC. High School Student. Pregnant. Kitty's "parental figure" and older sister. She is smart as a whip, looks for trouble, and trouble finds her.

KITTY'S GRANDMA, female, 60, BIPOC.

MRS. D, female, Mid 20s, BIPOC. Teacher in the Upper Grades School. The defender.

ACTOR 3: (plays the following roles)

TOMMY, male, 7. Elementary School Student. Exposed to too much of the real world.

MATTY, male, 17. High School Student. The class comedian.

ALISON'S DAD, male, 40s. Grounded. A wronged-decent dad.

MR. A, male, 40s. Teacher in the Upper Grades School. The troublemaker.

ACTOR 4: (plays the following roles)

KITTY, female, 10. Good natured and sweet.

APRIL, female, 18. Innocent and over-dramatic.

TOMMY'S MOM, female, 25. Conservative, judgmental, convicted in her views.

MRS C, female, early 20s. Teacher in the Upper Grades School. The worrier.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Please note: this is a play with music and not a musical. "3 W's" and "McShizzle's Lullaby" have been written and recorded by the playwright who owns the rights to the songs. A/V references are available upon script request. Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" (1902) is in the public domain.

As this is a non-naturalistic, linear play, the artistic team is encouraged to channel their creativity in scene/beat/character transitions which may include, but are not limited to dance breaks, musical interludes, and spectacle performance acts. The structure is outlined much like a teacher's curriculum plan: the anticipatory set takes the place of the prologue, units take the place of acts, and lessons take the place of scenes.

While we are following the play through McShizzle's perspective, some scenes may be amplified in design and artistic choices which may behave like a "three-ringed circus". I.e. In Lesson Nine, the parents may be in shadow while the young children and McShizzle are in light...but the mood is a cacophony of chaotic sound while the action and pacing is frenetic.

Regarding casting, the playwright's preference is for six actors to perform this play. However, for educational institutions and/or producing organizations who may have more students than parts allotted, you are welcome to have up to nineteen actors perform the play. It is heavily encouraged that, if possible, the role of Cartoon McShizzle be played by a local celebrity in the community. The playwright encourages the use of BIPOC casting when possible which includes instances noted of open ethnicity. However, Actor 1 must be black or African American and Actor 2 must be BIPOC. Please use your judgements and consider all possibilities of race and culture, not just the easy choices.

IN DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to all of Ms. Lundberg's former and current students.

*"You are the dream for us to become a better humanity. I believe in you. I see you.
You are fearless and I'm ridiculously proud of all of you."*

Additional thanks to the playwright's A+ All-Star Teachers!

Props to teaching mentor, Patch Clark, who is a fountain of inspiration and compassion, to ND Seibel for his gift for teaching, his energy, and encouragement with this piece, and to Todd Ristau for building up emerging playwrights to showing their authentic voice.

FORWARD

The Kids are Driving the Bus is a story which I've been wanting to write for a long-time because of my dedication to education. As public-school teacher completing my sixteenth year of teaching theater arts, my passion is to speak to the inequities of the educational system and how students have been forced to grow up – being the ones who are having to survive in a world full of adults and circumstances which have failed them. How can one teacher potentially make a difference and amplify her student's voices and is she making a difference for the ultimate success of the child or her wanting to make a difference to justify her legacy? How is that child's success measured and evaluated because ultimately, they are the ones who will be changing our world. Is that change what the student wants or is it a succession of wants and needs from a past generation to heighten their voice in how they micromanage what our world needs to look like? Can we allow ourselves to inspire the next generation to open possibilities of their world dreams without our selfish influence? How can we help them? Because this play also focuses on issues of representation and racial inequality, I've had to wrestle with areas of a "white savior" within the text and be aware of how to structurally incorporate why this is in this story and how I want to resolve it. As there are time specific, cultural references in the play, in addition to language, having a diverse panel of play readers will be important to the process. Is the journey of my protagonist transforming from "white savior" to ally? If this is the story, how do I clarify it?

In building towards developing this semi-autobiographical project, my goals for *The Kids are Driving the Bus* have been to build the bones and framework for this play using Aristotle's Poetic Structure so that it's not a documentary play, explore writing styles which lend to the storytelling (not just what I'm comfortable with), to incorporate the plot and character

breadcrumbs so that the audience is taken along the playwright's journey (and not blind-sight them with new, unsupported information), and to find the audience who would become invested in this play. With these goals in mind, how do I establish a creative process which continues to set myself up for success? Coming into the MFA program at *Hollins University*, my style was centrically focused on "epic" or time specific memory plays. I knew I wanted to explore different writing styles to see how these can open up the possibilities of my storytelling and how these explorations can lead to plays which people want to see. Where are the audiences for these plays and how can I reach them to further the process of the play development rather than doubting a concept...to allow it to sit so that no one gets to experience it? As an artist, I have pinned Martha Graham's speech ¹to Agnes DeMille (the first part of the quote) from when Mrs. Graham had doubts about her artistic process, "*There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost. The world will not have it.*" The urgency of this quote grounds me as a theatrical artist and playwright to push through finding the tools to reach the heart of the play.

What I have found as a sweeping statement and testament to the *Hollins University* MFA program, as well as my commitment to my education, is every class I have taken has informed the next class in a radical way. Tools I would learn in the *Design on a Dime* class rethinking theatrical design would resurface in conversation in the *Advanced Tutorial* class revisiting play structure which would further amplify, and echo themes brought up in the *First Drafts* class reimagining the possibilities of exploring writing for genre under tight deadlines. It became a constant moving puzzle of pieces that never seems to settle, but somehow all the pieces not-so-

¹ <https://karlwolfe.org/karl/martha-graham-agnes-demille/>

randomly fit together to form theater. In the *Memoir as a Performance* class, my goal as a playwriting student was to write a play from my experience, but with relevancy to an audience member. One of the first tools learned was a memoir is not an autobiography, you are encouraged to lie and let the play write itself. This is the approach I attempted to take with *The Kids are Driving the Bus*. Where I struggled along the way is asking myself where the audience members see themselves in this story. What I have found particularly challenging is to write about material as our world culture goes through a dramatic shift. If I address these shifts within my work, does it become an issue play and am I re-writing the play to focus on the issue because it's what an audience wants to see versus am I writing the story which I am compelled to write potentially being insensitive to not address representation? How can I incorporate representation within my work, but still stay true to the story? What are the plays which people want to see, am I writing these plays, and how do I get to where communities find a need for them? With all of this in mind, who is the target audience for *The Kids are Driving the Bus* and is it an issue play? When a panel of artists and educators met with me during the developmental writing process, they were asked specifically about who the audience is for this play at this stage in the process. Some interesting feedback was the first responder asked, "Is an adult audience going to lean into this?" Another individual said, "high school and up" and the final panelist commented on the theatricality is what drew her in. She added, "Interested theatricalities appeal to different types of audiences and I'd love to see the audience's response to the theatricality you've given us in this piece." They overall felt that there was a compelling "buy-in" to this play and watch as these characters struggle within the constraints of the system. The panel also mentioned one of the key moments of the play was the student's graduation and that made me rethink the structure of resolving the protagonist/antagonist plotline and how to resolve it. The question also came up of

“how do the kids drive the bus and why is it happening off-stage”? Originally my thinking was because this event is from the protagonist’s perspective that she needs to be the one who sees the bus being driven by the students. What didn’t occur to me until this panel discussion is that the audience wants to see the kids drive this bus on the stage not through the protagonist’s eyes. This prompted me to switch the scenes around and create a split stage action approach informing the audience that while the protagonist/antagonist relationship is resolving, we’re not yet done with this play. There’s more to come.

When I first began writing *The Kids are Driving the Bus*, I imagined the audience would be young adults and could see this performed by college students. However, after hearing this feedback, I feel that this could be powerful if performed by high school students and for high school students. This made me think of how I need to re-think some of the language, as well as lean into this idea of the circus. The audience of a circus are children or are adults who want to be transformed in a child-like way. The children in *The Kids are Driving the Bus* are forced to grow up in a realistic, harsh world without hope. The circus spectacle and the magic give us hope. How can I distance my own personal experience of an educational whirlwind of a circus to tell the story of this specific piece of theater? In the *Narrative Theory* class, I wrote a play about a personal family experience and the content was so “exactly what happened” that the peer response was it alienated the reader and even made them feel uncomfortable prying so closely into the authors life. This became a valuable piece of information even in this semi-autobiographical piece, *The Kids are Driving the Bus*, as it makes me question: what do I want the audience to feel at the end of the play, why do I need to write this story –was it a form a therapy or does it serve a higher function, and where is the relevancy for the audience? How can I help them connect to it? When I revisit revisions, I keep in mind if I was commissioned to write

this piece for my family member, what would I want to say and how does it relate to the larger scope of humanity?

Analyzing Lisa Kron's texts *Fun Home*² and *Well*³ struck a chord with me in how to break down a memoir and question oneself while this character's journey is a thread-line to the human condition which audience members relate to. In *Fun Home*, little Alison tells the audience, she wants to fly like an airplane with her dad and the audience watches as her father slowly separates himself from his family. In her play *Well*, the character of Lisa enters immediately telling us "I want to tell you a little bit about what we're going to be doing" (11). She states plainly to the audience that the play questions issues of illness and wellness and abruptly says the play is not about her mother and herself, yet subsequently references her mother sitting in a recliner as the other person on the stage. Lisa Kron keeps the character's want in the forefront so that the audience knows when the play will end and take them on the ride of the journey. In both plays, I've learned how effectively it is to connect the identity, want, and central conflict at the start of the play and spend the rest of the play having the character hopefully attempting to find their resolution. It is the four primary questions actors ask themselves in each scene and directors ask actors to revisit anytime a scene falls flat and we're falling away from the authenticity of the story: who am I, what do I want, what's in my way, and how do I get what I want. In *The Kids are Driving the Bus*, I knew what I wanted this play to be about, but I wasn't sure in earlier drafts whose perspective I was telling the play from. I want this play to be from Ms. McShizzle's perspective, but the audience doesn't meet McShizzle and her want until scene two. We do, however, meet Kitty in the opening scene who wants to go to

² "Fun Home" by Lisa Kron (Book and Lyrics), Alison Bechdel (Original author), Jeanine Tesori (Music), Published by Samuel French, 2015

³ "Well" by Lisa Kron, Published by Theatre Communications Group, 2005

school, but she is the only child whose magical gift from the clown goes up in flames. As a result, she misses the bus to school until McShizzle comes along, drives her to school, and gives her the gift of candy. Based on Lisa Kron's play structure, Kitty would be more likely the character the audience is following on her journey.

In preparing to write my semi-autobiographical memoir play, I found the best way to get out of my head was to voice record my stream of thoughts and questions of the experience, transfer this to paper, and allow the play to begin to write itself. It took much longer for me to take the content and find the structural "why am I telling this experience?". However, for *The Kids are Driving the Bus*, I found this tool useful because this play continues to reinvent itself. Vocalizing the narrative lends to the audacity of the style and helped me to further explore the extreme of character's intentions and how they either matched or pulled away from the dramatic question. As the director of another colleague's memoir play, which I spent close to a year analyzing, I had trouble identifying that play's dramatic question and how we want the audience to be feeling by the end. The playwright didn't share these answers except to relate directly back to his personal experience. Because this was such a personal experience for him, I struggled with finding how this play would connect with an audience or if there was a specific audience who would connect with it. As a playwright this makes me question what makes for a successful play and the "formula" for a play which the audiences want to engage in? Because the theatricality of a circus is heavily interactive, this "learned lesson" taught me the value of bringing the audience along on the ride and how to re-invigorate the audience experience in *The Kids are Driving the Bus*. Following the parallel structure of a circus show, this was a launching pad for me to look at how does a circus begin, end, and how do the performers engage with their audience? This concept opened my eyes to realizing Giggles wasn't the ringmaster of the show, it's McShizzle

whose world turns upside down when the clown takes over the show. With McShizzle as the ringmaster attempting to open the show in a circus spectacular and ending it in a ceremonial celebration such as the parade of animals, this action defends that the play is clearly from her perspective. I began to think where each of the scenes took place within the circus. Especially when using the metaphor of a trampoline to show students unfocused, bouncing all over the place and the use of the tightrope in the climax when the students must make their own life choices, the circus parallel with the audacity of educational politics, I found I had to question how every decision circled back to supporting the theme. When attending the writing workshop *Watch Me Work* with Suzan-Lori Parks, I asked her how she approaches plays which she wants to write at the start of her process, and does she have the audience in mind when writing it? She told me just to write it and let it work itself out but pay close attention to how secondary characters circle back to the theme. To not worry about the audience at this stage, just write it.

Analyzing musicals and memoir plays in the same semester highlighted the need to communicate early in the play the character's ultimate want (which tells the audience when the play is expected to end), but the importance of taking care of the audience while you take them on the ride of your story. Revisiting the structure of successful musicals, as *The Kids are Driving the Bus* is a play with music, there's a lot of moving parts to both genres. In Jack Viertel's book, *The Secret Life of the American Musical*⁴, Viertel speaks about the structure of the Golden Age musicals which allow for the *Bushwacking: Second Couples* (Chapter 6, 109). "First couple A, then couple B, then couple A, then couple B, reuniting them at the end" (112). I took a closer look at the couples in *The Kids are Driving the Bus* and noticed the first couple is AP Giggles

⁴ "The Secret Life of the American Musical: How Broadway Shows are Built" by Jack Viertel, Published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016

and Ms. McShizzle and the second couple is Caleigh and Kitty. In other words, administration versus teacher and student who missed her window of opportunity versus student who is the hope of the future. Their lives and conflicts intertwine, however the resolution of administration versus teacher concludes prior to McShizzle's resolution with Caleigh and Kitty so my thought returns to is the audience following Kitty? Kitty identifies most with Ms. McShizzle as they both are optimists and hope to build community for good. Caleigh makes it clear that she is a favorite of AP Giggles as they are jaded realists who believe building community under the real-life header. AP Giggles is the plays antagonist; however, I'm playing with the idea the first couple is Ms. McShizzle and Kitty and the second couple is AP Giggles and Caleigh. David Edgar references in his book *How Plays Work*⁵ the cause-and-effect model of play structure: "A dramatic action consists of a project, followed by a contradiction or reversal" (25). Thinking through Marsha Norman's five question exercise prompting an objective look at the play, which was explored in the *Narrative Theory* and *Advanced Tutorial* classes, coupled with David Edgar's play structure model, I started to investigate how a play with music setup might potentially be different from a straight play structure. "It is a play about a Teacher. The Teacher wants to change her students lives for good, but her methods are challenged by school administration. It all takes place in a circus. Along the way, the Teacher learns hers and the educational systems values are the same, they just reach them differently. We know the play is over when the Teacher's troubled student graduates high school." Thinking more about the protagonist's function in the world of her students, I need to take a closer look at how the play structure merges these two worlds. The inciting incident or dramatic action occurs when the clown takes over the circus tossing the ringmaster to the side and the world of the play is turned

⁵ "How Plays Work" by David Edgar, Published by Nick Hern Books Limited, 2009

upside down. The *Dramaturgy* class deconstructs academic written works which has allowed me to look at how play structure can effectively be dismantled to justify the “why now” of the story, as well as how best to have a dialogue with the audience about the play. Katalin Trencsenyi speaks extensively in her book *Dramaturgy in the Making: A User’s Guide for Theatre Practitioners*⁶ about the need for dramaturgs to bridge the language of the play for the artistic team and the audience which analyzes the why of play structure and asks questions to build a stronger communication. “It’s about the dance, it’s about the script, it’s about the production. But largely it’s about the relationship” (160). I found the study of creating bead diagrams and scene breakdowns especially effective for *The Kids are Driving the Bus* as I realized how the flow of each of these feeds back to the theme and how to adjust. The techniques in the dramaturgy class reminds me of David Ball’s text *Backwards and Forwards*⁷ in looking at another way to get to the dramatic question and find the breadcrumbs in the text which I may have missed reading chronologically. As a director, playwright, and reader of plays, I have always struggled with where to begin when analyzing a text to best attempt to discover what the playwright is trying to say. Using Gustav Freytag’s pyramid⁸ accompanied with Aristotle’s poetic structure⁹ has helped me to map out the possibilities and follow the breadcrumbs. In the *Plays with Music* class, we in fact studied the structure of *Hansel and Gretel*¹⁰ which is a children’s story about following breadcrumbs! The parallel with this story and the tool of using the breadcrumbs to

⁶ “Dramaturgy in the Making: A User’s Guide for Theatre Practitioners” by Katalin Trencsenyi, Published by Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2015

⁷ “Backwards and Forwards : a Technical Manual for Reading Plays” by David Ball, published by Southern Illinois University Press, 1983

⁸ “Freytag’s Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art” by Gustav Freytag, Translated by Elias J. MacEwan, published by theclassics.us, 2013.

⁹ “Poetics” by Aristotle, translated by Anthony Kenny, published by Oxford University Press; Reprint edition (January 20, 2013)

¹⁰ “Hansel and Gretel” by Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm, published by Random House, 1812.

circle the characters and tie plot back to the theme landed with me. When my *Playscripts Analysis* teacher Dominic Taylor read *The Kids are Driving the Bus*, after an early draft was developed, he also spoke to how the breadcrumbs of the play button up the structure and it feeds back to the theme. He said to decide what's important, put it in the play, revisit why it's important, and build breadcrumbs throughout the play. The same thing goes for the character's want. We meet Caleigh in scene two and it's mentioned in the classroom scene that she wants to be a nurse. Where do we see that in the play before and after this scene? Having her bandage up Kitty's boo-boo in scene two to, in the closing scene, Ms. McShizzle gifting Caleigh with a graduation gift of a stethoscope helped not only to establish Caleigh's need for nursing instincts, but also establishes how the world at large responds to her need. With the complication of being pregnant to living with resources constantly being ripped away from her, Caleigh is constantly re-assessing what is possible for her when so much is outside of her control.

Revisiting the poetic structure, I found that musicality is a dominant component of this play through the three songs in the play, but also throughout the dialect, the language, the direction, and the design. In the *Design on a Dime* class, we studied how to think about design in dramatically different ways. Robert Edmond Jones stated in *The Dramatic Imagination*¹¹ text, "When a playwright begins to awaken the music that lies in the spoken word, and when an actor begins to give this music its value, a new theatre springs into being" (60). Speaking to the musicality, plot, spectacle, and use of language in a play lifts the beats pulled out by the actor, envisioned by the director, and animated (36) by the design team. The musicality informs the spectacle and pacing as these characters reveal the absurdities and realities buried in a fantastical world. I feel that my central characters are McShizzle, Giggles, Tre, Kitty, and Caleigh all of

¹¹ "The Dramatic Imagination" by Robert Edmond Jones, published by Routledge, 2004

whom have opposing dynamics except for Tre who doesn't find opposition, but a parental "adoption" of sorts by McShizzle and Giggles. Tre is the symbolic hope for every child who has ever suffered, felt unwanted, and sought out hope. Because AP Giggles is so ruthless from the get-go and the audience sees her physically change in scene nine, I do feel there's more opportunity throughout the play to find her humanity. My hope for next steps is to take this play from the page to the stage and collaborate with the actress playing AP Giggles to dig out those moments. In the *Writing Plays with Music* class, we were lucky enough to have playwright and book writer, Doug Wright speaks with us about how he collaborates with artists on musicals. Curious about his approach to developing a one-person play, I asked him about his collaboration with actor, Jefferson Mays on *I Am My Own Wife*¹². He replied "When working with talented collaborators, give people the space to do their great works. Let them give it a try. They might show you something you don't see. Maybe they know something you don't." What I am excited for is the possibility of how an actress will open up this world where AP Giggles lives and be a part of a team to help me develop her even more.

When collaborating, I am reassured those creative processes are different for everybody and need to question myself on each project when in the process do I want to bring people in to look at my work. Some of my strengths which I have discovered as a *Hollins University MFA* playwright are that I feel confident in how to create the world of the play without telling the director the staging. As a director, I'm a visual artist and when writing, I want to take care of the audience by "putting them in the proverbial pool, not telling them about it." I understand how to create the play world and how the characters relate to this world. I also feel that I create compelling primary characters. Where I struggle regarding character is how they function inside

¹² "I Am My Own Wife" by Doug Wright, published by Faber and Faber Inc., 2004.

of the plot...specifically secondary characters. Why are they there and how do they moved the plot forward? What is the ending chapter of their journey? Additionally, I struggle with the specifics of plot, but have felt that utilizing Aristotle's tools has helped me clarify how to connect plot to theme. How does the title of the play feed into the action happening on and offstage? In terms of theme, I feel I am strong with developing the play's concept but need to work on building more breadcrumbs throughout the play to take the audience along the journey. When exploring language, dialect, and text, I feel that I successfully paint the picture for the actors, artistic team, and the audience through the dramaturgy. The musicality of the text has shifted dramatically from when I first began this play as I've given characters intention and obstacle through how they relate to the world. I am continuing to explore the rhythms and patterns in the scene versus the play as a whole.

Finally, I feel that because I am a visual creative artist that I really enjoy building spectacle in my plays and I do this well. Dominic Taylor also commented how having a fantastical world forces the playwright to re-boot Aristotle's poetics meaning the rules must be redefined. Since the circus elements are such a huge part of this play, where are the circus metaphors in setting and character and how do these metaphors tie back to the theme? I knew from the start that the educational system in this play represents a metaphorical circus and found the compelling images from the audacious clown to the designs of circus acts to feed into the theme. Additionally, marrying the world of education with this circus, I felt it was important to frame timeline of this play much like a lesson plan. I remember seeing the Broadway production of *Pippin* by my favorite director, Diane Paulus, which she set the world of the play within a circus and watched how she weaved elements of the circus into every aspect of that show. She brilliantly unveiled a theatrical world and showed how each scene, musical number, character

conflict was further complicated as it moved through this world filled with illusion. Observing these tools has helped me to further develop how the circus spectacle of *The Kids are Driving the Bus* unravels and reveals itself.

My literary hero, Virginia Woolf ¹³said “If we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think, then the opportunity will come”. In continuing to explore my creative process, I want to continue to create a community of artists who want to collaborate with me and let go of things which I can’t control. As the wise director, ND Seibel encouraged me to “find my genius space and live there”. To continue creating passion projects and build artistic works contributing my voice to the world.

¹³ “A Room Of One’s Own” by Virginia Woolf, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1929

UNIT ONE

ANTICIPATORY SET

November, 2019. A bus stop. In the center ring of the circus tent features the RINGMASTER with her company of acrobats and clown talent.

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY and KITTY stand in a diamond shape of the center ring facing outward holding a jump rope. The ringmaster, later known as MS MSHIZZLE, stands center in red tails and a black top hat. Spot light on the ringmaster.

RINGMASTER

Ladies and Gentlemen! Children of all ages! Welcome...to our show! Welcome to the-

SPX: Lion Roar

A CLOWN positioned behind the Ringmaster, a magician later known as AP GIGGLES, hooks her arms into the Ringmaster tossing her off-stage. The Clown stands in the middle of the diamond now facing the audience and holding a clown horn.

As the Clown slowly raises the horn in anticipation, the children prep their jump ropes for action.

A silence and then the Clown honks the horn. The children begin to jump rope.

Child and Clown in a call/response.

CLOWN

Don't forget your pencil.

Got my pencils!
MARCUS

No one uses pencils.
CLOWN

Got my cell phone!
ALISON

Get your sister ready!
CLOWN

Where'd I put my pencils?
TOMMY

Where'd you put my pencil?
CLOWN

Dunno.
KITTY

Marcus delivers his jump rope to the Clown.

CLOWN
(to Marcus) Got your lunch...catch the bus, don't be late.

She takes the rope, pulls a quarter from behind his ear, hands it to him. He returns to his place.

Alison delivers her jump rope to the Clown.

CLOWN
(to Allison) Got your lunch...catch the bus, don't be late.

She takes a rope and folds it into a bouquet of flowers, hands it to her. She returns to her place.

Tommy delivers his jump rope to the Clown.

CLOWN
(to Tommy) Got your lunch...catch the bus, don't be late.

She takes a rope and twists it into a balloon animal, hands it to him. He returns to his place.

Kitty delivers her jump rope to the Clown.

CLOWN

(to Kitty) Got your lunch...catch the bus, don't be late.

She takes a rope and presents Kitty with a card from a deck. As Kitty reaches for it, it turns into a flame and disappears. Kitty returns empty handed to her place.

On the following lines, the children walk the diamond formation around the Clown like the musical acts who encircle the head clown at the start of a circus.

CLOWN

Line leader...Marcus!

MARCUS

The bus and traffic stops for me!

CLOWN

Exit, Alison!

ALISON

I hope no one takes my favorite seat!

Alison leaves the diamond exiting off-stage.

CLOWN

Tommy!

TOMMY

The blinking stop sign means STOP!

CLOWN

Kitty!

KITTY

I wait and I wait, but the bus never comes.

TOMMY

Bye mom! Miss you tons and tons!

MARCUS

Bus be late today...YO-O-O-! (beat) Now, it's time to...

Clown honks her horn.

MARCUS AND TOMMY

Let us go.

Marcus, Tommy, and the Clown exit. Kitty is left alone to fend for herself. Again!

KITTY

Oh, no! Missed the bus A-G-A-I-N!

CALEIGH runs to Kitty.

CALEIGH

(calling to bus)

Hey! He-e-e-e-y! Getbackherebus! Kit, LOOKOUT!

White flash of light.

LESSON ONE

In the safety net of the trapeze.

CALEIGH

Damn!

KITTY

That car didn't obey the stop sign! YOU STOP AT THE BLINKY LIGHTS!

CALEIGH

You alright?

KITTY

I'm B-LIND!

CALEIGH

Get up.

KITTY

Why do headlights look the gates of Heaven?

CALEIGH

Life flashing before your eyes again?

KITTY

Ow! Uh, oh. Cut?

Kitty cradles her arm, her lip quivering. Caleigh pulls gauze from her backpack pocket.

CALEIGH

Press here. 'member how I taught you?

KITTY

Pressure.

CALEIGH

Yeah. Whachu fall on?

KITTY

Myself. (beat) Gramma's first aid kit's comin in handy!

CALEIGH

Hold still.

Caleigh cleans the cut with a wipe and applies a Bandaid.

KITTY

Why didn't Gramma go to nursing school when she has all this stuff? She'd be proud of you!

CALEIGH

Yeah, right.

KITTY

I mean it! The first in the family to go to college? That's gotta mean SOMethin'.

CALEIGH

You talk too much.

KITTY

You fix all my boo boos. (beat) You missed the bus too?

CALEIGH

Yeah, yeah. (beat) Close your coat. What d'ya think it's summer?

KITTY

It's warm on the bus.

CALEIGH

Buses ain't warm, boo. Dumbass kids are always messing wida windows...leave'nem cracked open. Be *cold*. Come on. I'll walk ya.

KITTY

Gramma-.

CALEIGH

-Gramma said we miss the bus one more time, we gonna live with grandpa!

KITTY

He smells like pee.

CALEIGH

Old people do. Come on, Kitty.

KITTY

We don't haveta go to scho--.

CALEIGH

--You forgotten what day it is?

KITTY

We could stay home . You can teach me how to wrap my ankle again!

CALEIGH

Midterms! You wanna stay in 5th grade the rest of your life? And that nursing school recruiter-.

KITTY

-Oh, yeah!

MS. MCSHIZZLE, the lion tamer, enters in her clown car and speeds past them.

CALEIGH

H-E-E-E-Y! Oh, see now look...white lady speeding past us. Not even a look back!

Kitty waves her hands frantically.

CALEIGH (CONT.)

Get outta the street? You wanna be roadkill? You remember how mama -.

KITTY

-Sorry! Sorry! I'm sorry!

Ms. McShizzle stops the car.

CALEIGH

Come 'ere.

Caleigh pulls Kitty close to her. Kitty pushes her away.

KITTY

Dang! Why you besayin' that? You didn't have to say *nothin* 'bout mama!

CALEIGH

Watch your mouth! Ain't gotta apologize to you. (beat) She's jus' waitin' there. An' now she's backin' up? An' now ..She's stopped.
I don't like this.

KITTY

(gasps) It's my teacher! I'd know that bun anywhere!

CALEIGH

A white teacher in this neighborhood? Boo, I don't think so.

KITTY

We should text her.

CALEIGH

You got a phone? Teachers don't text students.

KITTY

I hate walking to school.

CALEIGH

Then, don't miss the damn bus!

KITTY

We can catch up with her. She's at a stop sign.

CALEIGH

What she waitin' for?

KITTY

She's backing up.

CALEIGH

Get back over here! Kitty!

KITTY

Come on!

McShizzle rolls down the window.

Hey, you, uh, you lost? Y'crazy?
 CALEIGH
 It's too cold for y'all to be walking.
 MS MCSHIZZLE
 Ms. McShizzle! To the school!
 KITTY
 Ain't no taxi!
 CALEIGH
 STAT!
 KITTY
 Whachu now in an ambulance?
 CALEIGH
 Kitty spins in a circle like a siren.
 KITTY
 Reh-er-REH-er-REH-ER-
 CALEIGH
 KNOCKITOFF! Ms. Mc-uh...
 KITTY
 McSHIZzle! That's her name.
 CALEIGH
 Huh.
 MS MCSHIZZLE
 Hi Kitty! Get in, y'all.
 CALEIGH
 So, y'ar crazy.
 KITTY
 This is my sister, Caleigh. Caleigh, Ms. McShizzle!
 Kitty gets in the car.

CALEIGH

Would you get outta the car? We're gonna walk.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Nonsense.

KITTY

Smells like vanilla!

CALEIGH

Uh, yeah!

KITTY

Caleigh, you don't get it!

CALEIGH

No, you DON'TGET IT!!!

KITTY

Remember when I came home with my shoes all tied and was like, CALEIGH! I TIED MY SHOES!

CALEIGH

Uh, yeah?

KITTY

That was the first time a teacher didn't do it for me. Ms. McShizzle told me the story about the bunny and the tree and now...I CAN TIE MY DAGGONE SHOES!

CALEIGH

What?!

KITTY

She didn't give up on me and we won't give up on her! ADVENTURE!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I couldn't live with myself if I let children walk to school in the freezing cold.

KITTY

Soooo cold!

CALEIGH

Ain't Alaska! It's November 4th in North Carolina! Summer jus' ended yesterday-

MS MCSHIZZLE

-Kitty's made herself at home.

KITTY

I really, really have.

CALEIGH

Figures.

KITTY

Would you get in already? Baby, it be k-cawled outside! Bb-b-b-br-r-r-r!

Reluctantly, Caleigh gets in the car.

Beat.

CALEIGH

Ain't this illegal? Pickin' up kids in yer car?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Not in this district.

CALEIGH

What?!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I had to read the handbook pretty clearly, but yeah. You're completely safe. Oops!
Almost forgot to lock the ol' bugaboo doors!

Electronic locking of doors. Beat.

CALEIGH

Yer gonna kill us, ain't ya? You even look like that lady in the movie! The one with the damn tea!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Language, please. Kitty is one of my students. We're all going to the same place anyway, am I right? You attend this school?

CALEIGH

Depends on the day.

KITTY

Caleigh's a senior! She's gonna be a nurse!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Is that right?

KITTY

The first in our family! There's a nursing recruiter coming to school today. That's why we can't stay home-.

CALEIGH

-Boo! (beat)

So, why you drivin' in this...community?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Shortcut! The stretch isn't long. That's wonderful you want to be a nurse.

CALEIGH

Other white teachers use the highway. You not...like 'em or some'in?

MS MCSHIZZLE

That highway is the reason we don't have a dedicated middle and high school. No money in education. Although I enjoy the redistricting. Allowing children from all walks of life and all zones to diversify a school. Allows us to...learn a lot from each other.

CALEIGH

You a politician?

MS MCSHIZZLE

You know what I want, children?

KITTY

I wanna be President!

MS MCSHIZZLE

And I want you to change this world, Kitty! I want...all of you to change the world.

KITTY

Sing the Whitney Houston song, Ms. McShizzle!

CALEIGH

I'm 'bout to knock you-.

MS MCSHIZZLE

-I don't condone violence in my car, young lady.

McShizzle opens up her glove box.

CALEIGH

Oh, God! Unlock the daggone facache door!

She pulls out a bag of candy.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Candy?

KITTY

Me! Me!

CALEIGH

No!

KITTY

No?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, go on. A spoonful of sugar goes a long way. After all, sleeping your way through school doesn't help you with your education.

KITTY

It's not her fault, Ms. McShizzle! We don't live with daddy no more!

CALEIGH

Would you, shut it! She wasn't talkin'-'! (to McShizzle) Kitty says things...a lotta things.

Kitty reaches for the candy. Caleigh slaps her hand away.

OW!
KITTY

I SAID NO CANDY!
CALEIGH

But you told me-?
KITTY

-CANDY! S-U-G-A-R! She doesn't want me to sleep through CLASS!
CALEIGH

Beat.

Oh.
KITTY

Silence. Caleigh reluctantly takes a lollipop.
Kitty clears her throat. Caleigh grabs the candy bag, searching through it.

Smarties, please!
KITTY (CONT.)

Take a peppermint.
CALEIGH

A pepper-!
KITTY

Caleigh glares at her, hands her the peppermint, opens up the glove box, and returns the candy to its home.

MS MCSHIZZLE
There now. That didn't hurt, did it? (clears her throat) Is there anything I can do?

Caleigh shakes her head, stares out window.

DEER!
KITTY

CALEIGH
You scared the-!

KITTY
DEER! DEER!

CALEIGH
WE HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME!

KITTY
It was right there, Ms. McShizz!

MS MCSHIZZLE
That's *wonderful*, Kitty!

KITTY
I wish I had a million dollars.

CALEIGH
Don't start.

MS MCSHIZZLE
Oh, children. I hope one day for a better world and you, you are the key to it!

CALEIGH
You live in Never, never land?

MS MCSHIZZLE
Just an optimist.

CALEIGH
With a death wish.

MS MCSHIZZLE
I believe in my kids.

CALEIGH
You got kids?

MS MCSHIZZLE
You. I meant...you and Kitty. My students. I don't know where I'd be without them.

CALEIGH

Some rich school far from here? (beat) I don't buy it.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Don't buy--.

CALEIGH

All this phony savior sh--stuff.

KITTY

Caleigh! She don't mean no disrespect! I don't feel like she does, Ms McShizz!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'm sorry to be a disappointment to you, Caleigh.

Beat.

You know, a lot of my students live here. Some of the teachers too.

CALEIGH

Not you.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Doesn't mean I won't someday.

CALEIGH

That's some crazy ass dream, lady! Uh..I mean, miss.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You never know the cards you're dealt.

CALEIGH

You got blinders on? Daytime/nighttime...it don't matter. I walk out my door last night? Someone shot at me! Puttin' mail in the mailbox! I do Gramma's bill payin' online, but we don't got no wifi!

KITTY

I stream Paw Patrol from our neighbor! She gave me her password and EVRY'thang!

CALEIGH

Gramma don't like you using her password, boo.

KITTY

But I gots to get me some PAW PATROL!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Kitty, when we get to school, let's see if there's an extra wifi box we can check out from the library.

CALEIGH

You don't hafta to do that.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Nonsense! I believe there may be some school approved Paw Patrol assignments we can come up with together?

KITTY

YAY!

CALEIGH

You don't need to do us no favors.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Don't be silly! We have the resources.

KITTY

Yeah!

CALEIGH

We don't take somethin' for nuthin', boo!

Beat.

KITTY

Singing HER version of Paw Patrol.

PAW PATROL
PAW PATROL
PAW! PAW! PAW! PAW!

KITTY AND MS MCSHIZZLE

(singing)

PAW PATROL
PAW PATROL
PAW! PAW! PAW! PAW!

CALEIGH

YOU NEW AT THIS SCHOOL OR SOMETHIN'?

KITTY

You don't hafta yell.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Do I look new?

Caleigh shrugs her shoulders.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

I've been teaching five years and transferred to this district a few months ago. I'm the school's intervention specialist. You know...the place where students go for a "time out"?

CALEIGH

The school jail?

MS MCSHIZZLE

No, no. My classroom is a safe haven for all children.

CALEIGH

The last suspension teacher threw a desk at another student.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I am redefining that bugaboo of an In-School Suspension! Giving students extra special academic attention with a super special twist! Children will have hope again.

CALEIGH

Jesus.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You must do pretty good for yourself. Hadn't seen you in my class.

Caleigh snickers.

CALEIGH

That surprise you?

MS MCSHIZZLE

No. I--.

CALEIGH

Where hope goes to die.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Well...gosh. (beat) I think my favorite thing is watching my students grow up over the years and seeing them graduate...walking across that stage. That's really somethin', you know? The future. My hope for the future. The...rite of passage.

CALEIGH

.....

KITTY

WE'RE HERE!

CALEIGH

I'm 'bout to knock you!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'll drop you at the bus loop, Caleigh. Kitty's homeroom is near my class.

KITTY

Thanks, Ms. McShizzle!

School bell rings.

CALEIGH

Drop us at the front.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You'll be late to class.

CALEIGH

I do it all the time. I need to see her safe inside. Then, I'll go.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Okay.

She parks.

CALEIGH

It's easier when she gets on the bus. My route's always late and hers is early so I can actually see her get on the bus. K12 school and they won't let us ride the same damn bus.

MS MCSHIZZLE

It's a funny little system, isn't it?

Beat.

CALEIGH

Thanks for the ride. We won't be botherin' you no more.

MS MCSHIZZLE

If you need anything-

Caleigh steps out the car and pulls Kitty off-stage. They exit.

McShizzle calls out to them.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

I'm here...

Light shift. End of scene.

LESSON TWO

Atop the majestic circus elephant, serving as a school bus, Marcus' Dad drives the bus and Alison, a six-year old know-it-all, sits excitedly behind him in the front seat of the bus.

ALISON

(singing enthusiastically with herself)

HEY ALISON! SOMEONE' CALLIN MY NAME.
 HEY ALISON! LOOK, I HEAR IT AGAIN!
 THERE'S SOMEONE CALLING ON THE PHONE
 AND IF YOU'RE NOT ALISON, I'M NOT HOME...

MARCUS' DAD

I think you're s'pposed to sing with someone else.

ALISON

(sings)

HEY DRIVER-!

MARCUS' DAD

-Not me, kid.

ALISON

Where's the other bus driver? Is she sick?

MARCUS' DAD

I don't know, kid. They call me and I'm here.

ALISON

No one else will play with me.

MARCUS' DAD

The other driver sing with you?

ALISON

No. She's scary. Yells at us to be quiet.

MARCUS' DAD

Seems like a good route to me. Marcus never mentioned a problem.

ALISON

That's soooo cool that Marcus' dad drives a bus! We're in all the same classes, you know. Why doesn't he sit up here too? (calling) MAR-!

MARCUS' DAD

-He's in the back with his friends.

ALISON

I'm his friend too.

MARCUS' DAD

He don't wanna sit behind his ol' man. I respect that.

ALISON

Well, then. I'll just have to keep you company!

Beat.

You should be our new bus driver!

MARCUS' DAD

You need to be sitting back in your seat.

Alison sits back then promptly leans forward.

ALISON

Why do you have to open the doors every time you cross the railroad track?

MARCUS' DAD

In case I wanna to throw kids off the bus.

Alison leans back.

MARCUS' DAD (CONT.)

Makin' a little joke, kid.

ALISON

My mom says I don't understand humor and I believe her.

MARCUS' DAD

Huh.

ALISON

You know what I brought for lunch? Chicken salad, glazed carrots, and a chocolate chip cookie! The school lunchroom could learn a lot from me.

MARCUS' DAD

Oh yeah? You make it all yourself?

ALISON

I helped mommy make the cookies. She makes all sorts of cookies. Oatmeal, cherry-vanilla, cranberry-orange...

MARCUS' DAD

You got a book or somethin'?

ALISON

I always do all of my homework as soon as I get home. Cinnamon raisin-. Do you like cookies?

MARCUS' DAD

I buy my cookies, kid.

ALISON

What kind?

MARCUS' DAD

The kind I like.

ALISON

Fig Newtons?

MARCUS' DAD

Why?

ALISON

Mommy said old men need prunes. (beat) Why do you drive the bus?

MARCUS' DAD

It's a...job. Your mommy gotta job?

ALISON

She's a designer.

MARCUS' DAD

'Course she is.

ALISON

She's taking me to daddy's this weekend.

MARCUS' DAD

Parents don't live together?

ALISON

Mommy said he did something bad.

MARCUS' DAD

I'm sorry, kid. That's tough.

ALISON

I miss him. He's taking me to see Wart hog!

MARCUS' DAD

Wart hog? Like at the zoo?

ALISON

No, silly! My horse! He's at the stables. Do you like to ride horses?

MARCUS' DAD

Naw, fishin'! Marcus' been askin' to go, but someone's gotta drive the bus. Ever been?

ALISON

NO WAY! Too smelly!

MARCUS' DAD

An' horses smell like pancakes?

ALISON

Like...pancakes?

MARCUS' DAD

Yeah!

ALISON

Buttermilk or blueberry?

MARCUS' DAD

Whatever?

ALISON

Are they gluten free? Mommy doesn't let me have gluten.

MARCUS' DAD

Forget it.

Beat.

ALISON

Do you have kids? Other than Marcus?

MARCUS' DAD

A girl. Just started in upper grades.

ALISON

I could be the middle sibling! Marcus and I get along! Promise!

MARCUS' DAD

You want to be in my family, huh?

ALISON

Do I hafta go fishing?

MARCUS' DAD

Naw.

ALISON

I've always wanted a little brother.

MARCUS' DAD

Aren't you and Marcus 'bout the same age?

ALISON

I'm four months older, thank you very much! Mommy told me the doctor told her I couldn't have a brother even though I've been extra good this year and really want one.

MARCUS' DAD

I don't think that's your fault, kid.

ALISON

Don't tell anyone. Especially Marcus! He's the biggest gossip in the third grade! Daddy found out and he left. I don't want mommy to leave me since I told someone her secret.

MARCUS' DAD

Mommy's not going to leave you. She loves you. Who would eat all of her gluten free cookies? It's our secret. We are family, right.

MARCUS' DAD forms a pinky swear with
Alison.

Light shift. End of scene.

LESSON THREE

MS MCSHIZZLE's classroom as a trampoline aerial act. In the scene change, circus music plays and transforms into an obnoxiously dissonant school bell sounds akin to a fire engine's alarm.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, sweet Jesus!

TRE and MATTY bounce around her room making fire engine alarm sounds.

TRE	MATTY
RAH-Arrr-Arrr-ARAR--aRRR-RAHHH!	WHOO-WHOO-woo-oo-oo-WHOOP-WHOOP!

MS MCSHIZZLE

No, no! We do *not* enter my class this way. Go out and try again.

TRE, MATTY

Oh, come on! But we're here! This is stupid!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Try again! Take two.

They go outside of her door and wait.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Alright. Come in, children!

They bounce again making fire engine noises.

TRE	MATTY
RAH-Arrr-Arrr-ARAR--aRRR-RAHHH!	WHOO-WHOO-woo-oo-oo-WHOOP-WHOOP!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Alright, alRIGHT. Take your seats.

MATTY

We're inspired by the bell, Ms. MACirIFFic SHIZZLerrr-RIZZLehrrr- RAZZLE!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Yeah, well. It's ringing my last nerve.

TRE AND MATTY

Oh! Bring back that school bus magic! Yowza! Smack!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Take. Your. Seats.

They do. Matty pops up.

MATTY

Can I write on the board?

MS MCSHIZZLE

No.

APRIL enters rushing in.

APRIL

Ssss-orry! Sorry Sorry Sorry Sorry!

MS MCSHIZZLE

This is your third tardy, Ms. April.

APRIL

(whispers)

It's my time of the month.

MS MCSHIZZLE

For three weeks?

APRIL

I'm an anom-a-l-y. Some days are worse than others.

Beat.

Ms. McShizz-y...wat?

MATTY

McShizzle. Yes, Matty?

MS MCSHIZZLE

It's a picture of you, Ms. McShizz.

MATTY

What?

MS MCSHIZZLE

The board?

MATTY

Oh, fine, but be quick about it. And don't forget to autograph it. I don't want people to assume I'm drawing flattering pictures of myself.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Facts.

MATTY

Can I take roll?

APRIL

No. (beat) Alright, who's *not* here?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Me!

TRE, MATTY, APRIL

Okay. (Tossing her pencil on the desk.) How have midterms been so far?

MS MCSHIZZLE

April makes a diving and thud sound.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

That bad?

APRIL

Why do we have to do stupid midterms anyway? My mom says standardized testing is a waste of time and I agree with her!

MATTY

Cuz you didn't study! Woop!

APRIL

SHUT UP! Who's repeating the 11th grade! NOT me!

Matty throws down the dry erase marker.

MS MCSHIZZLE

OKAY! Okay....

McShizzle picks up the marker and hands it to
Matty.

How about adding some details to the picture?

Matty reluctantly takes the marker and
continues drawing on the board.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Crisis averted. NOW....back to the land of Greek theater.

Caleigh enters.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh? Hi...again?

MATTY

H'again? Haha!

Caleigh shoots Matty a glaring look. He cowers,
continues drawing on the board.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Are you in the wrong classroom?

CALEIGH

I wish.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Did you meet with the nurs-.

Caleigh shoots McShizzle a death look.

TRE

HA-hahahah - (explosive cough)

CALEIGH

You got somethin' to say?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Why don't you take a seat? Did they send you with a pass?

TRE

No p-aasss for the FIRECRACKER!

MATTY

Boom!

MS MCSHIZZLE

What's going on here?

Tre shrugs his shoulders, puts his head on his desk, and falls asleep. Caleigh brushes past her as she crouches into the desk chair.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Okay, n-no problem. (beat). Here is your packet for today's lesson..and pencils for everyone! There we are!

Caleigh knocks her pencil off the desk.

ALISON

(whispering to Caleigh)

Hey-- psst! I heard those girls in Mrs. C's class talking' in the locker room after gym. What they said? You had every right to smash that fake blonde girl's hand in a locker!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Late to class and chatty, Ms Alison?

ALISON

Uh, yeah.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Alright, class. So, let's get started.

Beat.

Ms. Caleigh? Pencils are used as tools not a trip hazard. Could you pick that up, please?

ALISON

Uh-h-h-h-h, I GOT IT, MS MCSHIZZ-!

MS MCSHIZZLE

-No, no, Alison. Caleigh is a responsible young lady and I'm sure-

Caleigh SLAMS her bookbag on the floor, sulks in picking up the pencil, and returns to her desk. Tre jolts up and drifts off to sleep again leaning back in his chair pulling his hoodie up.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Wonderful. (clears throat) Make sure to look at your worksheets for the overall summary of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus the King!

ALISON

(whispering to Caleigh)
Anyway, I believe you. I'm on your side.

CALEIGH

Well, they had no where else to put me!

MS MCSHIZZLE

What was that, Caleigh?

CALEIGH

I said they had no where else to put me so they threw me in her with you...*people*.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Their loss is our gain.

CALEIGH

Yeah, right.

MS MCSHIZZLE

So, if we review the summary of Antigone-

MATTY

(reading off McShizzle's paper)

ANN-tee-gon!

MS MCSHIZZLE
An-Ti-gon-eee.

MATTY
Ant-ii-gonEEE!

MS MCSHIZZLE
Okay, Matty. Why don't you take your seat.

MATTY
Hey! I want to play that dude that had sex with his mother!

ALISON
You would! Gross!

MATTY
That's tony, yo.

MS MCSHIZZLE
I'm glad to see what we're retaining.

McShizzle nudges Tre awake pulling his hood down and singing in his ear.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)
(musical chant) Get that grade. Get that grade.

Tre dances in his seat to the chant.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)
Who can tell me what happens at the end of Oedipus which leads into where we are with Antigone?

Tre falls asleep again.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)
Anyone? Look at your summary...

Beat.

MATTY

Oedipus did his mama!

CALEIGH

I'm *mad* at THAT!

APRIL

Why?! I'm mean...didn't he see her face?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Alison, take a breath. Caleigh, since you're coming in later to this unit, take a look at the summary to getcha all caught up.

Caleigh uncomfortable shifts her seat, doing her best to hold her tongue and composure.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Now as we move into Antigone, we need to learn about the genealogy of the family.

MATTY

Why we need to know this stuff, Bra? I'm not tryin' show no disrespect-.

MS MCSHIZZLE

-If you don't understand the past, how will you know where you want to go? If you don't understand what other cultures believe, how can you inform your own decisions? And I am Not. Your. Bra.

MATTY

Well, I ain't doing the nasty with MeMa.

APRIL

Some kids don't have a choice.

CALEIGH

HOW is this STUFF gonna "*deepen*" my learning?

MS MCSHIZZLE

We don't use that tone in here, young lady.

APRIL

This conversation isn't helping my headache!

Ms. McShizzle nudges Tre awake.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

(quick chant) Get that grade. Get that grade.

Tre dances in his seat to the chant.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Let's go back. We're in 500 B.C.

Tre falls asleep.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Who was guiding the choices and mandating the decisions of the citizens of Greece?

April raises hand.

APRIL

Gods 'n goddesses.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Zeus, Athena, Apollo...the Greeks believed that the gods and goddesses drove them to do what they needed to do.

MATTY

Like Jesus.

CALEIGH

No, Jesus was before the Greeks. Fool.

MS MCSHIZZLE

And we can't really talk about that.

MATTY

Wha?

CALEIGH

Church and State, dumbass.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Language.

CALEIGH

Zeus was the patriarchal *white* puppet master with giant muscles and old, ratty hair. Didn't you see Hercules?

Beat.

CALEIGH (CONT.)

I need to go to the nurse.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, uh. Alright. Just take the pass by the door and, gosh, I hope you meet with the-..

Caleigh exits in a rush without the pass.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

So, why did the Greeks feel they had to do whatever the Gods and Goddesses bestowed upon them?

MATTY

I got THIS! YO-YO-YO-they be all like. Zeus, I ain't doin' no laundry and big daddy with his big lightning bolt goes ZzZZZZZzzzzzzZZZZZtttttt and BOOM! THEY ELECTROFIED! PppuhEACE!! BOOM SHAHKALAHCKA!

Beat.

APRIL

Can I have a Bandaid?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'm all out.

APRIL

Can *I* go to the nurse?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Why?

APRIL

I need a...Bandaid!

MS MCSHIZZLE

No.

APRIL

I broke a nail. I. Need. A. BAN-DAID!

TRE

(Waking up startled)

WHERE IS--.

Beat.

He falls asleep again.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Matty? Can you take your seat?

MATTY

It's McShizzle in the style of Zeus! Pssaaatt!

MS MCSHIZZLE

That's....okay seat please. Let's look at your family tree for Oedipus. Who was his mother?

MATTY

Cle-men-tin-a.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Clymenestra. She's not a fruit and you're on the wrong sheet.

MATTY

My bad, yo.

MS MCSHIZZLE

We spoke of Helen of Troy last week. Flip to the next page...

MATTY

I GOTCHU....WAIT....WAIT...AND...WAIT...

APRIL

It's Jocasta, stupid!

MATTY

JO-CATTA!

TRE

(in his sleep)

FACTS!

MATTY

So, I'd put her name next to mother and wife on this chart?

APRIL

Ewww!

MS MCSHIZZLE

That's unfortunately correct. Let's talk about the children.

APRIL

So, wait...

MS MCSHIZZLE

Look at your grid.

APRIL

They had kids together! G-grooooooosss!

MATTY

I bet one of them walked with a limp! Hey, Ms. McShizz! Can I play the one that walks with a limp?

Caleigh returns to class, looks at the drawing of McShizzle on the board, takes a sharpie from her pocket and draws a giant "X" through the picture.

MS MCSHIZZLE

First, we need to know their names.

MATTY

Facts. Facts. Facts. Facts.

MS MCSHIZZLE

That is not their names.

CALEIGH

I'm back!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Wonderful. We're on the chart with the children's names. Look at the bottom.

CALEIGH

I'm straight.

Caleigh smacks Tre. Tre wakes startled.

TRE

What the-!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Language!

TRE

I didn't say nothin! You can't write me up for-

MS MCSHIZZLE

-The chart we're looking at the chart.

TRE

I don't need no stupid chart. I DON'T NEED THIS CLASS!

CALEIGH

HAH! Facts.

Beat.

MS MCSHIZZLE

How many child-?

TRE

-Two boys, two girls!

MATTY

And a OOOP!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Who were the sons? Yep. That page...that's right, Matty...

MATTY

...Elephant and Ploppy!

TRE

Etocles and Polyneices.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Right again.

TRE

I retain in my sleep.

APRIL

Poly-Nikes? Ha! Like your kicks?

TRE

I ain't wear no Nike, Bra.

MATTY

Did they have sex with their mom too?

MS MCSHIZZLE

No, it's not a requirement.

APRIL

Ewww!!!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Just...hold on. Let's play out how both brothers became cursed.

APRIL

Not it!

CALEIGH

NOT it.

TRE

Fine.

MATTY

Let's go, bra.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Tre, you'll be Etocles and Matty, Polynesices.

MATTY

That's cap.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Just listen. So, remember Oedipus?

MATTY

Yeah, my man! His mama lookin' like a sn-nawk!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Stop! His mother abandoned him when he was a child. He was *adopted*. Neither one...recognized...each other.

Beat.

TRE, APRIL

Ohhhhh!

MATTY

Waah Wah

MS MCSHIZZLE

And they birthed four children. Two boys, two girls.

TRE, APRIL, MATTY

Tragic. And a oop. That's tony, yo.

MS MCSHIZZLE

The Greek playwrights wanted to think...*extreme*. What else could they do? What do you think? Hmm? Remember, these plays competed for the biggest prize at the Greek festivals so they had to be violent and unthinkable.

MATTY

What did they win if their thingamagig won?

ALISON

A goat.

MATTY

A goat?

MS MCSHIZZLE

That's right. The...greatest of all time...

TRE

Facts!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Well, facts indeed! Glad you're back in land of the living, Mr. Tre!

TRE

Oh! The bra tore out his eyes!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Sort of, yes. He took the pin of the broach from his mother's dress.

MATTY

The baby mama?

MS MCSHIZZLE

And *gauged* out. His. Eyes.

Matty pretends to gauge out Tre's eyes. Then Tre pretends to gauge out Matty's eyes. He reaches for a pencil. Ms McShizzle intercepts.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Okay. No props, yet! The baby mama...the *mother* kills herself.

Matty reaches out towards Caleigh.

MATTY

Clementine! No!

CALEIGH

CALL ME A FRUIT AGAIN!

MS MCSHIZZLE

And the sons are left to rule the kingdom. Give me your best speeches to see who will become the next ruler of Thebes!

Tre and Matty pull up desk chairs to the East and West and stand on them.

MATTY

Poly! Nikes! Poly! Nikes! Whogotdabestkicks? PolyNikes! BOOM! DropDaMic! HE-EY!

Matty cups his ear towards the audience.

MATTY (CONT.)

I can hear 'em now! Aw SMACKA DOODLE WOOP WOOP!

TRE

Etocles, HERcules. Don' matter. Youze got *none* o'these. Ain't no cheese. Got no cheese. Only these...are my breeze!

AP Giggles, the Clown from the Prologue, enters slamming the door open.

AP GIGGLES

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

The kids all point to each other to assign blame.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

Guess that means, you're all to blame?

Matty approaches the clown with a fist bump.

MATTY

AP Giggles is in the HOUSE!

AP GIGGLES

Return to your seats.

TRE AND MATTY

Ma'am.

She honks her red clown nose.

AP GIGGLES

You know, I love y'all.

MATTY, TRE, CALEIGH, APRIL
WE LOVE YOU TOO, AP GIGGLES!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Assistant Principal, Giggles. Is everything alright?

AP GIGGLES

Pull out your textbook and answer the questions assigned to you.

MS MCSHIZZLE

The students and I were just discussing-.

AP GIGGLES

-Oh, I'm aware what yer *discussin'*!

AP Giggles winks at Caleigh who peers up from her book, smiles, and continues reading.

The bell sounds. Tre slides a notebook under his chair. Students hug AP Giggles and exit.

AP GIGGLES

McShizzle, we don't teach the way that you teach...the *content*...in this school.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Intervention should be more than-.

AP GIGGLES

-Stick to the textbook.

MS MCSHIZZLE

This isn't a jail. It's a classroom.

AP GIGGLES

I'll remember that for your next observation.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Every child has a right to learn.

AP GIGGLES

To learn? What-Caleigh leaves class to tell me she's *learn-ing* about incest?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I thought she was meeting with the nursing recruiter? She left my class to meet with--

AP GIGGLES

--Recruiter didn't come today. Caleigh's a fighter, not a healer. Doesn't belong in some nursing program. She knows better.

Picks the Greek worksheet up off her desk.

And this?

MS MCSHIZZLE

This is...

Giggles rips the worksheet in half.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

...taken out of context. There's a historical element-!

She rips it again.

AP GIGGLES

-Leave your history outta it, McShizzle! Your content meets too close to home for my babies. They don't need a reminder and...not one from *you*!

She balls up the paper .

MS MCSHIZZLE

We were just getting to the daughters. Powerful roles for independent girls. To have their voices heard-.

She drops it on the floor.

AP GIGGLES

-Stick to the pacing plan. Stick to the text.

The bell sounds. AP Giggles stomps on the balled up paper, opens the door, and yells off-stage as she honks her clown horn.

AP GIGGLES

Children! Who wants CANDY on the way to class? Who has the BEST candy?

Sounds of “me” are heard off-stage as Giggles exits.

McShizzle is alone. She notices the board with a picture of her with the big X through it. She takes lysol wipes, erases the picture, and aggressively wipes down the desks. She picks Tre’s notebook up from the floor, sits in his desk and reads from it.

Tre enters, a figment of her imagination, and reads it.

TRE

Holes. Holes in sounds like a void in my heart. A heart which breaks with effortless resistance because I am empty. My void is real. You were real to me. Now, you’re gone.

She closes the notebook. Tre disappears.

End of scene. Light shift.

LESSON FOUR

Later that day at the faculty meeting, the circus jugglers or teachers meet in the center ring. The set for the classroom may be used with repositioning of chairs and an added projector screen with projector. The teachers, Mr. A, Mr. B, Mrs. C, Mrs. D, and McShizzle are seated.

AP Giggles is at the projector and in dark, she plays a video of two high school girls from the school fighting in their neighborhood with family members watching. The screen should be in view of the audience so they can watch the video as the scene happens.

AP GIGGLES

As you can see, these girls are surrounded by family. They are encouraged... by their family... to fight. Parents in gangs. To get ready for the streets. Let's replay the scene.

AP Giggles replays the beginning of the video starting and pausing it as she narrates. Teachers squirm in their seats.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

HERE! The sister is trying to hand her a stick while it looks like the Aunt is screaming to give her the stick.

Video continues. She pauses it.

Up on the porch, there's grandma, holding the baby...all watching what's happening.

Video continues. She pauses it.

Little brother hands the other girl here a rock. The aunt of the other girl grabs the rock and throws it leaving the girl defenseless to the stick. KEEP WATCHING!

Video continues. She pauses it.

The man getting his car here is the father of the girl with the stick. It's because of *him*, we got this video to watch. Lights!

As AP Giggles shuts off the projector, Mr. A cuts on the lights.

MR B

They're just kids.

MRS D

Poor kids.

AP GIGGLES

So, you know now what we're dealing with.

MRS C

Who took this video?

MR B

The dad.

MRS C

Sorry, I mean. How do we even have this video to see? How did you get a hold of it.

AP GIGGLES

Student informants.

MRS D

If these girls find out who-?

AP GIGGLES

-These are not *bad* girls. They are being taught what they understand as skills.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Survivor...skills?

AP GIGGLES

This may be a wake up call to y'all, but this...this is real.

MR B

And if these "informants" are discovered?

AP GIGGLES

We take excellent care of them. They bring us resources towards intervention. (*looks at McShizzle*) Real intervention.

MR A

Are they members of the community?

AP GIGGLES

As I've said they are students who wish to make a difference. They've expressed an interest in activism and-

MRS C

-I'm just worried about gangs in the classroom. How do we know who's with who since you put out the Bandanna Ban?

MR A

What if you have children from both gangs in your class and a fight breaks out?

AP GIGGLES

You'd follow the natural protocol and call for administration. You got a whistle, doncha? What do you think they spend their tax dollars on?

MRS D

Not schools.

AP GIGGLES

For the teachers *to be prepared* in their classroom. Now, as this is our second faculty meeting of the year, we've had a few new people join us. Welcome them if you wish. Finally, there's been a lot of talk in the news of this new flu thing that's been going around? Our custodians clean with chemicals that say on the back of the bottle that it kills this coronavirus. So, y'all should all have that in your classrooms and if not, you will be responsible to buy some. In the meantime, we'll move on.

AP Giggles wheels the projector off-stage and exits. The teachers gather at a table.

MRS D

I've gotta tell you, the last time I called the office for administration, no one came.

MR B

You have to keep a log.

MRS C

What?

MR B

I keep track of every time I call the office and no one answers, so if there's ever a problem and I get blamed, I've got the log.

MRS C

Don't mean you won't get blamed.

MR A

Facts.

MRS C

You've been around the kids too long.

MR A

I'm about ready to retire. I don't need this. Kids body slamming into doors, destroying the bathrooms, having no respect for authority.

MRS C

This generation has absolutely no respect. I couldn't get away with half of what they do on a daily basis when I was their age.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Well, it's changed. Education, our circumstances are constantly shifting.

MRS D

You talking to us?

MRS MCSHIZZLE

I was agreeing with you.

MRS D

Didn't sound like it.

MR A

Oooh! There's about to be another video!

MR B

Those poor kids! I can't believe we had to watch that and you see, the parents don't care. We're glorified babysitters. What is it, McShizzle?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I think these are separate issues.

MRS C

Excuse me, but that apple don't fall that far from the tree.

MR A

I don't know...I've called parents who have been receptive.

MR B

'Course, they'll tell you what you want to hear.

MRS D

When it comes down to it, they just don't care. I don't blame them. I'd be tired if I had to take care of these kids and all their problems. The kids learn from the parents, yet they blame teachers when the kids act out. "Teachers ain't doin' their job" and mess like that.

MS MCSHIZZLE

One of my seniors, Tre, his dad was in a gang. I called his mom who told me about the gunshot coming through her house which killed his dad and how Tre...watched his father die. She told me...all she wanted for *him* was an education he deserves and to call her again even during class if he acts up. *This* doesn't sound like a mother who doesn't care?

MR B

How's that working out for you? How is Tre's behavior?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Well...he...sleeps a lot in class, but he's very bright. I found some of his poetry.

MRS C

Has anyone else had any success with homonyms? I can't deal with another they're, there and their incident. Absolutely no retention! ZERO! I think they *like* to show us how much they want to fail.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Can you show them some examples? Have them visualize or act it out?

MR B

McShizz, that is above my pay grade and it's 3pm so...time to go.

Mr. B, Mrs. C and Mrs. D exit.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I've never understood why people pursue teaching if they don't like children.

MR A

It ain't the paycheck! That's for damn sure! Haha. Little joke. Look, not all the teachers here feel the way *they* do. Not an easy school. We have an absent administration except for the power hungry AP Giggles who thinks everyone is expendable and everything should be *her* way.

MS MCSHIZZLE

So, the principal...if I went to him...

MR A

Oh, he'd go straight to her! Just....remember who you're doing all this for. Tre's...in my class too. Brilliant young man. Can't catch a break. I've gotta run. We're finishing "Romeo and Juliet" tomorrow and I still have to copy the worksheets.

MS MCSHIZZLE

The printer by you is out of service.

MR A

They always are. Gotta...give 'em a little kick.

Mr. A exits. McShizzle pulls out Tre's poetry notebook and reads. In her own time.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Wow...

Tre appears in a spot.

TRE

"She sees me. A mirror has no bounds. Her light dances around the room and finds solace in my heart. She is home. I am complete."

Tre disappears. McShizzle puts the notebook in her bag and exits.

Light shift. End of scene.

LESSON FIVE

The next day in Ms McShizzle’s classroom as a trapeze aerial act. Romantic music swells at the top of the scene and is interrupted by bell sounds. Tre, Matty and April enter making the fire engine sounds.

TRE
RAH-Arrr-Arrr-ARAR--aRRR-RAHHH!

MATTY
WHOO-WHOO-woo-oo-oo-WHOOP-WHOOP!

APRIL
BOO-boobilapa-BOO BOO! BOO-boobilapa-BOO BOO!

MS MCSHIZZLE
Alright, alright, alright. Take your seats.

MS MCSHIZZLE
We’re going to take a break from “Antigone.”

APRIL
WOOT!

MS MCSHIZZLE
Thank you, April. Need to switch gears in the...pacing guide.

TRE
We just started?

MATTY
I wanna do a rap battle!

MS MCSHIZZLE
Did I hear rap battle when I think you meant...DANCE BATTLE!

McShizzle hits the remote and dance music pumps through the room.

Like an athlete, she springs up on her desk!

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

See where the music takes you, children and explore the space! Find your dimensions!
Become one with the music!

The students bounce and land on top of their desks and dance.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Find your inner groove monster and dance! Dance! DANCE!

Matty falls off the desk. Music stops.

MATTY

The rhythm got me, Ms. McShizz! I'm aiyight.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Thank goodness. Here...okay, now THIS is actually a good segue into today's lesson.

The students climb into their desks propping themselves to bounce in their seats. McShizzle clicks the remote toward the audience and the students watch the opening scene from *West Side Story*.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Like Eteocles and Polyneices claiming their power over Thebes, let's watch how the *Sharks* and the *Jets* claim their power over the Upper West Side in NYC. The musical of "Romeo and Juliet" becomes alive in this opening scene of how we communicate in our communities and claim TURF!

APRIL

I wanna be Juliet!

MATTY

Who's that guy there, Ms. McShizz?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oops! Went too far past the opener. That's our Romeo, but he has a different name in the movie.

MATTY

IWannaBeHim!

MS MCSHIZZLE

You know how y'all say "that's Tony"? Well...that's Tony!

TRE

FACTS!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Now, let me scootchy, scootchy, scootchy, scootchy back on the ol' rewind and...there. Now, lets watch what happens.

The opening song of *West Side Story* begins to play and the students dance in their seats as they watch the film.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Who can tell me the family in "Romeo and Juliet" that reminds them of the Jets? You have a 50/50 chance.

TRE

The Montagues?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Bravo, Tre!

MATTY

Whoop Whoop!

MS MCSHIZZLE

And now, uh oh. It looks like we're about to meet the scary Sharks!

APRIL AND MATTY

Capulets!

The door flings open and Caleigh enters. No one notices as the music is too loud and they are engrossed in the film. Caleigh aggressively approaches April. The struggle between the girls escalates bouncing around the room as the dance on the screen escalates.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Watch how they dance as they express their inner conflict. Wanting their land, claiming what they think is theirs. Oh, run Baby John! Run!

TRE
Run, man!

MATTY
Sharks gonna get him! Chomp! Chomp!

Caleigh grabs April and drags her by the hair around the classroom. Matty films them with his cellphone. Tre knocks it out of his hand. Ms McShizzle opens the door and blows her whistle. No one responds. McShizzle grabs Caleigh, throws her out the class, and locks the door. Tre helps April stand up. McShizzle goes to her class phone.

MS MCSHIZZLE
Yes, there was a...what? You can't hear?

Tre reaches for the remote and stops the movie.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)
There was an altercation in my room...

AP Giggles unlocks the door and enters.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)
Never mind.

She hangs up the phone.

MATTY
AP Giggles, Caleigh went after April!

APRIL
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG!

MATTY
I have it on my phone. Most of it.

AP GIGGLES
I'll take that, honey.

MATTY
But...it's my phone.

AP GIGGLES

You know the rules against filming school fights. You'll get it back at the end of the day.

MATTY

Yes, AP Giggles.

She clicks on the phone.

AP GIGGLES

Aww, you change your profile picture?

MATTY

My third Facebook account, AP. You still know all the important stuff. Just wanna be left alone, yo. Me and my friends...we should have our own life. The logo's my masterpiece. Designed it myself.

Bell sounds.

AP GIGGLES

Tre, take April to my office.

TRE

Yes, em.

The students exit.

AP GIGGLES

They a see a fight and it used to be they'd break it up. Now, they watchin' it cheering on like a sport...it's all about the fame. They want to be seen. You get who our kids are now?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I don't understand. What...happened here?

AP GIGGLES

Something that's been planned for a while. The kids talking about it in the halls, you know how rumors start?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Why wasn't I warned?

AP GIGGLES

Kids change their minds! One minute they're besties and the next they're takin' off their earrings ready to knock each other out. They're unpredictable.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I blew my whistle.

AP GIGGLES

What?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I blew my whistle and no one came.

AP GIGGLES

I'm not in best shape, Ms McShizzle! You can't just blow your whistle and expect me to be here that minute.

Beat.

Now, I have parents to call, reports to file, and paperwork for the next three hours.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I had...no protection.

AP GIGGLES

Maybe this is all just too much for you! We do have some home school students who need instruction. You know. Login to a class. Teach some basic stuff.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I wouldn't know where to begin and how to navigate something like that. Computers scare me. You can't force me out of my classroom.

AP GIGGLES

Can't I?

MS MCSHIZZLE

If someone had a weapon? How could I protect myself? How could I protect the other students?

AP GIGGLES

You don't worry about them. They can protect themselves.

Tre re-enters, knocking on the door.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

Why aren't you in class?

TRE

I forgot somethin', AP.

AP GIGGLES

Be quick and get back.

TRE

Yes'm.

Tre looks around the classroom.

AP GIGGLES

See? No harm done. Two seconds and they forget it even happened.

MS MCSHIZZLE

This could have been a lot worse.

AP GIGGLES

Ms. McShizzle. It was your first fight in the classroom.
You'll get used to it.

AP Giggles exits. McShizzle sits at her desk.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Tre. Sorry.
Did you, uh,
...forget something?

TRE

Did I leave a notebook here? Can't find it.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Yes! Yes. It's just uh... here.

She hands him his book off her desk.

Funny.

TRE

What's that?

MS M CSHIZZLE

You two are a lot alike.

TRE

Who?

MS M CSHIZZLE

Tre honks his nose.

MS M CSHIZZLE

Oh, you're making a joke? It's funny!

TRE

I'm straight. You and AP, you 're both good to me. Both crazy, but good to me.

MS M CSHIZZLE

Well, I can only speak for myself. Yes, I-I-I care what happens to you. Now, that you have your book you really should scootchy on to class.

TRE

You
Read it?

MS M CSHIZZLE

Just the...first few pages.

TRE

My private property?

MS M CSHIZZLE

I...apologize, I-.

TRE

-How would the Sharks react if the Jets read their poetry?

MS M CSHIZZLE

Uh, I don't--

TRE

Trying to make you laugh. Haha.

So...

What did you think?

MS M CSHIZZLE

Did you mean to leave it for me to find?

TRE

Naw...

Yeah?

MS M CSHIZZLE

Why didn't you just ask?

TRE

Thought you might laugh? This looks like a mistake. Was it a mistake?

MS M CSHIZZLE

It's never a mistake to express yourself. You're a beautiful writer. You have a lot of talent. I'm impressed. Inspired even.

TRE

It's not stupid?

MS M CSHIZZLE

It's brave and so human.

TRE

Human.

MS M CSHIZZLE

Relatable? I think everyone should hear what you have to write. Have you shared this with mom?

TRE

Naw, she's busy with stuff.

MS M CSHIZZLE

If I can ever help. Don't let anyone take your joy from you. It's a small treasure we have to hold onto sometimes to...keep going.

TRE

You know, you're my favorite teacher.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You sleep through my class and I'm your favorite teacher?

TRE

I didn't sleep today!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I don't think even narcoleptics could have slept through today's class.

TRE

Mom's working three jobs and she needs help with my little brother. Plus, I work the night shift so I don't really sleep at home. I don't mean no disrespect by sleeping through class, I just-

MS MCSHIZZLE

- I understand. No, I don't.

You're a child. You should be allowed to be a child.

TRE

I can't afford to be a child in your world, Ms. McShizzle. Not right now, anyways.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You have a real talent, Tre. I mean it. You can get scholarships where you won't have to work during school. I'll help you. I see you. I want a bright future for you.

TRE

I wish I had your optimism.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Do you need a note to class?

TRE

It's a'ight.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Was there something else?

TRE

What happened today had nothing to do with you. Wasn't personal. Well, to you. She was planning the fight in the cafeteria and, I dunno. Guess she changed her mind?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Kids are unpredictable.

TRE

Huh, yeah.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Do you know why she did it?

TRE

Uh...

MS MCSHIZZLE

I can take it. I think?

TRE

April caught Caleigh and her bae having sex in the bathroom and April filmed it on her phone.

Ms. McShizzle collapses into her desk chair.

TRE (CONT.)

Schoolfights.com. "Pregnant teen has girl sex on the bathroom floor." Everyone wants to be seen.

MS MCSHIZZLE

How do they want to be remembered?

TRE

April, Matty...they're always hiding behind memes. Those logo icons? They keep sayin' their logo is an expression...I dunno. I think it's an excuse to say what they're scared to say without putting a face to it. Their face to it. To what they put out there. It's scary, you know? Putting yourself out there? Caleigh...she's a paradox. Her own worst enemy.

Beat.

MS M CSHIZZLE
 She's pregnant?

TRE
 Say what?

MS M CSHIZZLE
 I threw her out of the class.

TRE
 Naw. Caleigh, she's...she's *always* getting tossed around.

MS M CSHIZZLE
 I put my hands on her...and the baby... did she fall? Knock into anything?

TRE
 You did what you had to do, Ms McShizzle. We all see that.
 Ms McShizz?

MS M CSHIZZLE
 Hmm?

TRE
 I'm off to class.

He exits. McShizzle takes the lysol wipes and
 wipes down the desks.

AP GIGGLES (V.O.)
 Teachers, check your emails immediately and listen for announcements to follow. Repeat,
 teachers check your emails immediately!

McShizzle opens her email.

MS M CSHIZZLE
 (whispers)
 Poodle snarf.

Blackout.

End of Unit I.

UNIT II

LESSON SIX

Three months have passed. In her living room, Ms. McShizzle as the lion tamer sits centerstage in front of her computer with a projection screen behind her which faces the audience.

MS MCSHIZZLE

So...this is distance learning. I have a two days to prepare for new trainings and plan my lessons. I am computer technician, video operator, google classroom organizer, and my head will explode if I had to complete another survey! What would McShizzle do? IhatethisIhatethisIHATETHIS!

McShizzle slams her hands down on the computer. The projector screen lights up with CARTOON MCSHIZZLE dressed in the red tails and top hat as the ringmaster in a shimmering glow.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Hello, dear friend!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Who in the world are you? I can't do this! UGH! STUPID COMPUTER!

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Ah, ah, ah! Remember technology isn't the problem. Something *else* is the program.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Did I have a drink with lunch?

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

That's why I'm here!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Did I have lunch? Did I pee today?

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Oh, come now. Chop, chop, my friend and *buck up!*
These children need you!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Who are you? Did I press something?

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Only your imagination! Try clicking here.

“Team McShizzle” pops up on the screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, yeah. Okay.

Ms McShizzle clicks the button. Her image
joins Cartoon McShizzle on the screen.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

That’s it! Now, it’s time to go on an ADVENTURE!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Are you on a MAC or PC?

CARTOON FRIZZLE

I’m in your imagination, dear.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I can’t see you. Can you zoom in...or control plus, plus yourself?

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Try these.

Cartoon McShizzle hands a pair of glasses off-
screen which Ms. McShizzle pulls on screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Wow, thanks!

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Careful not to stare at the screen too long.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I don't have much of a choice.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Remember that snack and stretch breaks are out of this world! You can do it! We are McShizzle and I believe in you!

Believe in you

...in you

...you.

The image of Cartoon McShizzle transforms into the Clown. AP Giggles and Ms. McShizzle are side by side on the screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Aaaah!

Mr. A, Mr. B, Mrs C, and Mrs D, the circus jugglers and acrobats, appear on the screen as if they've been there for a while.

AP GIGGLES

That is *not* how we begin our faculty meetings.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'll just mute.

AP GIGGLES

Good idea!

MRS C

Who were you talking-

MRS D

Three months of distance learning and she's lost her mind.

MR A

We're all losing our minds.

MRS C

Where is everyone?

MR B

Hiding behind their screens?

AP GIGGLES

Everyone needs to mute! Not everyone is required to use their video. We're working on repairing computers. IS EVERYONE ON MUTE? Good. Now, this is how y'all begin your classes. I'm modeling the example.

Beat.

My students' are following your example and y'all...this is a basic example of classroom management. We need to look again at our best practices. Anyone creating lesson plans?

All teachers raise their hands.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

Really?

They lower their hands.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

Well, hot DAMN! Y'all aren't lateral entry! You remember how to create a plan, not a "to do" list? Our school aim is to be the highest performing school in the district! We aren't seeing the data plan improving! I did not sign on to administer at a C school! Our rating is moving from a C to a D and that is *not* our students fault. That one is on *you*, teachers! You can't sleep your way through the day. You actually have to teach these children! Something!

MRS C

AP Giggles-

AP GIGGLES

-I'm not finished!

Mrs D's baby cries in the background.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

Pandemy or no pandemy. You will do better. Our children deserve it. *You* have a job because they come *my* school!

WHOSE BABY IS INTERRUPTING-!

MRS D

She's trying to sleep and...well, you're yelling.

AP GIGGLES

MUTE!

MRS D

I hit it by accident when trying to get to her.

AP GIGGLES

What did I just say?

Mr. A raises his hand.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

Yes, Mr. A?

MR A

Do all students have computer access?

AP GIGGLES

We're working on it.

MR B

What about Wifi? Bandwidth may be an issue with large households.

AP GIGGLES

We're working on it. Ah, for the people who keeping popping out and rejoining, IT'S DISTRACTING! Just because I can't see you, doesn't mean I can't track what you're doing!

MR A

So...bandwidth?

MS MCSHIZZLE

This may be off the table, but what about the children whose only meals are the ones they get at school? Is there a way to get them packed lunches?

AP GIGGLES

We're working on it! In the meantime, I want to see *lesson plans*, folks. You can't let these children down! They. Are. Who. You. Are. Here. To. Serve. Clear?! I'm talking with transportation and getting wifi setup in the buses as stations in neighborhoods.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

I don't see bandwidth as a problem and the buses will be locked so safety won't be an issue. The students will have wifi access and can still remain 6 feet apart. Look at all I'm doing to help you!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Maybe we could have snacks in the buses or bagged lunches for the kiddos to pick up?

AP GIGGLES

This concludes our meeting. Ah, McShizzle stay back with me.

Mr. A, Mr. B, Mrs C, and Mrs D exit .

MS MCSHIZZLE

Is this about my observation? My comment on the lunch-?

AP GIGGLES

-Observations have been put on hold for the remainder of the school year.

MS MCSHIZZLE

That's a relief.

AP GIGGLES

With the notes I had put in your file this year-

MS MCSHIZZLE

-notes in my file?

AP GIGGLES

I have no other choice, but to put you on probation. With the high school students.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You're removing me from my classroom? Taking these students away from me?

AP GIGGLES

There's no need for your...intervention.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Why?

AP GIGGLES

We'll revisit your contract in a few weeks and see how you continue part-time with the elementary grades. That shouldn't be too hard. Even for you. You clearly can't handle the intervention required for the upper grades.

MS MCSHIZZLE

With all due respect, AP Giggles. These students...MY students come to school because I help them create and learn.

AP GIGGLES

They do not come to school because of *you!* You serious? You think you're the *only* teacher at this school? Ha!

MS MCSHIZZLE

My contract goes through the end of the school year.

AP GIGGLES

We are an at-will state.

MS MCSHIZZLE

They will think I have abandoned them. That I don't care-.

AP GIGGLES

-Don't nobody care what you think, McShizzle!
Do. Your. Job!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Isn't your job to be a support system for the teachers?

AP GIGGLES

My job...is to support this *school*. You can learn something from me.

AP Giggles hastily exits off the screen.
McShizzle is left alone onstage and on the screen. She laughs, the laughter grows to uneasy tears and then gentle peaceful laughter. She stares at the screen. As McShizzle hangs up the call, the stage goes black.

End of scene.

LESSON SEVEN

The next day. McShizzle's living room as the lion tamer in the center ring with the baby lions. She sits at her desk with her computer. Children's overlapping murmurs are heard in black. Four chairs are situated on-stage 6 feet apart facing in multiple directions. Each elementary school child enters and sits in a chair with their computer on their lap. As the overlapping conversations happen, they drag their chair to find better wifi and some sit on the floor. The projection screen shows Ms. McShizzle's face and four logos each with letter M, A, T, K identifying the icon of the child.

MARCUS

Ms. McShizzle! I've missed you so much!

TOMMY

Is that your...house?

ALISON

Can I come over? Do you wanna see my dog?

KITTY

Why can't I see you? You're all fuzzy!
Can you hear me?

MARCUS

What are we doing today? Isn't my hamster cute?

TOMMY

Did you get COVID? I need a haircut!

KITTY

Do you have any snacks?

ALISON

What's COVID? I still don't get it?

MARCUS

Is it the flu?

TOMMY

I feel funny...

The stage lights up.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Children! Oh, it's so wonderful to see all of you! Well...your uh icons. Can you turn your cameras on? Let me *see* you. It's the button next to the hang up but-.

They all disappear.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

No! Where did you-? Ooooooh...CURSE YOU BANDWIDTH!

Slowly, they re-appear with their cameras on.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Oh! YOU MADE IT! Just look at you! Your amazing, gorgeous faces! I can't believe you're here! You...you came back!

MARCUS

Don't be sad, Ms. McShizz!

Sad spelled backwards is DAS and DAS NOT RIGHT!

MS MCSHIZZLE

You are wise, Marcus! Of course, I just...yes. We'll wait for a few more minutes until everyone else joins. How's everyone be-?

ALISON

-We're the only ones who got computers.

TOMMY

Yeah, I don't think they're comin', Ms. McShizz.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You're the only ones?

In...the whole school?

KITTY

Just in your class.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, well. I'll just make packets to get to them.

MARCUS

They won't do them.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Don't be silly. How can you be so sure?

KITTY

We don't have to do our work. AP Giggles said so.

MARCUS

Is it true we aren't getting grades?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Ummm...

KITTY

Gramma said y'all teachers aren't allowed to give us grades, but you always told us that getting grades is getting our paycheck. So if I ain't getting my grade, how's my family gonna *eat*?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Children, first off, that...is true, but it doesn't mean you shouldn't come to school and your grades aren't treated like actual money. Your parents will give you things to eat.

MARCUS

Momma told me I could either have chicken or rice last night, but not both. I reached for the rice and she slapped my hand!

MS MCSHIZZLE

What am I hearing? We need to turn these frowns upside down? After all, a smile is a curve that sets everything straight!

TOMMY

Gotta pee!

Tommy runs offstage.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, that's fine well...

Audio of peeing and toilet flush.

MARCUS, ALISON, KITTY

Ew!

Tommy reenters and runs to his seat.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Welcome back!

KITTY

You didn't wash your hands! That's against the law!

TOMMY

I didn't want to miss anything.

MS MCSHIZZLE

This gives me an idea!

(McShizzle sings.)

WASH YOUR HANDS
SCRUB THEM CLEAN
WEAR YOUR MASK
OF A PRINCE OR A QUEEN!

STAND YOUR GROUND
SIX FEET APART
STAY SAFE AND WISE
THAT'S HEALTHY SMART!

Sing with me, children!

WASH YOUR HANDS

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY

WASH YOUR HANDS

MS MCSHIZZLE

SCRUB THEM CLEAN!

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY

SCRUB THEM CLEAN?

MS MCSHIZZLE

WEAR YOUR MASK.

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY

WEAR YOUR MASK

MS MCSHIZZLE

OF A PRINCE OR A QUEEN

OF A PRINCE	MARCUS
OR A QUEEN...THAT'S ME! OH YEAH!	KITTY
STAND YOUR GROUND.	MS MCSHIZZLE
STAND YOUR GROUND	MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY
SIX FEET APART	MS MCSHIZZLE
SIX FEET APART	MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY
STAY SAFE AND WISE	MS MCSHIZZLE
STAY SAFE AND WISE	MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY
THAT'S HEALTHY SMART!	MS MCSHIZZLE
THAT'S HEALTHY SMART!	MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY
Once again! With the captions on! Everyone! Join me! No child left behind!	MS MCSHIZZLE

On the screen, under McShizzle's box appears the words of the song with a bouncy "coronavirus" ball. The lights rise on the audience. They sing in a round.

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY,
AUDIENCE
WASH YOUR HANDS
SCRUB THEM CLEAN

MS MCSHIZZLE

WASH YOUR HANDS
SCRUB THEM CLEAN

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY,
AUDIENCE
WEAR YOUR MASK

MS MCSHIZZLE

WEAR YOUR MASK

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY,
AUDIENCE
OF A PRINCE OR A QUEEN!

MS MCSHIZZLE

OF A PRINCE OR A QUEEN!

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY,
AUDIENCE
STAND YOUR GROUND

MS MCSHIZZLE

STAND YOUR GROUND

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY,
AUDIENCE
SIX FEET APART
STAY SAFE AND WISE

MS MCSHIZZLE

SIX FEET APART
STAY SAFE AND WISE

MARCUS, ALISON, TOMMY, KITTY,
AUDIENCE
THAT'S HEALTHY SMART!

MS MCSHIZZLE

THAT'S HEALTHY SMART!

Clapping hands emoji's popup on the screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Wonderful, children! Give yourselves a round of applause!

Lights dim over the audience.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Now, who wants to go on an adventure?

MARCUS, ALISON, KITTY
Where?!

TOMMY
Blast OFF!

MS MCSHIZZLE

To a magical place where one only goes in secret!

MARCUS

The moon?

ALISON

Daddy's closet?

MS MCSHIZZLE

It's a place you all know well....it's the *bathroom!*

TOMMY

I just went there!

MARCUS, ALISON, KITTY

The bathroom?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I spy a place with water. We must practice what we just sang about, children. To keep you as healthy as possible! Take your computers and ...go!

The children vanish from the screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Children? Children? I-well...

I'll be here when you get back.

...Children?

Blackout.

End of scene.

LESSON EIGHT

McShizzle's living room filled with aerial silks, late that night. She lays on her couch staring ahead at the glow of the TV and a voiceover.

NEWS VOICEOVER

Well, Chuck! We're at day fifty-eight into this global pandemic...this quarantine. I sure thought this mess would be over by now. Hahaha. Lets look at the numbers. One-hundred thousand dead globally. Seven hundred forty-four deaths in our state, not so bad...and many more hospitalized. Italy continues to stay in lockdown, as we remain in lockdown. Businesses are struggling and don't see any glimmer of light when they may re-open. Schools are gearing up soon for an early summer break. We all just have to sit tight.

Beat.

With everything we've been through, we're hopeful it won't last much longer. Toilet paper is slowly being restocked. Remember, share with your neighbors. Toilet paper not germs. There's not enough inform-.

McShizzle shuts off the tv. She pulls the blanket on the back of the couch over her and falls asleep.

Lights dim. Classical music plays.

A spot appears on the sleeping Ms. McShizzle who hears the music and begins to dance. She discovers a package of toilet paper behind her couch and continues to dance with it lyrically as the music moves her.

In the music crescendo, two people dressed as toilet paper rolls join Ms. McShizzle in the dance. They unite in dance moves together, join hands in a spin and release of the toilet paper and exit the stage as Ms. McShizzle collapses back on the couch in a deep sleep.

Light shift. End of scene.

LESSON NINE

Cartoon McShizzle as the ringmaster appears on the screen above the sleeping McShizzle. Marcus, Alison, Tommy, and Kitty enter as clowns at various points in dark staring at their computers.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

98.4! What a beautiful day for a 98.4!
 There's so much to score.
 Maybe a trip to the *store*
 with TP galore wanting more and more.
 Sleepy head lookin' sore!
 Head out that there door!
 There's much to explore!

Lights up slightly on McShizzle dangling from the silks and slams her hand on the alarm.
 Cartoon McShizzle gasps.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

That's no way to start the day!

In her sleep.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Lesson - children can't- what do - they GO 'way... ADVENTURE!

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE

Lesson planning in your sleep again, McShizzle? Such a silly goose!
 An adventure you say? Right away!

McShizzle's alarm blares loudly. As Cartoon McShizzle counts down, Marcus, Alison, Tommy, and Kitty run to the edge of the stage facing the audience.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Five! Four! Three! Two! ONE!!!
 Blasting off...

Ms McShizzle smashes her hand on the alarm.
It crashes to the floor.

CARTOON MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Perhaps it's a good time for a rest!

Cartoon McShizzle sits as Marcus, Alison,
Tommy, and Kitty return to their seats.

Marcus, Alison, Tommy, and Kitty appear on
screen with Cartoon McShizzle, as themselves.

Ms McShizzle stretches wide, grabs the
scrunchy on the table next to the couch and
gathers her hair in a messy bun. Cartoon
McShizzle mimics her behavior. Ms.
McShizzle gathers the alarm clock off the floor
and turns it to face her.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, Poodle!

She races to the computer screen and turns on
the video. Cartoon McShizzle waves goodbye
and exits the screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

So, late. Late. Late!

Ms. McShizzle appears on screen joining the
children. She's muted.

MARCUS
Ms. McShizz!

KITTY
We've been waiting!

TOMMY
You're muted!

KITTY
We can't hear-!

MARCUS
We've been good though.

MS M CSHIZZLE
 POOO-DLEE-SNARRRRRFFF!

The children gasp.

MS M CSHIZZLE (CONT.)
 Oh! C-can you hear me?

TOMMY
 You said a bad word! Mwaaaam!

MS M CSHIZZLE
 I'm so sorry! Okay, so.

KITTY
 No she didn't! Stop being a baby!

TOMMY
 You're the baby!

MS M CSHIZZLE
 Children!

MARCUS
 Ms. McShizz?

MS M CSHIZZLE
 You can hear me. I'm so glad, I-.

MARCUS
 Ms McShizz!

MS M CSHIZZLE
 Yes, Marcus. Oh, my goodness. Yes?

MARCUS
 What's a poodle snarf?

TOMMY
 It's a cuss word!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Actually it's...a um...puppy sneeze!

MARCUS, KITTY, ALISON

Ooooooh!

MS MCSHIZZLE

It's 9am and...we only have 20 minutes left. Okay, I can do this.

MARCUS

I wanna sing a song! Stop! Would you-!

Marcus mutes and goes off camera. His icon appears. The stage illuminates to reveal a three-ring circus.

MS MCSHIZZLE

What's happening?

KITTY

His older sister said the F word off-camera in math class yesterday. That's a cuss word. Uh oh!

KITTY'S GRANDMA (OFFSTAGE)

You better clean that up! I will not have a messy ass house while you stupid kids sit there and do nothing! Get up! Now! Make me say that again!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'm sorry you had to-. Umm. So, I wonder if we could maybe? Is everyone okay?

Kitty's Grandma, a fire eater, and Tommy's mom, a sword swallower, enter onstage joining their child.

KITTY'S GRANDMA

You know I see you, right?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I--What did I do?

KITTY'S GRANDMA

Not you, Vanilla Bunhead! Oh, you know I'm speaking to you, Kitty! Clean up the kitchen! Makin' me come to your class and that's right. You better be embarrassed!

Kitty's Grandma exits.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'm trying to conduct my cl-

TOMMY'S MOM

-Ms. McShizzle, did you or did you not tell my son that he had to change his icon image?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I can meet with you after class, if you'd like.

TOMMY'S MOM

You think I got loads of time. You teachers! I'm an essential worker!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I thought you stayed home with Tommy?

TOMMY'S MOM

We'll discuss it now!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Children maybe we should meet tomor-.

TOMMY'S MOM

-Oh, this won't take long. In our household, we are an All Lives Matter family. We are a *Christian* family with Christian values and we love everyone as Jesus did. We do not place value of one life over another.

Marcus's dad, an animal trainer, and Caleigh, the knife thrower, enter joining their "child" on the computer screen.

TOMMY'S MOM (CONT.)

My child, a very happy child, came to me crying yesterday that he could not display his logo in class!

TOMMY

Alison had a Black Lives Matter one and you didn't say nothin' to her!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I---

ALISON

But black lives DO matter. Ms McShizzle says so!

Caleigh films the conversation with her phone.
Alison's dad, a fire-eater, comes on-screen.

ALISON

Daddy! Look! That's our bus driver and my new best friend!

TOMMY'S MOM

We just want everyone to be treated equally.

MARCUS'S DAD

Do not speak about my child as if he's not sitting right here! My child is proud of who he is. What and who he stands for!

ALISON'S DAD

I don't think Alison should be involved in this conversation. She's here to learn.

TOMMY'S MOM

This all started because my Tommy was *forced* to change his logo! To limit his creative expression. Otherwise, we wouldn't be in this mess!

MARCUS'S DAD

Well, some of us have been in this "mess" longer than others!

ALISON'S DAD

This is how you help us "raise" our children. Telling them these lies?

TOMMY'S MOM

Yes, lies and threats that our children have to feel guilty about what their ancestors did a long time ago. I mean, we need to move on!

MS MCSHIZZLE

What I told them was to be kind and... to listen-.

MARCUS' DAD

Well, at least somebody is!

CALEIGH

(aside in phone)

AP Giggles. I just sent it, but you need to call McShizzle's class. I'll keep recording.

TOMMY'S MOM

We choose to do nothing! All lives matter. Not just black lives!

MARCUS' DAD

Black and African American people are the only enslaved people who have been brought to America! Why do I have to keep explaining myself to you people!

TOMMY

Black men rape their wives!

Beat.

MS MCSHIZZLE

TOMMY!

MARCUS' DAD

What?! You tell your child that?! You in the next room from me or somethin'? Is that what you think...of ME?!

TOMMY'S MOM

Don't you yell at my son! He's allowed his own thoughts!

MARCUS' DAD

I'm a proud and descent black man and, as a proud and descent black man, I raise my child to have compassion!

ALISON

Daddy?

ALISON'S DAD

Just a minute, Alison. Look, I will never understand what you people had to go through.

ALISON

Daddy!

MARCUS' DAD

Never mind what it's like living every day as a black man.

ALISON'S DAD

Sir. This is not about you or your child.

TOMMY'S MOM

It's about all of the children in the school and I frankly still need some answers!

MARCUS' DAD

Any attack on me is an attack on him. When will you make the choice to get that!

TOMMY'S MOM

I refuse to sit here and-and be blamed for something my ancestors did! If you can't just move on, that's not my problem!

MARCUS' DAD

You are no better than your ancestors if you refuse to listen!

Caleigh stops filming, hits send, and exits.

TOMMY'S MOM

She started it! If McShizzle didn't ask my child to change his logo, we wouldn't be in this mess. My child wouldn't be upset and crying all the time!

ALISON'S DAD

Your "politics" have no place in the classroom. My child is there to learn!

TOMMY'S MOM

It's the truth! The news only shows white cops shooting black people, but what about the white police who are shot in the head?

MARCUS' DAD

You some'in crazy, lady!

The stage darkens and freezes. Caleigh and AP Giggles enter in spot on opposite sides of the circus floor. They are on their phones.

CALEIGH

You see how dangerous she is, AP. That video proves it.

AP GIGGLES

You set that trap, Caleigh?

AP Giggles coughs.

CALEIGH

I--what?

AP GIGGLES

Setherup?

CALEIGH

You been overmedicating? You sound-

AP GIGGLES

-You don't get t'question me. Whodoyouthinkyouare?

CALEIGH

Um...a future nursing student?

AP Giggles honks her red nose and laughs mockingly which turns into a hacking cough.

CALEIGH (CONT.)

You don't believe in me? You're the only one who never doubted-

AP GIGGLES

-You're a fighter. That's all you'll ever be. Comes in handy, right? Ha!

Spots darken as AP Giggles and Caleigh exit. Stage enlivens again to a convoluted cacophony three-ring circus.

TOMMY'S MOM

Don't they deserve justice? Lives are at stake and our children have enough to put up with right now without having to feel that their freedom is being taken away from them!

MARCUS' DAD

You are out of your mind! Oh, you believe all lives matter? Unless we look like you, we don't matter! Unless we all agree with you, we don't matter?

MS MCSHIZZLE

ENOUGH! ENOUGH! Yes! I asked Tommy to change his icon after he threw his teddy bear on the floor, kneeled on it's neck, and started laughing! It made me sick!

MARCUS' DAD

What?! When was this?

MS MCSHIZZLE

But, what else could I do? I wanted to reach through the screen and shake some sense in him. He is a child. Why would you expose him to what he doesn't understand? I also asked Alison to change her icon because she mentioned she was getting bullied.

ALISON

Tommy called me a bad, bad name. I can't say it. I WON'T say it, daddy. Mr. Marcus was really nice to me. Called me his family.

ALISON'S DAD

Alison, *we* are family. You and me.

ALISON

But-?

Marcus's dad exits.

TOMMY'S MOM

My son has been through-.

MS MCSHIZZLE

-I support all of my students. Their creativity, their dreams. I want them to be their very best. It doesn't matter what I believe.

ALISON'S DAD

You told my child you applaud her icon image.

MS MCSHIZZLE

No, I told her...I told her I applaud her making her voice heard.

TOMMY'S MOM

You're pitting these students against each other! Some educator. Someone should take your job!

AP Giggles, coughing and wheezing, appears on the screen at the trapeze and on the opposite side of the stage from Ms. McShizzle.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Well, I'm sorry that you chose valuable education time to show these students that your voice matter over theirs!

The lights begin to flicker.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Are the lights flickering or am I blinking?

ALISON'S DAD

AP Giggles, some of the parents are wondering when the buses with wifi will be coming to our neighborhood.

TOMMY'S MOM

If classes continue like this, I don't think you'll have a wifi issue. Get a better education at home.

AP GIGGLES

We've had...several (*coughs*) absences from our drivers lately, but I am working on it. The keys are in the bus, but no drivers.

She takes a pill and drinks some water.

ALISON'S DAD

With the extra wifi, my expenses are ..high and I'm struggling between feeding my family and my child's education.

AP GIGGLES

W-e-e-e-l-l-l-l, I'm staring at the bus parking lot from my office right now and it's filled with buses and resources. We just gotta get 'em out.

TOMMY'S MOM

My bigger concern is politics in the classroom. My Tommy doesn't need to be exposed to things that don't apply to him.

AP GIGGLES

Alison, Tommy, from now on, you'll report to your science teacher during this time.

Continued coughing, wheezing.

AP GIGGLES (CONT.)

DIS-MISSED!

Parents, Alison, and Tommy exit the screen and the stage. McShizzle and Giggles are left alone on each side of the center ring on the floor of the stage. *The final face-off.*

The lights flicker again.

AP GIGGLES

McShizzle, you--.

Hacking cough.

MS MCSHIZZLE

AP Giggles, is there a way we can set a standard about these icon identifiers? The children are cooped up at home, finding ways to express themselves and it's just--.

AP GIGGLES

-A video of the entire conversation was sent to me! Imagine I had to stop my day to find out you were making children cry! (coughs) Don't go away!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Video?

Someone took a video?

Giggles exits the stage. Matty, Caleigh, Marcus, and Kitty enter with their jump ropes approaching the High Wire Tightrope above Giggles and McShizzle who can't hear them on the mainstage.

MATTY

Probably a bad time to admit I got the fear of heights!

CALEIGH

I wonder if it's worse when your pregnant. Oh, wait? It is! GET goin!

MATTY

You have to win every time!

MARCUS

This is so awesome!

KITTY

I'm gonna be in first place!

CALEIGH

Not a competition boo. Don't look down.

Giggles re-enters with a glass of water as Matty, Caleigh, Marcus, and Kitty cross the high wire with their jump ropes to the other side.

AP GIGGLES

People are listenin', McShizzle! What I see-

Continues to cough.

MS MCSHIZZLE

What you see or maybe hear from the parents is conviction.

Giggles drinks water.

AP GIGGLES

They just tryin' to raise their babies.

KITTY

Hold the end. We can link the ropes together for better balance.

MARCUS

I see my dad! He's signing out the bus! He's leavin' the KEYS!

CALEIGH

Better get 'em before AP knows they're missin'.

MATTY

Hold up, I thought she was your best friend?

CALEIGH

She don't got my back!

KITTY

I can't focus with y'all gibber jabbering on!

MS MCSHIZZLE

To not make their own choices and where will we be if we can't allow children to make these choices?

Beat.

AP GIGGLES

We no longer trust you.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Who?

AP GIGGLES

The parents, the school...the community.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You. Just you.

KITTY

Almost there.

CALEIGH

Don't look down.

AP GIGGLES

This ain't about me, McSchizzle!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, yes it is. With those giant clown feet, you step on every human crumb that has a chance to make a difference in these kids lives.

AP GIGGLES

Human...crumb! You're a joke McShizzle thinkin' you can reach these children with a ten foot pole!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I know what they NEED!

AP GIGGLES

I AM WHAT THEY NEED!

AP Giggles launches into narcissistic laughter slowly turning into coughing. Matty slips, his body holding the high wire.

MATTY

Oh, sweet JESUS!

KITTY

You got this, Matty! We all made it so can you. Now, scootchy scootchy scootch!

Matty scootches to the other side. Matty, Caleigh, Marcus, and Kitty descend the ladder and exit.

AP GIGGLES

Your contract is terminated with this school district effective immediately. We can't take any more risks with irresponsible behavior by someone who should be their teacher.

MS MCSHIZZLE

We're in the middle of a pandemic. No one is hiring.

AP GIGGLES

You should have thought of that before you launched your war of the icons!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'm different than you.

AP GIGGLES

Just figure that out?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Scares you.

Giggles explosive laughter turns into coughing.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You think it's all a joke?

AP GIGGLES

Oh! (*honks her red nose*) Nothin' scares me, creampuff! I seen too much. I see you for who you are. Makes me *sick*.

As AP Giggles has a coughing fit, the middle of the stage opens up for a bus with Matty behind the wheel, accompanied by Caleigh, Marcus, and Kitty.

KITTY

You sure, you know how to drive this thing, Matty?

MATTY

I gotcha, lil' meow.

KITTY

R-r-r-a-a-w-w-w-w!

MARCUS

I can't believe my dad left us the keys! He's so-o-o-o COOL!

CALEIGH

Remember - left gas, right break.

MATTY

PshAAAAAW!

AP GIGGLES

Get in the damn bus loop line! You're FINISHED, McShizzle!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I won't stop fighting for those kids.

MATTY

(honking the bus horn) Get outta the road, yo!

KITTY

Don't hit the deer!

CALEIGH

'bout to be roadkill!

MARCUS

TWINKIN!!!

MATTY

TWINKIN!!!

AP GIGGLES

Your video classes expire and this parent video has been sent to the superintendent.
YOU'LL. NEVER. TEACH. AGAIN! *That's* a silver lining for 2020.

Blackout. Giggles & McShizzles videos
disappear off the screen.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Power outage?

MARCUS

WHOA!

KITTY

What happened?

CALEIGH

Blackout. Matty, quick. Street lights are out. Cops can't bust us. G-o-o-o-o-o!

MATTY

WOOOOOOT!

MARCUS

Yeeeeeaaahhhh!

KITTY

Aaaaaaaaaah!

MATTY

SKIIIIIIIRRRTTTTT! SKIIIIIIIRTTTT!

AP Giggles hacks a deep-seeded cough and
gasps for air. She passes out on her computer.

MS MCSHIZZLE

AP Giggles? OH...did I kill her? Oh, God...

McShizzle dials and reaches 9-1-1.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Yes, the Clown is down! Come quickly from the town!

McShizzle puts her on visor mask, hazmat helmet, and disposable gloves. She takes a washcloth with some ice and makes a compress.

CALEIGH

Turn here, bra!

McShizzle crosses over from one side of the stage to the other.

MARCUS

SPACE MAN!

MATTY, MARCUS, KITTY
A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-HHHH!!!!

CALEIGH
TURN THE WHEEL!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Heeeeeeeeyy!

KITTY
That's no spaceman! IT'S MS MCSHIZZLE!

MARCUS
Aww, SNAP!

CALEIGH
Hide!

Caleigh, Kitty, Marcus, and Matty duck out of sight. Caleigh pushes Matty up.

CALEIGH (CONT.)
Not you! Keep your eyes on the daggone road!

MS MCSHIZZLE
Matty! What's he doin-.

MARCUS

-You tryin' to kill us?

MATTY

If I'm goin' down, you're all goin' down with me. WHAT IS WITH THIS BUS?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Stop...start...forward...okay keep going. There you go!

KITTY

Let's go through a DRIVE-THRU!

CALEIGH

You outta your mind?

MATTY

Look, who's drivin' this here bus?

CALEIGH

Well, the obvious answer is you.

MATTY

That's right and, as the leader of this bus, I needs y'all to PIPE D-A-A-WN!

KITTY

JESUS TAKE THE W-HEEEEEL!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, dear God. What is he up to now? I---

SPX: Ambulance sound.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Right.

As McShizzle enters AP Giggles space, the bus disappears. She sits AP Giggles up and presses the compress against her forehead.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Assistant Principal Giggles? Can you hear me?

AP Giggles jars herself awake throwing the compress across the room, attempting to stand, and falls to the floor. McShizzle runs to her.

AP GIGGLES

NO!

MS MCSHIZZLE

You're sick!

AP GIGGLES

Of You! GETAWAYFROMME!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Do you...have you been tested?

AP Giggles coughs and gasps. McShizzle gets the compress and moves towards Giggles.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Help is on the way.

AP Giggles pushes her away.

AP GIGGLES

GET OFF OF ME!

MS MCSHIZZLE

NO! (beat) No...

Not letting go, McShizzle cradles AP Giggles in her arms. AP struggles against her.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Just...just let me.

In her own time. AP Giggles surrenders to her and begins to cry.

AP GIGGLES

Don't leave me.

Ms. McShizzle holds the clown's hand with one hand and the compress with the other. Giggles' clown makeup is dripping off her face.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'm here.

Ms. McShizzle unwraps the compress washcloth and glides it over AP Giggles face removing her clown makeup. Her face is naked.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

I see you. They're coming. Just hold on.

Beat.

You look halfway decent without all this caked on. These...layers.

Giggles begins to giggle gently.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

We both love these kids. Differently maybe. But it's there. We may be more alike than we think. What we want for them.

Giggles places her hand on McShizzles arm that cradles her.

PARAMEDIC (OFFSTAGE)

Someone call for a medic? Hello?

Light shift. End of scene.

LESSON TEN

In the center ring of the circus tent features the ringmaster Tre writing poetry.

TRE

There is no doubt. I know you care. I know...what do you care about...why would...ah? My days. No. My sleepless days. Yeah, that's good. You stand beside me...no, with me...beside. Okay. There is no doubt. I know you care. My sleepless days...you...stood right there. Boom!

Screeching tires. A bus pulls up. Kitty leans out the window.

KITTY

Hi Tre!

TRE

YOU-YOU STOLE A BUS?!

KITTY

Not me! Matty!

MATTY

HEY BRA! A-a-a-wiggy wiggy WAH wah!

Circus acrobats, Caleigh, Matty and Kitty exit the bus.

TRE

That's like a felony!

KITTY

But if the buses have snacks and we tell them we're starving, they'll let us keep the bus!

CALEIGH

There's no snacks.

KITTY

No Snacks? Awww, man!

CALEIGH

Got wifi, but there's a blackout so...no wifi.

KITTY

I told you we should've gone thru a drive-thru!

TRE

What are you talkin' about?

KITTY

Look these teachers been tellin' us the wifi snack buses will be here any day. Three months ago.

TRE

SO YOU JUST TOOK IT?

MATTY

It's the last day of school and they won't be needin' those buses for the summer and bro's gotta get his game on Netflix!

CALEIGH

We be straight!

TRE

AP Giggles won't like it.

CALEIGH

Who cares what she likes?

KITTY

You changed your tune?

TRE

That's school property! What kind of idiot would be stupid to come up with a plan to steal a school bus?

KITTY

Ummm, we didn't *steal* it.

CALEIGH

Yeah, chill bra.

MATTY

Marcus' and his dad were with us. He gave Marcus the keys...you know, letting him spread his wings. His dad's a school employee. Thereafter and furthermore...wedidnotstealdabus. (beat) Wiggy wiggy.

TRE

Why would Marcus' dad steal a bus for us?

KITTY

It wasn't stealing. I'M SO HUNGRY!

MATTY

How did he put it?

CALEIGH

He assisted and Marcus grabbed the keys--.

MATTY

Oh, YEAH-ZUHS! He assisted the school district by volunteering to get the resources out to, you know. The *nee-dy*. B-o-o-m! He was with us the whole time, bra. I didn't do nothin' illegal here.

TRE

If they were with you then where's Marcus and his pa?

CALEIGH

He promised Marcus he'd take him fishing today.

MATTY

I wish he was my dad.

Beat.

KITTY

So, if a blackout lasts for eternity, we won't have no more school!

TRE

Won't last for eternity.

KITTY

Are you sad you won't graduate?

TRE

Who says that?

CALEIGH

Bra, you ain't gonna graduate? You see your grades? Sad!

MATTY

Waaaa-whaaah...

TRE

You see your face? Fuggly!

MATTY

Whaah-waaaa!

KITTY

I miss school.

CALEIGH

Power only out a few hours, boo.

MATTY

Bein' in school with my friends. Walking to class.

KITTY

Ms McShizzle! I'll miss her most of all.

CALEIGH

Ugh.

KITTY

Matty hit her with the bus!

TRE

What?!

MATTY

She jumped outta the way! I did NAT hit her!

CALEIGH

She kinda saw us drivin' the bus.

TRE

Oh, well! Great!

CALEIGH

Won't nothin happen to us! McShizzle's out anyways.

TRE

Wat 'appen' to McShizzle?

KITTY

She got in big trouble.

CALEIGH

She brought that on herself, boo!

KITTY

She's not our teacher anymore.

TRE

That's cap, bra!

MATTY

A cap trap!

CALEIGH

Yup. Video circulating on the IG. I'd pull it up, but no wifi until the power comes on.

Beat.

KITTY

I'm so bored! What will be do without wifi? Or snacks? Will I starve to death?

CALEIGH

You expecting some sort of snack fairy to arrive or something?

In her car decked out with signs "We love you, children" and multi-colored balloons, McShizzle enters with a horn playing "off to the races".

MS MCSHIZZLE

Hello children!

CALEIGH

I rest my case.

Kitty runs toward her.

MS MCSHIZZLE

No, no. Kitty, remember our song.

KITTY

(sings)

WASH YOUR HANDS
SCRUB THEM CLEAN
WEAR YOUR MASK
OF A PRINCE OR A QUEEN!

STAND YOUR GROUND
SIX FEET APART
STAY SAFE AND WISE
THAT'S HEALTHY SMART!

CALEIGH

What the-.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Bravo! Now, I know this is a buggaboo of a power outage and they'll get the power back on soon-.

TRE

-Not in this hood.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Pardon?

TRE

Oh...It'll be a while.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Well, lucky I'm here!

CALEIGH

Didn't you get fired?

MS MCSHIZZLE

I brought snacks!

KITTY AND MATTY

SNACKS!!!!

McShizzle tosses over two duffle bags. The children run to them and tear them open.

KITTY

Chocolate and granola bars!

MATTY

FIRE CHIPS!

MS MCSHIZZLE

Kitty, you go over there and Matty, you over there. Remember to keep your distance.

MATTY

Yes, Ms. McShizzle!

KITTY

I'VE NEVER BEEN THIS HAPPY IN MY WHOLE LIFE!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I haven't forgotten about you two! Soon to be High School Graduates!

She pulls out a graduation gown!

Tada!

CALEIGH

She's Mary freakin' Poppins.

MS MCSHIZZLE

It was my gown. Try it on for size?

CALEIGH

In the middle of this COVID mess?

MS MCSHIZZLE

Oh, I left it outside for three days and only handled with disease-free gloves!

KITTY

Wouldn't fit anyway over the bump.

Beat.

What about Matty? Is He graduating?

MATTY

Naw, little meow. Got another year. Then, off to art school!

CALEIGH

Ha!

MS MCSHIZZLE

I'll have to come back to see you graduate, Matty! I'm always here for my kids graduations. In fact, if they're taking interns over the summer, I might be able to get you into the school of art.

KITTY

But everything's shut down, Ms McShizz! Not even you can make a Matty miracle.

MS MCSHIZZLE

In our own time, we will make it happen.

MATTY

My grades, yo.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Your art, yo. Focus on that and you'll get those grades up.

MATTY

You so sure about everything?

TRE

Ms. McShizz, what are you doing here?

CALEIGH

How did you find us?

MS MCSHIZZLE

The school records and the bus route map. I'm very resourceful when it comes to meeting my students needs.

TRE

You could get in a lot more trouble and we ain't worth it.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I won't leave until I see you both graduate. You're the only children I may ever have.
Ever.

TRE

Ms. McShizz-.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I told you I'd never leave you and I won't...until I know that you've graduated. Now,
gown?

McShizzle tosses the gown to Caleigh.

CALEIGH

What?

KITTY

SPEECH!!!

TRE

Put it on, yo.

MS MCSHIZZLE

What a wonderful idea! Yes, a speech.

CALEIGH

'bout what? This is stup-.

MS MCSHIZZLE

-Your dreams, Caleigh. Do it for me? If it means anything?

Beat.

CALEIGH

I don't get you. Why do you want to see us? Why love us?

MATTY

My mom don't even give me snacks.

MS MCSHIZZLE

I need you. All of you.

Caleigh snickers.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

You don't believe me? Caleigh!

CALEIGH

What...no! No, I don't. No ADULT has ever stood up for me. So, why should I? Look. I don't like you, but it ain't about you. I don't even know you and you wanna give me some gown, play all nice with my story.

TRE

Cay-

CALEIGH

No, man. I don't...I don't buy it. Take it back. I don't need a gown where I'm goin.

Caleigh looks at the gown.

MS MCSHIZZLE

There's something else.

McShizzle hands her a stethoscope from the inside the car.

Have to complete the look. Accept it. Don't? It belongs with you.

CALEIGH

I-uh.

MATTY

Would you, come on!

KITTY

Put it on for me. You always looked good in blue!

CALEIGH

Sorry. Yeah. So, okay.

She puts the gown on. Her smile grows.

CALEIGH (CONT.)

It's cushy. I like it. Feels...right.

She places the stethoscope around her neck. So, I always wanted to be a nurse. In like one of those big hospitals. I feel like it's a superpower, you know. Makin' someone feel better. So, I thought bein' a nurse was something real special. Like not everyone could do it? Then this COVID thing happened. Some of my neighbors here got the COVID and I never got to see them again. Seein, hearin' what these nurses are doin' for these people. I wanna to be a part of that. If I don't get sick. I hope I'm lucky enough to be a nurse. Thank you.

Caleigh hands the gown off to Tre.

TRE

Doesn't fit.

MS MCSHIZZLE

It's one size.

TRE

I'm not...I don't get to walk. I didn't pass.

MS MCSHIZZLE

Then, we'll look to getting you to pass. You may need a summer credit and may walk later, but you will walk.

McShizzle advances towards Tre, taking his hands in hers.

You. Will. Graduate.

Stage lightens as the power's back on.

KITTY

It's a McShizzle miracle!

The stage transforms into a final "parade of animals and circus acts". Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" underscores the following action. Everyone gathers once again on-stage fitted in caps and gowns facing Tre.

TRE

You bet on me?

MS MCSHIZZLE

And what have I always told my students?

TRE

No one has the right to take my joy.

She hands him a book.

TRE

MLK's "I Have A Dream".

MS MCSHIZZLE

He's much better with words, than I.

AP Giggles enters barefaced carrying the Ringmaster's jacket and top hat.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

You remember how we talked about how people want to be remembered?

AP Giggles helps McShizzle to put her jacket and hat on.

MS MCSHIZZLE (CONT.)

Ahh. Thank you.

AP Giggles extends her hand to Tre. Reluctantly, he shakes it. She joins Caleigh in the crowd of gowns as they watch Tre.

TRE

Was that?

Caleigh hands AP Giggles Tre's cap.

MS MCSHIZZLE

It's amazing what people look like below the surface. Now...we're all waiting?

Ms. McShizzle takes the gown out of Tre's hands and fans it out. As he slips his arms in the gown, AP Giggles approaches standing on the opposite side of Tre placing the cap on his head. He is sandwiched by Giggles and McShizzle who are beaming proudly.

AP GIGGLES

About time we got you up on this stage.

MS MCSHIZZLE

You know what to do?

TRE

I won't ever forget this. All of this.

MS MCSHIZZLE

It was all for you.

AP GIGGLES

Go. Make us proud.

McShizzle and Giggles step back into the parade of gowns. All with their eyes on Tre.

TRE

Fellow graduates. I hope these memories...I'll keep for a lifetime. To keep the magic inside of me. To keep the magic inside of you. It is my hope... to be remembered for my magic which is my music. To head to the west coast to make it big. Make Gramma proud of me. She encouraged my dreams. Sung to me as a baby and here I am now, a man. I stand here lookin' at y'all and I hope. I'm here ready to sing for my life. To write poems. Lyrics. Songs. (turns to face McShizzle) To know who's always had my back when she could have easily stepped away.

Beat.

This is "McShizzle's Lullaby".

(singing)

YOU'VE HELPED ME GROW
YOU MADE ME SEE
THERE'S SO MUCH MORE
THAT I CAN BE.

TRE (CONT.)

THERE IS NO DOUBT
I KNOW YOU CARE
MY SLEEPLESS DAYS
YOU STOOD RIGHT THERE

I'M THANKFUL FOR
THE CARE THAT'S SHOWN
WITHOUT YOUR HELP
I COULDN'T HAVE GROWN

A BETTER ME
CAUSE OF THE BEST YOU
MCSHIZZ, I'M THANKFUL
JUST FOR YOU.

He turns his tassel on his cap.

End of Play.