

Roosevelt Elementary

By Jais Brohinsky and Cohen Ambrose

Music by David S. Cohen and Jais Brohinsky

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Characters:

| | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| HARRY | Class President |
| IKE | Class President |
| HENCHMAN | President's henchman |
| TINA | Carnival Coordinator |
| ROBBY | Scientist |
| STUDENT | Bleacherman and FGBI agent |
| STUDENT 2 | Bleacherman and FGBI agent |
| STUDENT 3 | Bleacherman |
| JOEY | Bleacherman |
| ANNE | Artist |
| JACKSON | Artist |
| MARCUS | Artist |
| AL | Poet |
| FRANKIE | Poet |
| DUNC-DUNC | Poet |
| BERT | Director |
| LILLI | Actress |
| PAUL | Actor |
| STANLEY | 5 th grade playwright |
| THE PIANIST | A pianist |

SCENE ONE

(The stage is littered with recess activities and kids playing. A bell rings and distinguishable groups of kids come out onto the playground. There is a group that draws on posters, a group playing house, a group talking at a picnic table—these three groups are well defined and autonomous. There should be other kids, playing tag and in a sandbox. A girl gallops across stage, neighing like a horse. There should be an empty set of bleachers for 'Congress,' as well as a bush up stage center. JOEY walks onto stage in a suit. He carries a briefcase. He stares suspiciously at the different groups and looks with disgust at the empty bleachers. For the first time he looks directly at the audience. Slowly, as he speaks, more and more students stop what they're doing to listen.)

JOEY

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today is a great day in the history of Roosevelt Elementary. Today is a great day in the history of this grade. Today, for the first time since this school's inception, the Annual Carnival will be run completely by our fourth grade. There is power attached to this honor. As we emerged from the school-wide dodge ball game as clear victors, we inherited a responsibility usually designated to the older kids. But now, as the fifth grade nurses sprains and bruises, as the third grade redraws chalk lines on the blacktop, as the first and second graders scramble across the courts picking up scraps of popped rubber, it is up to us alone to perform plays, set up booths, paint murals, and rebuild the joys that have held Roosevelt Elementary together since the beginning of time. At the dawn of this new, golden age, we have become the shepherds of culture.

But a shadow darkens this golden day, taints this historic moment. It's creeping across the football field and rapidly approaching. It is the shadow of uncertainty, fear, and subversion.

When I look around me, I see no recognition. Truly, five days after triumph, our hearts should anticipate a long peace, and our minds should be free from the heavy weight that comes with such bloody, drawn out conflicts—such skinned knees and busted fingers that inevitably accompany the game of dodge ball. But this is not such a period—this is not a period of peace. This is a time when all the playground is split into two vast, increasingly hostile and

armed grades—a time of a great armaments race, in which slingshots and spitballs are accumulating like mad. And worse, a time that anticipates another, bigger game of dodge ball, in which the stakes are higher and the dodge balls larger, more powerful, and capable of devastating an entire team in one throw.

(An explosion off stage—bits of rubber fly onto stage and a dodge ball rolls across, the gathering crowd gasps and cowers.)

Five days ago I would have pointed to Joey S. and his fifth graders as allies. Five days ago, during the school-wide dodge ball game, we relied on them to watch our backs, catch unseen throws, call out if an enemy's foot crossed the line. Five days ago, when we won the dodge ball game using the A-ball Robby created, we superseded the fifth grade for the primacy of the playground, and everything changed. Joey S. and his cronies don't like to be outdone by a younger grade and, as you all know, were quick to create an A-ball of their own. Now we stand at a precipice. Our once-allies have grown dark and menacing. Today we can almost physically hear the mutterings and rumblings of an invigorated god of war craving the rubber slap of dodge ball hitting flesh.

Today is not a period of peace at all. We are engaged in a final, all-out battle between fifth grade bullies and true and decent folk like ourselves. These tattletelling tyrants have selected this as the time. And, ladies and gentlemen, the jacks have been thrown down—they are truly down.

Can there be anyone who fails to realize that the milk-money stealers have said, "The time is now" — that this is the showdown between the rightful playground-going-world and the godless, bullying crew of Joey S.? Unless we face this fact, we shall pay the price that must be paid by those who wait too long: never ending lines for the swings and seconds, thirds, or even fourths in the sandbox.

I look around me, however, and see child's play. I see fun and games at this time of danger. Yes, we won the dodge ball game, but now a new threat has reared its ugly head, and we do not rise to face it. We play, ignorant and unaware, and rot the foundation of glory we fought so hard to attain.

This pestilential rot is not caused by enemies invading our tree houses, or by the weirdoes of our grade. No, no, not the girl who neighs and runs like a horse—not the boy who eats his boogers, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the most elite grade in school has to offer—the first dibs on the slide, the best seats at lunch, and chocolate milk for all.

I have in my hand twenty cases of individuals who would appear to be either friends of or certainly loyal to the fifth graders, but who nevertheless are still helping to decorate our hallways, coordinate our carnivals, and otherwise influence our culture and the framework of our perceptions.

These fifth grade sympathizers are indubitably behind the newfound parity in dodge balls. Our secrets have been leaked. Our secrets have been stolen. What's next? Our playing cards? *(beat)* Our comic books? *(beat)* Our minds? *(beat)* No! *(beat, into base line)* We must stop these subversive machinations. We must uproot the spies among us!

Spies! Spies among us.
Spies! Spies among us.

Everywhere I go I'm being watched by the spies.
I can see the fifth grade influence in their eyes.

Spies! Spies among us.
Spies! Spies among us.

They have infiltrated every grade in our school,
But these kids don't notice they're Crayola-brained fools.

(JOEY implicates BERT and STANLEY, who are talking to each other.)

Just the other day
I heard a kid say
That he'd invited a fifth grader over to play

O-oh the traitor!

These folks don't realize
The dangerous spies

Will swarm us with dodge balls as numerous as
their lies.

Fourth grade self-haters!

(Dance)

I must admit
They're hard to see
They walk and talk like us they look like you and
like me

Dirty chameleons!

To catch all the spies
I need a surprise
I'll tap phones, piggy banks, and monitor the
slides.

Can't hide your dealings.

Spies! Spies among us.
Spies! Spies among us.

Listen up folks now you have to listen to me.
There's a war among us and it's easy to see.

ALL ON STAGE

Spies! Spies among us.
Spies! Spies among us.

Everywhere we go we're being watched by the
spies.
We can see the fifth grade influence in their
eyes.

*(Music cuts abruptly as STUDENT runs across the stage
yelling.)*

STUDENT

Dodge ball! Dodge ball! Dodge ball!

JOEY *(Grabs STUDENT by his collar.)*

I'm in the middle of a speech—

STUDENT

The second grade... it's playing dodge ball... against itself!

JOEY

My God, what villainous force is at work here?

(Runs off stage with STUDENT crossing paths with TINA, director of the Annual Carnival, she carries a carnival poster over to the artists.)

SCENE TWO

(Three children, ANNE, MARCUS and JACKSON, are sitting, chatting, and giggling. TINA enters and paces back and forth.)

TINA

Listen up, folks! Do you know why I have asked you all here today?

JACKSON *(Hitting his juice box hard.)*

Why the heck would we know, Tina? You're the one who asked us, so stop wasting our time and tell us.

TINA

Listen Jackson, I have been appointed as the director of decorations for this year's carnival, and I'm the one hanging my butt out there in front of the bleacher kids. I just failed a spelling test, I'm strung-out, hooked on phonics, and I will not stand here and listen to your lip! You hear me?

(JACKSON simply cocks his eyebrow at TINA and takes a long pull off his box.)

Now then, I have brought you here to offer you all the chance of a lifetime. Your mission, should you choose to accept it,

(She smiles as if a personal joke—which of course it is because she feels she owns the artists like dolls.),

will be to aid in the creation of meaningful and inspirational decoration art for this year's celebration. No cut and paste murals with macaroni noodles and glitter. No drawings of turkeys that look like your hands. No! I'm talking about real art, people! What do you say?

(Long pause as the artists consider the choice before

them.)

ANNE
How long does our work stay up?

TINA
As long as the carnival lasts.

ANNE
So...? Two months, three?

TINA
This isn't an exhibit, Anne, there's no gallery or anything, just for an afternoon in the gymnasium.

MARCUS
An afternoon! You know, I, for one, believe that a carnival is hardly the place for any true work of art.

TINA
Marcus, after the whole nude drawing fiasco in art class last week, you should be thankful to have a piece up for one minute, let alone an entire afternoon.

MARCUS
The art teacher is a Philistine. Nudes represent high art, not pornography. They are compellingly—

TINA (*Tapping her foot, or otherwise obviously annoyed*)
Marcus... are you in?

MARCUS
Well, I suppose I have been longing to put paint to paper again. The artist within me will serve our grade well. My brush is at your service.

TINA
Thank you. And you, Jackson, do you think you can put away the juice for a day and paint something normal?

JACKSON
Whatever. Wait, you're not gonna make me do some,

(*He mocks MARCUS.*)

"compelling still life," are you? I hate that bull—

TINA

- Free reign... mostly. But I warn you, I will be expecting nothing short of perfection from you all. This is our chance to shine. We must stand proudly, carrying the torch of the fourth grade ideal. We must make these paintings the most amazing, awe-inspiring works of art to ever grace the sweat-coated surfaces of the basketball court. This is our moment to shine out among the dull populous of the school. Let's send a message that cannot be ignored - we are the fourth grade, and we will be seen!

(A long, awkward pause.)

I'll go get your canvases.

JACKSON
Don't need one.

TINA
What?

JACKSON
I said I don't need one. I am a canvas.

(JACKSON rips off his clothes. He's wearing only a pair of tightie-whities.)

TINA
Jackson, put your clothes back on or I'll tell.

(JACKSON redresses)

Anne, are you with me?

ANNE
Yeah... I mean I'll do it. Don't get me wrong. But come on, Tina, don't you think the resources we're using here could be put toward other, more important things like free lunch for everyone or after school homework help?

TINA
Careful Anne—you sound like a fifth grader.

ANNE
No, seriously. Why throw away valuable supplies when our work is only going to serve the greater realm of elementary life for an afternoon. It seems to me that seatbelts on the school buses, solar panels on the swing set, and math tutors from the community college instead of eighth graders

would all be serving a greater purpose than an afternoon carnival.

TINA

I understand, Anne. But if I show up at the bleachers talking like that—

ANNE

Like what?

TINA

You know. Equal distribution of school resources—

ANNE

You say that like it's a swear word.

TINA

Well...

ANNE

Look, Tina. We've been best friends for how long now? Since we were what... eight? That's almost... two years. Put that into perspective, that's like twenty percent of our entire lives. I trust you, you trust me.

(Pause)

Trust me on this one.

TINA

Look, Anne, I've got a meeting scheduled at the bleachers in a few minutes. If you guys ever want funding from the Fourth Grade Endowment of the Arts, you've got to take this one for the team. Otherwise you'll probably end up in you-know-where.

MARCUS

Gym class!

(He shudders.)

TINA

I'm not with you on this one. I just can't be... it's not safe. Sorry, Anne.

ANNE

Why don't you let me come with you?

TINA

Where? To the bleachers? Oh... I don't know, Anne.

ANNE

Twenty percent, Tina. Twenty percent.

TINA

I'm not letting you come. I've worked too hard to risk it all with your "equality" shenanigans.

(Pause)

Do you have a crush on one of them?

ANNE

Ew! No way—I mean... Would that change things?

TINA

You *do* have a crush on one of them. Well, it's understandable. They *are* cool.

ANNE

The fourth grade bleacher boys are *not* cool.

TINA

They sure are. Everyone knows it.

ANNE

Too bad they can't be cool.

(Pause)

Being cool is a paradox.

TINA

What's a paradox?

ANNE

It's something that makes no sense.

TINA

Oh.

ANNE

Yeah, think about it.

TINA

Why would I think about something that makes no sense?

ANNE

Think about *why* it doesn't make sense. Think about *why* it's a paradox.

(*No reaction.*)

What makes someone cool?

TINA

Smoking cigarettes?

ANNE

Okay, but why?

TINA

Because they're bad-ass?

ANNE

Exactly. *Baaad*-ass. So there are certain things in school that we are supposed to do. We're supposed to share our snacks. We're supposed to do our homework. There are also things that we're explicitly not supposed to do. Like smoke cigarettes for instance. Being cool, then, is doing the things we're *not* supposed to do with a nonchalant disregard for the things we *are* supposed to do.

TINA

Being cool, then, is smoke cigarettes instead of doing my homework?

ANNE

You'd think! This is where it gets tricky. You see this idea of cool is laden with internal contradictions. Take my example of homework and smoking. If we're supposed to do homework and not supposed to smoke, then being cool is smoking instead of working. But because in order to be cool you can't do what you're supposed to do and have to do what you're not supposed to do, a new paradigm of cool is established—so now, in the new modernity of cool, one *has* to work and *not* smoke. The antithesis has been through the synthesis and is rapidly becoming the thesis.

TINA

What?

ANNE

I know! It makes no sense. The system creates its own

demise, over and over again. This is why the fourth grade boys playing government in the bleachers and relying on their perceived popularity will never actually achieve anything. Because the basis for their system of social organization is flawed with contradiction.

TINA

Jeez, Anne. I don't know if it is such a good idea to bring you after all. That sounds real smart, but do me a favor?

ANNE

Yes?

TINA

Shut up.

ANNE

What?

TINA

I've worked too hard to get into these bleacher meetings—I've been picked last at recess, never passed the ball, and forced to play goalie way too many times for you to just waltz up in here with your gibberish and ruin it all for me.

ANNE

What am I supposed to do?

TINA

Keep your mouth shut. If anyone asks you anything, talk about dolls.

ANNE

Dolls? I hate dolls.

TINA

They don't know that.

ANNE

Does this mean you'll take me?

TINA

Yes, Anne. But only because I'm happy you've finally put away your books, joined reality, and come down with a crush on a boy. Just remember: I've worked too hard for this respect. Now promise me you'll keep quiet. That's the

only way you can come.

ANNE

Okay, I promise.

(ANNE crosses her fingers behind her back as they exit.)

SCENE THREE

(AL enters sniffing glue.)

AL

Walt! Tell me where are we going? Why do you ceaselessly stare at me from the bushes laughing at me and asking 'Are you my angel'? Tell me this, old grubber, geezer from beyond, which way does your beard point today? What now father greybeard?

(DUNC-DUNC and FRANKIE are sitting at the picnic table. They talk to each other as AL approaches.)

DUNC-DUNC

Hey Frankie, look, Al's talking to himself.

FRANKIE

He's probably been huffing glue again.

(Pause)

He's been doing it more and more since the dodge ball game.

DUNC-DUNC

I don't know how he can still write with all that stuff in his head.

FRANKIE

I don't know if he can write without it.

(To AL)

Did you hear? The Carnival is our carnival.

DUNC-DUNC

Yeah, fourth grade only.

(AL stares and doesn't seem to notice the two.)

FRANKIE

Did you hear us? That means we can probably perform on stage. We can finally read to an audience. Everyone will be waiting to see Bert's play—they'll have to listen to us. They'll just have to.

DUNC-DUNC

Al? Can you hear us?

AL

Carnival?

FRANKIE

Yes, the Carnival.

AL

The Carnival is soaked in blood... and urine.

FRANKIE

What are you talking about?

AL

The Carnival is soaked in blood—broken fingers, skinned flesh from knees oozing pus and blood lapped up by tongues extolling the marvels of this carnival.

DUNC-DUNC

Jeez, Al. Are you feeling okay?

AL

I smell urine everywhere. I want to vomit thick globs of sentimentality and bleed idealistic rivers of bloody mucus into the laps of strangers. I'll kiss everyone I see so they can taste the feces coating my tongued language—I'll penetrate them with my numbness and laugh as they fumble blind and lost.

DUNC-DUNC

Gross.

AL

I smell urine everywhere, as if humanity has lost control of its collective bowels and bladder spewing shit and piss bombs instead of welfare. I choke on this social sewage epidemic of materialistic beauty, of oblivion addiction, of educational conveyor belts, industrialized dodge ball games, and imposed epitomes of 'cool'. I gulp gallons of

OJ and isopropyl alcohol to wash my mouth of this urea and chase unconsciousness to wake up in a pool my own fluids, smelling urine everywhere.

FRANKIE

Dunc-Dunc, you take Al to the nurse. I think he may have peed his pants. I'm going to find Tina. She's coordinating all the events and we're going to get stage space to read our poetry.

SCENE FOUR

(BERT runs across the stage to the actors. Lights follow him.)

BERT

Hey, hey, hey, everyone!

(The theatre group gathers around to listen. Music begins for song.)

I've done it. I've found the answer
To the androgynous monotony
Of the Fourth Grade Theatre Project.

Yes, I've found the answer.
No more homogenous artistry
One will decide, inform, and reject.

No longer will we rely on the plot.
It's more about what is—than what is not.
The theatre is not about distraction.
It's a house of learning, a house of action.

I've had enough of fantastic representations.
This school does not need more false
presentation.
Dodge ball divisions are the modern reality
And must be known in gross totality.

Yes. I've found the answer
To the androgynous monotony
Of the Fourth Grade Theatre Project.

I've done it. I've found the answer.
No more homogenous artistry

One will decide, inform, and reject.

Your characters will be held accountable.
Their emotions have become surmountable.
The spectators, observers, make the final
decisions
Regarding every word and plot collision.

Our audience is no longer with us, per se.
They will watch, removed, and judge the play.
They are outsiders subject to mental conflation.
This capacity to choose, I call: alienation.

I've done it. I've found the answer
To the androgynous monotony
Of the Fourth Grade Theatre Project.

Yes, I've found the answer.
No more homogenous artistry
One will decide, inform, and reject.

LILLI (*Singing, trying (and failing) to fit in*)
What do you call this theatre?

BERT
The Superman.

Superman.

PAUL
I like Batman better.

BERT
Superman... Theatre.

PAUL
What'd he just say?

LILLI
Something about aliens.

BERT
No longer will we allow our parents to cry and make
videotapes, no, they'll be aroused with a newfound capacity
for action and instruction! But, perhaps most importantly,
there'll no longer be a place for feeling or emotion.
It'll become a purely ephemeral moment of an evanescent,
yet everlasting moment of reason.

PAUL
What!

LILLI
But no one ever comes to our performances. Not even our parents.

BERT
Of course not. With an attitude like that we run ourselves through a cyclically vicious process. Sure, we can simply shrug our shoulders sadly and whine and moan about how nobody comes to our plays. 'Boo hoo, the kindergarten wing hallway is always a half empty during our shows.' Did it ever strike anyone that it might be a half empty hallway because we don't make sacrifices!?

PAUL
No, I think it's because they don't have hall passes.

BERT
You're all so naïve. If our shows were better, if they got the same publicity as the Fifth Grade Musical, if the same trouble were taken to build up our reputation and tradition, if a nucleus of grade-schoolers could be formed – perhaps by subscription – then more people would come and we'd have the funding for more material.

LILLI
But it's not like we ever use any props. You think they're distracting.

PAUL
Yeah, like that time I brought that fart cushion!

(LILLI and PAUL crack-up.)

BERT
No, no, no what I'm getting at is this question about our last remaining, hopeful artist who still grasps the potential to actually say something about the playground world.

(PAUL makes a fart sound. They laugh.)

I'm asking how, without the resources, is the theatre artist supposed to reach the everyday, shackled, ignorant, freedom- and knowledge-seeking grade-schooler of this year?

LILLI (*Still giggling.*)

What was that fat kid's name who sat on it, again?

BERT

Without student-government aid, I ask you, how is the tormented and heroic, abused and ingenious, the changeable and playground-changing grade-schooler of this frightful and important moment of the year supposed to fund his own theatre?

(*Pause*)

PAUL

The PTA?

BERT

One would think! But, no, instead, a whole heap of all the finest grade-school materials, relatively speaking, is splashed on the Musical; some expensive, pip-squeak, high-school choirboy is hired to play the lead and draw in the audiences, and the FGTP is denied the slightest new acquisition. On top of that the actors are all a bunch of green, dodge ball losers who play the parts completely wrong. It's true. You're all an overworked, misused, panic-driven, artificially whipped-up band of actors with as much direction as a freshly beheaded Thanksgiving turkey.

LILLI

But we have fun...right?

BERT

Exactly, Tulip...

LILLI

Lilli.

BERT

Whatever... but you're exactly right. *We-have-fun*. And nobody who fails to get fun out of his activities can expect them to be fun for anyone else. Those fifth-graders with their exquisitely painted backdrops, their boisterous appetite for large flocks of balsa wood airplanes, their disgustingly imposing use of papier-mâché, all brilliantly colored inside the lines with their endless supply of sixty-four packs of crayons with the little sharpener on the side: all this doesn't contain three pennyworth of fun!

(He jots a note.)

Now let's rehearse.

(PAUL and LILLI get into position/character.)

Paul, start at the line, "I come to see what mischief..."

PAUL

I come to see what mischief your uncle's brewin' now. Put it out of mind, Abby.

LILLI

John - I'm awaitin' for you every night.

BERT

Ok, stop. What you're doing is simply show, there's no contact being made! A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense! Feelings should be private and limited. A fourth-grader is an atom that breaks up and forms anew. It's time to show things as they are out here at recess. It's time to show the truth!

(There is no reaction. The children just stare blankly as a few uninterested kids play a game of tag occasionally bumping into BERT. The awkward pause holds until PAUL pulls BERT'S arm down and leads him offstage.)

SCENE FIVE

(A group is gathering at the bleachers. Students talk excitedly among themselves in pairs.)

TINA *(To STUDENT)*

Yes it's quite exciting. Bert is putting on a play. Jackson, Marcus, and Anne are readying the murals. And I heard that those three creeps who hang out by the picnic table want to perform poetry.

STUDENT

Ew.

JOEY *(To ANNE)*

Anyone who has followed this fifth grade conspiracy even remotely and can add two and two will tell you there is no

possibility of this war, and it is a war, of this war ending except by victory or the death of this grade.

TINA (*To STUDENT*)

Well yes, they are artists. But I like to think of them like cabbage patch dolls—if I squeeze them the right way, in the right place, they make the right noise, and for the Carnival to be a success, I just have to squeeze them all perfectly.

ANNE (*To JOEY*)

Barbies? Yes I love Barbies. Sometimes I cut off their hair and melt their bodies to destroy the embodied gender and beauty norms, thus disturbing the commodification of the woman's figure.

JOEY

Whoa.

(HARRY, HENCHMAN and ROBBY walk on stage and everyone quiets and stands to address the flag, with hands on hearts, except ANNE who looks around with humored disbelief. ROBBY stands behind and to the side of HARRY, who is also flanked by HENCHMAN and leads the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. Throughout the play, HENCHMAN hands note cards to the president during speeches and whispers in president's ear whenever questions are asked.)

ALL

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

(After opening, everyone says different things and the Pledge ends in disorder.)

HARRY (*Turns and addresses the bleachers kids, who sit.*)

In news today, they're serving foot-long hotdogs for lunch again. Robby's done some experiments and discovered that they are in fact *not* made of rubber. Also, Eric and Julie were seen holding hands while walking to school. This matter must be investigated. Any volunteers?

(STUDENT 3 raises his hand.)

Excellent. No time to waste, better get on that right now.

STUDENT

And bring back some juice boxes.

HARRY

Yes, juice boxes for everyone.

(HENCHMAN *hands* HARRY a note card. HARRY *reads*.)

Oh, that's right. I'm sure you've all heard by now. It's true. The second grade has split. Ms. Kim's class has attacked Mr. Ree's, and, from what we can tell as of yet, it seems the fifth graders are behind this.

(*Commotion in the bleachers.*)

HARRY

Folks! Folks!

(*Bleachers slowly quiet, STUDENT 2 stands.*)

STUDENT 2

What's the role of the fifth grade in all of this?

HARRY (*While HENCHMAN whispers in his ear.*)

From what we can tell right now, it's completely directive. There have been no players sighted tall enough to be in the fifth grade. But, since we know that they must be behind the attack, we can assume they probably supplied the dodge balls and certainly provided intelligence. What's worse is that the first grade, that whole big lot of them, seems to be trying to suck up to Joey S.

(*Students gasp.*)

HARRY

Yes, the first grade is standing on the sidelines, ready to join the game.

JOEY (*Aside to audience, HARRY mimes speech in background.*)

Do you see what's happening? The fifth graders are expanding their influence, smearing it through every grade. It's just like I told you—they're bent on controlling the school.

HARRY (*Taking note cards from HENCHMAN.*)

It seems that at the present moment in our school's history every grade must choose between alternative ways of life...

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by peaceful games like basketball and

baseball; free elections for team captains; choices like red or orange Koolaid; and freedom from bigger kids like the fifth graders.

JOEY (*Aside*)

But this guy, I don't know about him. He acknowledges the fifth grade presence, but not the infiltration. Ever since the dodge ball game he's made lots of fine speeches against Joey S. and his grade—lots of fine speeches with no results.

HARRY

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled network of bullies; fixed seating at lunch, skipping in line, and the suppression of other personal freedoms via barbaric measures like dodge ball.

JOEY (*Aside*)

Personally, I don't trust him. I don't trust him and I don't like him. Either he knows about the spies and doesn't do anything, or he's too blind to see the obvious. He's either an idiot or is in cahoots.

HARRY

If the second grade falls, it will succumb to this other, horrible way of life. If the second grade falls, what's next? Third? *Kindergarten*? We cannot let this happen. We can't let the school down. We must help Mr. Ree's class. Which is why I've taken the initiative as class president and sent some of our fourth grade dodge ball players to the game to assist the second grade.

STUDENTS (*Shocked, angry*)

Without approval? Where's the vote?

JOEY (*Aside*)

The son of a gun ought to be impeached!

HARRY (*Talks above, they quiet*)

And more—we will build a bigger dodge ball, a super dodge ball! Robby is already working on the designs.

ROBBY

The idea is similar to the A-ball, but bigger, much bigger, maybe a thousand times bigger.

(He pulls a sheet off a chalkboard revealing a circle on it and in the center a large H. The title and lots of math equations surround the drawing. The bleachers 'ooh' and 'ahh'.)

I call it: Da Bomb.

STUDENT

That *is* da bomb.

STUDENT 2

Definitely da bomb.

JOEY *(Turns and addresses HARRY.)*

Why don't we use this ball then...

(Awkwardly)

this "da bomb"?

HARRY

It's not ready yet. I just said Robby is working on the designs.

ROBBY *(Trying, and failing, to be heard.)*

About the designs—

JOEY

How convenient. Why don't we use the A-ball? It worked last time.

HARRY

Because that would mean another school wide dodge ball game. There'd be no way not to involve everyone. It would be a disaster.

ROBBY

Gentlemen, if I may—

JOEY *(Turning to bleachers.)*

Or, we could wipe out the entire fifth grade in one swoop.

HARRY

But if we didn't, they'd retaliate.

JOEY

Not if we hit them with enough balls.

HARRY

But if we miss even one, just one, they could use their own A-balls against us.

JOEY

For someone who talks about playing hardball with the fifth grade, you sure swing a light bat.

ROBBY (*Stepping in between.*)
Gentlemen—

HARRY (*Ignoring ROBBY and stepping around him.*)
For such a junior member of this counsel, you sure use a loud voice.

JOEY (*Approaching HARRY*)
Liar, liar, pants on fire.

HARRY (*Meets JOEY's approach.*)
Takes one to know one!

(The two stand face to face and stare. They hold for a long pause then break.)

JOEY (*Suddenly turning to the bleachers.*)
Fellow counsel members, don't you think it's just a little bit odd, a little bit strange that the same leadership we have telling us that the school is split in two camps, telling us confrontation is imminent, telling us that the enemy has actually engaged us in a game of dodge ball and that we've sent members of our own grade to go and play—isn't it a bit strange that this same leadership won't step up to the plate and squash this once and for all? The fifth graders have started another game. It is our job to finish it. But this plan, this refusal to employ our full might, what does it point to? I'll tell you what it points to. It points to spies! Spies! There are spies among you!

I have in my hand eight cases of individuals who appear to be loyal to or at least sympathetic to the fifth graders, and yet are still sitting here among us, sending our dodge ball players to the blacktop!

(Students yelling and shouting and standing and pointing.)

HARRY

Folks! Folks! Quiet!

(No one listens. HARRY glares at JOEY, who smiles and is content. STUDENT 3 enters. He stops in front of the bleachers and everyone quiets, but still stands.)

STUDENT 3

I found Eric and Julie crossing the football field, going toward the fifth graders—and they were carrying this.

(Unfolds a large piece of paper that has a circle on it with a large H in the middle.)

HARRY

'Da Bomb'!

JOEY

I knew it!

ROBBY

My baby!

JOEY

You see? Fifth grade spies, just like I told you. Harry has done nothing but talk and talk, and meanwhile our secrets are being sneaked across enemy lines. This must be how the fifth graders got the A-ball. They didn't figure it out; they stole our plans. And you,

(Pointing finger at HARRY)

you let it happen.

(A couple shouts of agreement from the bleachers.)

JOEY

There are spies, Harry, there are spies among us, and you're not doing anything about it.

(More shouts of agreement)

JOEY

What are you going to do about the spies, Harry?

(Echoes of 'yeah, what are you going to do about the spies, Harry' come from the bleachers.)

What are you going to do about the spies, Harry?

(Everyone in the bleachers is now saying 'What are you going to do about the spies, Harry?' in unison. They walk slowly, chanting it over and over, toward HARRY and HENCHMAN, who back away off stage. All exit, save JOEY and ANNE.)

JOEY *(Aside)*

I'll tell you what he's going to do about the spies. Nothing. Which is why the burden comes to honest patriots like myself. I will root out these vermin that nibble away at the foundation of our ideals—that rot the roots of our tradition and honor. I swear I will.

(Noticing ANNE)

What are you doing here? Don't you have some dolls to mutilate? Go on, scam.

(The two stare each other down. Eventually ANNE exits slowly.)

Where do I start? Think! I need to think like Joey S, like a fifth grader. What do I want? I want control. I want power. I want my pockmarked face smiling on statues built in the four corners of the playground. I want to undermine the underpinnings of the fourth grade—to strike at the core of their tradition...

(TINA and FRANKIE walk by with armfuls of art supplies and a banner for the carnival. JOEY watches them pass, gets an idea, and then exits.)

SCENE SIX

(TINA and FRANKIE walk with supplies to artists. JACKSON, ANNE, and MARCUS are furiously painting posters for the upcoming carnival. TINA walks with FRANKIE, explaining to her what each artist is working on while she tries and fails to get her attention.)

TINA

All right everyone, these posters need to be spectacular, vibrant, couleurs exquis! I want color, I want action, I want masterpieces!

FRANKIE

Tina.

TINA (*Examining ANNE's painting, then talking to FRANKIE, but ignoring her.*)

Ah yes, Anne, very nice. Now this is interesting! It's colorful, certainly vibrant, yet a seeming collage of pieces rearranged. I'm not sure the bleachers will approve.

ANNE

What are you saying?

TINA

I'm saying that this is far too incomprehensible. There's no specificity – a simple, presented object is adequate, but this –

ANNE

It's a metaphor.

TINA

With paint?

ANNE

Yes, with paint. I'm stripping the figure down, giving it direct treatment.

JACKSON

I'll show you direct treatment.

ANNE

What!

TINA

It's completely random.

(*JOEY creeps onto the stage and hides behind the bush. He takes out binoculars and watches.*)

ANNE (*Obviously still angry with JACKSON.*)

No, no. It's meticulously arranged. Randomness is just visceral incongruity. *This* is... factual cohesion, at least! I'm simply breaking the artistic process into a rearrangement of more pure elements. It helps to do away with inconsistencies and distractions.

FRANKIE

Tina.

TINA

Everything's all chunky looking.

ANNE

It's political. It's a statement. It cries, 'We have nothing to lose but our dodge balls.'

TINA

Let's just hope it doesn't get us into trouble.

(She moves on to MARCUS.)

FRANKIE

Tina.

TINA

It looks like Marcus is putting the finishing touches on his piece, adding shadow, highlights it is truly amazing. He's created a still... life, I suppose, of this... still-life scene. I feel like I could reach out and touch the vase, maybe even smell the flowers. He has somehow captured the very moment in time. Very nice. Very Van Gogh-esque... I'm talking early eighties here.

MARUCS

Van Gogh was a Philistine. And so were the eighteen eighties.

TINA *(To FRANKIE)*

I'm struck with it's consistent yet scattered, plain yet I'm sure very complicated, and serene yet horrifically disturbing all at once. Interesting!

MARCUS

Thank you. I do feel that the vase is somewhat lacking in intensity perhaps a bit more shadow.

(Moving on to view JACKSON's piece. JOEY sneaks away.)

TINA

My goodness this! Oh yes, this is new.

It's cutting edge, it's innovation, expression too.

It speaks of power. It speaks of change. It yearns and cries with aching.

I don't get it. What's it called?

(Pause)

JACKSON

Painting.

TINA

Whoa ho ho ho ho, did you hear that folks?
Jackson splashes modernism in with each stroke.

I think you just created something brand new.
Just think of everyone who'll want a piece of
you.

It's brilliant, it's avant-garde, it's
magnificent
It is poppin' fresh and crisp and puts the 're'
in recent.

I think you just created something brand new.
Just think of all things I can do with you.

I'll start by putting posters up around the
halls.
And plan an exhibition after school at the mall.
Your art will show the world our fourth grade is
the finest.
And I will rule as Princess Tina... your royal
highness.

MARCUS

What is this? You call *this* art?

TINA

It's groundbreaking, it's wonderful—

JACKSON

Oh don't even start.

TINA

I think you just created something brand new.
Just think of all the—

JACKSON

Stop! I've had enough of you.

TINA

It's brilliant, it's avant-garde, it's
magnificent
It is poppin' fresh and crisp and puts the 're'
in recent.

I think you just created something brand new.
Just think of all things I can do with you.

MARCUS
Jackson, this is nonsense. This isn't art.
Without a form or shape it can't speak to the
heart.

ANNE
It's an expression.

MARCUS
It's a mess.

TINA
It's rebellion manifest.

ANNE
Of unconscious moods.

MARCUS
With no reference.

TINA
And now the public test.

JACKSON
Wait! Stop! Reference? Moods?
I'm simply tapping in to the life paint exudes.

You say I've just created something brand new.
But it's obvious my work is beyond all of you.

TINA
It's brilliant, it's avant-garde, it's
magnificent
It is poppin' fresh and crisp and puts the 're'
in recent.

I think you just created something brand new.
Just think of all things I can do with you.

JACKSON

Cut it out.

FRANKIE
Tina.

TINA
I'm sorry, but this is modernism!

FRANKIE
Yeah, wow. Um... Tina?

TINA
This is groundbreaking –

JACKSON
Already used that one.

TINA
Right, this is –

FRANKIE
Ice-breaking?

TINA
Ice-breaking! This is earth-shattering! This is –

JACKSON
Shut up!

TINA
Wow, Frankie, tell me, or tell me not, is this not the most earth... *exploding*, piece of work you've ever witnessed?

FRANKIE
Um. Well certainly it, um, actually... I tend to understand words better—it seems emotional, but I like a form to connect to —efficient, clear definition, equations for the human emotion. Some sort of correlation. Anyway, I was—

JACKSON
What do you know? I mean, you understand my idea, but you're obviously hung up on images. Why not simply paint an emotion itself, that's the point after all, right? Paint a picture not of the merry-go-round, but of the dizzying nausea it creates? Then you've created something new, something worthwhile.

FRANKIE

Yeah. Whatever. Tina, I was hoping to ask you about the Carnival?

TINA
What about it...?

FRANKIE
Well, me and my friends over there

(Indicates picnic table)

were wondering if there's perhaps a possibility of us getting some space during the Carnival.

TINA *(Looking over to the picnic table.)*
What do you... do... all day, at that picnic table?

FRANKIE
We have some pieces we'd like to perform.

TINA
Pieces of what?

FRANKIE
Poetry.

TINA
Oh! Um... weird.

(TINA looks at her schedule.)

Okay, I suppose if it's short we could fit you in before Bert's play.

FRANKIE
Really? Great! Thanks a lot!

TINA
I'll pencil you in.

(She pencils them in.)

None of you guys paint or anything like... *useful*, perhaps?

FRANKIE
No. None of us. Thanks a lot though!

(She is very excited and runs away from artists, to the picnic table.)

SCENE SEVEN

(FRANKIE runs to the picnic table where DUNC-DUNC and AL are writing. JOEY eventually sneaks up and behind the bush.)

FRANKIE

We've got it! We've got stage time in the Carnival. We're going to perform right before Bert's play.

DUNC-DUNC *(Stops writing)*

Yes!

FRANKIE

On a darker note, the dodge ball's started up again. The second grade started a game that the fifth grade is behind, and even the first grade is getting involved. It could be another school-wide game.

AL *(Without looking up from writing.)*

What a surprise.

DUNC-DUNC

Not again.

FRANKIE

Yeah.

(Everyone is silent a moment.)

I just don't understand this warring between the grades.

DUNC-DUNC

How do you mean?

FRANKIE

I mean we're not so different from the fifth graders, not so new either.

DUNC-DUNC

You mean, like, we're all from the same mold?

FRANKIE

Exactly, and yet we enter again and again into the final moments of the same history played out again and again, a history of beaming dodge balls and child's screams.

DUNC-DUNC

Today is a sad day for the Carnival.

FRANKIE

It's a sad day for everyone.

(The two stare off into space—long pause.)

I started to write a poem that weaves together all the students from all the grades under a great umbrella of Roosevelt Elementary.

DUNC-DUNC

Sounds big.

FRANKIE

Huge.

DUNC-DUNC

What's it about?

FRANKIE

Direction. These complacent drones need some direction.

DUNC-DUNC

Can I hear it?

FRANKIE

Well, it's just a beginning, but sure.

(Clears throat)

Now Harry would go up to join
the great of men like Joey S.,
to work his fame with coins
and dodge balls pounding flesh.

All the bleachers and the blacktop
to the sand box and the slide,
lost beneath the rubber popped
and all the dreams that died.

One thousand tears, my Roosevelt,
are what I've cried for you,

and shattered years like frozen melt
into histories untrue.

DUNC-DUNC

Wow, Frankie. That's deep.

AL (*Without looking up from writing.*)

Deep? That's barely scratches the surface.

(*Guffaws*)

Walt could do better than that.

FRANKIE

Who the heck is Walt?

DUNC-DUNC (*Overlapping on 'heck'*)

Oh yeah? What have you been working on, Al?

AL (*Reads*)

I saw the best minds of this grade destroyed by madness,
starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through
foreign hallways looking for an angry fix, wide eyed youth
expelled from class for crazy, obscene odes praising
playground violence and deep cuts in lines turned gaping
wounds swallowing dreams of ring-around-the-rosy, gorging
on snow white fantasies only to heave and hurl intestinal
balls dodged by children who bit teachers in the neck and
shrieked with delight in principal's office for committing
no crime but their own mimesis of the six o'clock news, who
howled on their knees at recess and were dragged from the
blacktop waving dismembered genitals, who created great
suicidal dramas in Roosevelt auditoriums under the wartime
screech whistles useless for halting rubber bombardments,
who scoffed loyalty oaths as hypnotisms and were then bound
hand and foot and hanged despite hung juries, who drowned
in blood tears leaked from busted blue-eyed sockets
staining nurse's white linen, staining Roosevelt's line in
white, who bypassed failed absolutes promised like end-of-
the-day snacks lost to the tolling bell crying freedom as
if tomorrow's shackles did not exist, crying freedom in
antithesis to *other* blurring memory of constitutional
ideals, crying freedom justified in blood after blood after
blood after blood, crying freedom.

FRANKIE

Yes! That's it Al. You've done it.

DUNC-DUNC
Done what?

(JOEY crawls onto stage, past the poets, to the bush, where he continues spying.)

FRANKIE

Touched on this apathy and ignorance permeating Roosevelt today. We can speak to it. We can speak against it. We are going to have an audience and we won't let them sit complacently insulated. We'll rub the horrors of the school they tacitly accept and perpetuate in their faces. The fourth grade will hear us!

It's time that they listen.
It's time that they hear.
Our words may not always glisten,
But today our words are clear.

Look, now, I can see them
Sitting mute on their stools.
Our poetry will awake them—
Make revolution out of fools.

DUNC-DUNC

What if they don't hear us?
You said yourself they're complacent drones.
What if instead they fear us
And leave us on the stage alone?

(JOEY quietly sneaks off.)

FRANKIE

They'll listen, they'll hear, they'll have to.
This transcends you and me.
We'll break apart their shackles,
We'll teach them to think free.

These dodge ball games are finite
Propelled by ignorant fear.
You said yourself we're from the same mold,
Now help me to make that clear.

DUNC-DUNC

I don't know—

FRANKIE

Yes you do. We're in this
together.

DUNC-DUNC
It could go wrong-

FRANKIE
But it won't, they will hear.

DUNC-DUNC
I've never read to an audience.

FRANKIE
They will listen, they will cheer.

DUNC-DUNC
All right, I'm in-

FRANKIE
That makes two. Where is Al?

AL
Over here, listening to your plot.

FRANKIE
What do you say, Al? Will you join us?

AL
Eh. Why the fuck not?

FRANKIE, DUNC-DUNC, AL
Look, now, I can see them
Sitting mute on their stools.
Our poetry will awake them-
Make revolution out of fools.

DUNC-DUNC/AL
Out of fools.

Out of fools.

FRANKIE (*with DUNC-DUNC/AL overlapping 'out of
fools' on top of 'lu-u-tion'*)
Revo-ho-lu-u-tion.

Revo-ho-lu-u-tion.

(The poets exit singing and walking off together with a Wizard of Oz kind of feel.)

SCENE EIGHT

(PAUL and LILLI are in character rehearsing the same scene as before. BERT seems frustrated with his actors. STANLEY, a fifth grader, eats a chocolate bar and attempts to explain the workings of this love scene. He has a fake beard or moustache—it is important that it is fake—and is in fact the only character in the script to have any kind of facial hair. Eventually JOEY sneaks up and spies.)

PAUL
Put it out of mind, Abby.

LILLI
John – I'm awaitin' for you every night.

PAUL
Abby, I never give you... I never give you... line?

BERT
'Hope.'

PAUL
What?

BERT
'Hope!' Okay, stop, this isn't working! Stan, how is this relevant? I mean, the fifth graders, or should I say, your people, are at complete and violent odds with ours... not that I think our side is right either, but ultimately how are we, as artists, going to convey this message, through a love scene?

STANLEY
Well it's never going to work if Paul doesn't kiss the girl.

PAUL
Yeah! I mean... not that I want to kiss her, no offense, just the whole cooties thing... you know, it's just...

BERT

Come on, Stan. What does love have to do with a gaming holocaust, or the fifth and fourth grade agendas? We're only a year's difference in age. Let's reunite... like it was a few days ago.

STANLEY

It's a slippery slope, Bert. Since the big game a few days ago, the fourth graders are occupying an entirely new position on the playground, by force of revolution. And who is to say that this, to use a parable, this espousal power hierarchy may not simply be created again? And that we, the fifth graders, will be the spouse and you the patriarch? You see how I am creating the love metaphor here, Bert?

BERT

Sort of...

STANLEY

As the school gets more and more populated, and the areas behind the stalls in the restrooms where young relationships are supposed to emerge get fewer and fewer, more and more of us, in a stupor of passionate rage, are going to rush out onto the playground and start throwing balls at anyone we can find. Now, as far as the theatre is concerned, you and I approach it quite differently. In fact you've just announced that you don't think it works.

BERT

I don't think it does.

STANLEY

I don't think you're sure of that. I think it's that fourth grade impulsivity. I'd like to know what you were after when you were asking those questions from your actors... apparently you have a theme?

BERT

I was trying to find out why we're all alone. I'm talking about feeling like a part of a... a community—a collapsing community.

STANLEY

Ah! 'Community!' Now you've got a theme for the play.

BERT

Exactly. Shouldn't we be able to be equal students and not be lonely? Shouldn't we be able to share our toys, our

turns in the sandbox and the slide? Perhaps play a friendly game of hopscotch rather than violently throwing balls at each other?

STANLEY

I have a feeling that because I'm older than you and that because I happened to write this play you may expect me to give you the truth about something.

BERT

I do.

STANLEY

Well, we're trying to create a controversial statement about the division of the schoolyard via a love scene. Give us something to relate to.

BERT

Like what?

STANLEY

The future.

BERT

What's the future?

STANLEY

'What's the future?' Well, the community could collapse, and you could become enslaved, or perhaps even worse, we will both be enslaved by a... syndicated kind of totalitarian world run by, and don't start crying on me here, cyborgs.

(A giant, satisfied smile creeps across his face.)

BERT

I think this verifies my new theory—

STANLEY

No, Bert. This is about a collapse that carries a lot of stakes. The future holds many options, many of them scary, many of them gloomy.

BERT

That's awfully depressing.

STANLEY

I didn't come here to cheer you up. I came to see a show.

BERT

But I need help!

STANLEY

So do I Bert!

LILLI

You know, excuse me, but I've been here all day listening to Bert asking what's wrong and what's your opinion and why do we think we're lonely. To me it's not so much about being equal, it's more about an overblown testosterone beef of the fourth grade boys' fear of failure in a fifth grade world.

STANLEY

The grade school community has collapsed because the fourth grade boys are trying to do what the fifth grade has never done, which is to be both fulfilled athletically, and fulfilled in their relationships and in their art. The fifth graders have failed miserably at combining these, why should the fourth grade succeed?

LILLI

Well, maybe somewhere in our grade's struggle for and eventual independence, the fifth grade, being so blind sighted by their collapsing hierarchy, have stopped being real fifth graders. I miss that fifth grade energy.

STANLEY

Absolutely! It's because the fifth graders are scared to death of it.

LILLI

It's not just the fifth graders. The bleacher boys are talking about cancelling this production. Are you aware of that?

STANLEY

There will always be a theatre, no matter how many productions are cancelled and it may very well be an okay thing that the old fashioned theatre is gotten rid of. This is a painful transformation of our theatre, and of our language.

BERT

What do you mean?

STANLEY

Well, it is painful for me to lose the meanings of simple words like 'ball', which you can't yell in a crowded space without the threat of detention. So I am sorry that our theatre and our language have changed, but I am not against it. What I am simply trying to point out to you is that we have a dilemma of a deeply nostalgic boy, nothing more.

BERT

So, what do I do now?

STANLEY

Well, Bert, ask yourself why, as you've asked your actors, are you alone? Why have you, and a whole grade of directors and theorists walked around holding mirrors up to yourselves? Why have you so selfishly turned the mirror inward, away from nature, and imposed this peculiar misery upon your classmates?

BERT

My gut tells me that I've been stripped so raw of any glimpse of truth in the theatre that I've cast my frustration inward with such magnitude that I can no longer stomach anyone else's feelings. I've fought so hard and long to allegorically deconstruct false ideologies about the world. I'm exhausted. I'm fed up with the way people present their fake, skeletal forms, when I can clearly see their guts.

STANLEY

What about my system, Bert? Doesn't *that* shed any light into who people really are?

BERT

No. Not at all. In fact, if anything, it creates an even more unsatisfying, fake character. At this point, creating a false consciousness on stage is simply a lie. And no audience deserves to be hypnotized, Stan. Only the character who is free of illusions, who can reveal himself without justification, can direct his own life.

STANLEY

But then don't you run the risk of totally ruining an enjoyable evening for your audience? They've come to be immersed, have they not? They've come to be transported –

BERT

Absolutely! There's no wrong in entertaining –

STANLEY

Really? That's exactly what I'm understanding to be your problem.

BERT

No, we can entertain, but there's a fine line, Stan. There's no point in making people think if you don't even have their attention. We've got to excite them first – like foreplay. You can't just jump right in and hold a girl's hand, can you? No, you've got to write her notes, pick her a dandelion, warm her up, then dive in, you know? Theatre works the same way. Once you have your audience, the theatre becomes beneficial. Only *now* does it have the power.

(JOEY walks on stage, sees BERT talking with the fifth grader STANLEY and immediately drops to the floor and starts spying.)

STANLEY

But a naturalistic and metaphorical theatre will provide a more cognizant, cathartic experience for your audience.

BERT

Catharsis is muddled.

STANLEY

Go talk with Augusto the exchange student if you expect your audience to come prepared.

BERT

If you want cognition, you need clarity!

STANLEY

In the new theatre, your audience won't need to be prepared. They'll leave transformed. This could be fun you know, which is apparently just what you're after.

BERT

No, no, no. When you cry, you can't see, Stan. People want representations of reality. It makes them feel like their lives are exciting! They want to see tattlers tattling, bullies bullying, and... sluts slutting. They want the truth. They want the dirty truth.

(Lights fade on BERT and STANLEY, then rise on JOEY who sneaks away from hiding spot.)

SCENE NINE

(Students are finishing up the Pledge of Allegiance at the bleachers. ANNE and TINA are present, though ANNE does not participate in the pledge. The chalkboard has flipped revealing IKE's plan. Throughout scene HENCHMAN hands IKE notes for speech and whispers in ear to answer questions, as in Scene Five.)

ALL *(Disordered)*
With liberty and justice for all.

IKE *(Addressing bleachers)*
Okay, we don't have much time, so I'll jump right in. Did everyone get the memo?

(Waves a piece of paper reading TERRORIST)

(STUDENTS mumbling and shrugging—evidently no one read the memo)

IKE *(frustrated)*
From now on the fifth graders should be referred to as terrorists.

STUDENT
Why?

IKE
It tells all the other grades who the bad guys really are.

(Pause)

It's political.

STUDENT
Oh.

IKE
On a more logistical note, we have some facts to face people. The fifth graders have successfully stolen our secrets. They have the A-ball and now the design for 'da bomb.' However, we have a plan. We still have altogether more balls than they do... I think. Now, what we need to do is capitalize on this advantage. We need to deduce the location of all their balls and find out who will be

responsible for wielding them in the dodge ball game. Then, we will heave all of our balls at these individuals and preemptively take out their arsenal.

STUDENT

What happens if we miss?

STUDENT 2

Or if we don't hit all their players?

IKE

I've considered this possibility. To prevent the fifth grade from launching their own salvo, we will strategically position fourth graders around the playground equipped with A-balls. These individuals will be instructed to peg, hit, and otherwise decimate all fifth graders, whether or not they're involved in the game, should the bullies resort to such a tactic. Right now, Robby is working furiously to both actualize this 'da bomb' as soon as possible and to increase our production capabilities, in order to keep our stockpile of A-balls considerably larger than the fifth grade's.

(Explosion off stage)

However, this increased production is using up funds... funds that were going to be allocated to the Carnival. Tina-

TINA

Yes, sir?

IKE

What activities or performances can we afford to cut?

TINA

Well, we're pretty tight as is, sir, but I guess we don't really need the poetry readings. Yes, there should be no trouble dropping the poetry--no one really understands it anyway.

IKE

The poets... let's see

(Looking at paper HENCHMAN hands him)

no, that will not be enough. What else can go? How about the pie-eating contest?

TINA (*Looking at her papers*)

No. I mean, I'd rather not. It's a fourth grade tradition. We need it to boost morale. Hmm. We could reduce Bert's budget for his play.

IKE

Cut it altogether. The booths, games, and artwork will be adequate. The Carnival will go on.

TINA

Yes, I suppose you're right.

ANNE

You suppose he's right?

TINA

Shhhh.

ANNE

I will not 'Shhhh'.

TINA

Shhhh.

ANNE

You can't just let him do that.

IKE

Who is this madwoman?

TINA

Shhhh, Anne. You said you'd keep quiet.

ANNE (*overlapping on 'keep'*)

This is ridiculous. You can't let him cut Carnival funds to inflate more dodge balls. The Carnival is for the entire school, not just these bleacher boy losers and their balls they're always playing with.

STUDENT

We are not losers.

STUDENT 2

Yeah. We're cool.

ANNE

Ha! Cool? You win a dodge ball game, embarrass the older boys, and then what, you're cool all of a sudden? Sorry

gentleboys, but cool is a social construct and everyone *not* on these bleachers thinks you guys are losers.

STUDENT 2

You don't know what you're talking about.

STUDENT

What makes you so smart?

ANNE

Well, for instance, I know how we can still have the whole Carnival and end the dodge ball game once and for all.

STUDENTS (*Overlapping/shouting*)

Really?

How?

Are you serious?

ANNE

It's easy. Just pop all the dodge balls and make a rule against them, then give the funds back to the Carnival.

STUDENTS (*Overlapping/shouting*)

Pop the dodge balls?

Are you crazy?

How would we defend ourselves?

IKE (*Over STUDENTS*)

Someone get this insubordinate out of here. Where's the FGBI? Take her away.

ANNE (*Running away, yelling*)

There's no such thing as cool. There's no such thing as cool.

(ANNE *runs off stage. The FGBI run after her.*)

IKE

Tina, what was that all about?

TINA

I don't know. I'm sorry.

IKE

Bringing that lunatic here puts this entire grade at risk.

TINA

I used to play dolls with her at recess. I swear I thought she was normal.

IKE

No more girls at these meetings. You're okay, but these other ones are just too... emotional.

TINA

Yes, sir. I understand.

IKE

Good. Now,

(Indicating the chalkboard)

if all goes according to plan, this playground-wide assault will not be necessary. If we can manage to accumulate enough information regarding where the fifth graders are massing their arsenals and ball-toting players, then threat alone should be sufficient to hold the battle to the dodge ball court where, with our superior strength, we will win.

STUDENT

How are we going to get this information?

IKE

I will show you. Robby!

(From offstage ROBBY rides to the bleachers on a shiny red tricycle. It is equipped with cameras and its license plate reads U-2. As he rides in circles, IKE continues speaking.)

This, boys and girls, is the newest, most innovative, shiniest piece of stealth tricycltry ever to be invented. Its chains and spokes emit drops of oil every rotation to ensure silent pedaling. As you can see, the cameras will allow us perfect knowledge of the A-ball whereabouts and their intended users. With this machine, we will cross the football field, uncover the fifth grade secrets, and win the dodge ball game once and for all.

(The students on the bleachers stand and applaud. ROBBY rides off stage. JOEY runs to the bleachers.)

JOEY

They've infiltrated the Carnival!

STUDENTS (*Overlapping/shouting*)

What?

Who?

Where?

JOEY

The fifth graders! The kids at the picnic table are talking of revolution, the poster project is devising propaganda, and, most conspicuous, the dramatic performance has been written by Stanley Miller... the fifth grade playwright!

(Students begin to calm down.)

STUDENT

Joey, don't you think you've worried us enough with all of this? I mean—you haven't even produced a single fifth grade sympathizer.

STUDENT 2

Yeah. Besides, Ike here has a plan that will win us the dodge ball game.

(Other students agree)

JOEY

Ike has a plan? To win the dodge ball game? Look at you all, suddenly complacent and at ease during such a time of tension and war. Look around. The dodge ball game has transcended the blacktop. Our enemy has slithered across the football field, it has crawled under our slides, our bleachers, and now it has planted itself right into the heart of our Carnival. Don't you see? This conflict demands our whole attention, absorbs our very beings. We face a hostile ideology school-wide in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method.

I have in my hand five cases of individuals who are either loyal or sympathetic to the ideologies of the fifth grade—five cases of individual traitors who are responsible for producing the Carnival, for the permeation of culture throughout our fourth grade!

(Start spy music again.)

STUDENT

Not this again.

(Cut music abruptly.)

JOEY (*Shocked*)

Not this again? Not this again! You fools! The war could be lost right here. The time is now. I can stop this infiltration. This committee here on these bleachers can stop this conversion, this subversion—but I need power. Let us create a rule. I will then use this rule to prosecute these scum before their plans go into production. We cannot let the Carnival happen without first cleansing it of all fifth grade influence.

STUDENT 2 (*Discussing amongst bleachers, ignoring JOEY*)
I've had enough of Joey and this witch-hunt.

JOEY

Witch-hunt? Those theatre people are getting to you!

STUDENT

Five cases? What happened to eight cases?

STUDENT 2

What happened to twenty cases?

JOEY

I have in my hand—

STUDENT

This is ridiculous.

STUDENT 2

Ridiculous.

JOEY

Are you even listening to me?

STUDENT

What do you think, Ike?

STUDENT 2

Yeah, what do you think, Ike?

(Students quiet and all look to IKE)

IKE

Well... Look here, I've got as much of a problem as the rest of you with the idea that our fellow students, our brethren, could be knowingly and purposefully trying to

undermine the foundations of this grade. But Joey's got a point. If there's anything I learned commanding our forces on the dodge ball court, it's that one must be suspicious. Joey, what kind of rule did you have in mind?

JOEY
Well...

(Begin music.)

Any person proven to be affiliated with or
Sympathizing, empathizing—not full of hate
against the
Fifth graders and all their ideologies should be
Permanently expelled from Roosevelt.

Let me clarify I would prefer them all dead.
Detained is nice but not as good as popped in the
head.

But since we have our constitution I think
instead
We should permanently expel them from Roosevelt.

Unless of course we want to do away with their
rights.
We'd have more power and control to help in the
fight
Against these fifth grade terrorists who should
be tonight
Rounded up and expelled out of Roosevelt.

TINA
Joey don't you think it's all a little extreme?
With these changes you would have a power supreme
To dictate life or death I think you know what I
mean,
The power to expel them all from Roosevelt.

JOEY
Personally I am shocked, a little offended.
I don't think that you understand what I've
recommended.
If you don't think that we should win and see
this war ended
Maybe you should be expelled from Roosevelt.

TINA
No, no, no, I was playing devil's advocate.

JOEY

I'll let it go but know that questioning's a bad habit.

You need to do what you are told as meek as a rabbit

Or you will surely be expelled from Roosevelt.

In conclusion like I said I'd rather them dead. Detained is nice but not as good as popped in the head.

But since we have our constitution I think instead

We need to permanently expel them from Roosevelt.

Permanently expel them from Roosevelt.

IKE

I'm glad *someone* read the memo. But Joey, we don't have the capability to expel students. I suppose we could, say, hold them after school in detention... indefinitely?

JOEY

Yes, yes that will do.

IKE

And Joey—all this talk of detaining and expelling—you have to catch the spies first.

JOEY

Yes. Yes, I know. That's why I need the power to create new rules.

IKE

Right. Take these boys from the Fourth Grade Bureau of Investigation. They'll help you find and rid our grade of these vermin.

JOEY (*Singing*)

With the Fourth Grade Bureau of Investigation

I'll rid the schoolyard of this brutal

infiltration

Detained is almost as good as extermination—

(*Music cuts as IKE interrupts*)

IKE

Joey. This is your last chance.

JOEY

Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

SCENE TEN

(FRANKIE walks slowly up to AL and DUNC-DUNC who are sitting at the picnic table.)

DUNC-DUNC (*Beaming*)

I've finished my poem, Frankie. Read it.

(*Hands poem to FRANKIE*)

FRANKIE

No, Dunc-Dunc. It's over. They're not letting us perform.

DUNC-DUNC

What?

FRANKIE

I said it's over.

DUNC-DUNC

But why?

FRANKIE

Something about cut funds—a tricycle or something. I don't know and I don't really care anymore.

AL

They've set up secret spy machinery, put guns in the hands of hall monitors, and turned the blacktop into a slaughterhouse. The suppression of the schoolyard is nearly complete. And we are at its mercy.

FRANKIE

Al's right. What else can we do?

DUNC-DUNC (*Indicating the poem in FRANKIE's hand*)

We can write our poetry.

FRANKIE

I said it's over. We can't perform.

DUNC-DUNC

Is that why we write? To perform? What happened to change? What happened to making a difference? We don't need the reassurance of Mommy or Teacher or Tina or anyone, and we definitely don't need some stage to make our poetry *poetry*.

FRANKIE

Sure we don't need the reassurance, but we need the access. Without the stage we have no credibility. Without the stage we might as well be the horse girl neighing indiscernible nonsense. Without the stage we're shackled, silent.

DUNC-DUNC

That's not what you've convinced me of Frankie. You've showed me that it's our silence that shackles us. We don't need a stage—we have voices. Our voices can free us.

AL

Kids are not free. You both should know, this is not the beautiful school Walt and his friends once knew, not the historic playground where we used to play freely in the open soccer fields. The grass is fertilized with piss and blood. It's browned and dead. This Carnival is lost on time.

FRANKIE (*Reminiscing*)

When I was a kid I played with myself in a corner of the schoolyard all alone. I hated dolls and I hated games. If anyone was looking I hid behind a tree and called out "I am an orphan." And now here I am, the center of all this baloney, writing for the Carnival. Imagine! What was I thinking?

DUNC-DUNC

You were thinking about taking a stand. Who can prohibit an art or craft from being put into the Carnival?

FRANKIE

Who? The kids at the bleachers, that's who, the ones who allocate the funds. They control the flow of money, so they control what's in the Carnival.

DUNC-DUNC

They control what goes on stage at the Carnival. You're not hearing me, Frankie. Our art consists of words, and we have voices to make those words heard. All we have to do is speak... *loud*.

FRANKIE

We're just kids, Dunc-Dunc. Let it go.

AL

Some of us have never been allowed to stray into childhood. Some of us remain leashed to wickedness by social constructs tempting simplicity and leisure.

DUNC-DUNC

Al, you don't make sense. Frankie, what does it mean to grow up anyway? It's no more than an accumulation of experience. I can't multiply or divide, but life is mine anyway. Life is mine, this Carnival is mine, and these words are mine and I'm going to use them. I'm going to make them heard.

(Sings last refrain of song—slow, as an appeal. ANNE enters as song begins.)

Look, now, I can see them
Sitting mute on their stools.
Our poetry will awake them—
Make revolution out of fools.

(As song ends, FRANKIE holds the poem out in front of her and considers it.)

(Enter JOEY)

JOEY

Okay, sympathizers, I mean terrorists, I'm taking you traitors in.

(DUNC-DUNC and ANNE both hide as AL is arrested. FRANKIE sits down at the sandbox and starts drinking juice boxes. She remains onstage throughout Scene Thirteen.)

AL *(As he's dragged off screams)*

Holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy.

SCENE ELEVEN

(ANNE and DUNC-DUNC remain hidden throughout arrest. Once they've all exited, DUNC-DUNC makes to leave, but is confronted by ANNE.)

ANNE

If you were to stumble upon a crime
Would you feel responsible to try
To stop it, to fight it, to end it right there?
If the risk were your life—

Would you care?

(FGBI and JOEY march across stage. ANNE and DUNC-DUNC hide unnoticed.)

DUNC-DUNC

But some crimes, if they are crimes, are better to
leave
Out of your life if you can
To fight them, you bite in-to more than you chew
To die for another—

Would you?

I'm getting nervous the playground is tense.
I wish that this nightmare would finally dispense.

BERT (*Entering*)

What if the crime that you saw were committed
By people who organize your life and living,
The ones who determine the width of the halls
Who keep up the constant barrage of balls?

DUNC-DUNC

I'm getting nervous the playground is tense.
But I will not die for another's defense.

ANNE

Another implies that you can't be next,
Which isn't the case on this playground
One by one we will all disappear
If we don't stand together — that's clear.

BERT/ANNE

I'm getting nervous the playground is tense.
But together this nightmare might finally dispense.

(Piano interlude. ANNE gathers her flag materials.)

BERT/ANNE

I cannot walk straight away from these crimes.
I feel the responsibility's mine
To stop them, to fight them, to end their existence.

What makes a school—

It's system or students?

I'm getting nervous the playground is tense.

It's time that we all finally come to some sense.

BERT/ANNE/DUNC-DUNC

I cannot walk straight away from these crimes.

I feel the responsibility's mine

To stop them, to fight them, to end their existence.

What makes a school—

It's system or students?

I'm getting nervous the playground is tense.

It's time that we all finally come to some sense.

(Song fades out as ANNE and DUNC-DUNC exit.)

SCENE TWELVE

(BERT coaches LILLI and PAUL.)

BERT

Paul.

PAUL

Yes?

BERT

Who is your audience?

PAUL

My Mom and my Brother?

BERT

No, no. Who are they as a whole? What kind of audience are they? Of what age?

PAUL

'K' through eight?

BERT

Not that kind of age. You're acting for an audience of the scientific age. You must try and demonstrate your knowledge of human relations, human behavior, human

capacity. The way you're doing it now is so... so hypnotic, like you're in a trance. Snap out of it, man!

(He paces a while thinking and after a long pause continues.)

Aristotle suggested that all proper tragedy have recognition. This scene should look like... ritual. Move away from the audience, move away from yourself, otherwise the element of... of terror necessary to all recognition is lost.

(Lights rise on artists who are silently painting. JOEY and FGBI silently search and apparently ask for ANNE's whereabouts. Because they can't seem to find her, they arrest JACKSON and MARCUS instead, who struggle against them. They all exit and their lights fade.)

PAUL
Am I to portray science, then?

BERT
No. You're to portray theatre. Try it again. Go back to the line, "No, no, Abby..."

(Pause. PAUL and LILLI get into character, struggle to find their place.)

PAUL
No, no, Abby. That's done with.

LILLI
You come five mile to see a silly girl fly? I know you better.

PAUL
I come to see what mischief your uncle's brewin' now. Put it out of mind, Abby.

LILLI
John - I'm awaitin' for you every night.

PAUL
Abby, I never give you hope to wait for me.

(TINA enters)

BERT

Okay, okay, now we're getting somewhere.

TINA
Bert.

BERT
I'm sorry, I'm very busy. That was fabulous.

TINA
No, no. Bert, I need to talk to you.

BERT
Hold on. We'll be finished soon. Okay, Paul I need you –

TINA
Bert! The President has cancelled your show.

BERT
Would you please – what? What do you mean?

TINA
He called me in and asked what we could cut in order to save money for the big game.

BERT
And?

TINA
He wants to cut the show.

BERT
The whole thing?

TINA (*Sarcastically*)
Yes, the whole thing... is it in pieces?

(*Pause*)

Anyway, I couldn't do anything about it. He's the President. I'm sorry.

(*Enter JOEY*)

JOEY (*Flashing some kind of badge if identity.*)
All right folks, sorry to break up your little game of house, here. I'm with the FBI.

(*Reading from a list.*)

Bert, Lilli, and Paul?

BERT/LILLI/PAUL

Yes?

(As JOEY tells people that they're under arrest, they put their hands behind their backs as if handcuffed with invisible shackles.)

JOEY

You're all under arrest for treason to the fourth grade in suspicion of spying and friendly association with known criminal and fifth grade terrorist, Stanley Miller. You have the right to remain in possession of your juice boxes, as we sympathize with their deliciousness. Fellas...

(They're dragged off as the lights shift to FRANKIE.)

SCENE THIRTEEN

(FRANKIE, sitting in the sandbox, finishes a juice box tosses the empty container into a pile of empty juice boxes and glue cans. She's obviously peed her pants.)

FRANKIE *(Intoxicated)*

It's all my fault. Now Al's been captured and Dunc-Dunc hates me.

(She picks up DUNC-DUNC's poem, which was sitting next to her.)

She was right. We need to be heard. And this poem is good. Damn good.

(FRANKIE stands and first chord of song is played. FRANKIE sings.)

It's tiiiiime—

(She wobbles before falling backwards, asleep. From off stage rides the tricycle. The pilot is talking on a walkie-talkie.)

PILOT *(Adding static noise between sentences.)*

I'm passing the sandbox on route to the football field. I mean the fire engine is approaching the fire. Ten four.

(The pilot rides over FRANKIE's unconscious body and immediately begins to swerve out of control.)

PILOT *(Driving off stage.)*

Mayday, mayday. I've been hit. Going down. Mayday.

(Enter DUNC-DUNC)

DUNC-DUNC

Frankie? Frankie!

(She runs to FRANKIE and holds her body.)

Frankie, can you hear me? Please open your eyes.
They're gonna try Al for being a spy.

It's falling apart. It is coming undone.
I'm starting to think that they've already won.

Frankie, you cannot be dead you see.
We still have a revolution to lead.

I'm scared that I cannot do this alone.
How much power can there be in a poem?

You say that they'll listen. You say they will
care.

Our words will awaken and make them aware.

I hope that you're right and that I will succeed
To live up to you in verse and in deed.

Goodbye Frankie may you finally be free.
Now I must go. I have a revolution to lead.

(Piano interlude. DUNC-DUNC gathers FRANKIE's body.)

It's time that they listen.
It's time that they hear.
My words may not always glisten,
But today my words are clear

Look, now, I can see them
Sitting mute on their stools.
My poetry will awake them—

I'll make a revolution out of fools.

I'll make a revolution out of fools.

(DUNC-DUNC exits carrying FRANKIE'S body.)

SCENE FOURTEEN

(JOEY leads BERT, MARCUS, JACKSON, and an FGBI member across the stage.)

MARCUS

You're all Philistines. Philistines!

(JACKSON and MARCUS are brought to the bush, where they put up a sign reading 'JAIL'. They are guarded by an FGBI member. BERT is led and seated in front of the bleachers. JOEY sits on the highest seat. Scene begins. At some point, DUNC-DUNC enters and sits at the picnic table with a notebook. She writes and rips the paper out, crumples it into balls that she throws into a pile. Also, ANNE sneaks over to MARCUS and JACKSON, past the guard, tagging and freeing them from jail. MARCUS and JACKSON form a human chain upon seeing ANNE.)

JOEY

Bert, you have been charged with treason, spying, and friendly association with the fifth grader Stanley Miller.

BERT

Is this why you've canceled my production?

JOEY

How do you know Stanley Miller?

BERT

Stanley and I have collaborated several times. He's a writer and I'm a director. As far as my play-

JOEY

Are you two collaborating now?

BERT

Yes, his position within the fifth grade musical was terminated, due to artistic differences, so he asked me if I'd be interested in directing his new play.

JOEY

What is this new play?

BERT

Well... it's about intolerance, hysteria, the collapse of community—about empowerment and confessions. But if I may respond to the cancellation—

JOEY

Are you aware that Stanley Miller is a known member of the fifth grade?

BERT

I have a statement prepared that I am willing to read.

JOEY

—a known member of the fifth grade and an avid propagandist of their ideologies. Are you aware of this?

BERT

This information is irrelevant to my relationship—

JOEY

What is the extent of your audience? Who comes to see your plays?

BERT

Our parents, families, siblings, our fellow students—fourth graders that is.

JOEY

In other words, you have reached approximately twenty-five per cent of our population with your plays?

BERT

What? Really? That's all?

(Meanwhile, near the picnic table, students are assembling. A wagon is wheeled out and a line of students from offstage is formed and they pass dodge balls one by one down the line into the wagon. IKE directs the assembly line. At the same time, ROBBY wheels the chalkboard to IKE, making calculations/instructions, etc. As the wagon is filled, it is taken offstage, emptied, brought back on, refilled.)

JOEY

Twenty-five per cent of our population would then be influenced by this Stanley Miller through the production of his play. Was this your intent? To spread this fifth grade influence?

BERT

Well, obviously not. You see, one of the problems with the theatre is that while a painter can paint or a poet... poet... we can only set up theaters in grades where there are twenty-five or more kids of satisfactory type. So that one of our problems is this centralization of the theatre industry.

JOEY

Where have your audiences been? What localities have you played mostly?

BERT

We have played the widest variety of Roosevelt Elementary audiences that any Fourth Grade Theatre Project has ever managed.

JOEY

In what localities, Bert?

BERT

The chief localities are, the auditorium, the gymnasium, and in the case of this canceled production, the makeshift kindergarten wing hallway. But if you are speaking now of the audiences themselves—I want to pick up that point, if you don't mind—

JOEY

Actually I do mind. I want to quote from your article "Modern Theatre is Superman Theatre," on page 15 of the November edition of the Scholastic:

"There are only two theatres, one of which wants to make money; the other is the students' theatre which wants to make a new social order. The students' theatre intends to shape the life of this school, socially, politically, and elementarily. This ambition alone invests their undertaking with a certain Birdesque madness."

You are quoting from this Mr. Bird. Is he a fifth grader?

BERT

I am very sorry. I was quoting from Big Bird, star of the popular television series, Sesame Street, you may have heard of it?

JOEY

Tell me about this Big Bird, so I can get the proper reference, because that is all that I want to do.

BERT

Put in the record that he was the greatest puppet in the period immediately following Kermit the Frog.

JOEY

Kermit the Frog, huh? Of course, we had what some people call 'fifth grade sympathizers' back in the days of the Muppet theatre.

BERT

Quite true.

JOEY

And I believe Miss Piggy was guilty of teaching class-consciousness also, wasn't she?

BERT

I believe that was alleged against all of the Muppets.

JOEY

Exactly, Bert.

(ROBBY reaches a startling solution to a calculation regarding the H-ball, 'da bomb.' He gets IKE's attention and shows him the work. IKE is apparently impressed where ROBBY is worried, or terrified. They argue until IKE gets fed up and signals offstage. The FGBI enters and arrests ROBBY.)

BERT

Don't patronize me.

JOEY

You wouldn't know anything about patriotism, traitor.

BERT

You're one to talk about patriotism.

JOEY

I *am* one to talk about patriotism. I've worked this entire day to rid our grade of these freedom hating fifth grade sympathizers. We're at war here, and people like you are the enemy.

BERT

Freedom? This is exactly what I'm talking about! Think about the situation you've gotten us into before you talk about freedom.

JOEY

If by situation you're referring to the cleansing of our dear fourth grade so that the Carnival may continue, then I've thought it through.

BERT

You don't understand what I mean.

JOEY

Who could? You talk like a fifth grader.

BERT

I'm talking about this hypocritical suffocation of artistic freedom.

JOEY

What do you know about freedom?

BERT

First, you cancel my production, arrest my cast, deport Paul to the third grade, and now you lecture *me* on freedom hating?

JOEY

I am saving this grade. I am winning the war.

BERT

What war?

JOEY

The fifth grade threat.

BERT

What threat?

JOEY

The War on Ideology.

BERT (*Very confused*)
How can you have a war on ideology? It's just a concept.

JOEY
By ridding this grade of people like you.

BERT
It's like having a war on geometry...

JOEY
You're either with us or against us.

BERT
Or Algebra or Triangles.

JOEY
I have in my hand—

BERT
You don't have anything in your hand!

JOEY
You disgust me! Take this sympathizer, this spy, this traitor, this terrorist away.

(An FGBI member grabs BERT, takes him upstage, and proceeds to beat him while JOEY begins song. IKE lectures STUDENTS on strategy by pointing to plans on chalkboard. IKE and JOEY sing a duet from separate halves of the stage.)

JOEY
There is one less spy among us now.

IKE
One less terrorist to strike us down.

JOEY/IKE
I'll win this war
One at a time
Dead terrorists are by far my favorite kind

(FGBI member really beats into BERT hard. Audible grunts, moans, etc.)

IKE
I've made this playground safer by far.

JOEY

I hope I get at least a golden star.

JOEY/IKE

I have brought

Safety and peace

To a school that has not had either in weeks.

(JOEY and IKE turn and address the flag, hitting a long salutary note in an homage-giving position.)

Oh Roooosevelt.

(As JOEY and IKE salute the flag, JACKSON's arms reach from behind the bush and rip down the flag. ANNE's flag unfurls replacing it. JACKSON runs offstage. JOEY stops singing—FGBI stops beating BERT. JOEY and FGBI chase JACKSON off stage. IKE, HENCHMAN, and STUDENTS stare at the new flag. ROBBY re-enters cuffed as the dodge ball assembly line gets back into action.)

ROBBY

The Lanthanides in 'da bomb's' roto-converter will unstably fuse with the radioactive isotopes unleashing an infinitely destructive element of decimation.

(Pause. Everyone stops, stares.)

'Da bomb' will destroy everything.

(Pause. Still no reaction.)

It's bad. It is really, really bad.

(FGBI tackles him violently, drags him offstage. Everyone stops working, begins questioning amongst one another creating a din of confusion. Someone knocks over the wagon full of balls, which roll into the audience. STUDENTS scramble to pick up the balls and warn audience members of their danger. IKE tries to get people's attention, fails. HENCHMAN pays off pianist and begins dancing. Music starts.)

STUDENT 2

Who is that kid?

STUDENT

Mr. Balls's son.

STUDENT 2

Who?

STUDENT

The gym teacher. You know, Mr. Balls.

STUDENT 2

Wow

(Pause.)

He can really dance.

(As the sides grow in numbers, they form lines on either side of the stage as if facing off.)

HENCHMAN

Let's throw 'da bomb' at the fifth graders,
Thus eradicating their demonic behavior.
Let's throw 'da bomb' it'll be our new savior.

Ha-ha-lle

lu-u-u

iah-ah-ah

ALL ON IKE'S SIDE

Ha-lle

Lu-iah

(DUNC-DUNC runs over to BERT, who's still lying in pain. He encourages her to stand up against the HENCHMAN.)

DUNC-DUNC

We can't throw 'da bomb' at the fifth grade.
It will destroy everything that's not paved.
Savior? Ha! There'll be nothing to save.

Ha-ha-lle

lu-u-u

iah-ah-ah

(ANNE and MARCUS enter and help BERT to his feet.)

DUNC-DUNC/BERT/ANNE/MARCUS

Ha-lle

Lu-iah

BERT

Look what they've done. They bruised my ankle.
Those brainless minions, they do nothing but
mangle.

I'm with you, Dunc-Dunc, let's get out of this
tangle.

Ha-ha-lle
lu-u-u
iah-ah-ah

DUNC-DUNC/BERT/ANNE/MARCUS

Ha-lle
Lu-iah

IKE

Let's throw 'da bomb' at the fifth graders.
It'll deter all our future invaders.
We'll throw 'da bomb' it'll be our new savior.

Ha-ha-lle
lu-u-u
iah-ah-ah

ALL ON IKE'S SIDE

Ha-lle
Lu-iah

ANNE

You silly children, you are completely blind.
This plot to "save" the playground only redraws
the lines
Between all the grades and for all of time.

Ha-ha-lle
lu-u-u
iah-ah-ah

DUNC-DUNC/BERT/ANNE/MARCUS

Ha-lle
Lu-iah

*(Piano interlude. Dance-off: one at a time,
characters dance into the middle taunting the
opposing side and cheering or booing
respectively.)*

TINA

Wait everybody. Let's work this out.
Agreements aren't made from violence and shouts.
This isn't what our fourth grade's about.

Ha-ha
Lle-lu-u
iah

Ha-lle
Lu-u-iah

(The following verses are sung simultaneously. As they sing, the sides approach each other.)

ALL ON IKE'S SIDE

Let's throw 'da bomb' at the fifth graders.
It'll deter all our future invaders.
We'll throw 'da bomb' it'll be our new savior.

Ha-ha
Lle-lu-u
iah

Ha-lle
Lu-u-iah

ALL OF DUNC-DUNC'S SIDE

We can't throw 'da bomb' at the fifth graders.
It will destroy every one of our neighbors.
With no one to save, there can't be a savior.

Ha-ha
Lle-lu-u
iah

Ha-lle
Lu-u-iah

(At the end of the verses, the groups are in violent poses grabbing, hitting, or otherwise attacking each other. They freeze as an inhumane howl reverberates from offstage: 'I am a Canvas.' JACKSON runs across stage naked, splattered in paint, with the US flag wrapped around his neck like a cape. No one moves for a few beats after JACKSON has left the stage. Slowly, the people on stage unfreeze one or two at a time. IKE'S side goes off their respective side of stage. TINA runs back and forth, unsure which side to exit from, until finally following IKE. The sound of inflating

dodge balls and rumbling fills the theater. People move with trepidation and fear. The last to unfreeze, DUNC-DUNC moves to center stage and prepares to read poem.)

DUNC-DUNC

Today is a great day in the history of Roosevelt Elementary. Today is a great day in the history of this fourth grade. Today for the first time since this school's inception, the Annual Carnival has been seized and held hostage in the name of dodge ball. In the name of war.

(The sound of an air pump fills the theater, and DUNC-DUNC is completely drowned out. She keeps reading and gets extremely passionate, though no one can hear. IKE and his posse roll out a giant dodge ball painted with a US flag. They roll the ball past DUNC-DUNC, eclipsing her completely. She disappears as the ball rolls by. Lights cut and the theater is held in complete dark, filled with the sounds of pumping and rumbling. The house lights suddenly rise and the stage is empty save the giant ball. No curtain call. Keep the sounds playing.)

THE END

Authors' Notes

Characters:

Many of the characters are fit to be played by the same actor/actress. Certain combinations work well while still allowing seamless transitions between scenes: Jackson/Al/Robby, Ike/Harry, Anne/Lilli, Marcus/Stanley, Henchman/Paul.

Also, the sex of most characters is intentionally ambiguous. Most parts can be played by either a male or female—the names and pronouns need only be adjusted (e.g. Al/Allison).

Pianist:

The pianist is at once an insider and outsider. The pianist has the same job both in the production as a character and outside as a musician, i.e. to play music. S/he should be on stage the entire time, unless otherwise noted, and in fact should be used as a green show (playing as the audience enters) as well as for sound effects.

The pianist is incorporated into the script using bribes of money, candy, and favors. While a few of these interactions are noted in the stage directions, more bribery is encouraged to cement the objectification of the pianist.

Da Bomb:

Da Bomb is an important culminating effect. While it might seem intuitive to obtain a large, inflatable dodge ball, something less expected will receive a stronger reaction. If funds are lacking, dozens of pillows and couch cushions can be massed and taped together, then wrapped in a sheet or tarp. The lumpy representation is dodge ball-esque and therefore conveys the idea while demanding the audience's attention as well as their curiosity. Da Bomb should be large and intimidating and generally should be manufactured according to the space.

Actors' Scenes:

Throughout the play Bert, Lilli, and Paul are working on a production of *The Crucible*, of which they only manage to rehearse a few lines of a scene. Bert's dissatisfaction can stem from their inadequate acting, or, perhaps more interesting, insubstantial presentation. In the original production, for instance, the same lines were recited in the context of a different play every time. Each rehearsal the play changed. The actors began by traditionally practicing *The Crucible*, then in scene eight were costumed for *Lysistrata*, and finally acted out Desdemona's death scene from *Othello*.

5th Graders:

The fifth graders in the play are largely unseen—something akin to boogymen creeping around corners and hiding in closets. They are talked up, feared, and hated, but rarely witnessed. The only fifth grader written into the script is Stanley, who collaborates with Bert. Stanley is to wear a fake moustache or beard, something to obviously set him apart from the other 'children'. Other socially/culturally relevant distinctions are encouraged.

Intermission:

The play runs approximately an hour and a half. We feel an intermission greatly disturbs the rhythm and the

gathering tension. While we discourage an intermission, if it is necessary it is best positioned after scene eight.

Curtain Call:

The ending effect of this play can be easily damaged by a curtain call. The resulting tension caused by Da Bomb's presence and accentuated by the seemingly time-bombish nature of the inflation sounds should be allowed to sit and well and fester in the audience. A curtain call dissolves this tension, allowing the audience a relief and closure that seem antithetical to such a confrontational ending.

Sound:

The audience is left at the end confronted by Da Bomb and its noises. These noises should be allowed to play until the theater has cleared. To balance this conclusion, it is beneficial to have the pianist playing upon the spectators' entrance and throughout the seating, before slipping into scene one. This way, the audience is brought into the production confronted with a pianist and *its* noise, then left with Da Bomb and its noise.