

## Idea for a play by Phillip W. Weiss

**Title: *Maggie and the Professor***

**Synopsis: An outspoken woman and a pompous professor lock horns in a struggle over freedom of speech and academic integrity.**

**Principal character breakdowns:**

***Magdalena “Maggie” Ciernikova* is a graduate student. She was born and raised in Slovakia. She is 38 years old, attractive, with long blond hair. Often she is mistaken for being Swedish. Professionally she is an actress. She immigrated to the United States fifteen years ago. Her father, Henrik Kovac Ciernik, was a laborer and Slovak nationalist who fought with the Polish partisans against the Germans during World War Two and later against the Soviets during the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Maggie is proud of her Slovak heritage and reverts her father's memory.**

***Ernst Rheinhardt* is a professor of history. He is 68 years old, distinguished looking, fastidiously attired. He projects an image of authority. He is German-American. Although born in Brooklyn, New York, he lived for many years in Germany and is fluent in German. His father, who was a Sudeten German, was an officer in the Wehrmacht. (Rheinhardt's father was implicated in certain alleged war crimes committed in Czechoslovakia during the war but was cleared of all charges. Shortly after the war, he and his wife emigrated from Germany to the United States where he became a consultant for the CIA on Eastern European political affairs). Rheinhardt is considered an authority on the history of the Third Reich and the Wehrmacht. He is the author of fourteen books on Nazi Germany and related topics (including two which defend his father's actions during the war) and an internationally known lecturer. In 1998 he ran for US Senate as a third-party candidate, gaining a respectable 18 percent of the total vote.**

**Other characters:**

**Sunny – a waitress**

**Stepan Busoc – Maggie's friend**

**Prof. Kleiderman – hearing officer**

**Prof. Eppler – hearing officer**

**Prof. Corkman – hearing officer**

**Abner Yeabelman – Maggie's attorney**

**Zander O'Doul – Rheinhardt's attorney**

Cyndy Goodday – Maggie’s classmate

Erdley O’Shay – Maggie’s classmate

**Plot:**

**Scene 1:** Time: the present. Place: a classroom at an unnamed graduate school somewhere in the United States. On stage standing is Ernst Rheinhardt. Sitting are three women: Cyndy Goodday, Erdley O’Shay and Maggie Ciernikova. They are students. Rheinhardt is lecturing the class; the students are listening and occasionally jot down notes. Rheinhardt raises the subject of the Munich Conference. He asks a rhetorical question: Can anyone name the four principal persons who participated in the Munich Conference? To Rheinhardt's surprise, and dismay, Maggie replies ("Hitler, Chamberlain, Mussolini, and Daladier"). Maggie then goes on to expostulate on other topics: the role of the Slovaks during World War Two, her father's heroism, Slovakian culture, the Slavic people and why she left Slovakia. Soon Cyndy and Erdley are riveted exclusively on Maggie. To re-assert his control, Rheinhardt tries to get a word in edgewise, but Maggie keeps talking. Rheinhardt, feeling humiliated and shown up, is furious at this usurpation of his authority but can only suppress his emotions. He is afraid to cut her off for fear of alienating the other students. He is determined to re-establish his authority.

**Scene 2:** Time: later that evening. Place: Rheinhardt’s apartment. He calls Maggie and asks if she could meet him at a local restaurant. He wishes to discuss some important matters relating to her studies. Maggie, flattered that such a distinguished professor wants to meet with her, agrees to meet him the following evening.

**Scene 3:** Time: the following evening. Place: a restaurant. Maggie and Rheinhardt are seated at a table. They are facing each other. They have already been served food, which is on the table. Initially Rheinhardt is polite. He asks Maggie to tell him more about herself. Like in the classroom, Maggie begins talking and doesn't stop. Rheinhardt becomes increasingly impatient. Finally he yells, "Enough!" Shocked and perplexed, Maggie stops talking in mid-sentence and asks, "What's wrong?" Trying to regain his composure, Rheinhardt says that he has a proposal: if Maggie remains silent for the remainder of the class, he will give her an A on her term paper, an A for the class and give her permission to use his name as an academic reference. Maggie refuses the offer. She is indignant. She says that her silence is not for sale and that she has a right to fully participate in class. She explains that she enjoys sharing her thoughts with her classmates and to do otherwise would dishonor the memory of her late father who taught her to value personal integrity above all else, even if it means making difficult sacrifices. Rheinhardt scoffs at Maggie's idealism, and urges her to reconsider, warning her that if she refuses to accede to his request, "there could be consequences." Maggie gets up from her chair, pours a glass of water over Rheinhardt's head, and says "I'll see you in class." She exits. A waitress named Sunny enters and asks Rheinhardt if everything is alright.

**Scene 4:** Time: later that night. Place: the apartment of Maggie's close friend, Stepan Busoc. He is also from Slovakia. Stepan is 6 feet 5 inches tall, weighs 275 pounds and is a former Czechoslovak weightlifting champion. Maggie tells Stepan what happened at dinner with Rheinhardt. She wonders whether she did the right thing or did she overreact. Stepan assures her that she did the right thing and offers to "speak" with the professor if he tries to bully her again. Maggie thanks him for the offer but declines it because she doesn't want Stepan to get into trouble on her account and because she wants to work this matter out on her own. Stepan and Maggie embrace. She refers to him as "my mountain man." It is uncertain whether they are relatives or lovers.

**Scene 5:** Time: one month later. Place: same as scene 1. It is the final day of classes. Rheinhardt is returning term papers. Cyndy and Erdley are elated. They both received A's. Rheinhardt wishes the class the best of luck and dismisses the class. Maggie does not exit. She and Rheinhardt are alone. She is angry. She received an F. She tells Rheinhardt that her paper did not deserve an F. Rheinhardt is unmoved. Maggie vows to appeal the grade. Smug, Rheinhardt shrugs his shoulder and tells her that she would be wasting her time, and exits. Maggie is alone. She is weeping.

**Scene 6:** Time: two weeks later. Place: an office at the school. The office serves as a hearing room. Seated behind a desk are three people, two men and woman. They are members of the History Department faculty. They are the hearing officers. The woman's name is Prof. Kleiderman, the men are Prof. Eppler and Prof. Corkman. Seated on the other side of the desk are Maggie and Rheinhardt. Seated next to Maggie is her attorney, Abner Yeabelman. Seated next to Rheinhardt is his attorney, Zander O'Doul (who is female). Kleiderman calls the hearing to order and announces the agenda: to hear the case Ciernikova versus Rheinhardt. Yeabelman and O'Doul argue their respective cases. Yeabelman argues that the grade of F is unfair and unwarranted and was motivated by personal reasons that have nothing to do with Maggie's performance as a student. He also claims that Rheinhardt is biased against her because she is a Slovak, citing as evidence Rheinhardt's ethnic background and family history as noted in his bio published by the school and US government records. O'Doul denies the charges. She argues that Maggie's paper was so poorly written that her client had no choice but to fail her. She argues that the paper contained numerous errors in grammar and syntax, was poorly organized, had an inadequate bibliography (proof of insufficient research), and contained footnotes that were improperly formatted and therefore could not be verified, all evidence of poor scholarship. O'Doul further argues that Maggie demonstrated an inability to express herself concisely in class and could not concisely defend her arguments during classroom discussions. During the proceedings, six witnesses are called: Sunny, Stepan, Cyndy Goodday, Erdley O'Shay, Maggie and Rheinhardt. Also present are representatives of the news media. During the hearing Rheinhardt makes the following offer: if Maggie withdraws the grievance, he will change her grade from F to D-minus, the lowest passing grade, so Maggie could pass the course.

**Who prevails? Should Maggie accept Rheinhardt's offer to change her grade?**