

The teacher who made a difference
by Phillip W. Weiss

**Phil's Literary Works LLC
19 West 34th Street
Penthouse
New York, NY 10001
(212) 388-8690
pwnycny@aol.com
www.philsliteraryworks.com**

Copyright © 2017 Phillip W. Weiss

List of characters

Edward Gastrofsky – a public school teacher

Carlos – student

Edgar – student

Gladys – student

Louise – Ed’s wife

Raymond – Ed’s son

Kwantifa Jones – school principal

Melissa – teacher

Linda – teacher

Leroy – teacher

Dave – teacher

Mister Kopelski – auditor

Frank – a prison inmate

Prison guard

Synopsis: A public school teacher wonders if his life has been a waste.

This play is dedicated to all the teachers of the world. They are the unsung heroes.

Scene 1

Time: the present

Place: A classroom in an inner city public high school. In the room a teacher, Edward Gastrofsky, known to his friends as Ed or Eddie, is a teaching a history class.

ED

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents in American history. Can anyone tell me in what year it was written?

silence.

ED

Come on, one of you should be able to answer this question. It was in your homework assignment.

silence

ED

Did anyone do the homework assignment?

silence

EDGAR

Who the fuck cares about the Declaration of Independence?

ED

Edgar, watch your language.

CARLOS

That's right, bro. That's no way to talk in class.

EDGAR

And fuck you, too. Keep your face out of my business.

ED

Guys, that's enough now.

GLADYS

You homeys are all alike.

EDGAR

Shut your face, bitch!

GLADYS

You keep running off your mouth and I'll kick your brown ass.

ED

Stop this ... now! No more fighting, you hear?

CARLOS

He started it.

EDGAR

No, I didn't. You trying to get me into trouble?

GLADYS

You're doing that to yourself.

EDGAR

I told you once, bitch, shut your face!

GLADYS

You don't scare me.

EDGAR

You keep this up and I'll be fucking you up, but good!

GLADYS

You and who else?

CARLOS

You are such a pussy.

EDGAR

And your mother is a whore.

CARLOS

What did you say about my mother?

GLADYS

You heard him.

ED

STOP!

silence.

ED

Now, let's proceed with the lesson.

CARLOS

Fucking baboon face.

EDGAR

Look who's talking. You're so ugly that even a dog wouldn't fuck you.

CARLOS

Oh yeah? How's it feel being your mother's pimp?

The bell sounds, ending the class.

EDGAR

FUCK YOU!

ED

That's it for today. Class dismissed.

The students file out. Ed is left alone. He starts gathering up his papers. He then sits at his desk and places his head in his hands.

When will this torture end?

End of scene 1

Scene 2

Time: early afternoon

Place: the school auditorium. All the teachers are assembled. On stage is a black woman named Kwantifa Jones. She is the school principal. Jones goes to a podium and addresses the audience.

JONES

Greetings. You may be wondering why I called this meeting. So, let me explain. We will be having some visitors from the State Department of Education. They will be conducting an audit of the school. Now, you know what that means. They will be assessing whether the school is performing up to state standards. Last year, as I'm sure you recall, we received some demerits, which did not reflect well on us. There was even talk about closing the school. But we've had a year to improve and I'm certain that we will pass with flying colors. Are there any questions?

Hands are raised.

JONES

Yes, Linda?

LINDA

What about class size?

JONES

What about it?

LINDA

Will class size be taken in consideration during our evaluations?

JONES

No, they will not.

LINDA

I don't think that's fair. I average thirty-seven students in my classes.

JONES

And it's your job to teach those students.

LINDA

But half my students can't even speak English.

JONES

That why we have ESL classes. To help them learn.

LINDA

But they don't seem to learn English.

JONES

Who's the ESL teacher?

A man raises his hand.

JONES

Forgive me, but I don't recall your name.

MAN

That's okay. I'm new to this school. I'm Dave O'Malley.

JONES

How are things going in your class?

DAVE

Just fine.

JONES

Good. So, Linda, what's the problem?

LINDA

They don't seem to be learning English.

DAVE

Like I said, my students are doing fine.

JONES

After this meeting, I'd like to meet with you.

Linda sits down.

JONES

Now, I saw other hands raised. Yes, Leroy?

LEROY

My students seem to have really short attention spans.

JONES

Maybe that has to do with the way you present the material.

LEROY

Well, there's not many ways to teach algebra.

JONES

You have to keep the students interested and engaged. You can't be blaming the students all the time.

LEROY

Look, I'm not blaming anybody. I'm just saying that my students seem to have short attention spans.

JONES

Did you discuss this with the school psychologist?

LEROY

Yes, I did, and she said there was little she could do. I asked her if she could come to my class and observe the students. She said she would but never showed up.

JONES

I'll talk with the school psychologist, but I want to make one thing perfectly clear: I will not accept or allow any teacher to scapegoating the students. Yes, Melissa?

MELISSA

I had two students get into a fight in my class.

JONES

Which class do you teach?

MELISSA

English. We were discussing some poems by Longfellow when all of a sudden a fight broke out. The class was completely disrupted. I called security and it took at least ten minutes before they arrived. I think we need more security people.

JONES

How come I wasn't informed of this?

MELISSA

I thought you were. The security guard said he would inform you.

JONES

Nobody ever informed me. Now, if any incidents occur in your class room, I am to be informed immediately.

MELISSA

But when we inform you of problems, we get blamed for causing it.

JONES

I'm not like that. I keep an open mind. Anyway, in the future, all teachers are to report incidents directly to me. I don't want to be the last to know.

MELISSA

Okay, if that's what you want.

JONES

That's what I want. *(pause)* Are there any other questions? *(pause)* I don't see any hands raised, so I want to wish all of you a good day. Meeting is adjourned.

Jones quickly exits. The teachers slowly file out.

End of scene 2

Scene 3

Time: Two hours later.

Place: The teachers' lounge. On stage are Melissa, Leroy, Dave, Linda and Ed.

MELISSA

You really teach these kids English? They can barely speak their own languages.

DAVE

Yeah, I do my job.

MELISSA

I don't see the results.

DAVE

Maybe you're not looking hard enough. Their English is improving. Take my word for it.

MELISSA

I'd love to, but I can't.

DAVE

You think I'm lying?

MELISSA

I didn't say that. All I know is that half of my students can hardly speak English.

DAVE

Don't look at me. If you're having problems, take it up with the principal.

MELISSA

I don't know how these kids are going to get by without knowing English.

LEROY

Aren't we supposed to be a multi-cultural and diverse society?

MELISSA

Yes, but that doesn't change the situation. You have to know English to get by.

LINDA

My grandparents came to the US from Croatia and didn't know a word of English.

MELISSA

That was then and this is now. Are you saying that it's not necessary to know English?

LINDA

No. But we have to remember that we are a culturally diverse society.

MELISSA

So, we have to accommodate these students who don't want to learn English?

DAVE

No one is accommodating anyone. The fact is that assimilation does not happen overnight.

MELISSA

Sometimes I think it's not happening at all.

ED

In my morning history class, I thought I was going to lose it. I really did.

LEROY

No matter what, you got to maintain self-control. Otherwise, you're fried.

ED

I know that, but still it's getting harder and harder for me to put up with the crap.

LINDA

We have a lot of needy students and who have problems.

ED

Are they needy, or just nasty?

DAVE

I don't think it's a good idea to call your students nasty.

ED

I was just asking a question.

DAVE

It sounded more like an accusation to me.

ED

I wasn't accusing anybody of anything.

DAVE

What ever happened to being dedicated?

MELISSA

I am dedicated. I want my students to do well. But I also want students who are willing to learn.

LEROY

I think we all feel that way.

DAVE

Please speak for yourself. I think all students want to learn, even the ones who are difficult.

ED

Like when they tell you to your face, fuck you?

LINDA

Not all the students are obnoxious.

ED

Yeah, but all you need is one and the rest of the class soon follows suit. And nobody in management seems to care.

LINDA

What can they do? We still have to teach these kids. They can't do it for us.

MELISSA

I remember a few years ago I was teaching at Northside High, one of the roughest schools in the city. One of my students came in with a gun and fired it at another student. I was so shocked that I almost passed out. Now get this: after I reported this incident, I received an official reprimand for not having called security fast enough. The kid comes in with a gun and they blame me! That letter is still in my personnel file.

LEROY

That sucks. It's not fair. Meanwhile the union is nowhere to be found.

MELISSA

The union? Don't make me laugh. After I got my letter of reprimand, I went to the union and they told they wouldn't take my case, and I'm a member of the union.

ED

Why didn't they take your case?

MELISSA

They told me because they thought management had a good case; that I had lost control, like having to deal with kid with a gun was an everyday routine occurrence.

DAVE

The union is good for bargaining for money and stuff like that. When it comes to other issues such as personal safety, then forget it. It's part of the job.

ED

Well, if anything happens in my classroom, I'm still going to the union.

LINDA

Good luck to you. From my own personal experience as someone who has filed four grievances, don't expect too much from the union. They talk a good talk, but when it comes to action, you're basically on your own.

MELISSA

Sometimes I think the union and management are working together to give us a hard time.

The bell sounds.

LEROY

Back to the pits.

MELISSA

So much for education.

End of scene 3

Scene 4

Time: Evening

Place: The kitchen in Ed's apartment. Seated at a table are Ed and his son, Raymond, who is 19 years old. Louise is at the stove cooking dinner. Ed and Raymond are waiting to be served.

ED

So how was school today?

RAYMOND

Okay, dad. Nothing new to report. Attended classes.

ED

Good. Learn anything interesting?

RAYMOND

Yeah. How to calculate the slope of a line, real interesting stuff.

LOUISE

Raymond, you sound a little down. Is there anything the matter?

RAYMOND

Nothing, mom. When are we going to eat?

LOUISE

In just a minute. The beef stew's almost ready.

RAYMOND

Well, I'm hungry.

ED

Hold on, young man. What is bothering you?

RAYMOND

I told you: nothing.

ED

All day I have to deal with kids with attitudes. Please, spare me the attitude.

LOUISE

Your father's right.

RAYMOND

So I should shut up. Right?

ED

We didn't say that. We're concerned, that's all.

RAYMOND

About yourselves.

LOUISE

Raymond, how can you say that? You know we love you.

RAYMOND,

Aw, mom, you just wouldn't understand.

ED

What would we not understand?

RAYMOND

I'm not doing too well in school.

ED

Since when?

RAYMOND

Since the beginning of the semester. I've been cutting classes. To tell you the truth, dad, I don't I want to go to college. I want to join the army.

LOUISE

What? Join the army?

ED

Are you being serious? Your mother and I have been working like dogs for years to make sure you could afford to go to college. And now you don't want to go. Great.

RAYMOND

I can't help it, dad. That's the way I feel.

ED

Oh, so this all about the way you feel. Well, excuse me. Like our feelings don't count?

RAYMOND

Dad, the classes put me to sleep. In fact, in my history class I konked out and almost fell off my chair.

ED

Thank you very much, Raymond. You know, of course, that I am a history teacher.

LOUISE

And your father works very hard.

ED

Yes, I do.

RAYMOND

But what does that have to with me? I'd rather get a job and make money now. What's wrong with that?

ED

Nothing, If you get something good lined up, but you have no skills. Going to college will give you the credential needed to get a good job.

LOUISE

That's right, Raymond. Listen to your father. I wish I had gone to college. Instead, I left high school and got a job as a secretary, paying fifty dollars a week.

RAYMOND

What am I going to do with a college degree? Work in some office? Maybe become a teacher like you, dad?

ED

What's wrong with that?

RAYMOND

You tell me, dad. You're the guy who comes home every evening with a scowl on his face.

ED

Earning a living doesn't mean you have to enjoy it.

LOUISE

Look at Mister Kellman down the street. He's an accountant and makes a good living, yet you never see him smiling either.

RAYMOND

I went to the army recruiter on campus.

ED

They have an army recruiter on campus? Since when?

RAYMOND

I don't know since when, and who cares? I spoke with some sergeant and he told me about all the benefits you get by serving in the military.

LOUISE

What kind of benefits?

RAYMOND

They pay for your schooling and you get free health care. Plus, if you want to buy a house it's easier to get financing.

ED

Has it ever occurred to you that reason why they offer so many benefits is to hook people into joining?

RAYMOND

To me, it sounded like a good deal, plus I'll be making money and be out of that boring classroom. I really don't want to discuss this anymore.

ED

It's your life, Raymond. But I think you're making a big mistake. I want you to stay in school, get a college degree and get a good job. Just give it time.

LOUISE

Listen to your father. He knows what he talking about.

RAYMOND

Dad, I think my mind's made up. Now, please let's eat. I'm really hungry.

ED

And I've just lost my appetite.

End of scene 4

Scene 5

Time: Night

Place: A bedroom. Ed and Louise are in bed. Louise turns on the light.

LOUISE

What's wrong, Ed? Can't sleep?

ED

It's been such a lousy day.

LOUISE

What Raymond said upset you?

ED

That's part of it.

LOUISE

Well, I wouldn't worry about Raymond. He was just talking. You know how kids are.

ED

That's the problem. I know exactly how kids are, and I hope Raymond isn't that kind of kid.

LOUISE

What are you saying?

ED

Oh, I don't know. There's all kinds of stuff swirling around in my head. I just can't think straight anymore.

LOUISE

What's bothering you?

ED

At school the kids starting acting out in class, calling each other names, you know, the usual crap.

LOUISE

Well, that's nothing new. You should be used to it by now.

ED

I know I should, and I thought I was, until today when it suddenly hit me like a ton of bricks: I've been wasting my time being a teacher.

LOUISE

No, you haven't. You've taught thousands of students and because of you their lives are better.

ED

That's what we're told, that what we do matters. Well, I don't buy it. Today, for the first time I realized that all the while I've been teaching history to a bunch of filthy animals who couldn't care less about history or the country, or even themselves. And what's even worse, I can't even get my own son to listen to me. So what's the use?

LOUISE

I never heard you talk this way before. It kind of scares me.

ED

I don't mean to scare you, Louise, but I can't get over this feeling that my twenty-six years of teaching and trying to be a good father have been a complete waste of time.

LOUISE

No, it hasn't. Because of teaching, you've been able to make a good living and support me and Raymond.

ED

Making a living. Is that what it's all about? If the money is good, why complain? Is that what you're saying?

LOUISE

That's right. If the money is good, then why complain. Between your salary and my salary, we've made out quite well.

ED

But are we happy?

LOUISE

I am, every day that I'm with you.

ED

You know, that sounds so corny, but coming from you, it's okay. What would I do without you, Louise? (*They embrace*)

LOUISE

There. Isn't that better?

ED

Of course, it is. Remember when we first met?

LOUISE

How could I ever forget? We met while crossing the street. You were going one way and I was going the other when we passed by each other and our eyes met. I fell in love with you immediately.

ED

Yes, it was amazing. What were the chances of meeting like that? In the middle of the street?

LOUISE

I asked you where you were going and you told me that you were on your way to personnel. You sounded so official.

ED

Yes. I was just hired by the city and was going to personnel to sign some papers. If it hadn't been for the city we would have never met.

LOUISE

That's why I'm so grateful that you're a teacher. In a way, your job brought us together.

ED

You know, before I became a teacher, I thought about becoming a heavy equipment operator. I was always good with machinery.

LOUISE

But that's such dirty and dangerous work.

ED

So is teaching, believe me.

LOUISE

You never had problems with the students.

ED

But I had some close calls.

LOUISE

But that didn't stop you. You know the kids you teach really aren't bad.

ED

For a long time, I talked myself into believing that. That they're just a bunch of mixed up kids who really don't mean harm. I believed that, but no more. After today, I finally came face to face with the truth: that all my work has been for nothing. None of them can learn. They're nothing but losers, wash outs, dregs, human trash. That's who I've been teaching – degenerates. And now that may include my own son.

LOUISE

No, it doesn't. Ray is a good boy. He'll straighten out.

ED

Maybe I made a mistake not becoming a heavy equipment operator. Would have made good money helping to build things. I would have liked doing that.

LOUISE

So, why didn't you do it?

ED

This vocational counselor in high school, his name was Mister Molloy, told me that I should go to college, and I guess I believed him. I told him that what I wanted to do was operate heavy equipment and he laughed at that, He said that only losers do that kind of work and that I'm meant for better things. It was kind of like a pep talk.

LOUISE

Did you discuss this with your parents?

ED

With them, I had little to discuss. My father was a day laborer and my mother, well, she never had a job, so she couldn't provide me with much advice.

LOUISE

You sure about that?

ED

Yes, I am.

LOUISE

I'm surprised that you didn't talk with them. Your parents were very fine, decent people.

ED

And they liked you too. They were so relieved when I told them that I met a girl.

LOUISE

You see. You did talk with them.

ED

But that was just to inform them. My parents expected me to make my own decisions. They weren't deep thinkers. It was all on me.

LOUISE

It's too bad they're gone.

ED

They both died young. By the way, when would you like to visit your mother?

LOUISE

How about next week.

ED

That sounds good. You think she'll be able go back home soon?

LOUISE

I hope so. I'm going to meet with the social worker to discuss their plans for mom. (*pause*) That's what happens when you get old and live alone. There's no one to care for you when you need help.

ED

I guess she'll have to hire somebody.

LOUISE

That will cost money.

ED

We'll work something out. In the meantime, I got to figure what I plan to do with my life.

LOUISE

What's there to figure out? You're going to go to work.

ED

Yes, that's right. I'm going to go to work. What a life.

End of scene 5.

Scene 6

Time: The next day.

Place: the classroom. Edgar, Carlos and Gladys are seated; Ed is standing. He is teaching his lesson.

ED

Now, where did we leave off?

EDGAR

You were talking about the Declaration of Independence.

ED

Very good, Edgar. It shows that you were listening.

EDGAR

Yeah, I guess I was.

GLADYS

He's just trying to suck up to you.

EDGAR

Hey, you saying I'm trying to suck Mister Ed off?

CARLOS

Ha! Mister Ed, I like that. Like the talking horse.

GLADYS

What the fuck are you saying? A talking horse? What have you been smoking?

CARLOS

There was a tv show called Mister Ed. It was about a horse that talked.

GLADYS

I never hear anything so stupid in my life.

CARLOS

Well, it beats talking about the Declaration of Independence. Who the fuck cares about what some white men wrote whenever? They were just a bunch of slave owners anyway. Isn't that right, teach?

ED

Some were slave owners. That is true. But still they managed to create an important document in American history.

CARLOS

What's a document?

EDGAR

A piece of paper, dummy.

CARLOS

Who you calling dummy, dick-brain?

GLADYS

Yeah, dick-brain. Who you calling dummy.

EDGAR

I wasn't talking to you, so shut up.

GLADYS

Fuck you and your big mouth.

CARLOS

Girl, you keep up like that I'm going to shove my fist up your hole.

GLADYS

Fuck off, you fag.

EDGAR

That's right, you're just a fairy, just like your perv father.

CARLOS

Keep my father out of this.

GLADYS

We all know that he did time for molesting those little kids in the park. What a sicko.

CARLOS

Don't you call my father a sicko.

EDGAR

That's what he is.

CARLOS

You can talk? At least I have a father. You don't even know who your father is.

GLADYS

So what? At least his mother's still around.

CARLOS

With how many boyfriends? A dozen?

EDGAR

My mother's no whore. So shut the fuck up!

ED

Please, class, let's stop all this arguing and talk about the Declaration of Independence.

CARLOS

I'm cool with that.

EDGAR

Me too.

GLADYS

Yeah, let's do that.

ED

Good, and let's stay on track. Now, where were we?

CARLOS

You were talking about the Declaration of Independence, which is supposed to be a very important document.

ED

Excellent, Edgar

EDGAR

You see how smart I am?

CARLOS

You are nothing but a brown-nosing, ass licking suck up.

EDGAR

What the fuck is your problem now?

GLADYS

You are the problem, dick licker.

ED

Class, we must have order.

EDGAR

Teach, did you hear what she called me? A dick licker. I'm no dick licker.

ED

Please stop using bad language in the classroom.

EDGAR

She started it.

Did not. GLADYS

Did so. EDGAR

Did not, snot brain. GLADYS

Did so, slut. CARLOS

Mister Ed, please tell them to stop calling me names. GLADYS

Stop calling Gladys names. ED

Bitch, tramp. EDGAR

Whore, pig. CARLOS

Dick eaters. GLADYS

Stop it! Now! ED

I'll stop it if they stop it! EDGAR

Don't look at me. I didn't start anything. GLADYS

EDGAR

Always trying to get me to take the rap.

ED

Stop this arguing ... NOW! Stop it!

CARLOS

Stupid cunt!

GLADYS

Your mother's a whore!

EDGAR

Your father's a pimp.

GLADYS

At least he's making a living. That's more than I can say for your father.

CARLOS

Your father works? Doing what? Being the neighborhood clown?

ED

You're all a bunch of animals! You're impossible to teach! Get the hell out of my classroom, now!

CARLOS

But the class isn't over.

ED

Yes, it is. From the first moment you opened up your filthy sewers that you call mouths.

EDGAR

Hey, teach, you have no call to say that.

ED

Then shut up and let me teach!

CARLOS

We are letting you teach.

ED

You all disgust me. Get the hell out of here! NOW!

Kwantifa Jones enters. She is accompanied by a man. His name is Sigmund Kopelski. He is an auditor for the state.

JONES

Mister Gastrofsky, I would like to introduce you to Mister Kopelski. He is from the state auditor's office. He would like to observe your class. *Jones exits.*

EDGAR

We're leaving. Who the fuck needs this aggravation anyway?

KOPELSKI

Leaving? Has the class been dismissed already?

CARLOS

Teach told us to get out.

KOPELSKI

Oh, really. What's the problem?

ED

No problem really. Just a minor misunderstanding over the homework assignment. Now, class, please return to your seats.

Edgar, Carlos and Gladys return to their seats.

ED

Now, class, lets' resume our discussion about the Declaration of Independence.

EDGAR

Okay, teach. Teach.

ED

Thank you. The Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents in American history. Can anybody explain why this document is so important?

Silence

CARLOS

You tell me.

ED

Now, you can do better than that.

GLADYS

Is it because it told the Brits to get lost?

ED

Good answer. Any other ideas?

EDGAR

Because it was used to declare our independence.

Ed glares at Edgar. He is surprised and stunned.

EDGAR

Why you looking at me like that?

ED

That was the right answer. Where did you learn that?

EDGAR

From doing my homework.

Carlos and Gladys snicker.

ED

Well, I am very impressed. Now, in what year was the declaration of independence signed?

GLADYS

Who cares?

ED

I care.

GLADYS

Why do you care?

ED

Because it is part of the history of the United States which is my country, and your country too.

CARLOS

Maybe it's your country but it's not mine. I wasn't even born here. So why do I need to know this stuff?

ED

Because you live here now.

CARLOS

But not for long. Once I get a good job and make me some money, I'm leaving. I didn't ask to come here.

ED

Neither did I. But here I am, and here we are.

EDGAR

You know, teach, you think we're a bunch of dummies, but you know, we're smart too, but in our own way.

ED

You all think you're so smart, that you know it all, while I'm just a clueless white man. Right?

EDGAR

What do you mean by clueless?

ED

Stupid, dense, dumb.

EDGAR

You said it, not me.

ED

Yeah, but you asked what the word clueless meant and so I answered. My job is not only to teach you information but to get you to think about things.

GLADYS

I think about all kinds of stuff.

ED

I'm sure you do, but to think about history is to learn more about yourselves.

GLADYS

So that's why you're talking about the Declaration of Independence? So we can learn more about ourselves? I don't get it.

ED

Mister Kopelski, would you like to answer the young lady's question?

KOPELSKI

That's okay. I'm just observing. Taking few notes. I hope you don't mind.

ED

Not at all. (to Gladys) Now, the answer to your question is yes. By learning about the Declaration of Independence you learn more about yourself. That's because you are part of a culture whose roots go all the way back to that declaration, and by learning about the declaration you learn more about your culture which shapes you, me and everybody.

GLADYS

How come nobody ever explained this to me before?

ED

Maybe they did but you just weren't listening.

CARLOS

I listen all the time.

ED

You think so? Maybe you think you're listening when all you're doing is tuning out.

CARLOS

Nothing wrong with that. Calms me down.

ED

Or maybe it dulls your mind. Makes you stupid.

CARLOS

How do you know all that?

ED

I was young once.

GLADYS

You were?

ED

Yes.

EDGAR

You were a homey?

ED

I ran with a group. Used to play a lot pick-up basketball games.

GLADYS

You played basketball?

ED

Yeah. Why you so shocked?

GLADYS

Because you're a ... teacher. Teachers don't do stuff like that.

ED

Well I did, whether you believe me or not.

The bell sounds.

Guess that's the end of the class. See you all tomorrow.

End of scene 6

Scene 7

Time: Evening.

Place: The school yard. Carlos, Edgar and Gladys are seated on a bench.

CARLOS

Can you believe that the teach played basketball?

EDGAR

It is hard to believe.

GLADYS

I believe him.

CARLOS

You'd believe anything that wears pants.

GLADYS

Why are you always trying to start up with me?

CARLOS

I'm just jiving, that's all. I like seeing you get all hot.

EDGAR

He got a thing for you.

CARLOS

No, I don't. We're just good friends.

EDGAR

Yeah. That's what they all say.

CARLOS

It's all trash talk. Don't mean nothing.

EDGAR

It all means something. We never say stuff just to say it.

GLADYS

Anybody got a joint?

EDGAR

I'm all out.

CARLOS

Me too.

GLADYS

Damn. I'm going to need get some money.

EDGAR

I don't what to tell you.

CARLOS

You know, I think that bodega on Murphy Avenue is still open.

EDGAR

You want to go there?

GLADYS

We got to go somewhere to get some money.

EDGAR

What about asking your dad?

GLADYS

My dad? That fool? He has no money to spare. It all goes to booze.

EDGAR

I can't stand booze. Even the smell of it makes me sick.

GLADYS

But you're good with weed?

EDGAR

Yeah, that's more my speed, especially if it's mild. You know I have asthma.

CARLOS

I heard that weed is good for the lungs.

GLADYS

It's good for everything. That's why I need it every day.

CARLOS

I can't imagine anyone not smoking weed.

GLADYS

I can't either. Without my weed, I'll fall apart.

EDGAR

You think teach ever smokes weed?

GLADYS

Sometimes I think he's the biggest pothead going; he just won't admit it.

CARLOS

Here comes teach driving down the lane! He stops, shoots, and scores!

EDGAR

You should be a sports announcer.

GLADYS

You should. You have a good voice.

CARLOS

Yeah, maybe. Maybe I should play the game instead of just announcing it.

EDGAR

I've seen you play. You're not bad.

CARLOS

No, man, I'm great!

GLADYS

Listen to you!

CARLOS

Listen to me. That's right. I'm the coolest dude you'll ever know.

GLADYS

You are such a turkey.

EDGAR

What about me?

GLADYS

You? You're a chicken.

All three laugh.

EDGAR

So, everyone ready?

CARLOS

I'm cool.

GLADYS

Let's do it.

Edgar puts his hand in his pocket and takes out a 32-caliber snub-nose pistol.

EDGAR

Remember: we got to be fast. In and out. No wasting time like we did last week. After the job, we'll split up and meet at the usual place, and from there go get us some weed and have ourselves some party time. And Gladys, don't forget who got you the weed.

GLADYS

I won't.

End of scene 7

Scene 8

Time: Next day

Place: The classroom. On stage is Ed. He is alone. He is reviewing his lesson plan. Melissa enters.

ED

Look at this. No students. They're all truants.

MELISSA

Today is your lucky day.

ED

How so?

MELISSA

Didn't you hear?

ED

Hear what?

MELISSA

Three students from this school were arrested. Last night they robbed the bodega around the corner, and shot the guy behind the counter. A police car just happened to be driving by when it happened. That's how they got caught.

ED

Who were the students? (pause) No. Let me guess. Carlos, Edgar and Gladys.

MELISSA

That's right. How did you know?

ED

It didn't take much effort to figure it out. They're only the three nastiest students in this school, or maybe on this planet, and it's been my fate, or punishment, to have to try to teach them history.

MELISSA

It wasn't just you. All the teachers were complaining about them.

ED

Anyone complain to that state auditor? What was his name? Kowalski?

MELISSA

I think it was Kopelski.

ED

Whatever. Probably wouldn't do any good anyway. It would just be used against you as evidence of alleged incompetency or lack of commitment or some other bull crap.

Linda enters.

LINDA

I'm glad I found you.

ED

You talking to me or her?

LINDA

To you, Ed. The principal asked me to find you and tell you that she wants you to report to her office ASAP.

MELISSA

ASAP? That's never a good sign.

ED

Well, I'll hold off drawing any conclusions until after the meeting.

LINDA

You think you should contact the union?

ED

For what? Nothing's happened yet. Probably wants to assign me another class with other gems who will do all that they can to erode and destroy what little faith I still have in humanity.

MELISSA

The life of a public school teacher. The drama never ends.

ED

But life does, and sometimes that may not be such a bad thing.

End of scene 8

Scene 9

Time: A few minutes later.

Place: The principal's office. Kwantifa Jones is seated behind a desk. Then the sound of knocking on the door.

Come in. JONES

Ed enters.

You wanted to see me? ED

Yes, I did. Take a seat. JONES

Thank you. ED

Ed sits.

JONES
Now, I heard that three of our students were arrested yesterday and were charged with serious crimes. You know anything about this?

Only from what I heard. ED

From whom? JONES

Other teachers. ED

Like whom? JONES

ED

Why do you need to know this?

JONES

I'm asking the questions and I want you to provide the answers.

ED

I'm not comfortable answering that question.

JONES

I don't care if you're comfortable or not. I run this school, not you, and I want to know who told you about this incident and what you were told. I want to know because the school, and specifically you, have been implicated.

ED

Me? What did I do?

JONES

According to the police, the three students claim that yesterday you called them, and I quote, stupid, dense and dumb. Is that true?

ED

No, it is not true.

JONES

This was confirmed by Mister Kopelski.

ED

Those words must have been taken out of context.

JONES

I don't care in what context they were used. Maybe you were talking about yourself. Maybe you were trying to make a point. I don't care. I want to hear from you whether you used those words.

ED

I may have. So what?

JONES

Are you being serious? Those three students got themselves a lawyer who is claiming that it was their teacher in this school who incited them to rob by calling them stupid, dense and dumb.

ED

And you're buy that? These three students have sewers for mouths. They rag on each other all the time, use the filthiest language, show no respect for authority and now you have the nerve to get on my case? I'm not the perpetrator, I'm the victim.

JONES

Nobody's accusing you of committing any crime. But you have to watch what you say in class. You're a professional and you are expected to conduct yourself accordingly, which means maintaining self-control and being a role model for the students to follow.

ED

You're just saying that. All you care about is protecting the school's reputation.

JONES

You couldn't be more wrong if you tried. My primary goal is to make sure that the students in this school get a quality education. To achieve that goal requires competent teachers who have the skills to teach young people, including those with problems. Nobody ever said it's an easy job. If the teachers can't do the job, then the school will be closed. Now do you understand?

ED

Perfectly. It's just that I think you're blaming me for something I didn't do.

JONES

I'm not blaming you. They're blaming you.

ED

But you're believing this crap.

JONES

Crap? See what I'm talking about? You have to watch your language.

ED

I'm sorry. I was just trying to make a point.

JONES

You're making my point. Remember, you are a professional and you represent this school.

ED

But who represents me?

JONES

You know, Ed, I've been hearing rumors about you: that you're not too satisfied with your job. Are these rumors true?

ED

Who's been talking about me?

JONES

That doesn't matter. What does matter to me is any member of my faculty under my watch who may be sowing seeds of dissatisfaction among the staff. It lowers morale, erodes school operations, and makes my job much more difficult. That I cannot allow.

ED

I'm not eroding anything. I come to work, do my job, and leave.

JONES

If you, or any teacher, doesn't like their job, you are always free to leave. That option is always available.

ED

Who said anything about wanting to leave?

JONES

Frankly, Ed, you have disappointed me. A teacher with your experience should really know better than to use irresponsible language and say things that others might misconstrue. Am I making myself clear?

ED

Yes, very clear.

JONES

I'm glad my message is being received.

ED

What's going to happen now?

JONES

Later this morning you'll be assigned another class. In the meantime, watch what you say and stay out of trouble. Okay?

ED

Yes, Ms. Jones, and thank you.

JONES

You're welcome. Enjoy the rest of your day.

Ed exits. Jones picks up the phone.

JONES

Deputy Superintendent's office. Thank you. ... Hello, Charlene. ... I spoke with the teacher. ... He denied any involvement. ... I tend to believe him. ... He's something of a complainer but certainly no agitator or activist. ... I told him he'll be assigned a new class. ... Hold off on that? ... Okay. I'll assign him to library duty instead, until things simmer down. ... I'll keep you informed ... Good bye.

End of scene 9

LOUISE

Did they say that they're looking to fire you?

ED

No, but ...

LOUISE

Good. Then I think we're fine. You don't like teaching these kids, anyway.

ED

That's not the point. I feel like I'm being scapegoated.

LOUISE

You know, Ed, sometimes you can such a knucklehead. That's why I love you.

ED

I'm not being a knucklehead. I'm being serious. I don't want to lose my job. At this stage of my life, the last thing I want is to be unemployed.

LOUISE

But you're not unemployed. You've just been re-assigned. It will blow over.

ED

Yeah, right into my face. You know, I curse the day that I ever became a school teacher. Nothing but aggravation, and the students are ungrateful conniving monsters.

LOUISE

Wait a minute. Not all of them are monsters.

ED

To me all of them are. They hate me, hate the school and hate everything I believe in. Trying to teach them anything is just a big fucking waste of time.

LOUISE

Ed! When did you start using such language?

ED

Louise, I'm sorry. I couldn't help it. It's just that I'm so upset over the way things have turned out.

LOUISE

You are upset. Maybe you should contact the union.

ED

I called them; they told me what you said. As long as I'm on the pay roll. Management can assign me wherever they want.

LOUISE

So, what's to complain about?

ED

I feel like such a loser.

LOUISE

But you're not a loser. Every two weeks you'll still be getting a check. That's what counts.

Raymond enters.

RAYMOND

Hey, guys.

ED

Guys? Is that a proper way to address you mother and father?

RAYMOND

I always call you guys. What's the big deal?

ED

Well, I'd appreciate it if you stop calling us guys. Show more respect.

RAYMOND

I do respect you. What's wrong?

LOUISE

Your father had a bad day at work.

RAYMOND

I'm sorry to hear that. What happened? You got fired?

ED

No, nothing like that.

RAYMOND

So, what's the problem, dad?

ED

If I told you, you wouldn't understand.

RAYMOND

Hey, dad, I'm nineteen years old, not nine.

LOUISE

A bunch of kids from the school got into trouble and they're blaming your father.

RAYMOND

What did they do?

ED

Robbed a bodega and shot someone.

RAYMOND

So how are you involved?

ED

I'm not. But these three kids said that I said things in class that made them go out and commit a crime.

RAYMOND

So, what's the big deal? When I was in high school, my math teacher used the word pansy and I thought he was talking about me. (Raymond chuckles)

ED

You may find this amusing, but I don't.

RAYMOND

I'm sorry, dad, that memory made me laugh. I really thought he was talking about me when actually he was talking about himself. All I heard was the word pansy.

LOUISE

You see how smart your son is?

ED

Meanwhile you want to quit school.

RAYMOND

That was yesterday, dad. It was just a thought.

ED

You sounded like more than a thought to me. What changed your mind

RAYMOND

I had a great day in school. I got an A on my sociology term paper and B-plus on my English lit quiz.

LOUISE

Oh, Raymond, congratulations! (*Louise and Raymond hug*) Such a smart young man.

ED

Good! I'm glad you're staying in school. Keep up the good work. That's a big load off my mind.

RAYMOND

You know, dad, you really shouldn't get so wound up over things.

LOUISE

Listen to him. Already so grown up.

ED

I'm not wound up. It's the world that's wound up. I just don't see how in this wound up world, with all its nastiness, I'm making a difference in anybody's life or making the world a better place in which to live.

RAYMOND

You've made a difference in my life. Because of you and mom, I'm here.

ED

Yes, and I am very proud of you, but I can't say the same for my students. They are the lowest scum on earth. For them, everything I've done has been a one big awful waste of time.

LOUISE

Let me make you a cup of hot cocoa, and then I'll make dinner.

ED

I think I'll skip dinner and go to bed. Got to rest up. After all, tomorrow is another work day in the pits.

End of scene 10

Scene 11

Time: Evening

Place: a prison cell. Sitting in the cell are Carlos and Edgar.

CARLOS

That bitch gets probation while we get five years in the pen. It's not right.

EDGAR

You be a rat and look what you get, a reward. Some fucking society we live in. You can't even trust your own friends.

CARLOS

You mean Gladys was a friend? I thought she was just a hoe.

EDGAR

She was a hoe, alright, but I thought she had our back. I guess I was wrong.

CARLOS

You had feelings for her? A slut like her?

EDGAR

Shut the fuck up, okay?

CARLOS

Okay, homey. No need to get so touchy.

EDGAR

That damn gun. I should have never given it to you.

CARLOS

It went off by accident. What else do you want me to say?

EDGAR

If the gun hadn't gone off, the cops would have kept on going.

CARLOS

That fucked us up.

EDGAR

I told you to keep the safety on.

CARLOS

I thought it was on.

EDGAR

You thought. You mean you actually think?

CARLOS

What's that supposed to mean?

EDGAR

Aw, forget it.

CARLOS

No, I don't want to forget it.

EDGAR

Look, we're going to be doing a long stretch here, so let's make the best of it. No sense in us fucking around with each other.

CARLOS

Who said anything about fucking around? I just want to do my time and get out. With good behavior we could be out in a couple of years.

EDGAR

I wonder how the guy is who you shot.

CARLOS

Who cares? I told you it was an accident.

EDGAR

Some accident.

CARLOS

You shouldn't have given me the gun.

EDGAR

You said you were good with guns, so I gave you the gun. I didn't think you were actually going to use it.

CARLOS

I just wanted to scare the guy.

EDGAR

Well, you scared me too. For a while you were pointing that gun right at me. I should have never given you that gun.

CARLOS

You gave me the gun because you were afraid to use it.

EDGAR

No I wasn't. You fucked up, pure and simple.

CARLOS

So what? We'll get out and get back into business.

EDGAR

Too bad the judge didn't buy our defense, that it was the teach calling us names that made us do it.

CARLOS

Yeah, we had the judge going for a while, didn't we?

EDGAR

Imagine teach robbing a bodega?

CARLOS

No fucking way. *(Both chuckle)* You think he really played basketball?

EDGAR

A pussy like him? No way. He was just trying to sound cool. I mean, the guy fucking waddles.

CARLOS

I didn't even know that white guys played basketball.

EDGAR

How fucking stupid are you? Didn't you ever hear of Pete Maravich, Larry Bird, John Havlicek, Jerry West?

CARLOS

No. Who are they?

EDGAR

Basketball players who are white.

CARLOS

Never heard of them.

EDGAR

No wonder teach couldn't stand us. Man, if I was your teacher, forget it. I'd be a mental case.

CARLOS

Fuck you! You think you're better than me?

EDGAR

Yes, I do. I know basketball history while you don't.

CARLOS

Who the hell needs to know that crap? How's that put money in my pocket?

EDGAR

Do you actually have a brain inside that dome of yours?

CARLOS

You know, you're beginning to sound just like Gladys. In fact, you're even worse. At least she has an excuse: she's a girl. What's your excuse?

EDGAR

You looking to have me fuck you up?

CARLOS

A punk like you? You couldn't scare a fly.

EDGAR

You keep on like this and I'll treat you worse than a fly. So stop fucking with me.

MALE VOICE (*from off stage.*)

Will you two guys please shut up?

CARLOS

Fuck you, numb-nuts! We'll talk as loud as we want.

Prison guard enters. He is standing outside of the cell.

GUARD

You guys okay?

EDGAR

No problem, sir.

GUARD

I could hear you arguing all the way at the end of the block. Either you keep it down, or we'll have to take action.

CARLOS

We'll be cool, officer.

GUARD

Okay. Any more commotion, and you'll be hearing from me.

Guard exits.

EDGAR

Now you see what you've done. You almost got us into trouble.

CARLOS

Me? It was you who was making the racket. Did anyone ever tell you that you have a voice that sounds like a buzz saw?

EDGAR

Keep it down man. You heard what the guard said.

CARLOS

Fuck him! What are they going to do to us? Throw us in jail?

A prisoner enters. His name is Frank. He is pushing a cart that contains a box of books. He stops in front of the cell.

FRANK

You guys want a book?

CARLOS

Who are you?

FRANK

My name is Frank. I work in the prison library

EDGAR

They have a library in this place?

FRANK

Yeah. They didn't tell you that?

CARLOS

No, and what's more who gives a fuck? You can take those books and ...

EDGAR

Why are you getting on Frank's case? He's just doing his job.

FRANK

That's right, I'm just doing my job, so I'd appreciate it if you can the attitude.

CARLOS

Ah, fuck it. No sense complaining.

FRANK

So, do you want a book?

EDGAR

Yeah. What do you got?

FRANK

Mysteries, biographies, novels, histories ...

EDGAR

What kind of histories?

FRANK

Let's see. World history, European history, ancient history, American history ...

EDGAR

American history.

FRANK

Okay. Here's a book: Understanding the Declaration of Independence.

EDGAR

I'll take that book.

Frank hands him the book and exits.

CARLOS

What the fuck you going to do with that book?

EDGAR

Read it.

CARLOS

It's your brain.

End of scene 11

EDGAR

I don't think you even know how to read.

CARLOS

I can read just fine.

EDGAR

Okay. Here, read from one of these books. (*Edgar hands Carlos a book.*)

Carlos opens the book, then slams it shut and throws it against the wall.

CARLOS

Book does nothing for me.

EDGAR

You know, when teach was talking about the Declaration of Independence, I thought he was just wasting my time. Boy, was I wrong. In fact, while you were sleeping, I wrote a letter to teach, telling him how much I appreciate all he did for me. You want to hear it?

CARLOS

Thanking him for what? For wasting your time listening to garbage? You know what he'll do with your letter? He'll rip it up.

EDGAR

Maybe he will, but I'm mailing it to him anyway.

CARLOS

I thought you were a lot smarter than that. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going back to sleep.

End of scene 12.

Scene 13

Time: Morning

Place: The teachers' Lounge. Ed, Melissa, Leroy and Linda are taking a break. Ed is holding an envelope.

ED

Somebody sent me a letter. It's from a prison.

MELISSA

Who do you know that I don't want to know?

LEROY

Okay, Eddie, admit it: you're a hitman for the Mafia.

LINDA

Have you opened it yet?

ED

No.

LINDA

Think we should call the bomb squad?

ED

I don't think so. I don't hear any ticking and there's no smell, so I guess it's safe to open it.

Ed opens the envelope, pulls out the letter and reads it to himself.

MELISSA

Care to share the letter with us?

ED

Sure. *(Ed reads the letter aloud)* "Dear Mr. G. I'm Edgar. I hope you remember me. I was in your history class. Right now I'm in jail. I want to let you know that I did not forget your lessons about the Declaration of Independence. Because of you, I now use my time to read books about American history. The first book I read was Understanding the Declaration of Independence. I'm learning a lot, thanks to you. Take care, Edgar. PS: Sorry if I made any problems for you." *(Ed puts down the letter)* What do you think?

LEROY

Some letter. The kid even said he's sorry.

LINDA

Miracles do happen.

ED

I guess they do.

The bell sounds.

MELISSA

Break time is over. Back to work.

Melissa, Leroy and Linda exit. Ed is now alone. He looks up, then raises his fist in a gesture of triumph.

ED

Yes! It's good to be alive.

The end.

