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Teaching Disco Square Dancing to Our Elders: A Class Presentation

Drama/Comedy by Larissa FastHorse

Original music by Brian Joseph



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Teaching Disco Square Dancing to Our Elders: A Class Presentation

Drama/Comedy. By Larissa FastHorse. Original music by Brian Joseph. Cast: 2m., 2w. Kenny Two Hawks and Martin Leads to Water have problems. It's the end of middle school, and Kenny is on the brink of not making it into high school. Through a random drawing, the boys are assigned bizarre topics for their last middle-school presentation: *Do It Yourself Disco* and *Teaching Square Dancing to Senior Citizens*. Enter Amanda Smith, the class klutz and painfully shy half-white, half-Native American girl who gets *Exploring Your Culture: Taking Oral Histories* as her project. But Amanda is adopted and does not have anyone to ask about her culture, which she so desperately wants to learn about. Martin and Kenny make a deal with Amanda. They will combine all three projects so that the boys have a dance partner, and Amanda can interview Kenny's cool Grandma Two Hawks about the heritage they all share. They have three days to pull it together to create a presentation that will get Kenny into high school. Over the weekend, friendship is tested, first love blooms, and serious secrets threaten to unravel everything. Through it all, Grandma Two Hawks keeps her young people on track with her humor, guidance and a wicked disco dance. Area staging. Approximate running time: 65 minutes. Code: TQ1.

Cover photo: Native Voices at the Autry, Los Angeles, Calif., featuring (l-r) Noah Watts, Lavonne Rae Andrews, Robert Vestal and Tonantzin Carmelo.

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(TEACHING DISCO SQUARE DANCING TO OUR ELDERS:
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Teaching Disco Square Dancing to Our Elders: A Class Presentation was originally developed and produced by Native Voices at the Autry in Los Angeles. The world premiere was given February 8, 2008, at the Autry National Center. Executive producers: Jean Bruce Scott and Randy Reinholz. The cast was as follows:

Kenny Two Hawks Noah Watts

Martin Leads to Water Robert Vestal

Amanda Smith Tonantzin Carmelo

Grandma Two Hawks Lavonne Rae Andrews

Directed by José Cruz González with scenic design by Susan Scharpf, lighting design by Leigh Allen and costume design by Christina Wright. Original music by Brian Joseph and choreography by Larissa FastHorse.

Teaching Disco Square Dancing to Our Elders: A Class Presentation

CHARACTERS

KENNY TWO HAWKS: 14, Lakota. The wise-cracking ringleader and Martin's best friend. Although about to fail out of school, his nonchalance covers his fears.

MARTIN LEADS TO WATER: 14, Lakota. The sidekick who wants to be something more, but is afraid of losing what little he has.

AMANDA SMITH: 14, half Dakota, half white. The awkward girl whom everyone picks on, even if they aren't sure why, who desperately wants to belong somewhere.

GRANDMA TWO HAWKS: 63, Lakota. The cool grandma who is an elder, but certainly not elderly.

PLACE: Winner, South Dakota. A small border town near the Rosebud Sioux Reservation.

TIME: Present day, end of the school year.

NOTE ON PRODUCTION

This play is a musical of ideas. Although it is not a musical in the traditional singing and dancing sense, the flow and use of the music throughout the piece should be explored with transitions that blend and tie the scenes together.

Part One: Disco

SCENE ONE

(The street outside middle school, Thursday afternoon. KENNY TWO HAWKS and his best friend, MARTIN LEADS TO WATER, rush onto stage. Each is carrying a large, thin coffee table-style book, half wrapped in paper. MARTIN stops.)

MARTIN. Kenny, stop. Your topic isn't as bad as mine.

(KENNY is antsy and frustrated. He tends to have the energy of a caged animal. He rips the paper off his book and crumples it angrily.)

KENNY. It's way worse than yours, but I don't care because I was never going to high school anyway.

(KENNY tosses his book across the stage. MARTIN is used to KENNY's outbursts. MARTIN picks up the book.)

MARTIN. Sure you are. You're gonna be the first one in your family to graduate from—

KENNY. Shut up, Martin. I'm flunking and...know what? I don't care.

MARTIN (*covering his hurt*). Yes you do. And you're not flunking, you're on the cusp.

KENNY (*disbelieving*). Cusp? Seriously, if I have to say "cusp" to get into high school, I'm not going.

MARTIN. If you pass this final project, you're in. They'll have to move you up. I'm not going to high school without you. Come on, Kenny, three days, one last project in middle school...

KENNY. I'm not spending my three-day weekend doing a stupid presentation.

MARTIN. Mrs. MacNamera said we could combine projects. We'll do ours together and make it less lame.

KENNY. Tell me how doing a presentation on "Do It Yourself *Disco Dancing*" can't be lame?!? Then combine it with...what did you get?

(*MARTIN holds out his book. Dejected.*)

MARTIN. *Teaching Square Dancing to Senior Citizens.*

(*Suddenly KENNY bursts out laughing. It's like an emotion switch has been flipped. MARTIN brightens, he's been waiting for this.*)

KENNY. Know what? This is going to be classic. Kenny Two Hawks and Martin Leads to Water are going to finish middle school with a disco square dance for old people! They'll be talking about us for years.

MARTIN (*hesitates*). Are we using actual old people? Not my grand—

KENNY. Heck no. Your grandparents are...well...you know. We'll get my Grandma Two Hawks to help us.

MARTIN. She doesn't like being called old. I don't think sixty-three is technically even a senior citizen anymore.

KENNY. So we make her act elderly. She's cool. She'll do it.

(MARTIN glances through their books. He becomes concerned.)

MARTIN. Um...there's another problem here.

KENNY. What?

MARTIN. You need couples for this. Like girls.

KENNY. So you dance with Grandma and I'll like...give the presentation thing. You know the MC and DJ.

MARTIN. No way! I'm not going to be the only one disco square dancing with your grandma. *(He is mad. KENNY can see it, but he still tries.)*

KENNY. The senior citizen part is yours...I didn't care about high school anyway...

MARTIN *(pulls out his big guns)*. So you're gonna take the job at the hog farm with your dad?

KENNY *(warning)*. You really want to bring our dads into this, 'cause I'm locked and loaded, Martin.

MARTIN. You're not making me do this one alone, Kenny.

(KENNY knows this look, MARTIN's not budging. KENNY gives him this one. He glances back toward the school.)

KENNY. Which girl? *(Counts off with various memories.)* Marla, Jessica, Courtney, Sasha and Sunrise aren't speaking to me, which means none of their friends are

speaking to me. There's Melissa, but I'm not speaking to her.

MARTIN. You have serious issues with girls.

KENNY. OK, let's use your girlfriend, wait...you don't have one. (*Unsure.*) Hold it, isn't there someone else?

MARTIN. Um...I don't think the Mormon missionary girl is allowed to dance. Wait, we are missing someone...

KENNY. There's only forty kids in our whole class...

(There seems to be someone, but they can't put their finger on it. Offstage they hear a whining voice.)

AMANDA (*offstage*). Pleeeeee, Mrs. MacNamera. I caaan't. I'll do anything. Give me two other books. I'll do them both. Pleeeeee.

KENNY & MARTIN. Amanda.

MARTIN. I can't believe we forgot her. That's kind of sad.

KENNY. She's just so...forgettable...and beige.

MARTIN. It's not her fault she's a mixed breed.

KENNY. I didn't mean her skin color. She's beige all through.

MARTIN. But she is a girl, and she needs some help. We should see what she's got.

KENNY. I don't know...

(AMANDA SMITH stumbles onto stage, trips and drops her book. It tumbles across the floor to MARTIN's feet. He picks it up and shows the title to KENNY. Interesting.)

MARTIN (*to KENNY*). We can totally do this one.

KENNY. You understand one of us has to dance with her?
I'm just thinking of our safety.

(MARTIN gives AMANDA her book back. She is upset, but already trying to fade into the background. We can almost see the beige filling her.)

MARTIN. What's up? You got a problem with your presentation topic?

AMANDA. Um...sort of...yeah. I can't...I mean...no.

(She starts to flee off stage. MARTIN urges KENNY to stop her. KENNY turns on his KENNY charm and grabs the book out of her hands.)

KENNY. *Exploring Your Culture: Taking Oral Histories.*
That's easy. It's like a report on your grandparents, right?

AMANDA. Yeah, but I don't have any grandparents and even if I did, they aren't...my culture. *(Pained.)* It's mean to make someone do a final presentation on something they don't have. Especially this weekend...

KENNY. So, ask you parents. What's the big deal?

(AMANDA looks at KENNY then bursts into tears. Whoa, not what the guys expected. KENNY looks at her like she's and alien. He abandons AMANDA and joins MARTIN off to the side.)

KENNY. What the heck? We can't work with this.

MARTIN. Come on, Kenny, that wasn't cool.

(They look to AMANDA who's still crying.)

KENNY. What? I don't get—

MARTIN. You know she's adopted. Her parents are the white couple who own the coffee shop. She's half Lakota and half white. They're nice people, but I doubt they know much about Lakota culture.

KENNY. She hangs out with the white kids though, right? I mean she can do white culture, whatever that is.

(AMANDA still crying...)

MARTIN. She doesn't hang out with anybody. Amanda tried to take traditional dancing with the Lakota girls and Courtney totally called her out as a wannabe and she left the class crying, *(AMANDA wails)* like that.

KENNY. That's not cool. Hey, Amanda. I'm sorry. I forgot that you're...you know.

(AMANDA stops crying and starts to go. (KENNY and MARTIN both rush to stop her.)

KENNY. Wait. Here's the deal. Martin and I need another girl for our presentation, and you need...help. My grandma is part of our thing and she's Lakota and knows all the traditional culture and stuff.

MARTIN. We'd all be helping each other.

(AMANDA gets a glimmer of hope, but she's still suspicious.)

AMANDA. You mean your grandma would let me interview her and teach me about Lakota culture? With you guys? Really?

MARTIN. Yeah. We'd be a team.

AMANDA. You think she'd teach me how to dance?

KENNY. Actually, funny thing...our presentation is all about dancing.

AMANDA. Really? That would be sooo incredible! But... we only have three days. Is that enough time? I've never danced...

(KENNY reels her in. MARTIN realizes KENNY is really going to do this.)

KENNY. No way? You'll totally get this. It's easy.

MARTIN. High school, here we come!

KENNY. Tomorrow morning, my basement. OK, Amanda?

AMANDA. All weekend?

MARTIN. Yeah. We'll do one part of the project each day.
OK?

AMANDA. Um...I guess...yeah. I can't believe you guys are doing this with me.

KENNY. Believe it, girl. We're going to totally rock "Teaching Disco Square Dancing to Our Elders: A Class Presentation"!

MARTIN & KENNY. Bye, Amanda!

(The guys take off.)

AMANDA *(confused)*. Disco square dancing? Wait—
(She's alone. She goes the other way.)

SCENE TWO

(Thursday evening. AMANDA tucks into a corner of the stage, speaking quietly into a phone. She's somewhere in her house.)

AMANDA. I need to leave a message for room 14— No no no. I don't want to talk to her— Tell her her daughter— No, just say Amanda called and, tell her I'm sorry she came all this way but I don't know if I can... I won't be home all weekend so please, please don't call here...my house. I'll call back later. *(She hangs up, looking guilty.)*

SCENE THREE

(KENNY and MARTIN enter KENNY's basement. It's a pretty simple room with a couple chairs, some discarded stuff and a boombox. Nothing fancy.)

KENNY. You saw her walking here. Why didn't you wait for her?

MARTIN. I figured she could walk by herself. Besides... it's Amanda.

KENNY. Didn't know you cared so much about social suicide.

MARTIN. That's mean.

KENNY. You're the one who wouldn't walk with her and now I'm wasting a perfectly good school free Friday waiting for her.

MARTIN. You'd just be sleeping.

(*AMANDA runs in.*)

KENNY. Why'd it take you so much longer to walk here than Martin?

AMANDA (*immediately intimidated*). Huh? How do you know?

MARTIN. I saw you. What way did you go?

AMANDA (*very uncomfortable*). I...I like to go around the park.

MARTIN. First Ave's way faster.

AMANDA. I...I don't mind...

KENNY. Tomorrow you walk with Martin. (*MARTIN shoots KENNY a glare.*) We can't wait for her all day.

AMANDA (*brightens*). OK. That's cool. Should we meet or...

KENNY. It's not a date. Just find him and walk.

(*AMANDA feels foolish. MARTIN sees it.*)

MARTIN. I'll wait for you at the corner of First and Maple.

KENNY (*yelling*). Grandma!

(*GRANDMA TWO HAWKS enters. She isn't happy.*)

GRANDMA TWO HAWKS. Don't push it, Kenny. I'm still recovering from the fact that when you need old, the first person you think of is me.

KENNY. No, Grandma. We thought of Martin's grandparents first, but...you know. (*She nods.*) Amanda's grandparents are so old they're dead. Great-Grandma lives on

the rez and neither of us will dance with Great-Grandpa Stone.

MARTIN. I'd rather flunk.

KENNY. So, you were the only one left.

MARTIN. We know you're totally not old enough to be a senior citizen, but we figured you're sooo talented that you could act old.

KENNY (*reluctantly pulls his ace*). Truth is...if I don't do this, they're not letting me to go high school...if I want to go.

GRANDMA TWO HAWKS. You're going. I didn't spend the last nine years dragging your butt into school so that you can work on a hog farm. Unless someone's going to pay you to sit on that wall with those boys?

KENNY. The point is...I've agreed to do this thing so you should be supportive. Besides, you like Martin; do it for him.

(GRANDMA wants to say so much more, but she turns her attention to MARTIN.)

GRANDMA TWO HAWKS. Martin can speak for himself. At least he should. (*Looks to AMANDA.*) How'd they rope you into this?

(AMANDA immediately tries to turn up her beige under the sudden attention.)

AMANDA. I wasn't going to do it, but I...um...they said you'd teach me about your...sort of my...culture.