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Dramatic Publishing



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Drama
by
Tommy Lee Johnston

“Social conflict pervades our schools ... students have become ... numb to the anti-bullying messages of their teachers and principals. *Gifted* delivers the point in a way students can relate to.

It's about more than just bullying, it's about breaking down differences and stereotypes in subtle and meaningful ways. *Gifted* delivers the message with humor and poignancy, and the students hear it.”

— Michael Shapirol, Principal, Shepard Middle School, Deerfield, Ill.

“*Gifted* is warmly and instantly accessible for anyone from 8 to 80 ... a rare gem for children and an utter delight for adults.

Tommy Lee Johnston has truly given us a Gift.”

— Michael Colucci, Artistic Director, Red Twist Theater, Chicago

Gifted – Drama. By Tommy Lee Johnston. Cast: 4m., 3w. Mr. Jenks revisits his high-school alma mater as a substitute teacher for a class of highly gifted students. Discovering the passage of time hasn't erased his own painful experiences as a bully, he now faces a class of kids whose lives and experiences all too closely resemble those of the very students he taunted. Zach, Maggie, Jake, Janie, Jamie and James all struggle in their own way with their gift of intellect and the impact it has on their social standing in life and school. Their stories of being bullied quickly take Mr. Jenks back to a time of much shame and pain. He must face his feelings while helping the students understand the senselessness of bullying, and he will deliver news to the students that will force them to see life in a whole new way. *Gifted* moves at a fast clip, revealing the day-to-day drama and humor these kids live. It's a story of love, respect, devotion, extreme forgiveness, and embracing one's own gift. *Simple set. Approximate running time: 70 minutes. Code: GC6.*

Cover production: Kids Acting Out Theatre, Nova H.P., Highland Park, Ill.

Cover photo: Michael Brown. Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN 10: 1-58342-815-1
ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-815-3



9 781583 428153 >

www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
Phone: 800-448-7469
815-338-7170



Printed on recycled paper

GIFTED

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(GIFTED)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-815-3

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Gifted premiered at the Redtwist Theatre Company, Chicago, in April of 2007. The director was Tommy Lee Johnston, production director was Brandee Johnston, sound and lights were by Werner Briske. The cast was as follows:

Zach.	Samuel Louis Johnston
Mr. Jenks	Tommy Lee Johnston
Maggie.	Hayley Otto
James	Mark Briske
Janie.	Nicole Johnston
Jamie	Claire Kedjidjian
Jake	Paul Briske

GIFTED

CHARACTERS

ZACH – The only student left at Campbell Prep who still wears a school uniform every day. Zach is always the first to arrive and the last to leave. He goes through his daily routine of preparing the class for learning before his teacher and fellow classmates arrive. Zach is extremely proud of his genius.

MR. JENKS – Substitute teacher. A teacher for 20 years, but this is his first experience with a “gifted” program. Mr. Jenks is a former student of Campbell Prep and is still famous for his athletic accomplishments in all sports during his school days.

JAMES – Incredibly bright, he is the closest thing to a walking reference book. James is very quiet and will only speak when information is required or questions need answering.

MAGGIE – Maggie and her cell phone are inseparable. She is not thrilled about being associated with the “gifted” program but makes up for it by hanging out with the school’s most popular.

JANIE/JAMIE – Siblings. Jamie is a boy. They are fraternal twins.

JAKE – A rebel and very much a loner. He is the oldest in the group at 17, and he hates the idea of groups because of the labels attached. Jake does not like his association with the “gifted” program and his peers within the class.

NOTE: *Gifted*, a play in one act, is set in a small classroom. Six chairs in a semicircle. The teacher’s desk positioned center stage with three chairs on either side. The class is free-form. Students are vocal, debating and sharing ideas on all subjects. Dialogue can overlap at times, offering a sense of disorder and realism.

SCENE FOUR

(MUSIC FADES.

Bell rings. Next day. KIDS begin entering room and take their seats. ZACH has been there preparing the room as the rest of the KIDS arrive, except JAMES. Second bell rings as JAKE steps into room and MAGGIE hangs up her cell phone. KIDS sit quietly for a moment. They all look around, a bit confused.)

JAKE *(to MAGGIE)*. Where's Jenks? *(She shrugs her shoulders. Then to the TWINS.)* Dumb and dumber, where's Jenks? *(They shake their heads. To ZACH.)*

Hey, squirt, where's the teach?

ZACH. Where's the teach? Why do you speak that way?

JAKE. I don't need a lecture, squirt, just an answer.

ZACH. I really don't appreciate you calling me squirt, it's very derogatory.

JAKE. You are pretty short, squirt.

MAGGIE. Leave him alone, Jake, why you so nasty today?

ZACH. Using "squirt" as some sort of reference to my stature is incorrect, it doesn't mean that at all, look it up, Jake.

JAKE. Could you just answer the question? Where...is...
the...teacher?

ZACH. He's...not...here.

JAKE. That's brilliant. Squirt as a noun, an instrument, as
a syringe, for a liquid, a small quick stream, the action
or an instance of, an impudent youngster.

ZACH. Impudent?

JAKE. Impudent. Marked by contemptuous or cocky bold-
ness or disregard of others. Insolent.

ZACH. So you're good at memorizing the dictionary, not
that impressive, Jake.

MAGGIE. Leave him alone!

(Conversation becomes heated and builds.)

JAKE. You defend him? I've seen you in the hallways
with your friends, how you treat him, and everyone else
in this class, and now you defend him?

MAGGIE. It's not the same, I don't put him down, and I
don't embarrass him in front of others.

JAKE. You don't think ignoring him isn't embarrassing?
(To ZACH.) She ignores you, doesn't she?

MAGGIE. No, it's not the same.

JAKE. Zach...she ignores you, doesn't she?

ZACH. Yes, but I understand.

JAKE. Understand? You don't like it, do you?

MAGGIE. Stop it, Jake! It's different, Zach.

JAKE. Tell her, Zach, you don't like it, do you?

MAGGIE. Stop it!

JAKE. Do you? Dammit, Zach, answer the question! Do
you like it?

ZACH. No!

JAKE. He likes you, for God's sake, don't you get that?
He has since the third grade.

ZACH. Second.

JAKE. Do you think there is anything worse you can do to him than ignore him? Pretend he doesn't exist?

MAGGIE. That's not fair!

ZACH. I'm sorry.

JAKE (*to ZACH*). Sorry? What are you sorry about? (*Back to MAGGIE*.) He walks these halls, he's ridiculed, teased, humiliated!

ZACH. I don't care about that.

JAKE. I don't believe you, how can you not care? You don't care they treat you like crap?

ZACH. No.

JAKE. You don't care?!

ZACH. No!

MAGGIE. Leave him alone!

JAKE. You don't care she ignores you?!

MAGGIE. Stop it!!!

JAKE. Zach?

ZACH. Yes! I do!! I do care about that!!!

MAGGIE. Zach, it's different out there, my friends don't understand.

JAKE. Understand what? That he's just a kid like they are?

MAGGIE. He's not!

JAKE. He is!

MAGGIE. They can't relate, he can't relate.

JAKE. They don't try.

MAGGIE. Because they can't!

JAKE. They don't try!

MAGGIE. They can't! They think he's a freak! *(Pause. ZACH drops his head and turns away. MAGGIE is sorry she said it.)*

JAKE. That's right...he's a freak like the rest of us...look at him, the way he's dressed, the way he combs his hair, that stupid pocket protector, he just oozes freak, right?

ZACH. I am not a FREAK!!!

(Suddenly out of nowhere, ZACH charges JAKE. Reacting quickly JAKE puts ZACH in a headlock. The whole CLASS is on their feet.)

MAGGIE. Oh my God! Let him go, Jake!

ZACH. Take it back, Jake.

JAKE. Zach, I never knew you had it in you, freak.

ZACH. I am not a freak!!!

JANIE. Let him go, Jake!

JAMIE. You'll hurt him!

MAGGIE. Don't hurt him!

JAKE. I could never hurt him more than you have.

MAGGIE. Don't be so dramatic! Let him go!

JAKE. Only if he promises to go back to his seat.

ZACH. Let me go!

JAKE. Do you promise?

ZACH. Let me go!

JAKE. Promise?

(At that moment MR. JENKS walks in.)

MR. JENKS. Jake!

(JAKE lets go...ZACH sucker punches him in the stomach, dropping JAKE to his knees. Other than the sound of JAKE trying to get his breath, the room is silent.)

MR. JENKS *(cont'd)*. Step back, Zach! *(He reaches down to JAKE.)* Are you OK? *(JAKE nods. MR. JENKS helps him to his seat and looks over to ZACH.)*

ZACH. I understand punching a fellow classmate in the stomach does not fall within the code of proper conduct, and I'm willing to face any disciplinary action you or the school sees fit.

MR. JENKS. Sit down, Zach.

ZACH. I'll go to the office, Mr. Jenks.

MR. JENKS. Sit down.

ZACH *(begins to walk to the door)*. I'll turn myself in.

MR. JENKS. Sit down, Zach! It was wrong, you know it, right?

ZACH. Yes.

MR. JENKS. And you won't do it again?

ZACH. I'm not intending to.

MR. JENKS. Good, sit down.

(The CLASS settles back into their chairs. JAMES enters, head down and sits at his desk.)

JAMIE. That never happens.

JANIE. You're never late.

MAGGIE. Everything OK, James?

(No answer. Rapid fire.)

JANIE. He doesn't look very good.

JAMIE. Are you ill?

JANIE. Maybe you should go to the nurse's office.

MR. JENKS. He's fine.

JANIE. I don't know, he looks a little flushed.

JAMIE. Sign of a fever, do you feel chilled, James?

MR. JENKS. He's OK.

JANIE. The flu can be tricky.

MR. JENKS (*becoming impatient*). He doesn't have the flu.

JAMIE. It's tricky, the flu.

MAGGIE. And it's contagious! I don't want the flu!

MR. JENKS. Class.

JANIE. A trip to the nurse is the best idea.

(Overlapping.)

JANIE/JAMIE/MAGGIE. I don't want the flu, nurse is the best idea, I don't want to get sick!

MR. JENKS. Stop it! Be quiet! He doesn't have the flu! You're not going to get sick! I just need for you to be quiet for one minute! (*The CLASS is suddenly quiet. All eyes on MR. JENKS as he gathers his thoughts and takes a long pause.*) James is fine. I just came out of a meeting with the principal, Mr. Jaffe...he informed me today that Mr. Z won't be coming back.

(Silence.)

ZACH. What... You mean this week?

MR. JENKS. No...

MAGGIE. ...Never?

MR. JENKS. Mr. Z has been ill.

ZACH (*out of his seat*). But it's only temporary.

MR. JENKS. He's been sick for a while...a few months now.

ZACH. No... He's never been sick...I would know if he's been sick, he didn't email me...he would've told me.

MR. JENKS. James' father has been treating him.

MAGGIE. ...Cancer?

ZACH (*to MAGGIE*). He doesn't have cancer...he can't... James?!

MR. JENKS. They thought they had it under control; he didn't want to tell you guys, he didn't want to worry you.

ZACH (*becomes frantic, to JAMES*). James...what is it?

MR. JENKS. It got worse, Zach, they couldn't keep up with it.

ZACH. James?!

JAMIE. Is he dying?

(*No answer.*)

ZACH (*rushes back to JAMIE*). No! He's not dying! He wouldn't do that! (*Back to JAMES.*) James, what is it?!

MR. JENKS. Zach, please.

ZACH (*more desperate now*). Tell me, James...you have the answers! (*He grabs his arm.*)

MR. JENKS. Zach.

ZACH. You always have the answers, James! James! (*To CLASS.*) He always has the answers. You always have the answers! (*Tugging on his arm.*) Stand up, James! Stand up! Stand up!!!

MR. JENKS. Please, Zach.

ZACH (*in tears*). James! You always have the answers!
Stand up! Tell me!

JAMES. I...don't...know.

ZACH. You always know! (*He is defeated, he pauses. Slowly he drops his head into his hands. Stepping away. Slowly and softly.*) You always know. You always know.

(After a long pause, JAKE stands and walks to ZACH. He puts his arms around him and pulls him in close.

MUSIC IN.

MAGGIE, also crying, stands and puts her arms around both of the boys. JANIE and JAMIE and finally JAMES do the same as the CLASS stands in a group hugging the Lights fade.)