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Family Plays

Special Class

By Brian Kral



Special Class

**First performed by the Rainbow Company of Las Vegas,
who took the production to the American
Theatre Association Convention in San Diego, Calif.**

**Other successes include an appearance on
“Good Morning, America” and a two-year run that included
performances at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.**

*Drama/comedy. By Brian Kral. Cast: 6m., 8w. A teacher asks, “What’s the first step?” The student answers, “To find the common denominator.” From that innocent premise, *Special Class* explores the dreams and disappointments of a disabled child in our society. The text also includes informative notes on the original rehearsal process. The notes prove to be helpful both in preparing performers to portray characters with disabilities and in describing how standard acting exercises may be adapted for the performer with a disability. This play is a challenge for actors of all ages and a moving, haunting experience for every audience member. The original cast was a mixture of children and adult actors. *Single int. set. Contemporary costumes. Approximate running time: 70 minutes. Code: SV7.**

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www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-13 978-0-87602-235-1



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By

BRIAN KRAL

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(SPECIAL CLASS)

ISBN: 978-0-87602-235-1

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

SPECIAL CLASS was first performed by the Rainbow Company in October, 1978, with a mixed cast of handicapped and non-handicapped actors. The present version of the play was performed at the 1980 American Theatre Association Convention in San Diego, with the following Rainbow Company artists:

Cast (in order of appearance):

Mr. Morrison.....	Brian Strom
Johnny.....	Ricky Bonicalzi
Lara.....	Rhonda Frost
Mrs. McKinney.....	Loy McCrea
Robin.....	Joe Kucan*
Darren.....	Steven Frost
Patricia.....	Mae Courson*
Victor.....	Berry Turner
Carolyn Brown.....	Deborah Sankuer
Joy.....	Dale Segal
David.....	Scott Davidson
Nadine.....	Angela Gutwald
Clare.....	Jessie Martin
Jenny.....	Chris Martin**

*The roles of Robin and Patricia were double-cast, with Robin Renshaw and Maite Garcia alternating with Joe and Mae.

**In this production, the role of Jenny was performed as "Jimmy," a male student aide. However, the preference is for a girl in the role.

Production Staff:

Director.....	Jody Johnston
Technical Designer.....	Donald Newquist
Technical Director.....	Michael Dorough

SPECIAL CLASS was premiered in Las Vegas, October 13-29, 1978, by the Rainbow Company Children's Theatre of the City of Las Vegas.

The Rainbow Company, under the sponsorship of the City of Las Vegas Department of Recreation and Leisure Activities, provides a full spectrum of theatre experiences for youth. Each year there is a complete season of live performances, creative dramatics instruction, and extensive touring by the company. There is a Rainbow Company Children's Ensemble, a group of forty-five youngsters, ranging in age from 7 to 17, selected from more than 400 children attending creative dramatics classes. In addition to acting in Rainbow Company productions, the Children's Ensemble members work backstage in all technical capacities, and receive training in every aspect of theatre craft.

The Rainbow Company is housed in the Reed Whipple Center of Las Vegas.

The play was written under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, through the Nevada State Arts Council, and was subsequently toured throughout the Clark County School District under a grant from the National Committee, Arts for the Handicapped, of which the Rainbow Company is a Model Site.

A Director's Note on SPECIAL CLASS

"Just because an instrument is shaped a little different, doesn't mean it can't play a beautiful tune."

Theatre, as an art form, is singular in its ability to adapt, and good directors are masters of the craft. We seek to get the best performance possible out of each individual actor and pursue this task by whichever route necessary. With one actor you might use improvisation, with another, personalization, and with a third, highly structured analysis. You push each individual to his own peak, demanding he employ his voice, body and mind to the best of his ability to create a living portrayal of a character. A good director will modify as necessary to utilize his company's strengths without sacrificing the intent of the script. And, of course, a good director never forgets that Theatre is a collaborative art, a compilation of the diverse artistic input of the cast and crew.

So, if I were to offer some advice to the potential director of Special Class, based on my own experiences as the producer/director of the premier production, it would be, "Remember your job and you'll find that this show is no big deal." That is, that while the production of a play with a mixed cast of handicapped and non-handicapped young performers may appear to be a formidable, if not insurmountable, undertaking, if you keep things in perspective and rely on those skills and instincts which you have utilized in the past to produce good Theatre, you'll find this show no more complicated than any other in your repertory. Flexibility and the willingness to adapt should be your most important guidelines.

The first major question you may have is where to locate performers, both handicapped and non-handicapped. For the Rainbow Company's production, we found potential handicapped actors through a variety of sources. Articles run in local papers, flyers distributed to Special Education classrooms, Adaptive Recreation Centers, and organizations dealing with the handicapped (i.e. Muscular Dystrophy Association, Easter Seals Centers, Cerebral Palsy Association, etc.) all proved excellent means for identifying youngsters. We were fortunate to have a permanent company of children (non-handicapped) ages 7-17 to draw on as well.

I should emphasize that, from the first, we mixed handicapped and non-handicapped youngsters in the show as well as in the initial Creative Dramatics classes. Additionally we integrated a variety of handicapping conditions in each class, placing youngsters in wheelchairs in the same sessions as children who were blind or deaf or mentally retarded. These decisions had a significant impact on the formation of a sense of ensemble within the company for a number of reasons. First, many handicapped youngsters, even those who are mainstreamed, have very little social interaction with their non-handicapped peers. They are, in many cases, outsiders in their schools, and have very few after-school activities which they share. Working with the non-handicapped members of our company, many of whom are talented, outgoing, popular youngsters, friendships developed which led in turn to the handicapped per-

formers acquiring social skills and more positive self-images. Not that this personal growth was entirely one-sided, for as the non-handicapped youngsters worked with their handicapped friends, helping them perfect performance skills, they in turn had to learn how to be handicapped, a lesson taught most thoroughly by the handicapped group. I feel that for young actors to acquire this kind of background in an entirely non-handicapped company would require background research of such scope as to be almost impossible for a child. Whereas through extended personal contact they were able to simulate handicaps with precision and with an understanding of why movements or behaviors occur.

An additional bonus with a mixed cast is that it has a much stronger impact on a non-handicapped audience. Junior High School students in particular take a much deeper look at their attitudes and misconceptions when they realize that one of "them" has portrayed a handicapped youngster with such honesty that they have been "tricked." It allows the question and answer interchange between actors and audience with which we followed our performances to be much more candid as it enabled the audience peers to relate to. ("How did you feel when you couldn't walk?" "How did you learn to be blind like that?" "Did people really think you were retarded?" etc.)

Our pre-rehearsal time was spent in Creative Dramatics classes with approximately 80 handicapped youngsters, divided into eight classes. Most of the standard Creative Dramatics exercises were used. One thing to keep in mind, though, is that creativity is not limited because a handicapping condition is present, so don't limit your choice of activities because you can't think how a handicapped child might do them. Don't assume, for example, that a visually handicapped child could not do the mirror exercise, or a child without hands could not do mime. Remember that most handicapped individuals spend their lives adapting. All you have to do is pose the problem and let them find their answers. In our group, for instance, one visually handicapped youngster performed the mirror exercise with her hands by following the warmth transmitted from her partner's hands. Another mimicked facial expressions by feeling her partner's face and allowing her partner to feel hers. When her partner thought that the two faces were the same, she would change her expression. Also, keep in mind that while every child can benefit from Creative Dramatics, not all of them will have the discipline, attitude and ability necessary to perform a structured play before an audience.

When I selected my cast, I looked first for youngsters who I felt not only had the qualities needed to perform their specific role but equally important, youngsters who had the ability to openly discuss their personal handicaps. The cast was, after a time, able to be totally relaxed with each other. And although it may have seemed strange to an outsider to hear such comments as "Talk about the blind leading the blind" or "That flat looks like Robin (who has C.P.) painted it 'cause the floor and Robin have more paint than the flat!" this good-natured ribbing helped develop a feeling of camaraderie. And not just between handicapped and non-handicapped. Keep in mind that most visually handicapped youngsters, for example, have little contact with the deaf, or orthopedically handicapped etc. since most handicapping conditions are put in separate schools.

Also, you will find that while some roles call for specific handicapping conditions, others do not. We placed each youngster where we felt they could give the strongest performance. For instance, in our two mountings of the production, we had a mentally retarded individual as Jimmy and a non-handicapped child as Jenny; a Cerebral Palsied boy as Robin and a non-handicapped boy as

Robin; a girl who was totally blind as Patty and a girl who had partial sight as Patty. In each case, we chose the best performer we had at the time for each role. And we made decisions about those characters who have handicaps not discussed in the show. Our Johnny had Spina Bifida, our David, Multiple Sclerosis, our Victor, Fredrick's Ataxia. It is vital that the actor fully understands the character's handicapping condition as this will affect performance.

To create the depth of understanding in character for non-handicapped cast members, I developed activities which simulated many of the play's handicapping conditions. Each actor spent a minimum of three days with each of the following:

1. Placing gauze pads over each eye, the actor then wraps an elastic bandage several times over them to hold each in place, thus blinding themselves totally.
2. Having their hands placed in a fist and taped with adhesive tape so that they have no fingers on either hand.
3. Having them manipulate a manual wheelchair.
4. Having them use a walker, not utilizing their legs at all.
5. Having them walk in a leg brace, or with a yardstick taped to their legs to prevent bending.

The important thing in each case is that the actor not be permitted to drop his handicap when it becomes inconvenient. Parental understanding is also important. My actors became "handicapped" on Fridays after school and were not "able-bodied" until the following Monday morning. During that time they were to engage in all the activities they normally would, i.e. eating, shopping, homework, television or movies, etc. This, combined with being in close contact with handicapped youngsters in rehearsals, gave my non-handicapped actors the insights they needed to create "living" characters.

When working with my handicapped performers, adaptability became the key. As two of the cast members were totally blind, and one, an Albino, was virtually blind under the glare of stage lighting, the set had to be placed in exactly the same location for each performance. No chair could be left out of place, no prop positioned even several inches from normal, as the confidence of the blind actress depended on the precision of their placement. When most directors speak of energy, they are concerned about tempo and pace. My concern toward energy was that Rhonda (Lara) and Steven (Darren), both with Dystrophy and both in electric wheelchairs, remembered to charge their batteries each night. Timing on a scene could be radically changed if the chairs were running slower than normal.

An interesting point about Rhonda and Steven is that while most inexperienced actors have a tendency to show tension on stage by shifting their weight, Rhonda and Steven had an unnerving habit of shifting their chairs back and forth, as though all the tension centered in their control hand.

Another significant point about tension concerned Tony Amos (Victor) and Robin (Robin), both of whom had neurological disorders. As they became more tense, their movements, normally spastic and shaky, became more so. With this in mind, several scenes were scheduled to be performed at functions prior to opening, so that nerves on opening night would not be as severe.

But perhaps the most significant advice I can give the potential director of this script is not to lower your own artistic standards for this production either because you are working with youngsters or because you are working with the handicapped. Demand quality in performance. Integrity, tempo, and concentra-

tion should not be sacrificed. Don't hesitate to criticize if needed, to push when necessary. It is vital that, if Theatre with handicapped performers is to grow not only as therapy but also as an art form, we not make excuses for our performers or settle for anything less than quality work. Do not be guilty of settling for too little.

The Rainbow Company performed *Special Class* for over 27,000 people, 20,000 of them youngsters. We toured for over two years using two companies and were still receiving requests when we put the show to bed. Even with that extensive performance schedule, we only began to scratch the surface. It is my hope that other companies will take up where we left off. Through the tremendous correspondence we received from audience members, we discovered that 87% of the youngsters had never had personal contact with a handicapped individual. With *Special Class*, other youngsters can realize, as one young audience member wrote,

"I used to be afraid of handicaps. I used to think they were freaks. But now I know that we all have handicaps. It's just the kids we saw in the play had to wear theirs on the outside, like a sign saying so."

Special Class is a unique script in the realm of Dramatic literature for children. Don't allow the fear of its special challenges to keep it from production. The loss to its potential audiences — and performers — is too great.

Jody L. Johnston
1980

Special Class

time:

a weekday in June; late morning and afternoon

place:

a special ed. classroom

characters:

Mr. Morrison, a teacher

Mrs. McKinney, the classroom aide

Carolyn Brown, her replacement — a student teacher

(students in Morrison's class)

Johnny

Robin

Patricia

Darren

Lara

David

(students from Mrs. Furnham's class)

Victor

Nadine

Clare

Joy

and Jenny, a student aide for Morrison

The action of the play can be performed without intermission; there should be a blackout between scenes one and two, however.

Special Class

SCENE ONE

A classroom in the morning. Students quietly work at their desks, and there are two students, Darren and Johnny, seated at opposing sides of the teacher's desk. Darren, in a wheelchair at the right of the desk, is working in a book, while Johnny is looking at a math problem on the blackboard: $1/8 + 2/3 + 1/4$. Mr. Morrison, the teacher, is behind the desk.

MORRISON

What's the first step?

JOHNNY

Uh . . . To find the common denominator.

MORRISON

That's right.

(The room is hexagonal in shape, with the teacher's desk facing front from the upper right corner. Behind the desk and extending left, either on the wall or on wheels, is the blackboard. It is followed by a posterboard of identical size that continues to the left-hand corner of the room. In front of the posterboard is a single desk which serves as an independent resource center. Another wall continues downleft, and has a door opening into a bathroom and adjoining classroom. Parallel to the wall is a long table.)

And what do you think that is?

JOHNNY

I don't know. What do you think it is?

(The desks of the students are arranged roughly in three vertical rows in the center of the room. The right row has two desks; the center row has three desks; the left row has two desks. These last two desks are the only ones presently occupied, the upstage one by Patricia, the downstage one by Lara, Darren's sister, who is also in a wheelchair. Her desk is the furthest downstage of all the desks, and faces up towards the posterboard. At the long table, Mrs. McKinney, the teacher's aide, works with Robin, a young man with Cerebral Palsy.)

MORRISON

How about twelve? Will that work?

JOHNNY

You're the teacher, don't you know?

MORRISON

I know what'll happen to a certain little boy with a great big mouth if he doesn't put his mind on his math.

(Pause.)

JOHNNY

Twelve's too small. Try twenty-four.

MORRISON

(Writing on board.)

All right. And if the denominator's twenty-four . . .

(Hands Johnny the chalk.)

Here. You take it from there.

(He returns to the open book on his desk. Lara goes to the pencil sharpener, sharpens her pencil, and returns to her desk. Mrs. McKinney puts her arm around Robin.)

MRS. McKINNEY

Very good, Robin. I can't believe how much better your handwriting has gotten.

ROBIN

(With difficulty.)

You're just saying that.

McKINNEY

Oh, now. I wouldn't pull your leg.

MORRISON

You'd better not. He'll fall over. Isn't that right, Robin?

ROBIN

But . . . gracefully.

PATRICIA

You don't have to take that from him, Robin.

MORRISON

(Broadly patronizing.)

Now, now, Patricia, don't let's be harsh. I wasn't picking on Robin. No, no. When you are older, — say, old enough to be a teacher yourself, — then —

DARREN

Like thirteen?

(There is laughter from everyone but Morrison.)

MORRISON

Patricia? When were you born?

PATRICIA

April 22, 1964. (The year should be 14-16 years earlier than the present.)

JOHNNY

(At blackboard with answer: 25/24.)

I'm done with this problem.

MORRISON

One moment, please! I'm in the middle of a very important exercise. Now then, Darren, we know that Patricia's birthday was in April, which comes before May, which comes before June, which is now

DARREN

Yeah, yeah.

MORRISON

And that she was born in the year nineteen and sixty-four. And what does this mean? . . . That if you'd paid closer attention to your arithmetic — like Johnny here — you'd know that Patricia's already older than thirteen.

JOHNNY

Can we get back to work?

ROBIN

Yeah!

MORRISON

What? You want work? Fine! I'm giving a five-hundred word spelling test tomorrow.

LARA

Ah, Mr. Morrison . . .

MORRISON

All right, all right . . . make it two-fifty.

PATRICIA

Two-hundred and fifty words?

LARA

It's almost summer! And we've got a hundred word test on Thursday.

MORRISON

Okay, forget it, you'd all just flunk anyway, I'd have to teach you on my vacation.

(To Johnny:)

Did you finish that problem?

JOHNNY

Three years ago.

MORRISON

Yeah? Well, it's probably all wrong.

(A buzzer sounds in the vestibule between this classroom and the next.

Mrs. McKinney exits to answer it.)

You got it right. You must be cheating. Now, is this a proper or an improper fraction?

JOHNNY

What do you mean?

MORRISON

(Writing on board: $1 \frac{1}{24}$)

Is this a whole number or a mixed number?

JOHNNY

A whole number.

MORRISON

No. When you add these up, your numerator is larger than your denominator, so that makes this —

JOHNNY

(Interrupting.)

A mixed number; all right.

(Pause.)

MORRISON

Go back to your desk and do the next three problems. I'll check them later.

JOHNNY

All right.

(He goes to the downstage center desk with the help of a crutch. He wears a leg brace on one leg. Lara again goes to the pencil sharpener.)

MORRISON

Needs sharpening again, huh?

LARA

Yeah.

MORRISON

You must be working real hard to wear out your pencil that fast.

DARREN

She ain't working at all.

LARA

Shut up, Darren!

(Mrs. McKinney re-enters.)

DARREN

If mom heard how you talk to me —

McKINNEY

Good lord, Mr. Morrison, what a couple of Lazy Daisies! I swear, they'd rather argue than study anyway.

LARA

(Going to her desk.)

I'm working.

MORRISON

(To Darren:)

Do you two do this at home?

DARREN

Yeah.

MORRISON

Then why don't you go home and do it?

(To Mrs. McKinney:)

Was that for me? I've got a parent's conference at ten-thirty.

McKINNEY

No, it was for me. Billy's school called the office — I have a sick child.

MORRISON

Anything serious?

McKINNEY

I don't think so. But I'd like to get him home.

MORRISON

Sure, take the day off.

McKINNEY

Not the whole day. I'll run over on my lunch hour.

MORRISON

There's only a week left of school — I think we can spare you for an afternoon.

McKINNEY

I hate to miss the celebration. Do you all promise to save me a piece of cake?

MORRISON

I'll personally see to it that everyone keeps their hands off the last slice, okay?

McKINNEY

Fair enough.

MORRISON

I mean, it's the least we can do, considering you baked it.

McKINNEY

All right, I'll go. But, now, you give David my best wishes, and tell him I'm sorry I couldn't be here.

MORRISON

We will.

McKINNEY

And I'll stop at the office and see if they have anyone else they can send down to help.

MORRISON

(Laughing.)

Don't worry about it! Just pick up your son before they ship him off to the hospital.

McKINNEY

Robin? You finish up this section, and I'll look at it tomorrow, y'hear?

ROBIN

All right, Mrs. McKinney.

McKINNEY

You take your time. And don't be a Messy Bessie.

ROBIN

Aw, not me.

McKINNEY

Okay. Goodbye, kids.

(She exits downleft of wall, into hall.)

DARREN, LARA and JOHNNY

(Calling.)

Bye.

PATRICIA

(Not realizing she's already gone.)

So long, Mrs. McKinney.

(Pause. Patricia waits for a response while the others return quietly to work. Then she does so also. Lara again starts for the sharpener.)

MORRISON

Break the point this time?

LARA

No. I can't get started.

MORRISON

Oh? What's the problem?

LARA

(Bringing her book.)

I don't understand this.

MORRISON

That is a problem.

(She opens her book on the vacant corner. Darren, meanwhile, is searching the right corner of the teacher's desk: lifting books, checking the floor, etc. He then goes to his desk, looks inside, and around at the room.)

DARREN

Where's my pencil?

JOHNNY

You looking for your pencil?

DARREN

Yeah.

JOHNNY

(Mysteriously.)

While you were busy studying, I saw this little tiny pencil burglar climb down from the air vent on a rope ladder. He grabbed your pencil, ran back up, and pulled the ladder in after him.

DARREN

That's not very funny.

JOHNNY

And he had little blue shoes, and a long red cape, and a mustache that stuck out like birds' wings. And it almost looked like he was flying when he —

DARREN

(Louder.)

That's not funny, John.

JOHNNY

I know! But what you gonna do? That's what happened.

MORRISON

(Low, into his book.)

All right. Back to work.

DARREN

I'll bet you took it.

JOHNNY

What do I want your dumb old pencil?

LARA

Nobody's got your pencil, Darren.

DARREN

Then where'd it go?

MORRISON

Here! I'll give you a new one! Now get back to work.

(Darren gets the pencil, then returns to his desk, running close by Johnny.)

DARREN

(Low.)

You'd better not leave that leg hanging out. I'll run over your toes.

JOHNNY

Oh, you're tough, Darren.

DARREN

Tough enough, John C.

JOHNNY

Yeah?

DARREN

Yeah.

JOHNNY

Well, you watch it next time you go by, Darren. I'll stick this crutch in your spokes, and you'll hit the ground so fast you won't know what hit you.

DARREN

Yeah?

JOHNNY

Yeah. And then I'll knock you down again and punch you in the gut!

DARREN

Try it, cripple-head!

JOHNNY

I will, you handicapped piece of bacon!

MORRISON

That's it! If you guys want to fight, go ahead! But there won't be any party this afternoon.

(Pause.)

JOHNNY

We didn't mean it, Mr. Morrison.

DARREN

Sure. We've been planning the party for weeks. We can't cancel it.

PATRICIA

Me and Joy have worked up a song and everything.

ROBIN

And what about David?

LARA

That's right; it's David's party. It wouldn't be fair to cancel it.

MORRISON

It just seems to me that there isn't much point in having a party if everyone's

going to be arguing. I mean, what kind of a party is that?

JOHNNY

We won't fight anymore. Honest.

PATRICIA

Please, Mr. Morrison. It means a lot. Really!

MORRISON

All right. If we finish the spelling review for Thursday . . . and if everyone gets their English done, . . . we'll have the party.

ROBIN

All right!

MORRISON

But I'm serious! If there's any more fighting —

LARA

Don't worry. If Darren gets in another fight, I'll beat him up. Okay?

MORRISON

Well, when you put it that way —

PATRICIA

So the party's on?

MORRISON

If we get our work done.

ROBIN

You can count on it.

MORRISON

Good! That's what I want to hear.

(To Lara:)

Now, where were we?

DARREN

(Searching his corner again.)

Where's my notebook?

(Pause; then everyone laughs.)

LARA

You left it on your desk when you were looking for your pencil, stupid.

VICTOR

(In doorway.)

Did somebody say you was having a party?

DARREN

Not yet! You're early!

VICTOR

I heard all the noise; thought maybe you started without me.

(Buzzer sounds in the vestibule.)

You want me to get that, Teach?

MORRISON

No, I think I'd better answer it. Do me a favor, though, huh? Keep an eye on these characters until I get back.

VICTOR

Not to worry. I gots 'em covered, Boss.

(Morrison disappears into vestibule.)

So what was going on? It sounded like a knock-down, drag-out at Madison Square Garden.

DARREN

Nothing was going on.

LARA

Except my dumb brother tried to ruin the party for us.

DARREN

I did not!

(He runs his wheelchair into hers.)

VICTOR

Hold it a minute! I'm no referee, so don't put me in the middle. I'm just an innocent bystander.

PATRICIA

"Innocent" may be pushing it. Brenda Verchik said that on your last date —

VICTOR

Watch it, now. You'll blow my cover.

ROBIN

(Laughing.)

What "cover?"

VICTOR

That's cold, Rob. I thought you was my friend.

ROBIN

Sometimes.

VICTOR

That's it. I'm leaving.

ROBIN

Only kidding.

VICTOR

So who's having the party?

LARA

We are.

VICTOR

Yeah? What's the occasion?

DARREN

You know! For David!

PATRICIA

It's a going-away party. David'll be at a regular school next year.

VICTOR

Really?

(To Darren:)

Is that why we —

DARREN

Sh, sh!

JOHNNY

It's not so tough, like everybody thinks. Kids pick on you. But I'd just trip them and punch 'em in the gut.

PATRICIA

Have you ever been to a regular school?

JOHNNY

No.

PATRICIA

Then you don't know, do you?

VICTOR

I don't want to scare anybody, but it looks like the guest of honor has already left.

ROBIN

He hasn't been here yet.

LARA

Mr. Morrison told Mrs. McKinney that he'd be late to school because he had a doctor's appointment.

VICTOR

Poor guy. I'd rather go anywhere than go to the doctor.

JOHNNY

Me, too. I can't walk in the door without having an operation.

ROBIN

They're all right.

VICTOR

Naw, they're spooky. I always feel like they're telling secrets behind my back.

LARA

Our doctor's an old fat guy.

DARREN

Yeah. He's got cold fingers, and he's always smoking a dirty old cigar. Smells like cat food.

PATRICIA

The worst thing is they're always shining bright lights in your eyes, and —

JOHNNY

(Interrupting.)

How would you know?

PATRICIA

I can see lights.

JOHNNY

Yeah? How many fingers am I holding up?

PATRICIA

(Feigning innocence.)

Gee, I don't know. How many fingers am I holding up?

(She has raised a fist to take a swing at him. He steps back to avoid the blow, but loses his balance, falling over. She jumps on him, pinning him down and tickling him. He tries to fight her off by pulling her hair and pushing her away, but can't.)

JOHNNY

Get off of me!

PATRICIA

Keep your fingers out of my face!

VICTOR

(Overlapping.)

Yes, folks! Here we are, ringside, at the fifteen-round free-for-all, the Vanilla Thrilla!

DARREN

Give him one for me!

JOHNNY

You're crushing me, Patty!

VICTOR

(Overlapping.)

Two light-weights, going at it, tooth and nail, crutch and heel, looking for an opening!

LARA

No fair! He wasn't ready!

ROBIN

Quiet! The party!

VICTOR

Yes, folks, and we are here for it! We are here!

(Carolyn Brown enters downleft, from hallway.)

CAROLYN

(Uncertainly.)

Excuse me

(They all stop as they notice her. The silence is immediately followed by Morrison's hasty entrance from the vestibule. He rushes in, but stops, too, upon seeing Ms. Brown.)

CAROLYN

Is this . . . Room Ten?

MORRISON

Yes. It is, Miss Brown. And congratulations! You've managed to catch my class at their best; they only get worse as the day wears on.

CAROLYN

You know my name?

MORRISON

The office called to tell me you were on your way. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to warn my students.

JOHNNY

(Whispering.)

Let me up!

(Patricia and Victor help him up.)

CAROLYN

Oh, you don't have to get up.

VICTOR

It's all right. They're used to greeting people on their feet.

JOHNNY

(Low, to Patricia.)

I think you broke my leg brace.

PATRICIA

(Whispering back.)

You had it coming. You know I hate that.

MORRISON

Class! . . . This is Miss Carolyn Brown. She's here to help us this afternoon while Mrs. McKinney is gone, and, from the looks of things, you can use all the help you can get!

CAROLYN

Hi, kids. I'm looking forward to working with you.

MORRISON

Why don't we go around the room and introduce ourselves. This young man here is →

ROBIN

I can . . . say it. My name is . . . Robin.

CAROLYN

Oh. Well, how do you do, Robert?