

In America

an original screenplay by

Hal Harper

Act I**Scene I**

Setting: San Francisco, California, sometime in the mid-1990s. Roosevelt Junior High School, a wing of the San Francisco Community College District, specializing in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to immigrants recently arrived in America.

At Rise: In the background, we see the walls of Roosevelt Junior High School. In the foreground, six vignettes unfold.

In one classroom, local SCHOOL BOARD members meet amid a crisis atmosphere that has been brought on by the State Accreditation Commission's threats to close down the school due to alleged fiscal mismanagement and growing anti-immigrant rhetoric.

In his office, the school Principal, MR. WHITE, an older, not surprisingly white-haired gentleman sits at his DESK. HE is accompanied by MS. BEASLEY, an older woman whose loyalty to her boss is rivaled only by her affection.

At the school's entrance, THOMAS JOHNSON, a recent teaching graduate from New York University looks up. A newcomer of sorts himself, he is on his fifth job interview as an ESL teacher. It's high time to land a job in his dream city of San Francisco or else return home a failure to his native New York.

Inside the Teacher's Room, the TEACHERS wait their turn at the copy machine while others sort through books and papers in preparation for the first day of the new semester.

In Room 308, the STUDENTS patiently await their new teacher.

Outside in the school hallway, the THUG BOYS, a mean, callous bunch marked by their foul clothes and ill-manners loiter.

In the classroom where the SCHOOL BOARD is meeting, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER WALTERS comes quickly to the point.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER WALTERS

Good morning, fellow School Board members. As you know, we are all here today to discuss the future and fate of this very school in which we are meeting, Roosevelt Junior High, currently under review by the State Accreditation Commission who will decide its fate in the wake of school budget cuts and charges of District mismanagement.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER LINDSAY

That's crazy. This school's academic performance is exemplary. Seventy percent of its students transfer to state colleges and universities while at the same time its certificate programs in health, science, firefighting, auto and aircraft maintenance contribute mightily to the San Francisco Bay Area and its economy.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER BRADLEY

Just a year ago, before the State Accreditation's Commission's report, we had over 110,000 students. Now we're down to 70,000. The students are going elsewhere and who can blame them? They don't even know if there's gonna be a college here next year.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER WALTERS

No one does, thanks to the State Accreditation Commission. You know, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Commission accuses the school of mismanagement and predicts its demise, the public hears that, stays away, and the prediction becomes "true."

In MR. WHITE's office, the school Principal sorts through stacks of papers before selecting one.

MR. WHITE

What's this Ms. Beasley?

MS. BEASLEY

That's the resume, Mr. White, from that new teacher candidate, Mr. Thomas Johnson, from New York City who's here to interview for that new teaching position that just "opened up." It's nearly 9:00 o'clock. He should be here any minute.

MR. WHITE

Yes, it's too bad about Pendergrass. I guess he just couldn't take it anymore. Hell, the stress can get to anyone. I know it keeps me up at night wondering what's going to happen. Well, show him in when he arrives, Ms. Beasley. We really need to fill that position.

In Room 308, the STUDENTS continue to await their new teacher.

ROSETTA, an attractive, young woman from Nicaragua speaks out.

ROSETTA

I wonder what happened to our regular teacher, Mr. Pendergrass? He disappeared all of a sudden.

JOSE, quick-witted from El Salvador, replies.

JOSE

In my country of El Salvador, that happens a lot.

ROSETTA gasps.

RICO, a young man from Puerto Rico reassures her.

RICO

I don't think he meant that kind of disappearance, Rosetta.

ENRIQUE, an ascetic young farm worker from Mexico is concerned.

ENRIQUE

Do you think those kinds of things could happen in America?

JOSE

Quien sabe? Who knows? It has happened to some of my friends and families. And you know, if the police stop you for anything, they can arrest you, and then it's "Adios muchachos. All they will call you will be deportee."

RICO laughs. ENRIQUE and ROSETTA are quiet.

SOPANNY, a small, wide-eyed figure from Laos is hopeful.

SOPANNY

I hope Teacher teach us good English.

MEI LI, a strikingly beautiful woman from China is optimistic.

MEI LI

Oh, I'm sure he will.

NGUYEN TRAN, a brash young man from Vietnam is skeptical.

NGUYEN TRAN

How can you be so sure?

MEI LI

I don't know. I just am. I can feel it.

*VUONG ANH, an old man from
Vietnam reflects.*

VUONG ANH

We shall see.

*Outside the school, MR. JOHNSON
tries to calm himself before
opening the front door.*

MR. JOHNSON

Gee, I hope I get this job. I'm tired of sleeping on my friend's couch in his studio apartment in the Mission District. I mean, it's nice of him to let me stay there and all, but I can't live there forever. And rents are so expensive here, even more than in the Big Apple, if I don't land this job, I'll have to go back to New York a failure.

*Inside the TEACHERS ROOM, The
TEACHERS prepare for classes.*

MS. NEILSEN

Isn't it a shame about Mr. Pendergrass? He was such a nice man.

MR. DANIELS

My G-d, Ms. Neilsen, you talk about him like he was dead. He just had a nervous breakdown. I mean, it does happen. How many have we lost that way?

MR. ALBERT

Well, he was ready to retire anyways, Mr. Daniels. I guess that's one way to leave.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Yeah, Mr. Albert, but what a way to go. The police said they found him in a coffee shop muttering over and over to himself, "Table, chair, cat, dog. Table, chair, cat, dog." Isn't that terrible?

MS. NEILSEN

That's what happens when you teach the lower levels for too long, Ms. Rodriguez. You know how it can get to you. You start talking to everyone like they're five years old.

MR. DANIELS

It's true. It's a hazard of the trade.

MR. DUGAN

Nobody ever said that teaching was easy. We do the best we can.

MS. NEILSEN

Well, I hope they find a good replacement for him.

MR. DANIELS

They'll be glad if they can find anyone right now. Kids today are staying away from the teaching profession in droves. They all want to go into the STEM fields instead of education because "that's where the money is."

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Well, I'm sure the corporations love that. Get everyone to write code 'till it's so commonplace, you can pay them the same low wage as a grease monkey in an auto shop.

MR. DANIELS

Some of those "grease monkeys" make better money than we do. Heck, they probably all do.

MR. DUGAN

Everyone makes more money than we do. We're teachers. Teaching is its own reward.

MS. NEILSEN

Who said that?

MR. DUGAN

Governor Jerry Brown.

MS. NEILSEN

That's easy for him to say.

MR. JOHNSON

I heard they called him, Governor Moonbeam

MS. RODRIGUEZ

If the shoe fits...

MR. DANIELS

Give some of these politicians a chance, and before you know it, we'll all be teaching in charter schools and getting paid even less.

MR. ALBERT

I hope not.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Ain't that a bitch!

The TEACHERS return to their work.

In the school hallway, the THUG BOYS deride the immigrant STUDENTS passing by.

SPIKE

Would youse (sic) look at them damned foreigners. All dressed up and going to school to learn English, just so's (sic) they can take jobs away from us real Americans. Where do they get off gettin' an education here, anyways? Hell, I was born here in this country and I ain't never got one, none that I can remember anyway... True, I ain't got a job neither but hah! Education! It's for suckers.

SHADY

Didn't need one, eh Spike? Yeah, me too.

LARRY

Me either.

SHADY

Youse neither?

LARRY

No, I went to school. I just remember one of my teachers hammering that lesson into our heads, that's all. She'd say, "positive plus positive equals too" and "negative plus negative equals either."

SHADY

What the - what are you talking about? Say, you ain't one of them wiseguys, are you?

LARRY

No. I was just thinking.

SPIKE

Well, quit thinking. I'm the one (that)does the thinking around here, see. I got my education the hard way. With a two-by-four over the head, courtesy of my old man.

SHADY

That ain't nothin'. My old man used to choke me so hard, my face would turn blue, and my ma would have to haul him off of me. Sometimes she'd have to call the doctor, but just for advice on how to revive me.

SPIKE

See. That's what I'm talking about. It's all them damn immigrants' fault.

LARRY

Huh? Howdaya figure, Spike?

SPIKE

Because, Brainless, if them damned foreigners wasn't using our American doctors for their own doctoring in the first place, us real Americans could get a doctor whenever we needed one. It's as plain as the dumb nose on your face.

LARRY

Gee, I never thought about it like that before.

SPIKE

That's why I'm the brains of the outfit, stupid, and you're just a moron. I told you before, all the education you'll ever need, you'll get from me, see?

LARRY

Yeah, Spike. I see.

*The TEACHERS, however, see the
subject of education in a
different light.*

(up music: Education)

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER LINDSEY

WHAT ORCHESTRATES CREATION
SPARKS THE MIND'S IMAGINATION
OPENS PATHS TO EXPLORATION
BY DEGREE

MR. JOHNSON

WHAT STIMULATES ONE'S KNOWLEDGE
BLAZES TRAILS PERHAPS TO COLLEGE
ITS TRUTHS IF STUDIED WELL
SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

MR. DANIELS

IT'S A LIFE OF INSPIRATION
DEDICATION, INNOVATION
THAT CAN SPUR A REVELATION
BY AND BY

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER WALTERS

IT'S THE KEY TO INFORMATION
EXCAVATION, TRANSFORMATION
WHICH MAY LEAD TO GRADUATION
IF YOU TRY

MS. BEASLEY

WHAT IS THIS GRAND VOCATION
WHICH DEMANDS NO EXPLANATION
BUT DESERVES A CELEBRATION
EDUCATION!

ALL

OH EDUCATION, EDUCATION
YES, EDUCATION IS THE BACKBONE OF THE NATION
IT WILL FREE YOUR SOUL AND BRING YOU LIBERATION
OH EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

SPIKE

MY FATHER BEAT ME MERCILESSLY
HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO DO IT
MY MOTHER NEVER READ OR WROTE
THIS EDUCATION SCREW IT

MR. WHITE

AS YOU WIND YOUR WAY THROUGH LIFE

MS. BEASLEY

IT MAY HELP YOU WIN A WIFE

SPIKE

MAYBE EVEN THROW A KNIFE
EDUCATION

SCHOOL BOARD

IT CAN HELP TO WIN YOU FRIENDS
IT'S THE FUN THAT NEVER ENDS

MR. JOHNSON

IT MAY BRING YOU DIVIDENDS
EDUCATION

ALL

OH EDUCATION, EDUCATION
YES, EDUCATION IS THE BACKBONE OF THE NATION
IT WILL FREE YOUR SOUL AND BRING YOU LIBERATION
OH EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

TEACHERS, SCHOOL BOARD

WE RESPECT IT

THUG BOYS

WE REJECT IT

TEACHERS, SCHOOL BOARD

WE EXPECT IT
TO HELP US TO SEND THEM ON THEIR WAY

STUDENTS

WE IMPLORE IT

THUG BOYS

WE IGNORE IT

TEACHERS & SCHOOL BOARD

WE MOST HEAR-TI-LY ENDORSE IT

MR. WHITE AND MS. BEASLEY

WE JUST HOPE THEY'LL LEARN TO READ SOMEDAY

SCHOOL BOARD

IT BEFITS ADMINISTRATION
TO MAINTAIN ACCREDITATION

THUG BOYS

IT JUST SERVES THE CORPORATION
IT'S A RACKET

TEACHERS

IT DEMANDS ONE'S GREAT ATTENTION

STUDENTS

TO ATTAIN ASSIMILATION

THUG BOYS

IT'S JUST PURE INDOCTRINATION
WE CAN'T HACK IT

ALL

OH EDUCATION, EDUCATION
YES, EDUCATION IS THE BACKBONE OF THE NATION
IT WILL FREE YOUR SOUL AND BRING YOU LIBERATION
OH EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION
(spoken)

WE GO FORTH NO RESERVATION!
ONWARD NOW A JUBILATION!
RALLY ROUND THE POPULATION!
EDUCATION!

*The song ends. All but MR. WHITE
and MS. BEASLEY remain. As the
set widens, MR. WHITE'S OFFICE
reveals a school poster that
reads, "Everybody is Somebody at
Roosevelt Junior High."*

As MR. WHITE reviews MR. JOHNSON's resume, MS. BEASLEY announces the young candidate.

MS. BEASLEY

Mr. White, that teaching candidate for the new position, Mr. Johnson, from New York City, is here to see you.

MR. WHITE

Yes, thank you. Send him in, please, Ms. Beasley.

MS. BEASLEY

Right away, Mr. White. Anything for you.

SHE offers a flirty smile to MR. WHITE who clears his throat uncomfortably before exiting to the adjoining waiting room where a nervous MR. JOHNSON awaits.

MS. BEASLEY (continued)

Good morning, Mr. Johnson. We've been expecting you.

MR. JOHNSON wipes his brow but says nothing.

MS. BEASLEY (continued)

What's the matter, Mr. Johnson? Butterflies in your stomach?

MR. JOHNSON

No, thanks, I've got some already, thank you.

MS. BEASLEY

Hmmm... This way.

THEY enter Mr. White's office.

MS. BEASLEY

Mr. White. This is Mr. Johnson. He's here to interview for the new ESL teaching position that just "opened up."

MR. WHITE stands.

MR. WHITE

Ah yes, ESL, English as a Second Language for our newcomer students. That's fine. Mr. Johnson. It's nice to meet you. I was just going over your resume. Says here you went to NYU. I'm a Cal man myself. Play any sports there?

MR. JOHNSON

Just a little basketball, sir, at the Harlem YMCA on 135th Street.

MR. WHITE

Basketball's a fine game. I ran track. Did the quarter mile in a minute five. Also, a member of the varsity swim team.

MS. BEASLEY feels MR. WHITE'S muscles.

MS. BEASLEY

Yes. That's why he's in such good shape for a man his age.

MR. WHITE

That'll do, Ms. Beasley. Yes, sir, went in the Marines, got out, taught sports in the district for twenty-five years. Then they made me a principal. Imagine me! A school principal. Never heard of such a thing. But I guess they figured an ex-military man and sports teacher make for a good leader and who was I to argue? I was happy to get the job. Now I've been with the district for over forty years, seen its ups and downs, highs and lows, hills and dales, all that, you know, but I'll tell you, what we're facing now is unlike anything I've ever seen in all my years. The money's just not there anymore. Some insiders say it all dried up during the "Reagan Revolution" when all the homeowners' taxes were cut while some of the kids today are saying it's all because of the "top 1 percent." I don't know about that. That's all above my pay grade and besides, I've got a school to run. Now you're here to interview for a teaching position, so what say we get down to brass tacks?

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, sir, Mr. White.

(up music: The Interview Song)

MR. WHITE

WELL, MR. JOHNSON
HOW DO YOU DO?
HOW DO YOU PLAN TO IMPRESS US
AT THIS INTERVIEW?
SPEAK MR. JOHNSON
HOW DO YOU FEEL?
GIVE US YOUR ALL RIGHT NOW

(blunt)

Well, Mr. Johnson?

MR. JOHNSON

(meekly)

Mr. White.

I AM SO EXCITED LATELY
I WOULD LIKE THIS JOB SO GREATLY

*MS. BEASLEY exposes a bare leg
to MR. WHITE.*

MS. BEASLEY

DO YOU THINK MY LEGS ARE SHAPELY?

*MR. WHITE buries his head in his
hands.*

MR. WHITE

NOO NOO NOO
MS. BEASLEY THAT WILL DO!

MS. BEASLEY retreats.

MR. WHITE (Continued)

SO, MR. JOHNSON
WHERE DO YOU HAIL FROM?
ARE YOU A HEARTY LAD
OR ARE YOU A GLUM?
WELL, MR. JOHNSON
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE
AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

MR. WHITE (Continued)

(blunt)

Well, Mr. Johnson?

MR. JOHNSON

(meekly)

I COME FROM MANHATTAN ISLAND
WHERE THE DAYS ARE NEVER BORING

MS. BEASLEY comes out of hiding.

MS. BEASLEY

WOULD WE EVER FIND YOU SNORING
IN THE BRONX ZOO?

MR. WHITE

Noo Noo Noo

(tossing a pencil in the air)

Whoop Ti Do

(bellowing)

Ms. Beasley, get a clue!

*MS. BEASLEY retreats once again.
MR. JOHNSON attempts to calm his
would-be employer by offering
him his most heartfelt feelings
as to why HE wants to become an
ESL teacher. A skeptical MR.
WHITE listens.*

MR. JOHNSON

IT IS MY HOPE TO TEACH A CLASS IN ESL

MR. WHITE

Oh, is it?

MR. JOHNSON

IT IS MY HOPE TO DO IT VERY WELL

MR. WHITE

I would expect so.

MR. JOHNSON

SO MANY YEARS
I'VE STUDIED HARD TO BE
AT A PLACE LIKE HERE
SO MANY YEARS
AND NOW I'M HERE

MR. WHITE

Hmm.

WELL, MR. JOHNSON
IT SEEMS YOU WENT TO SCHOOL
AND LOOKING AT THIS RESUME
I SEE YOU ARE NO FOOL

*MR. WHITE plops MR. JOHNSON onto
a chair.*

MR. WHITE (Continued)

SO, SIT RIGHT DOWN AND LISTEN
TO THE NECESSARY RULES
YOU'LL NEED IN ORDER TO SUCCEED
NOW MOST IMPORTANT IS PUNCTUALITY
FOR WITHOUT PUNCTUALITY
CLASSES SIMPLY CANNOT START ON TIME
AND SECONDLY IS CLASS RATIONALITY
FOR WITHOUT RATIONALITY
THERE IS NO SENSE OF REASON NOR RHYME

MS. BEASLEY steps forward.

MS. BEASLEY

AND THIRDLY IS ACCURACY
AND ACCURACY MUST BE COMPULSORY
FOR WITHOUT ABSOLUTE ACCURACY
CLASS IS SO LESS SUBLIME
AND THAT IS A WASTE OF TIME

TO TALLY STUDENTS' ABSENCES
THEIR PRESENCES, PERFORMANCES
TO DEAL WITH THOSE DISTURBANCES
THAT RISE FROM TIME TO TIME

MR. WHITE & MS. BEASLEY

MAKES CLASS FAR MORE SUBLIME

MR. WHITE

WELL, MR. JOHNSON
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?
ARE YOU ABLE TO MEET THE GRADE
OR MERELY PASS THE HAT?
ARE YOU AWARE OF ALL THERE IS
IN GOVERNING A SCHOOL
OR MR. JOHNSON ARE YOU A FOOL?

MR. JOHNSON

Oh no, Mr. White.

(OH), I AM SURE THAT I CAN RISE
AND EVEN YOU I WILL SURPRISE
PLEASE DO NOT LOOK WITH NARROW EYES
I'M SURE YOU WILL AGREE
THAT YOU WERE ONCE LIKE ME

IT'S NOT EASY TO START AT THE TOP
WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AT THE BOTTOM
AND I KNOW YOU COULD GIVE ME THE CHOP
WHEN YOU'VE THE CARDS
AND I KNOW YOU'VE GOT 'EM
BUT PLEASE MR. WHITE
BE NICE AND REMEMBER
WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG
AND LIFE WAS SEPTEMBER
AND PLEASE MR. WHITE
PLEASE GRANT ME IF YOU WOULD
THIS ONE FIRST CHANCE TO DO GOOD

MR. WHITE

(to MS. BEASLEY)

Hmm. Well, Ms. Beasley, what do you think about this boy?

*MS. BEASLEY appraises MR.
JOHNSON again.*

MS. BEASLEY

Well...

HE'S BRIGHT AND MATURE
AND HE'LL GO FAR
AND IF I SMOKED
I'D OFFER HIM A CIGAR
HE'S CLEAN AS A WHISTLE

MS. BEASLEY (Continued)

AND NOT PART OF A MOB
AND SINCE WE'RE DESPERATE I'D SAY

MR. WHITE AND MS. BEASLEY

MR. JOHNSON YOU'VE GOT THE JOB TODAY!

MR. JOHNSON

(hardly believing his ears)

I have? That's wonderful! ... I've got the job?

MR. WHITE

If you want it.

MR. JOHNSON

If I want it? Gosh, Mr. White, you don't know how much I want it. Heck, I thought I was going to have to go back to New York and freeze my a... aunt fanny off there as usual next winter. Now, I can be socked in here by beautiful San Francisco fog instead!

MR. WHITE

That's the spirit. There's nothing quite like it in the world.

*HE extends his hand to MR.
JOHNSON.*

MS. BEASLEY

It just so happens one of our regular teachers, Mr. Pendergrass, took "ill" this morning and will have to be out for at least the entire semester. We need a replacement teacher right away and it looks like you're it.

MR. WHITE

Welcome aboard, Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you, Mr. White. Ms. Beasley.

*MR. WHITE walks over to his DESK
and rustles through some papers.
A class assignment form is found
and handed to MR. JOHNSON.*

MR. WHITE

Now then, Mr. Johnson. You'll be teaching an intermediate ESL class. You know the level. They've got the rudiments of English down. They just need to build on the basics.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, sir.

MR. WHITE

Your class will be in room 308. If you have any questions, please feel free to call on myself, Ms. Beasley or any other members of the staff. We'll be happy to assist you in any way that we can.

MR. WHITE looks at his watch.

MR. WHITE (Continued)

Hmm. It looks like class is about to start. You'll just have time to get to the Teacher's Room to meet your new colleagues and get ready for class. Ms. Beasley will show you the way.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you, sir.

MS. BEASLEY

Right this way, Mr. Johnson.

MS. BEASLEY holds open the door for MR. JOHNSON who exits. MR. WHITE gives MS. BEASLEY the A-OK sign who returns it in kind.

(Blackout)

ACT I

Scene II

Setting: Roosevelt Jr. High - Hallway

At Rise: STUDENTS chatter in myriad languages as THEY make their way to class.

MS. BEASLEY shows MR. JOHNSON to a door whose sign reads, "Teachers' Room."

MS. BEASLEY

Right this way, Mr. Johnson. This is the "Teachers' Room."

MR. JOHNSON

(awed)

Gosh. The "Teachers' Room."

MS. BEASLEY opens the door. Inside the TEACHERS are preparing for class around a long, wooden table. MS. NEILSEN with flowery bonnet on her head is diligently running off copies of classroom assignments on the school copy machine while waiting her turn in line stands loud and proud MS. RODRIGUEZ, dressed in jeans and Mexican vest. SHE and MS. NEILSEN are chatting.

Across the room sorting through texts at the large, wooden bookshelf towers BILL DUGAN. A mountain of a man, his enormous features cannot conceal his professorial qualities.

In the center of the room at one end of the long teacher's table sits MR. DANIELS. Crisp and trim, HE is looking through his briefcase at a pernickety rate.

At the other end of the table is MR. ALBERT. A portly man with huge jowls and handlebar moustache. HE sits alone with coffee, donuts and newspaper.

The TEACHERS do not notice that MS. BEASLEY and MR. JOHNSON have entered. MS. BEASLEY clears her throat to announce MR. JOHNSON. The TEACHERS continue on with what they are doing. MS. BEASLEY clears her throat again. This time the TEACHERS come to attention.

MS. BEASLEY

(perfunctory)

Teachers. I'd like you to meet our new teacher, Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson will be taking over Mr. Pendergrass's classes, who due to "personal reasons" will not be with us this semester.

MR. DANIELS

You mean he had a nervous breakdown.

THE TEACHERS snicker.

MS. NEILSEN

(sighs)

It's a wonder we don't all have a nervous breakdown at one time or another what with all we have to contend with.

The TEACHERS murmur in agreement.

MS. BEASLEY

I trust everyone will assist Mr. Johnson in familiarizing himself with the rules and regulations of our school.

The TEACHERS stare blankly.

MS. BEASLEY (Continued)

And now, if everyone would join me in extending Mr. Johnson a rousing welcome to Roosevelt Junior High.

The TEACHERS respond unenthusiastically.

TEACHERS

Welcome.

MR. JOHNSON

(awkward)

Thank you.

MS. BEASLEY turns to Mr. Johnson.

MS. BEASLEY

Now, Mr. Johnson, you're in good hands. (indicating MR. DUGAN) Mr. Dugan here will show you the textbooks you'll be using. I'll be back before the bell rings.

MR. JOHNSON nods anxiously as MS. BEASLEY exits. HE looks up a bit dumbfounded at his newfound colleagues.

MR. JOHNSON

(awkward)

It's very nice to meet you all.

A strained silence follows cut mercifully short by MR. DUGAN who hands a textbook to his tongue-tied colleague.

MR. DUGAN

Hi, I'm Bill Dugan. You can call me Bill. This is the textbook you'll be using in your class.

MR. JOHNSON accepts the book gratefully.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you.

(looks at the title)

Hmm. "In America." How interesting.

MR. DUGAN

(matter-of-fact)

They're all the same really. In every chapter, in addition to a grammar point and vocabulary list, there's a real-life situation that the students will most likely encounter. You know, like taking the bus, making a doctor's appointment, filling out a job application...

MR. ALBERT peers up from his newspaper.

MR. ALBERT

Fat chance of that happening.

MR. DANIELS slams down his briefcase.

MR. DANIELS

(indignant)

Well, maybe not at the beginning levels where you teach, Mr. Albert, but you can bet that my students are getting ready for the real world, and that includes learning how to fill out a job application!

Murmurs of agreement from the other teachers. MR. ALBERT shrugs and returns to his newspaper.

MR. JOHNSON offers up a hopefully more benign topic of conversation.

MR. JOHNSON

(to MR. DUGAN)

I was wondering... Mr. Dugan..., why is it that they call this school Roosevelt Jr. High School if it's really part of the community college system?

Before HE can respond, MS. NEILSEN barges in.

MS. NEILSEN

That's because, Mr. Johnson, for seventy-five years, this used to be a Junior High School, but when the demographics of the city changed, the school was closed. In the mid-1970's, however, when a new wave of immigrants came to the United States after the end of the Vietnam War, this neighborhood was revitalized, and the school was reopened, this time as an Adult School teaching English as a Second Language, or ESL, to newcomers from all around the world. And although now an Adult School, the neighborhood rallied to keep the original name of the school, and the Board agreed, so the name, Roosevelt Junior High, has never changed.

MS. NEILSEN is clearly pleased with her brilliant account of the school's history. MR. DUGAN can only concur.

MR. DUGAN

That's... right... Ms. Neilsen.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Well, you know, that's what the neighborhood wanted. I went to school here, too, then.

MR. DANIELS

Nostalgia, you know.

MR. ALBERT

Yes, nostalgia. But what were they thinking? I mean you have to agree. It is a funny name for an Adult School, Roosevelt Junior High.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

It's better than Mr. Albert.

MS. NEILSEN

I don't know. I kind of like it, too. It reminds me of when I was in junior high school.

MR. ALBERT

Now, that must have been a long time ago, eh, Ms. Neilsen?

MS. NEILSEN

Indeed, it was, Mr. Albert. Long enough to remember what gentleman is and how he's supposed to act.

MR. ALBERT bristles at this remark and returns to his newspaper. MR. JOHNSON, who has been hoping to avoid such local politics on his own first day at work says nothing. HE soon finds himself the topic of scrutiny though as MR. DANIELS steers the conversation his way.

MR. DANIELS

So, tell us, Mr. Johnson. How is it that you decided to teach English as a Second Language?

MR. JOHNSON

(thinking)

Well... you know, my grandmother taught English to displaced persons or "DPs" as she said they were called, the refugees from Europe, after World War II, and she said that it was a life-changing experience. The story always fascinated me, so I chose teaching ESL as my major in college.

The TEACHERS offer no comment to this account and MR. JOHNSON's exuberance soon fades away.

Uncomfortable with the silence, MR. JOHNSON turns the question around.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, if I may ask you the same question: Why is it that all of you have chosen to teach ESL, and how is it that you have been able to continue with the profession for so many years?

(up music: To Help Others On Their Way)

TEACHERS

IT'S WHAT WE DO
IT'S OUR REASON D'ETRE
IT'S OUR PURPOSE FOR BEING HERE
TO HELP OTHERS ON THEIR WAY

IT'S OUR LIFE'S WORK
IT BRINGS US OUR MONTHLY PAY
IT'S WHAT WE SWEAT AND PRAY FOR
TO HELP OTHERS ON THEIR WAY

TO HELP OTHERS ON THEIR WAY
AS THEY SAIL ACROSS THE SEA
LIKE SO MANY DID BEFORE THEM
TO THIS LAND OF JUBILEE

TO HELP OTHERS ON THEIR WAY
WHAT A LOVELY THOUGHT IT IS
TO SPEND A LIFE JUST DOING THAT
HELPING OTHERS ON THEIR WAY

AS OUR FOREFATHERS CAME FROM PLYMOUTH ROCK
AND OTHERS CAME FROM SPAIN
WHILE OTHERS MADE THE JOURNEY HERE
WRACKED IN SLAVERY'S CHAINS

THE NEW WORLD WAS FORBIDDING
WITH ITS SUDDEN WEALTH AND GAIN
BUT SOON THEY GOT THEIR FOOTING
AS OTHERS HELPED THEM ON THEIR WAY
AND WE DO THE SAME TODAY

The BELL RINGS and MS. BEASLEY re-enters the room to rally the troops.

MS. BEASLEY

Alright teachers. It's show time. Get your books, pencils and attendance sheets together. Have a great class, send any problems that might come up to Mr. White's office and don't forget to take the roll.

The TEACHERS begin to file out.

MS. BEASLEY (Continued)

And remember, no eating, drinking, gum chewing or phone pagers in the classrooms.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

(exits muttering)

Yeah, yeah, and all that jazz.

MS. BEASLEY turns to MR. JOHNSON to hand him his attendance sheet.

MS. BEASLEY

Mr. Johnson, here is your attendance sheet. (kindly) Good luck.

HE takes the attendance sheet from MS. BEASLEY.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you.

MR. ALBERT

Yes, good luck, Mr. Johnson. You'll need it. Out of the frying pan and into the fire, I always say.

MR. JOHNSON is a bit shaken by this remark as HE exits the Teacher's Room to begin his first day of class.

(Blackout)

ACT I**Scene III**

Setting: The School Hallway

At Rise: There is a great buzzas STUDENTS and TEACHERS make their way through the hallway.

Lurking nearby, the THUG BOYS watch and wait.

As the final BELL RINGS, MR. JOHNSON stumbles through the Hall clutching his attendance sheet. His first teaching assignment, so long sought after, and at last achieved, now seems an impossible task. Spying the rookie teacher, the THUG BOYS begin to mock him.

MR. JOHNSON

Oh me, oh my. What shall I say? Can I do this job today?

(up music: Teacher Panic)

MR. JOHNSON

THE BELL'S ALREADY RUNG
THE CLASS HAS JUST BEGUN
IS THERE A PLACE TO RUN?
OH CAN THIS JOB BE DONE?

IT'S SO CLEAR
IT IS SO SCARY
HOW CAN ONE JOB
BE SO HAIRY AND NIGH?

COULD I HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN?
SHOULD I THIS JOB HAVE TAKEN?
MIGHT I HAVE MOVED TOO FAST?
CAN I STAY IN THE PAST?

THUG BOYS

TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC

TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC

TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC

MR. JOHNSON (Cont.)

ALL THE WALLS
THEY FEEL SO CLOSE
MAYBE I'LL JUST BE
A MOSEYING ALONG

THUG BOYS (Cont.)

TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC

MR. JOHNSON

FOR FOUR LONG YEARS I'VE STUDIED HARD TO PLEASE
BUT NOW I FEEL A TREMBLING IN MY KNEES
AND SO I WONDER IF I CAN THE DANCE
OH WELL, MAYBE I'LL JUST MOVE TO FRANCE

*MR. JOHNSON approaches the
classroom door. The Room Number
308 hangs on the door ominously.*

MR. JOHNSON

BEFORE ME COMES THE DOOR
THAT I'VE NOT SEEN BEFORE
OH WILL I MAKE THE GRADE?
WHEN I WALK ON THE STAGE?

THUG BOYS

TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC
TEACHER PANIC TEACHER PANIC

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

ALL THE WORLD IT SEEMS SO LARGE
WHY DO I FEEL NOW I CAN'T TAKE CHARGE
WHERE CAN I CATCH AN OUTBOUND BARGE AWAY
BUT LIKE THEY SAID,
"MR. JOHNSON YOU'VE GOT THE JOB TODAY!"

*As the THUG BOYS exit, a great
sense of resolve sweeps over MR.
JOHNSON who summoning up all of
his courage, slowly opens the
classroom door that will lead
him to his destiny.*

(Blackout)

ACT I

Scene IV

Setting: Room 308

At Rise: Immigrant STUDENTS from around the world sit expectantly at their DESKS as MR. JOHNSON enters.

MR. JOHNSON steps up to the LECTERN to greet his STUDENTS.

MR. JOHNSON

Good morning class.

STUDENTS

(in unison)

Good morning, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON writes his name on the blackboard.

MR. JOHNSON

My name is... Thomas Johnson.

HE turns to the class.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

It's very nice to meet you.

STUDENTS

(in unison)

It's very nice to meet you, too.

MR. JOHNSON is a bit startled by this second chorale response.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, now then students, since we're all new here today... (at least I know I am), I thought it might be nice for us to get to know each other a bit. You know, who you are, where you're from, what you hope to achieve in class... anything, anything at all.

The STUDENTS sit silent.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, maybe I should start. My name is Thomas Johnson. I'm from Manhattan, New York. My father is a doctor, and my mother is an author of children's books. My hobbies are film and travel and I'm looking forward to working with all of you here this semester. Now how about you?

The STUDENTS remain silent. MR. JOHNSON is perplexed.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Anyone? (no response) Surely there must be somebody who has something they'd like to share with the class.

The STUDENTS remain silent.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(slightly desperate)

Anyone? Anything?

One beautiful, young Chinese woman, MEI LI, rises slowly from her DESK in response to MR. JOHNSON's pitiful plea.

MEI LI

Do not despair, teacher. We will tell you.

(up music: Student Introduction Song)

STUDENTS

DEAREST TEACHER
WE WILL TELL YOU OF US WHAT WE CAN
WE ARE WITNESS TO THE SLAUGHTER
THAT PERVADES ALL MAN

WE WERE AFRAID
OH YES, WE WERE AFRAID

WE BEAR SILENT TESTIMONY
TO THE FALLING REIGN
WE FORGIVE THEM FOR THEIR FAILINGS
THOUGH WE BEAR THE PAIN
WE WERE AFRAID
OH YES, WE WERE AFRAID

MR. JOHNSON

(relieved)

I see. Well, now class, let's hear your stories.

*HE points to a group of LATIN
STUDENTS; RICO, ROSETTA, JOSE
and ENRIQUE.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Why don't we start here?

LATIN STUDENTS

WE CAME FROM SOUTH OF THE BORDER
WHERE THE SOLDIERS DESTROYED LAW AND ORDER
WITH MACHETES THEY DREW IN THE AIR
SO WE FOUGHT AND WE DRAGGED OURSELVES HERE
AI YAI YAI YAI
YAI YAI YAI
OLE

MR. JOHNSON points to RICO.

MR. JOHNSON

How about you, young man?

*RICO steps forward to the
clicking of castanets.*

RICO

MY NAME IS RICO
I COME FROM PUERTO RICO
MY LIFE IS SPICY
LIKE THE SWEAT UPON MY BROW

*RICO takes ROSETTA by the hand
to introduce her.*

RICO (Continued)

THIS IS ROSETTA
SHE COMES FROM NICARAGUA
SHE DANCES PRETTY
WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

*ROSETTA struts brazenly across
the classroom floor before
halting tantalizingly close to
MR. JOHNSON.*

ROSETTA

I AM ROSETTA
I COME FROM NICARAGUA
YES, I DANCE PRETTY
WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN
I'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU
A NICARAGUAN MAMBO
IT'S THE HOTTEST DANCE
IN MY COUNTRY THIS YEAR

*ROSETTA dances and the other
LATIN STUDENTS join in. When
they finish, MR. JOHNSON calls
to one of the students.*

MR. JOHNSON

You, sir. What is your name?

JOSE flashes the thumbs-up sign.

JOSE

My name is Jose.

MR. JOHNSON

Jose... And where are you from?

JOSE

I'm from El Salvador.

MR. JOHNSON

El Salvador. I see. Well now, tell me Jose. Why did you come to this country?

JOSE

Why did I come to this country? Well, teacher, I'll tell you.

(up music)

LATIN STUDENTS

WELL, THE GUNS IN THE TOWN
THEY WERE SOON ALL AROUND
THERE WAS SCREAMING
WHEN THE BAD SOLDIERS CAME
AND THEY CHASED US AGAIN
IN THE EVENING

SO, WE GOT OUT OF THERE
AND WE MADE OUR WAY HERE
TO EL NORTE
WHERE THE MOON AND THE STARS
AND THE WOMEN AND CARS
ARE SO SPORTY

ALL STUDENTS

WE WERE AFRAID
OH YES, WE WERE AFRAID
WE WERE AFRAID
OH YES, WE WERE AFRAID

The LATIN STUDENTS join ranks.

LATIN STUDENTS

NOW WE CAME HERE TO LEARN
 AND HOPEFULLY EARN SOME DINERO
 AND WE WEAR OUR BERETS
 AND PARADE LIKE A GAY DESPERADO
 BUT WITHIN US NO LIE
 WE ARE TREMBLING INSIDE
 AUTOMATIC
 WANNA FLAP LIKE A BIRD
 'CUS WE CAN'T FIND THE WORDS
 ONLY STATIC

ALL STUDENTS

WE ARE AFRAID
 OH YES, WE ARE AFRAID
 WE ARE AFRAID
 OH YES, WE ARE AFRAID

MR. JOHNSON

Well, in this class there's no need to be afraid. In here, you are safe. I promise.

The STUDENTS grow quiet at this pronouncement. The LATIN STUDENTS return to their seats. MR. JOHNSON surveys the classroom.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

What about some of the other students? What is your story? Tell me, please. I want to know you all.

MEI LI, the beautiful young student who had previously risen to MR. JOHNSON's aid greets him now with an ancient Chinese melody.

MEI LI

MY NAME IS MEI LI
 I WANT YOU TO KNOW
 I CAME FROM CHINA
 ALMOST SEVEN WEEKS AGO
 I AM SO EAGER TO DO SO WELL
 MR. JOHNSON, HOW DO YOU DO?

MR. JOHNSON is touched by the young woman's sincerity and nods to her kindly as SHE resumes her seat.

MR. JOHNSON

I'm fine, Mei Li. Thank you. *(moving on)* Alright. Anyone else?

From one corner of the room, the RUSSIAN and UKRAINIAN STUDENTS, LAVONNA, FANYA, JOSEF and VLADIMIR begin humming a traditional Russian melody. LAVONNA, middle-aged and weather-beaten steps forward.

(up Russian music)

LAVONNA

MY NAME IS LAVONNA
FROM UKRAINE, I TELL YOU
LIVING HERE IN AMERICA
A DREAM THAT HAS COME TRUE
I LOVE AMERICA
IT'S (A) LAND WHERE YOU CAN DO
ALL THAT FREEDOM WILL ALLOW
IT'S (A) PLACE FOR ME AND YOU

At this the RUSSIAN STUDENTS rise and begin to waltz to a delightful Russian folk melody. When finished, THEY return to their DESKS.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you. That was very nice. *(beat as HE surveys the class)*
What about from Vietnam? I know we have some students from Vietnam because I read the attendance sheet and I saw two Vietnamese names on it. Now don't be shy. How about it? Does anyone have a story they'd like to share with the class?

NGUYEN TRAN, a young Vietnamese-American youth with slicked back hair and shirt-tail hung fashionably loose slinks brashly to the middle of the floor.

*Standing self-assured, HE eyes
SOPANNY, the tiny, wide-eyed
girl from Laos, dressed in a
long, bright, flowery dress.
Seeking to impress her, HE
blasts forth an Elvis-inspired
blues rendition of his life.*

(up early rock and roll music)

NGUYEN TRAN

MY NAME IS NGUYEN TRAN
FROM THE PLACE YOU ALL KNOW WELL
I WAS SCRITCHING AND A-SCRATCHING
JUST THIS SIDE OF HELL
WHEN A NUMBER ONE JOE BOY
(TURNS OUT HE WAS MY DADDY)
FREED ME FROM THAT SMELL

WHEN I WAS SMALL
IN THE STREETS OF SAIGON I DID PLAY
WHEN THE GI'S LEFT
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY
MY DADDY TOOK ME TO KENTUCKY
(NOW THAT WAS COOL)
WE WOUND UP HERE IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY

MR. JOHNSON

Kentucky? You do seem to have a bit of a southern accent there,
Tran.

NGUYEN TRAN

Yes, teacher. Tha' becau' I lived in Kentucky for two yea'.

MR. JOHNSON

I see. Well, it's very nice.

NGUYEN TRAN

Thank you, teacher.

The STUDENTS all rise and sing.

STUDENTS

NOW WE'RE HERE IN THIS LAND
 WHERE WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND
 WHAT THEY'RE SAYING
 SO WE CAME TO THIS SCHOOL
 TO GATHER THE TOOLS
 TO SUCCEED WITH

NOW WE SEE YOU ARE HERE
 IN THE SPOTLIGHT SO CLEAR
 OF THIS CLASSROOM
 AND WE WAIT FOR OUR TURN
 AND HOPE WE CAN LEARN
 FOR TOMORROW

*MR. JOHNSON offers a sympathetic
 look to his STUDENTS as HE
 passes among them.*

*Having come full-circle, ALL
 sing the final refrain.*

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS

WE'RE NOT AFRAID
 OH NO, WE'RE NOT AFRAID
 WE'RE NOT AFRAID
 OH NO, WE'RE NOT AFRAID
 WE'RE NOT AFRAID
 OH NO, WE'RE NOT AFRAID

*The STUDENTS and MR. JOHNSON
 return to their places at their
 perspective DESKS and LECTERN.*

MR. JOHNSON

Well, class, it's very nice to meet you all. I look forward to getting to know you more as the semester proceeds. (*HE surveys the class.*) Now there were a few students who didn't get a chance to introduce themselves. Perhaps if they could do so now...

HE points to SOPANNY

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

You miss, in the flowery dress, what is your name?

SOPANNY

Sopanny.

MR. JOHNSON

Sopanny. And where are you from, Sopanny?

SOPANNY

I'm from Laos. When I was small, I used to play with the rain.

MR. JOHNSON

That's a nice story, Sopanny. You know the US and Laos have a long history of friendship. Many of your Hmong and Mien tribes people helped our soldiers during the Vietnam War. Thank you.

SOPANNY

Yes, my uncle was in that war.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, thank your uncle for his service, Sopanny.

SOPANNY

Thank you, teacher, but he was on the side of the Communi'.

MR. JOHNSON

Oh! (pause) Well, welcome to the class anyway.

*The STUDENTS laugh at this.
SOPANNY smiles. MR. JOHNSON
calls on a sweet, older Russian
woman sitting beside LAVONNA.
This is FANYA and SHE speaks in
a thick, Russian accent.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And you, ma'am, what is your name?

FANYA

My name Fanya.

MR. JOHNSON

I see. Your name is Fanya. And you must be from Russia.

FANYA

Da.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, it's very nice to meet you.

FANYA

It's very nice to meet you, too, teacher. I have good feeling about you. You will be good teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, thank you, Fanya. I hope so.

FANYA smiles. Near her is a middle-aged Russian gentleman wearing a wool cap on his head. This is JOSEF. MR. JOHNSON calls on him.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And you, sir. What is your name?

JOSEF

(Russian accent)

My name is Josef.

MR. JOHNSON

Josef... And what brings you to class today, Josef?

JOSEF

(shrugs)

To tell you truth, I don't know. At home I was doctor. Here, I am nobody. Perhaps I will again be somebody if I study English... I don't know.

MR. JOHNSON

(encouraging)

Well, that's nonsense. Of course, you are somebody. "Everybody is Somebody at Roosevelt Junior High." (with mirth) I know because I read it on a school-made poster inside the principal's office waiting room just this morning.

The STUDENTS laugh.

JOSEF

(giving in)

Hokay. (sic) I am somebody... Let me just say I am lost somebody here.

MR. JOHNSON

Fair enough. Well, maybe we can help you become "found" somebody here this semester.

The class laughs again. JOSEF shrugs.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And the tall gentleman in the back sitting by the window?

VLADIMIR

I am Vladimir.

MR. JOHNSON

Vladimir. (checking the attendance sheet) Yes, hello, Vladimir. How are things in Transylvania?

VLADIMIR

(puzzled)

Excuse me.

MR. JOHNSON dismisses his own ill-attempt at humor.

MR. JOHNSON

Oh, nothing... Well, welcome to the class, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR nods deeply to MR. JOHNSON, still a bit confused by the teacher's reference.

MR. JOHNSON calls next on an older Vietnamese gentleman who

*has been sitting quietly next to
NGUYEN TRAN. It is VUONG ANH.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And you, sir. What is your name?

VUONG ANH

My name is Vuong Anh.

MR. JOHNSON

Vuong Anh? You must be the other student from Vietnam whose name I saw on the attendance sheet. Is that right?

VUONG ANH

Yes, teacher. I am Chinese-Vietnamese. I speak Chinese and Vietnamese... and a little English.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, that's impressive. As for me, I only speak one language... English. I wish I knew more.

The STUDENTS laugh.

JOSE

More English?

MR. JOHNSON

No, more languages in general, Jose. I only speak one language, English. You know the way it works. You students are here to learn this country's language and culture. When I go to your country, you can teach me your language and culture, but right now we're here in America, so...

MR. JOHNSON searches the room.

MR. JOHNSON

And one more student. You sir, what's your name?

ENRIQUE answers softly.

ENRIQUE

My name is Enrique.

MR. JOHNSON

Enrique. And where are you from, Enrique?

ENRIQUE

I am from Mexico.

MR. JOHNSON

Really? What part of Mexico?

ENRIQUE

It is a small village in the state of Sonora in the Northwest of Mexico. My father and I used to pick fruit in the big orchards there but when the cartels started to become more powerful, we got caught in the middle of the drug wars, so we got out of there quick and made our way to Fresno, CA, where we picked fruit for a few seasons. Afterwards, when we found a cousin who lives here in San Francisco, we came here. We like it here. It's very peaceful.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, San Francisco is nice, isn't it? Well, welcome, Enrique. Of course, many of our farmworkers come from Mexico. They've been coming here for years, in fact, since here was there.

The students laugh.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

But enough of that. As for me, this is my first time teaching at Roosevelt Junior High or anywhere, really.

The STUDENTS gasp. MR. JOHNSON goes to the blackboard.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

I hope that things go well. If I make any mistakes, just let me know. Now as I said before, my name is...

HE writes his name, "Thomas Johnson."

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

... Thomas Johnson. Now you can call me Thomas or Mr. Johnson, or perhaps this being an adult class... Tom. Whichever you prefer. Just please don't call me Tommy. My big sister used to call me Tommy and well, let's just say, it's not my favorite name...

The STUDENTS grow quiet and cast their eyes downward at this discourse.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

What's this? Is there some problem here? Now don't be shy.

MEI LI raises her hand.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, Mei Li.

MEI LI

Excuse me. But in my country, we always call our teacher, "Teacher."

ROSETTA quickly confirms this.

ROSETTA

Si, in my country, too. We say "Teacher." It is a sign of respect.

RICO pipes in.

RICO

Yes, we, too. It's the same in my country.

LAVONNA

So in mine, too.

SOPANNY

And in mine!

The STUDENTS murmur in agreement. MR. JOHNSON is taken aback by this commotion.

MR. JOHNSON

(to himself)

Teacher. Teacher. (then aloud) Well, it is a little unusual in this country to call one's teacher, "Teacher." But one thing about this class is that we're here not only to learn about the American language and culture, but from each other's as well, and I suppose that includes me, so... Alright then. Teacher it shall be!

Everyone is pleased at this decision. The BELL rings.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, class. That's all the time we have for today.

HE holds up the textbook, an ESL Reader, which like this musical is entitled, "In America" and opens it to the assigned pages.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Please read the first chapter in our new textbook, "In America," entitled, "Getting to Know You" and do the exercises that follow on pages 1-5. We'll review them next class.

Some open their textbooks briefly to locate the exercises as THEY gather their items.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Any questions?

The STUDENTS have none.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Any answers?

The STUDENTS have none.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, I hope you'll have a few by the end of the semester.
Nice meeting you, see you tomorrow, and don't forget to do your homework.

STUDENTS

(in unison)

Have a nice day, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON takes his place at his DESK as his STUDENTS gather up their belongings.

RICO

See you tomorrow, teacher.

ROSETTA

(flirty)

Goodbye, teacher.

VUONG ANH, NGUYEN TRAN and SOPANNY approach.

VUONG ANH

(bowing lowly)

Goodbye, Teacher. It is an honor to meet you.

MR. JOHNSON

(bowing slightly in return)

Well, it's very nice to meet you too, Vuong Anh.

NGUYEN TRAN

(mischievous)

Goodbye, Mr. Johnson. You number one, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

(chuckling)

Well, thank you, Tran. And you are number one student, too, I'm sure.

THEY exit. Now all have left
save *MEI LI* who has been
standing off to one side of the
room. Slowly, *SHE* approaches.

MEI LI

Goodbye, teacher. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON

You're welcome, Mei Li. See you tomorrow?

MEI LI

Oh, yes.

MR. JOHNSON

That's fine. Don't forget to do your homework.

MEI LI

Yes, I will. I mean, I won't. Goodbye teacher.

MEI LI runs out in a fluster.
MR. JOHNSON finds her behavior
odd but quickly dismisses it as
HE absent-mindedly picks up his

ATTENDANCE SHEET from the
LECTERN.

Returning to his *DESK*. *HE* starts
to reflect on the day's events,
and his newly bestowed moniker.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(softly to himself)

Teacher.

HE speaks the word a bit louder,
still getting used to it.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Teacher. They call me "Teacher."

(up music: Song: They Call Me Teacher)

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER THOUGHT
THAT I COULD BE A SOMETHING?
THERE WERE SO MANY TIMES
I THOUGHT I'D BE A NOTHING
BUT NOW I LOOK AROUND ME
THERE'S A BRAND-NEW KIND OF CREATURE
SHH! THEY CALL ME TEACHER

IT SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY
THAT I WAS LOST IN WONDER
A STORY WITHOUT AN END
THAT I COULD ONLY PONDER
BUT NOW THAT TALE IS OVER
THERE'S A BRAND-NEW DOUBLE FEATURE
SHH! THEY CALL ME TEACHER

CHOOSE THAT TEXT
AND PLAN THE CLASSES
RUN THOSE COPIES
WRITE THOSE PASSES
GIVE THE HOMEWORK
DON'T TAKE SASSES

*The STUDENTS re-enter the
classroom, college dress and
textbooks at the ready.*

STUDENTS

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER THOUGHT
THAT HE COULD BE A SOMETHING?
THERE WERE SO MANY TIMES
HE THOUGHT HE'D BE A NOTHING
BUT NOW WE LOOK AROUND HIM
THERE'S A BRAND-NEW KIND OF CREATURE
SHH! WE CALL HIM TEACHER

HH! THEY CALL ME TEACHER

VUONG ANH

A BRAND-NEW CHANCE AT LIFE
HOW CAN WE EVER THANK HIM?

MEI LI

I'D LIKE TO BE HIS WIFE

NGUYEN TRAN

THE THOUGHT IS TOO EXCITNING (sic)

JOSE

I DIG THAT CRAZY CHALK DUST
IT'S BETTER THAN A REEFER

STUDENTS

SHH! WE CALL HIM TEACHER

MR. JOHNSON

OUT OF THE BOOKS AND INTO THE FIRE
THAT'S WHAT COMES FROM ALL THAT HIGHER LEARNING
YEARS AND YEARS OF STUDY IT TOOK
ALWAYS BURIED IN A BOOK AND YEARNING
TO BE A TEACHER
TO BE A TEACHER
NOW I'M A TEACHER

The music continues and MR. JOHNSON surprises the STUDENTS with a few steps of his own. When it is over, THEY gather around their teacher as if to attend a lecture. Some of the STUDENTS begin to chatter.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

STUDENTS WAITING
ALL ASSEMBLED
HOPE MY CLASSES
WON'T BE TOO DULL

MR. JOHNSON points to the disruptive STUDENTS.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

TRY TO REACH HIM
TRY TO REACH HER

(shushes them.)

SHH!

The STUDENTS stop their chatter.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

THEY CALL ME TEACHER

*A blanket of fog sweeps across
the stage as MR. JOHNSON leaps
onto his DESK.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

OUT OF THE FOG AND INTO THE LIGHT
WALKING ON TOP AND DOING IT RIGHT AWAY
PICKING UP TIME AND HAVING A BALL
LOOKS LIKE WE CAN HAVE IT ALL TODAY
THEY CALL ME TEACHER

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

THEY CALL ME TEACHER
THEY CALL ME...

*It is now the STUDENTS' turn to
shush their over-exuberant
teacher.*

STUDENTS

SHH!

MR. JOHNSON

(whispered)

TEACHER.

(Blackout)

ACT I

Scene V

Setting: In a nearby park, we see Roosevelt Junior High school in the background. Charming Victorian houses line the streets.

At Rise: The STUDENTS are discussing their new teacher.

RICO

What do you think of the new teacher, Rosetta?

ROSETTA

(dreamily)

I like him bery (sic) much. He's bery (sic) handsome.

JOSE looks sideways at ROSETTA.

JOSE

You think all the men are handsome, Rosetta.

ROSETTA

Oh, no. Only the handsome ones, (turning to Rico) eh, Rico?

RICO brightens at this remark.

RICO

You think I am handsome, Rosetta?

ROSETTA

Oh, (j)yes (sic) Rico. You are bery (sic) handsome, too.

RICO smiles shyly. ROSETTA notices that ENRIQUE is unusually quiet and whispers to RICO.

ROSETTA

Psst... Hey Rico, what's the matter with Enrique?

RICO

I don't know. (to Enrique) Hey, Enrique, que pasa?

ENRIQUE

Oh dios. I don't want to tell you. It's too bad. I am ashamed to say.

ROSETTA

Come on, Enrique. We are your friends. Tell us.

JOSE

Yeah, come on, homey. Tell us.

ENRIQUE is hesitant but then blurts out the news.

ENRIQUE

It's my father. He was picked up last week by the local police because he was delivering a load of peaches in a truck with a broken taillight. The police called ICE who told the police to hold him and now they are going to deport him as an illegal.

ROSETTA

But he's been here for years. How can they deport him for that?

JOSE

It's because he's Mexican.

RICO

Callate, (shut up) Jose! You just have to be strong, Enrique. It can happen to any of us anytime. That's why we have to stay in the shadows.

ROSETTA and JOSE nod their heads in agreement. ENRIQUE is silent.

SOPANNY remains focused on her goal.

SOPANNY

I hope teacher teach me better English.

NGUYEN TRAN

No problem. He number one teacher.

LAVONNA

(nods to Fanya who returns the gesture)

I think so, too.

MEI LI

He will. I'm sure of it.

JOSE

How you can be so sure?

MEI LI

I don't know. I just am.

NGUYEN TRAN

Well, whatever. I' for sure we need it. People sometime' break my ball when they don' understand my English.

JOSEF

Break your ball? What is that?

NGUYEN TRAN

Mean they give you very hard time. They say that a lot back in Kentucky.

JOSEF

(thinking)

Hmm. Maybe is like Russia. But in Russia say, "We break your head."

NGUYEN TRAN shrugs.

VUONG ANH

(humble)

I cannot say about you, but I know that I am just grateful to be here.

The OTHERS murmur in agreement.

LAVONNA

Da. Here in America is freedom.

FANYA

Is democracy.

ROSETTA

Is many bery (sic) handsome men.

The others look at ROSETTA as if she's a broken record. VUONG ANH begins to sing.

(up music: America America)

VUONG ANH

AMERICA SO VERY BIG
AMERICA SO GRAND
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
IT'S EVERYBODY'S LAND

I THOUGHT MY LIFE WAS FADING FAST
WHEN I WAS IN MY COUNTRY
SO MANY WARS THEY CAME AND WENT
AND I WAS LEFT IN MISERY
AND I WEPT

NGUYEN TRAN

FOR DAYS ON END

VUONG ANH

AND SOMETIMES I WOULD SEE THE BOATS
AS THEY SAILED OFF TO THAILAND
AND EVERYDAY I HOPED AND PRAYED
THAT ONE DAY I'D BE ON 'EM
AND ESCAPE

NGUYEN TRAN

TO THE PROMISED LAND

ALL STUDENTS

AMERICA SO VERY BIG
AMERICA SO GRAND
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
IT'S EVERYBODY'S LAND

ALL STUDENTS

AMERICA SO VERY BIG
AMERICA SO GRAND
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
IT'S EVERYBODY'S LAND

VUONG ANH

AND WHEN AT LAST I SAW MY CHANCE
MY FAMILY I COLLECTED
AND FINAL HONORS BOWED AND PRAYED
TO ANCESTORS RESPECTED
AND WE LEFT

NGUYEN TRAN

AT HIGHEST TIDE

VUONG ANH

ON STORMY SEAS WE TOOK ALOFT
MY FAMILY SCARED AND CRYING
THE SOLDIERS, PIRATES ALL BE DAMNED
AT LAST THE SUN WAS SHINING
AND WE LANDED

NGUYEN TRAN

IN A CAMP

*VUONG ANH throws up his hands in
exasperation.*

ALL STUDENTS

AMERICA SO VERY BIG
AMERICA SO GRAND
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
IT'S EVERYBODY'S LAND

VUONG ANH

FOR FIVE LONG YEARS WE WAITED
FOR THE RED CROSS TO AGREE
THEY CLASSIFIED MY FAMILY
AS A GROUP OF REFUGEES
AND WE WAITED

NGUYEN TRAN

AND WAITED AND WAITED

VUONG ANH nods in agreement.

VUONG ANH

AND FINALLY THE DAY IT CAME
WHEN WE WERE ALL SET FREE
AND PASSPORTS, VISAS, ISSUED
TO THE LAND OF LIBERTY

(exalting)

AMERICA

NGUYEN TRAN

AT LAST AT LAST!

ALL STUDENTS

AMERICA SO VERY BIG
AMERICA SO GRAND
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
IT'S EVERYBODY'S LAND

VUONG ANH

I THANK MY GOD
MOST EVERYDAY

FOR BLESSINGS I'VE RECEIVED
I THANK HIM FOR THE CHANCE TO LIVE
IN TRUE DEMOCRACY
AMERICA

NGUYEN TRAN

IT'S A MIRACLE

VUONG ANH nods again.

VUONG ANH

AND SOMETIMES WHEN I MISS MY HOME
MY HOME ACROSS THE SEA
AMERICA, AMERICA
GOD SHED HIS GRACE ON THEE
AND I SMILE

NGUYEN TRAN

AND THANK AMERICA

VUONG ANH smiles broadly.

ALL STUDENTS

AMERICA SO VERY BIG
AMERICA SO GRAND
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
IT'S EVERYBODY'S LAND

*The STUDENTS conclude their
tribute to their newfound
country with a heartfelt
rendition of the final lines
from Irving Berlin's classic,
"America the Beautiful."*

SOPANNY

AND CROWN THY GOOD

ENRIQUE

WITH BROTHERHOOD

ALL STUDENTS

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

*The STUDENTS cheer. A warm glow
fills the air as THEY begin to go
their separate ways.*

JOSE

Okay you guys. See you mañana, huh? I have to get to my job at
the restaurant.

*JOSE is followed by ENRIQUE who
offers a slight wave to the
others as THEY exit. RICO calls
to them.*

RICO

Hasta mañana, Jose. Adios Enrique. (to ROSETTA) Vamos Rosetta?

ROSETTA

Okay. (to others) Bye.

THEY exit.

VUONG ANH bows.

VUONG ANH

I, too, must take my leave. Until our next meeting.

JOSEF

Goodbye. Have a nice day.

VUONG ANH exits followed by NGUYEN TRAN, SOPANNY and MEI LI. THEY stand off to one side of the stage. The RUSSIAN STUDENTS remain. VLADIMIR and FANYA begin to speak in their native tongue while JOSEF and LAVONNA translate into English.

VLADIMIR

Eta bil prikrasni orok.

JOSEF

(It was a wonderful class.)

FANYA

Da. Uchitsel priyanich.

LAVONNA

(Yes, the teacher is nice.)

THEY chuckle.

VLADIMIR

Shto ti sobirayahasya dialet sivodnya?

JOSEF

(What are you going to do today?)

FANYA

Ya idu damoy gatovitz abyet.

LAVONNA

(I'm going home to cook.)

From upper stage left enter a RUSSIAN AMERICAN MAN and RUSSIAN AMERICAN WOMAN who enter and stop and observe the immigrants.

RUSSIAN AMERICAN WOMAN

Look at those women. One of them is younger than the other, yet they both remind me of my grandmother.

RUSSIAN AMERICAN MAN

I know. Every time I hear Russian it reminds me of when I was a little boy. My grandparents used to speak it all the time.

RUSSIAN AMERICAN WOMAN

Mine did, too. And if they weren't speaking it, they were always telling me about it. You know... life in the old country this... life in the old country that...

THEY chuckle.

RUSSIAN AMERICAN MAN

You know, it's funny. We're so different from this new group of immigrants... yet we're so alike.

RUSSIAN AMERICAN WOMAN

(marveling)

Yeah. Ain't it the truth.

(up music: Who Are These People From Russia?)

RUSSIAN AMERICAN WOMAN

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

RUSSIAN AMERICAN MAN

BRAVING BREAD LINES IN THE SNOWY DEPTHS OF WINTER
FACING TRIALS AND DESPAIR ON EVERY HAND
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA?
WOULD WE TOO NOT HAVE SAILED FOR BETTER LANDS?

*The RUSSIAN AMERICAN MAN and
RUSSIAN AMERICAN WOMAN return
upstage left as the RUSSIAN
STUDENTS walk upstage right to
rejoin their classmates.*

Enter lower stage left a young CHINESE AMERICAN MAN and CHINESE AMERICAN WOMAN. Enter lower stage right, an older CHINESE IMMIGRANT MAN and CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMAN. The immigrants, dressed in poorer clothing, begin to speak in their native language. Mei LI and NGUYEN TRAN step forward to translate.

CHINESE IMMIGRANT MAN

Gamyat hoyeet uh.

NGUYEN TRAN

(It's hot today.)

CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMAN

Fan doh okay hoyee yumpt
bui dong cha.

MEI LI

(When we get home, we can
drink some refreshing tea.)

CHINESE IMMIGRANT MAN

Yahm yuen jao fangong.

NGUYEN TRAN

(Finish your drink and then
it's back to work.)

CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMAN

Hai mei gwok jao hai gum
jo guh lu.

MEI LI

(In America, that's what you
do. Work hard and succeed.

The CHINESE IMMIGRANT MAN nods in agreement. The CHINESE AMERICAN COUPLE look to the CHINESE IMMIGRANTS and sing.

CHINESE AMERICAN MAN

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM CHINA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM CHINA?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

CHINESE AMERICAN WOMAN

THEY SAY THE DAYS WERE DARK BEFORE THE REVOLUTION
AFTER THAT MY FATHER SAID THINGS GOT MUCH WORSE
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM CHINA?
WOULD WE TOO NOT HAVE TRIED TO FLEE THAT CURSE?

*The CHINESE AMERICANS join the
RUSSIAN AMERICANS while the
CHINESE IMMIGRANTS join MEI LI
and NGUYEN TRAN.*

SHOPPING LADIES & CHINESE AMERICANS

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA, CHINA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA, CHINA?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

*Enter cigar smoking lower stage
left, CUBAN AMERICAN MAN
followed by CUBAN AMERICAN
WOMAN. From lower stage right
enter two CUBAN IMMIGRANTS ,
CUBAN IMMIGRANT #1 and CUBAN
IMMIGRANT #2. JOSE and ENRIQUE
translate.*

CUBAN IMMIGRANT #1

Que bola, acere? Que vuelta?

JOSE

(How are you, man? What's
up?)

CUBAN IMMIGRANT #2

Nada, monina. Lo mismo.
Todo igual.

ENRIQUE

(Nothing much, buddy. The
same. Everything's the
same.)

CUBAN IMMIGRANT #1

Tratando de cogerle la
vuelta.

JOSE

(Trying to adapt to this new
life.)

CUBAN IMMIGRANT #2

Si.

ENRIQUE

(Yes.)

The CUBAN AMERICANS sing.

CUBAN AMERICAN MAN

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM CUBA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM CUBA?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

CUBAN AMERICAN WOMAN

FROM THE FALLING GRIMY STREETS OF OLD HAVANA
TO THE GOLDEN SANDS THAT GRACE MIAMI SHORE
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM CUBA?
WOULD WE TOO NOT HAVE FACED THE CANNON'S ROAR?

*The CUBAN AMERICANS walk upstage
left to join their counterparts
while the CUBAN IMMIGRANTS join
RICO and ROSETTA and STUDENTS
upstage right.*

**SHOPPING LADIES, CHINESE & CUBAN
AMERICANS**

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA, CHINA, CUBA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA, CHINA, CUBA?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

*Enter lower stage left enter
sporting fine tweed suits and
new wool caps, two older Irish-
Americans, IRISH-AMERICAN MAN
and IRISH-AMERICAN WOMAN.*

*Enter lower stage right,
straight from Donegal, a young
Irish couple, an IRISH LAD and
IRISH LASS who speak in a lovely
Irish brogue.*

IRISH IMMIGRANT LAD

Ah, 'tis a brilliant day.

IRISH IMMIGRANT LASS

To be sure it beats the weather back in Donegal.

IRISH IMMIGRANT LAD

Donegal isn't so bad. Everything's there a man might need.

IRISH IMMIGRANT LASS

Everything but me.

THEY laugh as HE whirls her around. The IRISH AMERICANS exchange a knowing glance as the IRISH AMERICAN MAN begins to sing.

IRISH AMERICAN MAN

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM IRELAND?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM IRELAND?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

IRISH AMERICAN WOMAN

AH, THOSE BLACK DAYS OF THE GREAT POTATO FAMINE
SURE THE HUNGER STILL REMAINS HOW MANY DIED
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM IRELAND?
WOULD WE TOO NOT HAVE JOINED THE RISING TIDE?

The IRISH AMERICANS walk upstage left to join their counterparts while the IRISH IMMIGRANTS walk upstage right and do the same. ALL join together for the final refrain.

ALL

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA,
CHINA, CUBA, IRELAND?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA,
CHINA, CUBA, IRELAND?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

ALL

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA,
CHINA, CUBA, IRELAND?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE CROSS THE SEA?
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FROM RUSSIA,
CHINA, CUBA, IRELAND?
DON'T YOU KNOW THEY LOOK A LOT LIKE ME

The RUSSIAN, CHINESE, CUBAN AND IRISH AMERICANS exit while their IMMIGRANT counterparts remain.

Enter goose-stepping, the THUG BOYS. SPIKE, the Thug Boys Leader, raises his hand and the marching stops. HE wastes no time confronting the newcomers.

SPIKE

Look at 'em there. Damn foreigners - come to this country to destroy our country and tear down our American way of life. Well, that's not gonna happen. Not on our watch.

The THUG BOYS murmur in agreement. SPIKE turns away from the immigrants and throws an evil glare at the audience before beginning his low dirge.

(up music: The Thug Boys Song)

SPIKE

WE ARE THE GHASTLY CREW
WE KNOW WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU
WE DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO
CHARLIE

THUG BOYS

(HUM)

SPIKE

WE LIVE IN TUMBLE DOWN
WHERE OUR SHIT DON'T TOUCH THE GROUND
WE KNOW WHAT'S UP AND DOWN
CHARLIE

THUG BOYS

(HUM)

The THUG BOYS begin to goose-step in place.

THUG BOYS (Continued)

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
WE RUN THE SHOW
WE'LL TELL YOU WHO CAN STAY
AND WHO MUST GO

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
THIS IS OUR TOWN

*The THUG BOYS seize several of
the IMMIGRANTS by the collar.*

THUG BOYS (Continued)

WE'LL BEAT YOU UP, BOYS
WE'LL KNOCK YOU DOWN

THEY push the IMMIGRANTS aside.

THUG BOYS (Continued)

OH, GET ON OUT OF, OH, GET ON OUT OF HERE
WE DIDN'T INVITE YOU
NOBODY ASKED YOU
SO, PACK YOUR BAGS AND GET RIGHT OUT OF HERE

OH, GET ON OUT OF, OH, GET ON OUT OF HERE
WE DIDN'T INVITE YOU
NOBODY ASKED YOU
SO, PACK YOUR BAGS AND GET RIGHT OUT OF HERE

*The IMMIGRANTS stand in fearful
silence bar the IRISH LAD who
raises his voice in protest.*

IRISH LAD

WHAT THESE MEN SAY
CAN'T BE TRUE OF US (JEER I)
THEY TOO WERE IMMIGRANTS (JEER II)

JEER I

GET OUT OF HERE
GET OUT OF HERE
WE DON'T WANT YOU
IS THAT CLEAR?

JEER II

LESS THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO
WITH A FIFE AND A BOW
AND A FIDDLER TO AND FRO
NOW THEY'D DENY US THE SAME (JEER I)
NOW THEY'D DENY US THE SAME (JEER II)

GET OUT OF HERE
GET OUT THE DOOR
WE DON'T WANT YOU
ANYMORE

THUG BOYS (Continued)

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
KNOW OUR NAME
WE'LL ROUND YOU UP AT NIGHT
WE HAVE NO SHAME

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
HEAR OUR CALL
WE'LL CLOSE THE BORDERS
WE'LL BUILD A WALL

WE KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT
WE KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT
IT'S NOT THE BLACK
IT'S JUST THE WHITE
WE KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT
WE KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT
AT SIX O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
YOU CAN'T HIDE
YOUR HORSE IS SADDLED UP
IT'S TIME TO RIDE

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
WE DON'T CARE
WE'LL SEND YOU BACK FROM WHERE YOU CAME
BACK OVER THERE

OVER THERE FROM WHERE YOU CAME
WE WILL SWEEP YOU DOWN THE DRAIN
STAY AWAY FROM OUR BACK DOOR
WE DON'T WANT YOU ANYMORE

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
WE REMAIN
OUR TIME IS COMING
WE'LL RISE AGAIN

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
DON'T YOU SEE
NOBODY WANTS YOU
DAMNED REFUGEES

The IRISH LAD again gives reply.

IRISH LAD

WHAT THESE MEN SAY
CAN'T BE TRUE OF US (JEER I)
THEY TOO WERE IMMIGRANTS

JEER I

GET OUT OF HERE
GET OUT OF HERE
WE DON'T WANT YOU
IS THAT CLEAR?

The THUG BOYS cut him off.

THUG BOYS

DON'T TELL US WE WERE IMMIGRANTS
THAT'S JUST A BUNCH OF COMMIE SHIT
SO, HURRY UP AND FLY AWAY
YOUR TIME WILL SOON BE NEARING

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
BOMBS AWAY
AS STORM CLOUDS GATHER
WE'LL HAVE OUR DAY

*The THUG BOYS turn and once again
face the audience menacingly.*

THUG BOYS (Continued)

WE ARE THE THUG BOYS
LOOK AROUND
WE'RE COMING TO YOUR BLOCK
TO YOUR HOMETOWN

*The THUG BOYS stand mean and
resolute. The IMMIGRANTS stare
back at them, disbelieving and
frightened.*

(Blackout)

ACT I
Scene VI

Setting: The Teacher's Room

At Rise: A Teacher's meeting.

The TEACHERS are chatting amiably away. MS. BEASLEY raps a ruler on the table to call them to order.

MS. BEASLEY

Alright, teachers, if you would please come to order. Mr. White has called this special meeting today because he has some very important that he wishes to say to everyone.

The TEACHERS quiet down.

MS. BEASLEY (Continued)

So, without further ado, Mr. White.

SHE smiles to MR. WHITE as HE grimly takes the LECTERN.

MR. WHITE

Teachers of Roosevelt Jr. High. There is in this country as I know you're aware, a crisis in education. Everywhere, schools are being closed as deeper and deeper budget cuts are making it virtually impossible to keep open the doors of institutions, which have traditionally offered sports, arts, music and ESL classes to students.

HE shoots a sharp look at the TEACHERS.

MR. WHITE (Continued)

Certainly, we are not immune to such actions being taken here. The State Accreditation Commission has made that clear. And don't think there aren't a lot of people who would be just as happy to send our students packing to whichever country it is they came from in the first place.

The TEACHERS shift nervously in their seats.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

(caustically)

Someone ought to put those crackpots on a boat and ship them back to wherever it is that they came from.

Some TEACHERS murmur or snicker at this remark.

MR. JOHNSON

But where would that be?

MR. ALBERT

(obtusely)

Argentina?

MR. DUGAN

You might have something there, Mr. Albert.

MS. NEILSEN

(exasperated)

Honestly. Our students have as much right to be here as anyone.

MR. DANIELS

(irate)

If we were to judge all those deserving to be here according to their overall merit, I am sure that many of our students would have even more right to be here than a lot of our own homegrown jackasses do.

MS. RODRIGUEZ (Continued)

"America for the Americans." That's a laugh. Hah! Have they taken a good look in the mirror lately? (hoots) That's a hoot! Hah! They don't look like Indians to me!

*The TEACHERS snicker. MS.
RODRIGUEZ rises from her seat
to expound further upon the
subject to the amusement of her
game colleagues.*

*(up music: They Don't Look Like
Indians To Me)*

MS. RODRIGUEZ (Continued)

BY THE SHORES OF GITCHE GUMEE
IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT I SAY THEN SUE ME
LIVED THE MAIDEN POCAHONTAS
WHOSE MEETING WITH JOHN SMITH
WOULD PROVE CALAMITOUS

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS
A PEACEFUL EXISTENCE
UNTIL THIS CHANGED AT
THE SETTLER'S INSISTENCE

AND NOW THEY WOULD CHASE
NEW SETTLER'S AWAY
CLAIM THIS LAND
AS THEIR CHALET
THEY PUT ON AIRS AND THEY MAKE A DISPLAY
BUT THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME (HAY-NA HAY-NA)
NO, THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME (HAY-NA HAY-NA 4X)

WHAT GIVES THEM THE REGAL RIGHT
TO SAY WHO STAYS OR GETS OUT OF SIGHT?
THEY HOLD COURT LIKE A BLOOD THIRSTY KNIGHT
BUT THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME (HAY-NA HAY-NA)
NO, THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME (HAY-NA HAY-NA 4X)

The TEACHERS begin an impromptu Native-American inspired dance while an amazed MR. WHITE and MS. BEASLEY look on.

MS. RODRIGUEZ (Continued)

ENGLISH ONLY IS THEIR ANSWER
BUT SHOULDN'T IT BE CHEROKEE OR NARRAGANSETT
NICE YOU GAVE GERONIMO A CADILLAC
WELL, MAYBE WHILE YOU'RE AT IT
YOU COULD GIVE HIM SOME LAND BACK

PEACE AND HARMONY EARTH AND SKY
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S WORTH A TRY?
I LISTEN TO THEIR HATE AND I WONDER WHY
CAUSE THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME (HAY-NAH HAY-NAH)
NO, THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME (HAY-NA HAY-NAH4X)

As the TEACHERS carry on with the indigenous people's inspired demonstration, MS. NEILSEN calls to MS. BEASLEY to join them in the dance. To everyone's surprise, SHE does and in turn invites MR. WHITE. Although initially hesitant, HE soon the hoopla and sings the final refrain himself.

MR. WHITE

PEACE AND HARMONY EARTH AND SKY
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S WORTH A TRY?
I LISTEN TO THEIR HATE AND I WONDER WHY
CAUSE THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME

ALL

NO, THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME

MR. WHITE

NO, THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INDIANS TO ME

MR. WHITE calls the TEACHERS back to order.

MR. WHITE

Alright now teachers. Let's settle down.

The TEACHERS return to their seats.

MR. WHITE (Continued)

Now I don't like this anymore than you do, but in addition to the threat of complete school closure, as if that weren't enough, I've also received a memo from the School Board reminding us to put greater emphasis on the teaching of American Culture in our classrooms.

MR. DANIELS

What do they expect from us anyway? Are we supposed to go to class wrapped in the American flag?

MR. ALBERT

(densely)

Oh, no. I'm sure they wouldn't want that. That would be a desecration.

MS. NEILSEN

I'm sure, Mr. Daniels didn't mean that, Mr. Albert.

MR. DANIELS

True, I didn't. but I hate when downtown tries to dictate what we teach in the classroom. Whatever happened to Academic Freedom?!

MR. DUGAN

Well, everyone's got a right to have a say in students' curriculum, for example, parents. At least 'til their kids are 18. That seems reasonable.

The TEACHERS ponder this for a moment. The SCHOOL BELL RINGS and MR. WHITE adjourns the meeting.

MR. WHITE

That will be all teachers. Have a good class.

*The TEACHERS make their way to
the door.*

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Ain't that a bitch?

MR. DUGAN

It's not bad if you're standing on top of the hill, but it's a flood from where I'm standing. (to MR. JOHNSON) What about you, Mr. Johnson? Are you planning to take Mr. White's talk to heart and put greater emphasis on the teaching of " American Culture?"

MR. JOHNSON

(considering)

Well, I suppose that since we're always trying to do something new in the classroom and since I'm a new teacher, everything I do is new, at least for me, so sure, why not? It could be fun.

MR. DUGAN

(cheering him on)

That's the sprit, Mr. Johnson. Spoken like a true rookie. You just keep that "gung-ho" attitude uppermost in your mind and you're sure to make a great teacher!

MR. JOHNSON

You think so? Well, I hope so. Thanks. See you.

MR. JOHNSON exits.

MR. ALBERT

He'll never make it.

MS. NEILSEN

Hush, you.

(Blackout)

ACT I

Scene VII

Setting: Room 308

At Rise: The STUDENTS sit patiently at their DESKS.

MR. JOHNSON takes a place behind the LECTERN and greets his STUDENTS. RICO is chatting happily with ROSETTA.

MR. JOHNSON

Good morning class. Sorry I'm late. We had a teacher's meeting this morning.

RICO

Take your time, teacher. No rush.

The students laugh.

MR. JOHNSON

I thought we would do something different in class today.

The STUDENTS stop laughing and turn their attention to the teacher.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

You know... sometimes it can be frustrating to study a new language.

The STUDENTS nod in agreement.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And while we teachers try to do our best, sometimes the methods and materials we use might be considered old-fashioned or outdated.

The STUDENTS lean forward in their seats.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

For example, although the English we study in our textbooks is grammatically correct, you've probably found that when you leave the classroom, few Americans actually "speak" the more formal English that we study here in the classroom.

The STUDENTS stir in agreement.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

So, today I thought we would practice some American English.

The STUDENTS brighten.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

It is quite different, you know, than British English. In fact, here in America, we've tried to make it so on purpose, ever since the days of the American Revolution when we fought for our independence from England and began to forge our own identity as a new nation. Although we've kept much of the writing system we inherited from Great Britain, our way of speaking is quite intentionally independent as is our country of America.

MR. JOHNSON pulls down a chart to illustrate the differences between the two systems of English. On the top left-hand corner, a heading reads, "British English" while the right reads, "American English." MR. JOHNSON picks up a pointer from the chalkboard.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Now first class, please listen.

HE raises the pointer and uses it to tap his way down and across the chart to illustrate his lesson.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)**British English****American English**

What do you

Whaddaya

Where do you

Wheredaya

When do you

Whendaya

Who do you

Whodaya

Why do you

Whydaya

How do you

Howdaya

The STUDENTS are puzzled by this strange recital. LAVONNA raises her hand.

MR. JOHNSON

Lavonna?

LAVONNA*(skeptical)*

Excuse me, teacher, but this is usual English?

MR. JOHNSON

In England, no, but in America, yes. (to the class) Now question: How many of you want to learn to speak British English? Raise your hands.

The STUDENTS sit stiffly.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Alright, then. Now how many of you want to learn to speak like an American?

The STUDENTS' hands shoot up excitedly.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, of course you do. After all, this is America and in America, we speak American English, so it's only natural that you want to learn how to speak like an American.

The STUDENTS nod. MR. JOHNSON continues.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Now then, this American English, this "whaddaya, wheredaya, whendaya" English; how common is it? When do we speak it? Can we speak it with our family?

STUDENTS

Yes?

STUDENTS

Yes?

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Yes, we do... We speak this way even at the workplace. Everybody speaks like this in America. Friends, families, doctors, lawyers bus drivers, cooks, even the President of the United States. But of course, he speaks it. After all, he's the chief American!

The STUDENTS are excited by this idea and turn to their classmates to discuss it. MR. JOHNSON allows them a moment before returning to the lesson.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Now, let's everyone repeat.

HE raises the pointer and taps it once on the "British English" side of the chart which reads, "What do you."

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

What do you.

HE taps his pointer again and the STUDENTS repeat.

STUDENTS

What do you.

HE taps the pointer on the "American English" side of the chart which reads, "Whaddaya?"

MR. JOHNSON

Whaddaya.

HE taps the pointer again and the STUDENTS repeat but this time with less confidence.

STUDENTS

Whaddaya.

MR. JOHNSON

(encouraging)

Good! Again! Whaddaya.

The STUDENTS don't repeat.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Let's try it again.

MR. JOHNSON taps the pointer three more times.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Whaddaya. Whaddaya. Whaddaya.

This time the STUDENTS repeat.

STUDENTS

Whaddaya. Whaddaya. Whaddaya.

MR. JOHNSON

(pleased)

Good. Now let's try the next one.

MR. JOHNSON repeats the procedure.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Where do you.

STUDENTS

Where do you.

MR. JOHNSON

Wheredaya.

STUDENTS

Wheredaya.

MR. JOHNSON

Wheredaya. Wheredaya. Wheredaya.

STUDENTS

Wheredaya. Wheredaya. Wheredaya.

MR. JOHNSON

(excited)

Yes! That's it! Now let's try it the American way only.

HE taps the pointer down the entire length of the "American English" side of the CHART and the students repeat each "WH" word cluster as HE taps.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Whaddaya, wheredaya, whendaya, whodaya, whydaya, howdaya.

STUDENTS

Whaddaya, wheredaya, whendaya, whodaya, whydaya, howdaya.

MR. JOHNSON

(more excited)

Awesome! Now let's try it backwards.

HE taps the pointer up the CHART as HE recites.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Howdaya, whydaya, whodaya, whendaya, wheredaya, whaddaya.

*The STUDENTS howl in excitement
but repeat.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Howdaya, whydaya, whodaya, whendaya, wheredaya, whaddaya.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes! Splendid! Now let's try this. I'll give you a line using written or traditional British English pronunciation and you give me back that line using American English. Are you ready?

*The STUDENTS straighten up in
anticipation of the drill.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Alright, then. Here we go.

*(up music - Song: American
Pronunciation Song)*

MR. JOHNSON

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?
WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?
WHEN DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE
TO THE MOVIE SHOW?

STUDENTS

WHADDAYA WANNA DO?
WHERE DAYA WANNA GO?
WHEN DAYA WANNA LEAVE
TO THE MOVIE SHOW?

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS

IT'S ALL IN A DAY
WHATEVER YOU DO
WHATEVER YOU SAY
REFLECTS UPON YOUR WAY

MR. JOHNSON

WHO DO YOU WANT TO MEET?
WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE THERE?
HOW DO YOU WANT TO GET THERE?

STUDENTS

WHODAYA WANNA MEET?
WHY DAYA WANNA BE THERE?
HOW DAYA WANNA GET THERE?

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS

WELL, LET'S NOT BE LATE!

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS Continued)

IT'S ALL IN A DAY
 WHATEVER YOU DO
 WHATEVER YOU SAY
 MAKES A BRIGHTER DAY

MR. JOHNSON

YOU SOUND SO VERY GOOD

JUST LIKE I KNEW YOU WOULD

IT'S AMAZING HOW

STUDENTS

WE SOUND LIKE
 WE WERE BORN HERE

WE'D LIKE TO
 GIVE YOU THREE CHEERS

IT'S INCREDIBLE HOW

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS

WE CAN LEARN SO MUCH IF WE TRY!

IT'S ALL IN A DAY
 WHATEVER YOU DO
 WHATEVER YOU SAY
 TO HELP YOU ON YOUR WAY

MR. JOHNSON

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?
 WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?

STUDENTS

WHADDAYA WANNA DO?
 WHEREDAYA WANNA GO?

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS

AS LONG AS YOU TRY
 YOU CAN GROW!

MR. JOHNSON applauds the class.

MR. JOHNSON

That was wonderful, class. Splendid. Splendid. Now those were the "Wh" questions, "What, where, when, who, why and how" followed by the auxiliary verb "do" plus the pronoun, "you." Now let's try it again, but this time ending the word group with the pronoun "he." First, please listen. What does he. Whadduzzy. Where does he. Whereduzzy. When does he. Whenduzzy. Who...

*From down the hall, the sound of
 goose-steps marching is heard.
 It is the THUG BOYS singing an
 ominous reprise of their
 dastardly dirge. ALL freeze.*

SOPANNY

(alarmed)

What (is) that, teacher? *(sic)*

The STUDENTS look to MR. JOHNSON with alarm, but HE, too, is at a loss for words.

MR. JOHNSON

I ... I'm not sure, Sopanny.

The THUGBOYS continue to goose-step towards the classroom.

LARRY

You sure this is a good idea, Spike?

SPIKE

It's a good idea 'cuz I say it is.

The STUDENTS grow more worried.

VUONG ANH

Something is wrong.

LAVONNA

(acidly)

They sound like Cossacks to me.

FANYA nods knowingly to LAVONNA and stands beside her as JOSEF and VLADIMIR stand behind them. SOPANNY screams.

SOPANNY

Make them go away, teacher!!!

Before HE can speak, the classroom door bursts open, and the THUG BOYS enter, still goose-stepping.

SOPANNY screams and runs for cover to NGUYEN TRAN and VUONG ANH as ROSETTA runs to RICO.

LAVONNA and FANYA join hands together, their eyes throwing daggers as if to say, "We have seen your kind before."

JOSEF and VLADIMIR, too, comically consider holding hands together before deciding against it.

MEI LI stays close to MR. JOHNSON who stands face-to-face with SPIKE THE THUG BOY LEADER.

SPIKE raises his hand. The marching stops. HE stares coldly at MR. JOHNSON before giving the order to his ghastly crew.

SPIKE

Alright, boys. You know what to do.

MR. JOHNSON tries to intercede.

MR. JOHNSON

Now wait a minute. This is a classroom. You can't just come in here and disrupt it. Who do you think you are anyway?

Infuriated by the question, SPIKE whirls wildly around to MR. JOHNSON.

SPIKE

(with crazed glare)

Who do we think we are?... We're your worst nightmare, teach.

MR. JOHNSON

(dryly)

I don't doubt that.

The two men stare fiercely at one another. SPIKE THE THUG BOY LEADER pushes MR. JOHNSON aside.

SPIKE

Now move aside, teach... if you don't wanna get hurt.

MR. JOHNSON does not move.

Enraged, SPIKE strikes MR. JOHNSON on the jaw hurling him to the ground. HE stands over and leers down at him.

SPIKE

I told you to move.

MEI LI slightly screams and runs over to MR. JOHNSON'S aid.

SPIKE (Continued)

(impatient)

Well... what are you waiting for?

Beat as ALL await his next words.

SPIKE (Continued)

Wreck this place!

The THUG BOYS begin their foul deed. DESKS and chairs are overturned. Student belongings are hurled across the room. Classroom maps and posters are torn down from the walls and ripped into pieces. Even the American flag is seized and trampled.

MR. JOHNSON sits up nursing his aching jaw. HE stares in horror at the flagrant display of vandalism occurring before him.

HE attempts to stand but is held back by MEI LI.

MEI LI

No... wait... stay down. They will hurt you again.

MR. JOHNSON is confounded by MEI LI's actions but before HE can reply, SPIKE calls out to his henchmen to stop the madness.

SPIKE

Enough!

The THUG BOYS, however, do not stop. Crazy as loons, THEY continue their act of savagery unabated. SPIKE roars.

SPIKE (Continued)

I said, "That's enough."

The THUG BOYS slowly cease their maniacal actions as they finish destroying the last few classroom items remaining.

While no outward glee is shown, THE THUG BOYS seem strangely satisfied at the chaos they have sown.

The STUDENTS are stunned. RICO can barely contain his outrage.

MR. JOHNSON attempts to stand again. This time, MEI LI offers him her hand.

MR. JOHNSON

(grateful)

Thank you.

SPIKE storms over to the two who are still dazed.

SPIKE

This is just a warning. One way or another, we'll get rid of you. We'll destroy your whole school. You ain't gonna teach no damned immigrants English here.

MR. JOHNSON

Immigrants have always built this country. We should help them build it. They don't need you to knock them down. They have enough trouble as it is.

SPIKE

Sez you. (to the STUDENTS) Get this straight. We don't need youse (sic) foreigners here, and we don't want youse here, neither (sic). The best thing youse (sic) can do is just pack your bags and get the hell out of our country. Comprende?

RICO can't take it any longer.

RICO

We will never leave! This is our country, too! Viva America!

HE rushes from ROSETTA's side to challenge SPIKE but is intercepted by SHADY who knocks him to the ground.

ROSETTA screams and runs to his side. SHADY stands smirking over the crumpled figure.

Frightened by the violence, SOPANNY begins to sob.

NGUYEN TRAN puts a comforting arm around her shoulder as HE shoots the THUG BOYS an angry glare. The THUG BOYS jeer at him in return.

SPIKE

(to the students)

Make it easy on yourself. Get out of here before things get really ugly. There's more than one way to skin a rat.

MR. JOHNSON, his face ashen, his voice shaking with anger, confronts SPIKE the THUG BOY LEADER again.

MR. JOHNSON

Now see here, I suggest that it is you who get out. The sick deed you have committed here today... to strike out at innocents who have done you no wrong... and to do so in a classroom... is an act of desecration which proves not only your cowardice but your disregard for the sanctity of the classroom. You are all cowards who are no better than common street thugs.

(with rising anger)

Now get out of here. Get out of my classroom.

The THUG BOY LEADER sneers at the remark but retreats.

THUG BOY LEADER

(to his THUG BOYS)

Come on.

(to MR. JOHNSON and the STUDENTS)

We've warned you.

MR. JOHNSON

(quiet anger)

Get out.

The THUG BOYS exit. ROSETTA helps RICO to his feet. MR. JOHNSON walks over to them.

MR. JOHNSON

Are you alright, Rico?

RICO
(recovering)

I'm fine, teacher.

*RICO looks at the classroom
in disarray.*

RICO (Continued)
(bravely)

I guess we showed them, huh, teacher?

MR. JOHNSON
Boy, did we ever. Next time though, I think I'll take the
subway.

RICO
Huh?

MR. JOHNSON
Oh, it's nothing. Skip it.

*RICO goes to join ROSETTA, NGUYEN
TRAN and VUING ANH who are
comforting SOPANNY.*

ROSETTA
There, there, Sopanny. It'll be alright.

*SOPANNY ceases her sobbing and
smiles at RICO and ROSETTA. MR.
JOHNSON addresses the class.*

MR. JOHNSON
Now everything will be alright, class. Those men will not harm
you anymore... at least, not today.

*The STUDENTS now past their
initial shock begin to react.
VUONG ANH speaks first.*

VUONG ANH
They remind me of the Communist soldier (sic) in Vietnam.

NGUYEN TRAN

That's right.

JOSE

And the soldiers in our village.

The LATIN STUDENTS stir in agreement.

JOSEF

You were right, teacher. They are no better than common street thugs.

The RUSSIAN STUDENTS nod their heads. LAVONNA is more direct.

LAVONNA

Those bastards.

Some of the STUDENTS smile at LAVONNA'S outburst. Others are silent. Realizing her words are inappropriate for the classroom, SHE apologizes to MR. JOHNSON.

LAVONNA (Continued)

I am sorry, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON sighs.

MR. JOHNSON

That's alright, Lavonna. They are bastards.

LAVONNA smiles sheepishly.

Enter MR. WHITE and MS. BEASLEY who are horrified by the scene that greets them.

MS. BEASLEY reels backwards, collapsing into MR. WHITE'S strong and able arms.

MR. WHITE

Steady, Ms. Beasley. Steady.

As MR. WHITE attends to MS. BEASLEY, MR. JOHNSON looks over the classroom that had once been a safe bastion for its learners and teachers.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, come on, class. We'd better clean up.

As the STUDENTS somberly upright overturned desks furniture and clear away debris, SOPANNY walks by them all in a daze, stopping only when SHE reaches the trampled American flag.

Falling to her knees, SHE gently picks up the tattered emblem of America's promise of freedom and democracy and weeps.

Silently NGUYEN TRAN watches.

(Blackout)

ACT II**Scene I**

Setting: A fog-swept dusk in a residential neighborhood in the Richmond District of San Francisco close to Roosevelt Junior High School. Parked in the small driveway of one of the many fine Victorian homes is a shiny Toyota Tercel.

At Rise: The gentle fog rolls in.

Enter from across the street NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1 and NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2 pulling home shopping carts filled with bags of groceries. The WOMEN stop for a rest.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

Phew! Let's rest for a minute. I'm beat. (beat) Fog's rolling in.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

It's that time of day. I must have bought enough groceries today to last a week. It was a zoo at the checkout line, And the clerk wouldn't even take my coupon for fifty- cents off the vegetable oil and it said, ".50 Cents Off" plain as day. Just because the checkout scanner couldn't read it. You'd think it would kill him to do a regular customer a favor.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

Honestly. Sometimes I wonder whether common courtesy is just a thing of the past.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

(wistful)

I don't know, but it sure seems like it sometimes. (beat) Say, did you hear about those Thug Boys who went to the Junior High School and vandalized a classroom?

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

I certainly did. I couldn't believe it. (indignant) It's a disgrace, that's what it is. (wistful) Why can't people just leave other people alone?

From the house across the street where the shiny Toyota Tercel is parked enters MRS. CHAN with TWO YOUNG CHILDREN in tow. An assimilated Chinese immigrant, MRS. CHAN still retains a perceptible accent.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

Oh, look! There's Mrs. Chan. (waving) Hi, Mrs. Chan!

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

Hello, Mrs. Chan

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

(waving)

Hi, Mrs. Chan.

MRS. CHAN returns the waves.

MRS. CHAN

Oh, good afternoon, lady. (sic) How are you?

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

Fine, Mrs. Chan. Where are you and your lovely children off to this evening?

MRS. CHAN

We go my husband's office meet him. We go out dinner tonight!

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

Oh, that sounds like fun. Where are you going?

MRS. CHAN

New Chinese restaurant, in downtown.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

Well, have a nice time. Say hello to Mr. Chan for me.

MRS. CHAN

Thank you, Lady (sic). I will. See you later. Bye.

*MRS. CHAN loads her CHILDREN
into the Shiny Toyota Tercel
and buckles them in safely.*

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

She's such a nice lady.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

She sure is. I'm glad she wasn't there when that band of hooligans vandalized the school.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

Oh, no. She doesn't go to school anymore. True, maybe her English isn't perfect but... she's been in this country now for over twenty years.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

(pointedly)

And she and her husband have done pretty well for themselves.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

That's true.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

And why not?

*The two women nod to each other
as if to say, "Yes, why not?"
MRS. CHAN starts her car and
pulls out of the driveway. As
SHE goes driving down the road,
NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1 begins to
sing.*

(up music: (Shiny Toyota Tercel)

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

SHE GOES DRIVING DOWN THE ROAD
IN HER SHINY TOYOTA TERCEL
AND SHE KNOWS IT DOESN'T MATTER
HER KIDS WILL GO TO COLLEGE

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

AND NOBODY SEES HER SMILING
AS SHE THINKS ABOUT CHINA
AND OF WHERE SHE USED TO LIVE
IN A HOVEL

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1 & #2

IT DON'T MATTER
WHERE SHE CAME FROM
NOW SHE'S HERE
AND IT DOESN'T MATTER

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

AND SHE GOES DRIVING CROSS THE GOLDEN GATE
IN HER SHINY TOYOTA TERCEL
AND SHE KNOWS IT DOESN'T MATTER
HER BURDENS HAVE BEEN LIFTED

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

AND NOBODY SEES HER SPARKLING
AS SHE THINKS ABOUT CHINA
AND THE BOY FROM THE VILLAGE NEXT DOOR
WHOM ONE DAY SHE WOULD MARRY

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1 & #2

IT DON'T MATTER
WHERE SHE CAME FROM
NOW SHE'S HERE
AND IT DOESN'T MATTER

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1

SO SHE GOES DRIVING DOWN THE FREEWAY
IN HER SHINY TOYOTA TERCEL
AND SHE KNOWS IT DOESN'T MATTER
SHE'S ALREADY MADE IT

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #2

AND NOBODY SEES HER LAUGHING
AS SHE THINKS ABOUT CHINA
AND THE LONG ROAD THAT SHE'S DRIVEN
FROM THAT HOVEL

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN #1 & #2

IT DON'T MATTER
WHERE SHE CAME FROM
NOW SHE'S HERE
AND IT DOESN'T MATTER

(Blackout)

ACT II

Scene II

Setting: Room 308

At Rise: The STUDENTS sit at their DESKS talking quietly to one another. The classroom has returned to its previous condition minus a few of the original student-made posters.

In one corner of the room, a bright, new American flag stands proudly where its former self once stood.

MR. JOHNSON enters the classroom and the STUDENTS come to order.

MR. JOHNSON

Good morning, class.

STUDENTS

Good morning, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

It's nice to see you all here today. (*looking around the room*) I see they've fixed up the classroom pretty nicely.

HE studies the STUDENTS.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(reassuring)

Now class, listen up. Those men who were here before won't bother you again. The police have arrested a number of them, and I don't think that any of them will be coming back to this school anytime soon.

The STUDENTS appear relieved at this news and turn to their classmates to discuss it in hushed tones. MR. JOHNSON waits a moment before continuing.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Now, today I thought we would begin with a quiet assignment, a writing assignment. I'd like you all to please take a look at this picture.

HE holds up a large black and white commercial PICTURE of a young woman on a warm summer day resting against a tree in a park. The caption reads, "Daydreaming."

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

What is this woman doing?

JOSE raises his hand. MR. JOHNSON calls on him.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Yes, Jose.

JOSE

It says, she is "Daydreaming."

MR. JOHNSON

That's right! She's daydreaming! Now what is daydreaming?

LAVONNA

(shrugging)

Daydreaming is daydreaming.

MR. JOHNSON

Well... yes, Lavonna, but what is daydreaming?

MEI LI takes out a dictionary and reads from it.

MEI LI

Daydreaming is "having a happy or pleasant imagining about oneself or one's future."

MR. JOHNSON

That's right, Mei Li, but (mildly scolding) you're not supposed to read the answer from a dictionary.

MEI LI winces slightly at this mild rebuke. HE continues.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

When you daydream, you usually are not thinking about things that are happening around you at the time, but something different, something special, something that could be far, far away. You may be thinking about your friends or family, or a place you've never been before. Maybe it's a fantasy. You might find yourself in an enchanted forest, with rocks and trees and magical streams all around you.

The STUDENTS brighten at this image.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Or maybe you're driving down a desert road going a hundred miles an hour... or just enjoying a warm spring day with the one you love...

At this, RICO looks to ROSETTA who smiles in return.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Who knows? It could be anything. It's your dream... It's your daydream.

SOPANNY raises her hand.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Yes, Sopanny.

SOPANNY

Teacher, can you daydream only in the day?

MR. JOHNSON

No, Sopanny. You can daydream anytime. In the day, in the night...

HE looks at the clock on the wall which reads nine o'clock.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(with mirth)

... even at nine o'clock in the morning. Just so you're awake when you're doing it. (to JOSE) You hear that, Jose. You have to be awake first.

JOSE

I'm awake.

MR. JOHNSON

Just checking.

JOSE and some of the STUDENTS laugh. SOPANNY nods.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Now what I'd like you to do is just sit back and relax... and daydream. You can daydream about anything you like... the past, the present, the future. Anything... Anything at all. It's your daydream.

Beat as HE surveys the class.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And when you're ready, on a clean sheet of paper, I want you to write down your daydream. Don't worry about grammar, spelling or punctuation. Just write. Now during this exercise, I am going to lower the lights and play some soft music to help you think and write more freely. Okay?

The STUDENTS nod. All but ENRIQUE who seems to be already lost in thought.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Enrique? Are you still with us?

ENRIQUE responds dreamily.

ENRIQUE

Oh yes, teacher. In my country, when I was with my father working in the fields and it was very hot, the crew manager would sometimes give us a break and at that time, I could just sit there and daydream. I no have to do nothing.

MR. JOHNSON

(sympathetically)

Yes, Enrique. It's good to daydream. It's good for your heart, mind, body and soul. (to the class) Alright, now, class. Let's begin.

MR. JOHNSON walks over to the light switch and dims the light. He walks to the AUDIO PLAYER and presses the "play" button.

(up music: Daydreams)

As soft music fills the air, MR. JOHNSON sits at his DESK and begins to grade a stack of papers. As the STUDENTS start to absorb both the mood and soft music, THEY begin to daydream.

A roving spotlight shines upon the STUDENTS illuminating their thoughts as THEY write. It finds ENRIQUE first.

ENRIQUE

I CAN SEE ME IN THE FIELD
ON A WARM AND SUMMER DAY
WITH MY FATHER
AS THE CROWS ARE FLYING BY
WITH THE DEVIL IN THEIR EYE
WE GO ON LAUGHING

MANY DAYS HAVE PASSED AND GONE
SINCE I WALKED ALONG THE DAWN
WITH MY FATHER

ENRIQUE (Continued)

I CAN SEE HIM SMILING STILL
AND I GUESS I ALWAYS WILL
THE FIELD IS CALLING

DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS
DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS

JOSEF is vexed.

JOSEF

LOST! WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO LEARN
STUCK HERE IN THIS CLASS
I'VE DONE IT ALL BEFORE
I WAS A DOCTOR

HELL! WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO
STUCK HERE IN THIS TOWN
WHERE I DON'T UNDERSTAND
A WORD THEY'RE SAYING

THE PRIDE OF MY CLASS
THE PLUM JOBS JUST WAITING
FOR ME TO ACCEPT THEM
AND LOADS OF RESPECT

BUT THERE WERE LIMITS
A HUNDRED DOLLARS A MONTH
YES, THERE WERE LIMITS
A TWO DOLLAR HAT

DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS
DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS

*VUONG ANH longingly raises his
head from his paper.*

VUONG ANH

SHE WAS MY WIFE
I HEAR HER CALLING
SHE WAS MY LIFE
BUT NOW SHE'S GONE

VUONG ANH (Continued)

THE SOLDIERS TOOK
 MY CHILDREN'S MOTHER
 BUT IN ME NOW
 HER SPIRIT CARRIES ON

I SEE HER STANDING
 BY THE OPEN WINDOW
 I SEE HER STANDING THERE
 HER EYES, HER GAZE
 SHE COMES BEFORE ME NOW
 AND SHE IS CALLING
 OH, HOW I YEARN
 FOR THOSE FORGOTTEN DAYS

DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS
 DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS

*ROSETTA dreams of the past and
 of better things to come.*

ROSETTA

GRASS UNSEEN
 SKY SO GREY
 HOUSES OF CARDBOARD AND TIN
 DUMPS BY THE ROAD
 A DIRTY OLD WELL
 AND NEVER A PAPER OR PEN
 AND ONLY A DOLL FOR A FRIEND
 I'LL NEVER GO BACK THERE AGAIN

FOR I KNOW THAT
 LIFE IS WORTH LIVING
 MANY WONDERS THEY LIE IN STORE FOR ME
 AND I KNOW THAT
 LIFE IS JUST BEGINNING
 I THANK GOD FOR THE WONDROUS SIGHTS I SEE

DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS
 DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS

*MEI LI's daydream holds no
 surprise. It is of her teacher,
 MR. Johnson.*

MEI LI

THERE WE SIT
AT THE PARK
HOLDING HAND IN HAND
HOPING HE WOULD LIGHT THE SPARK
MAKING IT SO GRAND
ROBINS SING AND EAGLES FLY
SWIFTLY THROUGH THE LAND
OFFERING HIM MY SWEET PERFUME
WILL HE UNDERSTAND?

DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS
DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS

STUDENTS

PEACEFUL LIFE
NO MORE STRIFE
BEAUTY IN THE LAND
DAY IS DONE
GONE THE SUN
ALL WILL LEND A HAND

WHO KNOWS WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS
WILL WE PROUDLY STAND?
NOW AT LAST
WORST HAS PASSED
TIME TO START AGAIN

DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS
DAYDREAMS, DAYDREAMS

*The STUDENTS finish up their
papers and put down their
pencils.*

MR. JOHNSON

Is everyone finished?

The STUDENTS nod.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Good. Then let's collect the papers. I'll return them to you next class after they're corrected.

MR. JOHNSON collects the papers thanking the STUDENTS as HE goes.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Thank you. Thank you.

HE picks up ENRIQUE's paper and glances at it.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Looks good, Enrique. Thank you.

ENRIQUE smiles. MR. JOHNSON collects the last of the papers and returns to the LECTERN.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Thank you, class. Before we leave today, I have an announcement to make. (beat) In one week's time... we will have the final test.

The STUDENTS blanch visibly at this news. MR. JOHNSON continues.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

The test will cover all of the teaching points taught in the second half of our textbook. Part I will consist of fifty multiple choice questions, and Part II will consist of three essay questions, one of which is to be answered in one complete paragraph with a topic sentence, 3-4 supporting sentences and a conclusion as we have studied this semester.

The STUDENTS blanch again.

MR. JOHNSON

So, I suggest that you go home and review your texts, notes and quizzes and study them in preparation for the test. Any questions?

The STUDENTS have none.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Any answers?

The STUDENTS have none.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(semi-scolding)

Well, I'm sure you'll have some by test time. Alright, then.
Class is dismissed.

*The STUDENTS rise from their
DESKS. RICO turns to ROSETTA.*

RICO

Un examin. Ai!

ROSETTA

Is no problem, Rico. You will do fine, I'm sure.

*RICO nods but remains unsure.
MR. JOHNSON overhears their
remarks and calls once again to
his class.*

MR. JOHNSON

And one more thing, class...

The STUDENTS freeze.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(reassuring)

Don't worry too much about this test. Remember, I'm not testing
you so much, as I am myself to see how well I've taught you this
past semester.

*The STUDENTS consider this
concept for a moment but soon
dismiss it as irrelevant as THEY
are determined to pass the test
for their own sake. THEY
continue to collect their
belongings.*

The RUSSIAN STUDENTS confer among themselves before stopping by MR. JOHNSON's DESK to ask him for some more information about the test.

LAVONNA

Is grammar test, teacher?

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, Lavonna. It's mostly grammar. And one essay question that you choose, that you would like to write about. Just review your book. I'm sure you'll do fine.

LAVONNA

Thank you, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

(a final call to the class)

Remember: Don't forget to study. Next Friday is the big test!

The STUDENTS exit. All but MEI LI who has once again stayed behind to speak with MR. JOHNSON after class. Unaware SHE is there, HE begins to gather up his papers. MEI LI calls to him.

MEI LI

Mr. Johnson?

His thoughts on the test, HE cannot hear her. Instead, HE begins to reflect on his own test anxieties.

(up music: It's Their Big Test)

MR. JOHNSON

IT'S THEIR BIG TEST
OR IS IT MINE?
IT'S THEIR GREAT QUEST
OR IS IT MINE?
IT'S THEIR FAILURE OR SUCCESS
OR IS IT MINE?
PERHAPS THAT IS THE REASON WHY
I'M TREMBLING INSIDE

IT REALLY IS A STRANGE AND FUNNY FEELING
WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW QUITE EXACTLY WHAT TO DO
IT SEEMS AS IF YOUR HEAD IS SIMPLY REELING
AND YOU ARE STUCK LIKE GLUE

IT'S THEIR BIG TEST
OR IS IT MINE?
IT'S THEIR UNREST
OR IS IT MINE?
IT'S THEIR GAME OF CHESS
OR IS IT MINE?
PERHAPS THAT IS THE REASON WHY
I'M TREMBLING INSIDE

*His troubled lament soon turns
into a rallying cry as a growing
sense of overcomes him.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

I'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
I'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
IT'S PASS OR FAIL
IT'S TOOTH AND NAIL
I'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

I'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
ON THIS POINT I OBSESS
WHEN BELL IS RUNG
AND DAY IS DONE
I'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

(determined)

I've got to pass this test!

*The STUDENTS re-enter now
with textbooks in hand.*

STUDENTS

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
IT'S PASS OR FAIL
IT'S TOOTH AND NAIL
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

MR. JOHNSON/STUDENTS

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
ON THIS POINT WE OBSESS
WHEN BELL IS RUNG
AND DAY IS DONE
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
(determined)

We've got to pass this test!

*MEI LI tries again to speak but
is drowned out by the fevered
pitch of MR. JOHNSON and the
STUDENTS.*

MEI LI

MR. JOHNSON, HOW CAN I EVER TELL YOU?

MR. JOHNSON, HOW COULD I EVEN DARE?

MR. JOHNSON, DO YOU EVER NOTICE ME?

MR. JOHNSON, DO YOU EVEN CARE?

MR. JOHNSON/STUDENTS

WE'VE GOT TO
WE'VE GOT TO
WE'VE GOT TO
PASS THIS TEST

IT'S PASS OR FAIL
IT'S TOOTH AND NAIL
WE'VE GOT TO
PASS THIS TEST

WE'VE GOT TO
WE'VE GOT TO
WE'VE GOT TO PASS
THIS TEST

WHEN BELL IS RUNG
AND DAY IS DONE
WE'VE GOT TO
PASS THIS TEST

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS (Continued)

We've got to pass this test!

Unable to reach MR. JOHNSON, MEI LI explodes in frustration.

MEI LI

MR. JOHNSON
DO YOU KNOW I AM HERE?
MR. JOHNSON
OR DO YOU EVEN CARE?
OR AM I JUST ANOTHER STUDENT
SITTING IN THEIR CHAIR?
OH NO
MR. JOHNSON THAT'S NOT FAIR

MEI LI softens her tone.

MEI LI (Continued)

THE HOURS I'VE LONGED TO TELL YOU THE WORDS
THEY'RE NOT IN A TEXTBOOK AND NOTHING I'VE HEARD
IT'S ONLY A FEELING AND MAY SOUND ABSURD
BUT MR. JOHNSON, I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU I LOVE YOU
I THINK I'LL TELL YOU I LOVE YOU TODAY
OH PLEASE MR. JOHNSON LOOK MY WAY

MR. JOHNSON continues to turn a deaf ear to MEI LI as HE and the other STUDENTS remain fixated on the test.

MR. JOHNSON/STUDENTS

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
IT'S PASS OR FAIL
IT'S TOOTH AND NAIL
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
ON THIS POINT WE OBSESS
WHEN BELL IS RUNG
AND DAY IS DONE
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

MR. JOHNSON/STUDENTS (Continued)

(determined)

We've got to pass this test!

MEI LI tries again.

MEI LI

Mr. Johnson?

I WANT A MAN
A MAN WHO IS GOOD
A MAN WHO HAS HONOR
AND LIVES LIKE HE SHOULD

I KNOW SUCH A MAN
HE'S THE ONE MAN FOR ME
BUT PLEASE, MR. JOHNSON
OH HEAR ME, MR. JOHNSON
OH PLEASE
I GET DOWN ON MY KNEES

*MEI LI sinks to her knees in
despair. Startled by this
behavior, MR. JOHNSON helps her
up.*

MR. JOHNSON

What's that, Mei Li? Come up from off of there. Can you imagine?

A TEACHER AND A STUDENT
STROLLING IN THE PARK
GOING TO THE MOVIES
MEETING AFTER DARK?

A TEACHER AND A STUDENT
HOLDING HANDS
AND MAKING SPARKS?
I THINK NOT MEI LI
I THINK NOT

*A 1920's "yaka-hula-hicky-dula"
type melody strikes up the band.*

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

I'M SORRY MEI LI
THIS THING COULD NEVER BE
A TEACHER-STUDENT FLING
WOULD NEVER DO
THINK ABOUT IT MEI LI
NOT EVEN A CUP OF TEA
OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CLASSROOM AND THE HALLS
WOULD EVER DO

REALISTICALLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK THAT IT'D BE CRAZY
IF WE DID THE WHICKY-WHACKY
AND THE HOOTCHIE-KOO?

COMMON SENSIBLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT'D MAKE "THE DAILY"
IF WE DID THE TOUCHY-FEELY
AND THE HOW'S BY YOU?

TO YEARN FOR YOUR INSTRUCTOR IT
WOULD NEVER EARN A LAUREATE
AND I'D NOT LIKE MY JOB TO QUIT
FROM SUCH A SCANDAL

FOR ME THE JOY IS TEACHING AND
I DON'T NEED A REPRIMAND
FROM THOSE WHO'VE BEEN SO GRAND
TO LEND A HANDLE

REALISTICALLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT WOULD BE CRAZY
IF WE DID THE WHICKY WHACKY
AND THE WHOOP-TI-DOO?

COMMON SENSIBLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT'D MAKE "THE DAILY"
IF WE DID THE TOUCHY-FEELY
AND THE YOU KNOW WHO

OUR CHANCES'D BE SO USELESS THEN
OUR FACES SPREAD ON CNN
I'D HAVE TO QUIT MY JOB
AND MOVE TO KENYA

MEI LI

Kenya?

(undaunted)

IF YOU CHOSE THAT FAR OFF PLACE
I WOULD SURELY BRING MY LACE
AND WE COULD FIND A PLACE
IN NAIROBI

As this, MR. JOHNSON throws out his arms in exasperation as the STUDENTS begin to surround the two in a 1920's flapper inspired dance number.

STUDENTS

REALISTICALLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT WOULD BE CRAZY
IF YOU DID THE WICKY WHACKY
AND THE HOOTCHIE-KOO?

COMMON SENSIBLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT'D MAKE "THE DAILY"
IF YOU DID THE TOUCHY-FEELY
AND THE YOU KNOW WHO

Caught in the moment, MR. JOHNSON and MEI LI's eyes meet briefly before being separated by the exuberant, budding scholars all about them.

STUDENTS (Continued)

REALISTICALLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT'D BE CRAZY IF YOU
DID THE WHICKY WHACKY
AND THE WHOOP-TI-DOO

COMMON SENSIBLY MEI LI
DON'T YOU THINK IT'D MAKE "THE DAILY"
IF YOU DID THE TOUCHY-FEELY
AND THE HOOTCHIE-KOO
AND THE WHOOP-TI-DO
AND THE YOU-KNOW-WHO
AND THE HOW'S-BY-YOU

*The dance over, MR. JOHNSON
stares ahead pensively as HE
reprises his original lament.*

MR. JOHNSON

IT'S THEIR BIG TEST
OR IS IT MINE
IT'S THEIR GREAT QUEST
OR IS IT MINE
IT'S THEIR FAILURE OR SUCCESS
OR IS IT MINE
PERHAPS THAT IS THE REASON WHY
I'M TREMBLING INSIDE

*The STUDENTS, unwilling to
end on this melancholy note,
rally MR. JOHNSON for one final
cheer.*

MR. JOHNSON & STUDENTS

(with building intensity)

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
IT'S PASS OR FAIL
IT'S TOOTH AND NAIL
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST
ON THIS POINT WE OBSESS
WHEN BELL IS RUNG
AND DAY IS DONE
WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST

THEY give a final yell.

WE'VE GOT TO PASS THIS TEST!

*Great hurrahs fill the air as
MR. JOHNSON stands triumphant
with his STUDENTS. Lost in the
celebration, no one notices MEI
LI as SHE runs tearfully from
the classroom.*

(Blackout)

ACT II**Scene III**

Setting: Mei Li's Apartment

At Rise: Heartbroken over MR. JOHNSON'S rejection of her, MEI LI kneels at the FAMILY ALTER.

In her nightgown, SHE bows to the black-embossed PHOTOGRAPH on the ALTER and lights a STICK OF INCENSE.

From the ALTER, SHE removes the photograph and sitting on her bed, SHE gazes at the image of her fallen matriarch.

MEI LI

Oh, mama, mama, mama.

SHE breaks down in sobs.

MEI LI (Continued)

Oh, mama, I miss you so much. I wish you were here now, mama. I want to tell you of this wonderful man I have met. He is a good man, mama. Kind, smart, handsome. True, he is my teacher, mama, but after all... he is a man. I wish you could meet him, mama. After all your struggles to succeed, to become a nurse in our country, to bring us here to America, that you did not live to see your dream of living in America come true... Oh mama, you are gone now, and I am so alone. I thought he cared about me, but he does not even know how I feel about him, how often I think of him, how much I long for him.

SHE sobs again. Suddenly, SHE sits up as if someone has entered the room.

MEI LI (Continued)*(searching)*

Mama, is that you? (beat) Mama, can you hear me? (beat) Mama,
are you there?

*(up music: Oh Mama, Can You Hear Me?)***MEI LI (Continued)**

OH MAMA HERE I SIT ALONE
WONDERING WHERE YOU ARE
WHY YOU WENT SO FAR AWAY

OH MAMA I REMEMBER WHEN
SIMPLER DAYS OF JOY
PLAYING GAMES WITH TOYS AND THEN
WHY DID IT HAVE TO END?

BUT NOW HE'S APPEARED TO ME
HE HAS COME INTO ME
AND MY LIFE

HE MEANS SO MUCH TO ME
HE'D BE SO GOOD TO ME
AND MY LIFE
AND I WOULD MAKE A GOOD WIFE

IT'S FUNNY HOW FATE COMES TO PASS
YET I KNOW THESE FEELINGS WILL ALWAYS LAST
IT'S A ROUGH WAY DOWN THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD
WHERE IT STOPS WHO CAN KNOW
I LOVE HIM WITH EVERY BREATH I TAKE
OH MAMA CAN YOU ME A GOOD WIFE MAKE?
I'D DO MY BEST
YOU COULD DO THE REST
OH MAMA CAN YOU ME A GOOD WIFE MAKE?

*MEI LI rises from her bed, a
captive of the swirling music
all around her.*

MEI LI (Continued)

OH THE TIME I REMEMBER OH SO WELL
WHEN MY MOTHER FACED THE TORTURES OF LIVING HELL
THE STRUGGLE SHE FOUGHT
HOPE COULD BE WON
BUT MAMA IT COULDN'T BE DONE

YOU KNEW THE END WAS NEAR
AS A NURSE OF THIRTY YEARS
YET YOUR SECRET YOU KEPT SO WELL INSIDE
STILL AS THE HOUR DREW
YOU CALLED ME CLOSE TO YOU
AND KISSED ME ONCE MORE BEFORE YOU DIED

OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE
OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE

TO THE SICK YOU ALWAYS WERE A FRIEND
YOU'D STOP BESIDE THE ROAD TO LEND A HAND
TO WORK AT BREAK OF DAWN
THROUGH THE NIGHT YOU CARRIED ON
A HERO TO THE VERY END

HOW SPLENDID WERE THE DAYS
WITH YOUR WARM AND WINNING WAYS
SO MANY ILLS YOU CURED EXCEPT YOUR OWN
THEN SHADOWS FILLED THE ROOM
AS YOU BRUSHED THE HAND OF DOOM
AND I WAS LEFT TO FACE THIS WORLD ALONE

OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE
OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE

THE APPLE BLOSSOMS BLOOMED IN OUR BACK YARD
LIFE WITH YOU IT NEVER SEEMED SO HARD
YOU DANCED IN THE LIVING ROOM HALL
LIKE A QUEEN DANCED AT HER BALL
AND YOUR CHILDREN WERE YOUR ROYAL GUARD

MEI LI (Continued)

YOUR LAUGHTER, YOUR JOYS
YOUR SONGS FOR GIRLS AND BOYS
YOUR LOVE IT MADE OUR HOUSE SO SAFE AND WARM
BUT NOW IN DEAD OF NIGHT
WHEN I SEEK YOUR GUIDING LIGHT
I PRAY TO FIND YOUR SHELTER FROM THE STORM

OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE
OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE

OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA ARE YOU THERE
OH MAMA CAN YOU HEAR ME
OH MAMA I KNOW YOU'RE THERE

In one hand, MEI LI clutches her mother's PHOTOGRAPH close to her while the other reaches up to heaven.

(Blackout)

ACT II**Scene IV**

Setting: Room 308

At Rise: It is the day of the big test and MR. JOHNSON is at his DESK sorting through test papers while his STUDENTS are anxiously awaiting their final instructions. MEI LI's thoughts are elsewhere.

MR. JOHNSON racks the test papers together on his DESK TOP before rising with them to the LECTERN.

MR. JOHNSON

Good morning, class. Well, this is the day. The day of the big test. Now don't be worried... *(with mirth)*... although I know I didn't sleep a wink last night.

The STUDENTS laugh good-naturedly at this. MR. JOHNSON turns serious.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Now you'll have one hour to complete the test. As said before, Part I will consist of fifty multiple choice questions and Part II will consist of three essay questions, one of which is to be answered in no less than three paragraphs.

MR. JOHNSON studies the STUDENTS.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Is everyone clear on this?

The STUDENTS nod.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Good. Are there any questions before we begin?

The STUDENTS have none.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Any answers?

The STUDENTS have none.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, I'm sure I can expect some from you today.

The STUDENTS respond to this with light, nervous laughter.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

I am now going to distribute the test to you face down. Please do not turn your paper over until you're instructed to do so. Is that clear? Lavonna, Fanya, Josef and Vladimir, is that clear?

The RUSSIAN STUDENTS nod.

RUSSIAN STUDENTS

Yes, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Great. Just checking. Alright, here we go.

HE begins to distribute the tests.

MR. JOHNSON

Break a leg, Jose.

RICO

Thank you, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Rosetta, good luck.

ROSETTA

Thank you, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Good luck, Mei Li.

MEI LI says nothing. MR. JOHNSON hands out the remainder of the tests. HE returns to the LECTERN and looks at the CLOCK on the wall.

MR. JOHNSON

You will have exactly one hour to complete the test. We will begin when the clock strikes nine.

All eyes turn to the clock which reads 8:59. As the clock strikes 9:00, MR. JOHNSON instructs his STUDENTS to begin.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Alright class. It's nine o'clock. Please turn your tests over. You may begin.

MR. JOHNSON proctors the test with an exacting eye as the STUDENTS turn their tests over and begin to write. As the ticking clock becomes louder, the hands on it move noticeably, illustrating the passage of time. While completing their tests, the STUDENTS sing.

(up music: Tick Tock Tick Tock)

STUDENTS

TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
LISTEN TO THE TICKING CLOCK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
LISTEN TO THE TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK

The STUDENTS return to their tests. All but JOSEF who shrugs his shoulders and muses about what the test means to him.

JOSEF

OH, BACK IN RUSSIA
 A TEST MEANT EVERYTHING
 IT WAS YOUR TICKET UP AND DOWN
 IT WAS YOUR BRASS RING
 BUT HERE IT'S DIFFERENT
 THERE IS NO THREAT OF STORM OR STRIFE
 AND THOUGH IT DOESN'T MATTER
 STILL, I'D LIKE TO DO WELL FOR MY WIFE

*The STUDENTS raise their heads
 and sing in determined chorus.*

STUDENTS

GODDA MOVE UP
 GODDA MOVE UP
 GODDA MAKE IT
 CAN'T GET ENOUGH 'NUFF 'NUFF
 MY SPIRITS ARE SO HIGH
 I WANNA TOUCH THE SKY
 GODDA MOVE UP
 GODDA MOVE UP
 UP UP UP

*The STUDENTS return to their
 tests, all but JOSE who stares
 straight ahead and sings of
 his life's ambitions.*

JOSE

I'M NOT GONNA BE NO LOUSY GRAPE PICKER
 OR A SHOESHINE BOY OR A CANDLE STICK MAKER
 I'M NOT GONNA WORK IN NO FAST-FOOD JOINT
 OR A CHEAP GARAGE
 AND LET SOMEBODY POINT
 AND SAY "SEE"
 AND THINK THEY'RE BETTER THAN ME
 I'M GONNA MAKE IT
 I'M GONNA SUCCEED

*The hands on the clock move
 forward.*

STUDENTS

TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
 LISTEN TO THE TICKING CLOCK
 TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
 LISTEN TO THE TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
 TICK TOCK TICK TOCK

The STUDENTS return to their tests. All but NGUYEN TRAN who seems unusually reflective.

NGUYEN TRAN

THE TIME OF HUSTLE IN SAIGON
 THE LESSONS OF KENTUCKY
 AND NOW THIS LIFE IN SAN FRANCISCO
 SOME FOLKS WOULD SAY I'M LUCKY
 THOUGH I'VE BEEN BAD
 MY GI DAD
 SOMETIMES I WAS SO HATEFUL
 BUT NOW I'VE PEACE
 A BRAND-NEW LEASE
 TO ALL I AM SO GRATEFUL

STUDENTS

GODDA MOVE UP
 GODDA MOVE UP
 GODDA MAKE IT
 CAN'T GET ENOUGH 'NUFF 'NUFF
 MY SPIRITS ARE SO HIGH
 I WANNA TOUCH THE SKY
 GODDA MOVE UP
 GODDA MOVE UP
 UP UP UP

The STUDENTS return to their tests. ENRIQUE philosophizes.

ENRIQUE

THROUGH TRIALS AND TRAILS, I'VE FOUND THIS LAND
 WOULD SOME THINK ME NOW ONLY HALF A MAN?
 MY FATHER'S WORDS I HEAR AGAIN
 WITHOUT AN EDUCATION
 YOU'RE DOOMED TO LIFE'S FRUSTRATIONS
 YOU'LL NEVER BE
 THOUGH YOU'LL LONG TO BE
 MORE THAN JUST A PAIR OF HANDS

The hands on the clock move forward. The STUDENTS sing.

STUDENTS

TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
LISTEN TO THE TICKING CLOCK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
LISTEN TO THE TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK

The STUDENTS return to their tests, all but MEI LI who continues to think of MR. JOHNSON.

MEI LI

WOULD HE NOW NOTICE ME
AFTER EVERYTHING WE'VE BEEN THROUGH?
IT'S SO HARD TO SIT HERE AND FACE HIM AGAIN
I'M SO SORRY
I'M SO BLUE

STILL, WHAT WOULD I GIVE FOR JUST ONE LOOK
TO BE SWEEP AWAY IN HIS ARMS
HOW SAFE WOULD I FEEL IN HIS WARM EMBRACE
OH, I'D GIVE HIM ALL MY CHARMS
OH, I'D GIVE HIM ALL MY CHARMS

The STUDENTS join together for one final determined chorus.

STUDENTS

GODDA MOVE UP
GODDA MOVE UP
GODDA MAKE IT
CAN'T GET ENOUGH 'NUFF 'NUFF

MY SPIRITS ARE SO HIGH
I WANNA TOUCH THE SKY
GODDA MOVE UP
GODDA MOVE UP
UP UP UP

The clock ticks away.

STUDENTS (Continued)

TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
LISTEN TO THE TICKING CLOCK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
LISTEN TO THE TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK

The clock strikes 10:00. It has come full circle. The test is over.

MR. JOHNSON

Alright, class. Pencils up. Make sure your name is on the top left-hand corner of your papers before passing them up to the front of the class... Quickly!

The STUDENTS hurriedly hand in their papers to the front of the class. MR. JOHNSON collects them and returns to the LECTERN.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Thank you, class. The test results will be ready for you next Monday. That is, as you know, also the last day of the semester and yes, we will have a class party. Apparently, it is a tradition here at Roosevelt Junior High for classes to have an international "potluck" on the last day of class with students bringing samples of their country's food and culture for all of us to taste, explore and enjoy. It sounds delicious.

THE STUDENTS laugh.

STUDENTS (Continued)

While I'd be happy to help you with the planning, from what I hear, you're pretty much the experts when it comes to these things, so with your permission, I'll leave it to you.

THE STUDENTS laugh again.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

As for me, I've got to get home to work on these tests, so I can correct them in time for our final class. I'll let you know the results then. Until then, have a great weekend.

MR. JOHNSON exits. Most of the STUDENTS follow, but the LATIN STUDENTS remain to talk among themselves.

ROSETTA

Gee, Mr. Johnson sure left in a hurry today.

RICO

He probably can't wait to start correcting those tests. I hope I passed.

JOSE

Don't worry, Rico. You passed, man. I know you've been studying.

RICO

For sure, man. I want to get a good grade.

ENRIQUE

(woefully)

I just hope it helps.

ROSETTA

Of course, it will. Enrique, how is your father doing?

ENRIQUE

It's very bad. The INS had a hearing on his visa status yesterday. They ruled he is illegal, and they are going to deport him back to Mexico next week.

JOSE

Hang tough, muchacho. Don't give up.

ENRIQUE

I'm not giving up. I just want to help mi padre.

RICO

Estará bien. It'll be fine.

ROSETTA

I'm sorry for you and your family, Enrique.

ENRIQUE is silent as HE follows his classmates from the classroom. RICO puts a comforting arm on his friend's shoulder as THEY exit.

(Blackout)

ACT II**Scene V**

Setting: The Teacher's Room

At Rise: The TEACHERS are as always preparing for their next class. Most are sitting around the worktable except MR. DUGAN who is pouring a cup of coffee. HE drops two quarters into a coffee can and takes a sip.

MR. DUGAN

Now, that's a good cup of coffee. This, I don't mind paying for, but paying out of my pocket to make copies of classroom assignments for students because we've supposedly "surpassed" our "ration" of copies, that's something else.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Ain't that a bitch? I remember when the school district used to actually pay for those kinds of things.

MR. DANIELS

Did you hear that there's talk of them closing down another community college in a different state?

MR. JOHNSON

Which one?

MR. DANIELS

I don't know, but I heard it's a case similar to ours. Good academics and all, but someone in administration blew it with the finances, and the charter school hounds are on it like a dog on a bone, so everyone's in hot water.

MS. NEILSEN

Why are they always picking on the schools, anyways?

MR. DUGAN

Because we're the best deal in town and now that more community colleges are offering free tuition, it's driving the charter school backers nuts.

MS. NEILSEN

I heard they want to privatize everything, especially education, as a social planning tool to have students study only what's best for the corporation and allow those same corporations to decide who gets the opportunity to get an education and what they'll need to study if they want to move up the corporate ladder.

MR. JOHNSON

I don't know. It doesn't seem like schools' curriculum development is the corporation's place. There should be more community input.

MR. DUGAN

It all began with the conservative "Reagan Revolution." Since that started, California schools have dropped from 3rd to 47th in the nation in per student spending, and test scores have dropped dramatically, as funding resources and programs traditionally reserved for education dried up.

MR. DANIELS

More spoils of the "Reagan Revolution."

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Spoils is right. Not only was money taken away from our schools, but the same thing was done to our state mental hospital system, so they were closed down, and many of its long-care patients were handed one-way bus tickets to right here in beautiful downtown San Francisco where we've had an army of homeless people living on our streets ever since. *(she begins to dance)* Thank you, Mr. Reagan. Look, I'm doing an Irish jig in honor of the former President mixed in with my own Latin heritage. This one is called the "SF Homeless Dance." Like "Cucaracha," I'm actually stepping over homeless people on the street. *(pretending)* Oh, there goes one. There's another. Don't want to land on 'em. They look bad and they smell worse. *(singing to the tune of La Cucaracha)* La cucaracha, La cucaracha, stay away from dirty blankets; La cucaracha, cucaracha, Stay away from dirty tents."

MR. JOHNSON

Well, I'm glad to see you haven't gotten jaded over the situation, Ms. Rodriguez. Me, I'm still getting used to them. True, we have homeless people in New York, but nothing like I've seen here in San Francisco. It's like a hobo convention here!

MS. NEILSEN

Well, Reagan's gone now. Why can't we just reopen the mental health facilities and get those people the care they need?

MR. DUGAN

Because that would make too much sense, Ms. Neilsen. Remember! Don't let the facts confuse you. Who knows why in the richest country in the world, there isn't enough money for some of the most basic of necessities, like food, clothing and shelter for everyone? Why are we being taxed to death and not seeing anything for it in return?

MS. NEILSEN

There's never enough money.

MR. DANIELS

Oh, there's money, alright. It's just not being spent where it's needed and that's right here in River City.

MR. ALBERT

I thought we were in San Francisco.

MR. JOHNSON

But how can we get the money?

MR. DUGAN

I know. I've got it! We'll just "Tax the Rich"!

MS. NEILSEN

"Tax the Rich"?

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Ain't that a bitch!

MR. DUGAN steps forward.

(up music: Tax the Rich)

MR. DUGAN

WITH MONEY NOT FOR HEALTH CARE
 THE OLD, THE SICK, THE BLIND
 OR HOMELESS VETS WHO BRAVELY FOUGHT
 NOW STONED OUT OF THEIR MINDS
 IT GOES INSTEAD TO GREEDY MEN
 HIGH WALLS TO HIDE BEHIND

MS. RODRIGUEZ

AIN'T THAT A BITCH?
TAX THE RICH

MR. JOHNSON

WHILE MILLIONS LIVE IN POVERTY
AND OTHERS STARVE AND FREEZE
THE INFRASTRUCTURE'S CRUMBLING
OUR JOBS WENT OVERSEAS
THE WORLD'S A FRIGGING TINDERBOX
WE'RE ALL AFRAID TO SNEEZE

MS. RODRIGUEZ

AIN'T THAT A BITCH?
TAX THE RICH

TEACHERS

THEY CLAIM THEY CAN'T AFFORD IT
THEY'D RATHER STEAL AND HOARD IT
LET'S OVERTHROW THE BASTARDS
AND SEND THEM ON THEIR WAY

THE TIME FOR TRUTH IS COMING
BEFORE WE TAKE A DRUBBING
LET'S GATHER UP OUR FORCES
AND NOT WAIT A SINGLE DAY

AIN'T THAT A BITCH?
TAX THE RICH

MS. NEILSEN

WITH ROADS ACROSS THE NATION
IN ROLLING DISREPAIR
AND DOCTORS BILLS OUT OF THIS WORLD
(taking a chair)

I THINK I NEED A CHAIR
THESE CUTS TO SOCIAL SERVICES
WE'D BETTER ALL BEWARE

MS. RODRIGUEZ

AIN'T THAT A BITCH?
TAX THE RICH

MS. NEILSEN

WHILE COMPANIES MAKE KILLINGS
OUR PLANET DRIFTS ASTRAY
AS LOBBYSISTS KEEP SHILLING
THE CORPORATION WAY
LET'S SHARE THE WEALTH MORE FAIRLY
AND FIND A BETTER WAY

MS. RODRIGUEZ

NOW HERE'S A SWITCH
TAX THE RICH!

TEACHERS

THEY CLAIM THEY CAN'T AFFORD IT
THEY'D RATHER STEAL AND HOARD IT
LET'S OVERTHROW THE BASTARDS
AND SEND THEM ON THEIR WAY

THE TIME FOR TRUTH IS COMING
BEFORE WE TAKE A DRUBBING
LET'S GATHER UP OUR FORCES
AND NOT WAIT A SINGLE DAY

AIN'T THAT A BITCH?
TAX THE RICH

MR. DANIELS

IN HELL-HOLES LIKE AFGHANISTAN
IN KURDISTAN AND PAKISTAN
FROM SELMA DOWN TO BIRMINGHAM
THE MONEY'S STOPPED, IT'S ALL DRIED UP
THE ONLY PLACE TO LOOK IS UP
WHO'S THAT UP THERE WHO DOESN'T CARE
THE PUPPETEER, THE MASTER
JACK FELL DOWN AND BROKE HIS CROWN
AND JILL CAME TUMBLING AFTER

MS. RODRIGUEZ

AIN'T THAT A BITCH?
TAX THE RICH

MR. DANIELS

Well, it's that time again. Back in the box.

MR. JOHNSON

Our class is having their last day of class party today. If you have a chance, please stop by for some dim sum, papusas and piroshki.

MS. NEILSEN

If there's free food - you can count on Mr. Albert.

MR. ALBERT

Did somebody say dim sum?

MS. NEILSEN

And it is homemade.

MR. DANIELS

The students do know how to throw a party!

MS. RODRIGUEZ

See you there.

MR. JOHNSON

That's great! See you there.

MR. JOHNSON exits.

MR. DUGAN

That should be some party.

MR. ALBERT

It always is. Hmmm.

HE eyes and grabs a doughnut from the table and opens his mouth wide.

MR. ALBERT (Continued)

Down the hatch.

(Blackout)

Act II**Scene VI**

Setting: Room 308

At Rise: MR. JOHNSON is at his LECTERN as the STUDENTS begin to arrive to class bearing delicious dishes from their countries for the last day of school potluck.

MR. JOHNSON

Just look at all this food. Is that green tea salad, I see, Sopanny? It looks delicious. Good morning class. I trust you all had a good weekend.

STUDENTS

(in unison)

Good morning, Teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Now class, listen up. I have great news for you. Having spent the entire weekend grading your tests, I am very happy to announce that all of you have passed your final examinations and all of you are to be promoted to the next level of study beginning next semester. Congratulations everyone.

A wild cheer goes up among the STUDENTS as RICO struts over to the AUDIO PLAYER, pulls out an AUDIO TAPE from his pocket, inserts it into the machine and pushes the "PLAY" button.

Dance music fills the air. While some of the STUDENTS take dance partners, others stand on the sidelines talking excitedly.

The music is soon silenced though as ROSETTA walks purposefully over to the AUDIO PLAYER and shuts it off.

RICO looks up.

RICO

(surprised)

Huh? Que pasa?

ROSETTA calls for the STUDENTS' attention.

ROSETTA

Wait a minute, everybody. Wait a minute. Before the party begins, we have a small token of our appreciation we'd like to give for Mr. Johnson.

The STUDENTS quiet down.

ROSETTA

And to present the present...

ROSETTA gestures to SOPANNY.

ROSETTA (Continued)

Sopanny?

With outstretched hands, SOPANNY steps forward to present a brightly colored package to MR. JOHNSON.

SOPANNY

Mr. Johnson, this is from all of us. It's not much... but please...

MR. JOHNSON is genuinely surprised as HE accepts the gift.

ROSETTA

We love you, Mr. Johnson.

RICO

(echoing)

Yeah, Mr. Johnson. You're the best!

The STUDENTS cheer as MR. JOHNSON stands before them moved by this unexpected outpouring of affection. MEI LI cheers, too. The STUDENTS grow quiet as THEY wait for their teacher to speak.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you, students. This is very kind of you... I didn't expect this. Thank you, Sopanny. Thank you everyone.

LAVONNA

Open it teacher!

NGUYEN TRAN

Yeah, open it.

All of the STUDENTS urge him to open the present. He does so and unwraps a plaque.

FANYA

Read it, teacher.

LAVONNA

Yeah, read it.

MR. JOHNSON

It says, "BEST TEACHER AWARD" And look, there's my name right there in the middle - "To Teacher" I'm honored.

The STUDENTS laugh and cheer.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Thank you very much, class. You know, they say a teacher never forgets their first class and certainly I will never forget you. We've learned a lot together this past year you and I - certainly I have - and wherever we go, we must always strive to remember the lessons that we have learned here at Roosevelt Junior High.

And now - let the party begin.

The STUDENTS cheer. RICO once again pushes the "PLAY" button as the STUDENTS quickly find dance partners.

As MR. JOHNSON claps his hands in time to the music, HE is surprised to find MEI LI suddenly standing beside him.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Mei Li!

MEI LI looks hopefully to MR. JOHNSON.

MEI LI

(hesitant)

Mr. Johnson... would you like to dance?

MR. JOHNSON is startled at this proposal but thinks it harmless enough.

MR. JOHNSON

(gracious)

Why, I'd love to, Mei Li.

MEI LI beams so radiantly that MR. JOHNSON appears to blush. As the two begin to dance, RICO and ROSETTA look on while the RUSSIAN STUDENTS nod to each other knowingly.

Suddenly, in walk MR. WHITE and MS. BEASLEY followed by members of the SCHOOL BOARD and the TEACHERS.

Seeing the scene before them, MR. WHITE and MS. BEASLEY turn to one another and smile. It is a sad smile, though.

Caught off guard, MR. JOHNSON motions to RICO to stop the music.

As the music abruptly stops, the STUDENTS stand momentarily confused as MR. JOHNSON walks quickly across the room to greet his guests.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

(somewhat flustered)

Mr. White. Ms. Beasley. Members of the School Board. What a nice surprise. Won't you please join us?

MR. WHITE

I'm afraid we can't, Mr. Johnson. We've just told the other teachers and we thought we should tell you as well.

MR. JOHNSON

Tell me what?

The STUDENTS are all ears. MR. WHITE comes quickly to the point.

MR. WHITE

I've just received a call from the School Board ...

HE motions to the SCHOOL BOARD. A tense silence fills the room.

MR. WHITE (Continued)

In fact, members of the board are here with us now. You know School Board Members Lindsay, Walters and Primrose.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, how do you do.

MR. WHITE

It seems that the campaign against us waged by those who have worked long and hard towards the closing of our school has proven successful. (beat) It is my sad duty to report to you that at the end of this semester, Roosevelt Junior High School is to be closed... permanently.

The STUDENTS gasp.

MR. JOHNSON

(stunned)

But that can't be. What will happen to our students? Where will they go? What will they do? How will they learn?

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER PRIMROSE

Unfortunately, they won't, at least not here, now that the State Accreditation Commission has condemned this school.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER LINDSAY

We tried, but you know the story. The money just wasn't there.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, I've heard that one before.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Ain't that a bitch.

MR. WHITE can only shake his head.

MR. BEASLEY

This can't be. This just can't be.

MS. BEASLEY dabs her eyes with a tear-stained tissue as MR. WHITE consoles her.

MR. WHITE

There, there, Ms. Beasley.

LAVONNA is disgusted.

LAVONNA

Is (sic) like Russia again.

The RUSSIAN STUDENTS discuss it among themselves.

RICO and ROSETTA walk over to where MR. JOHNSON is standing. Both offer comforting arms around their teacher's shoulders.

RICO

(sympathetically)

It's okay, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON places his own arm on the student's shoulder.

MR. JOHNSON

I'm just sorry for all of you.

VUONG ANH turns to NGUYEN TRAN.

VUONG ANH

This no good for teacher.

NGUYEN TRAN nods in agreement.

NGUYEN TRAN

This no good for student, too.

From across the room, JOSEF explodes in anger.

JOSEF

I cannot believe that such things like this can happen here in America! In Russia, yes, but in America, no!

ENRIQUE

I don't know. I guess that such things sometimes do happen like this... even in America.

JOSE

(*disdainful*)

Humph. Such things do not surprise me.

The full scope of the tragedy finally dawns upon SOPANNY who with frightened eyes turns to MR. JOHNSON for an answer.

SOPANNY

But teacher ... what about next semester?

MR. JOHNSON stoops down to eye-level with SOPANNY.

MR. JOHNSON

(kindly)

I don't think there's going to be a next semester, Sopanny.

LAVONNA

(bitterly)

Or a semester after that, if I understand the word "permanently" correctly.

VUONG ANH is philosophical.

VUONG ANH

Well, at least we have our memories.

MR. JOHNSON

(walking towards VUONG ANH)

That we do, Vuong Anh. That we do. They may be able to take away our school, but they'll never be able to take away all that's been accomplished here.

NGUYEN TRAN

That's true, teacher, but one thing's for sure, these are the last days of Roosevelt Junior High.

MR. JOHNSON nods sadly in agreement.

NGUYEN TRAN begins to sing.

(up music: The Last Days of Roosevelt Jr. High)

NGUYEN TRAN (Continued)

THE SHADOWS ARE REVEALING
 THE SUN IS SINKING LOW
 I'VE GOT AN EMPTY FEELING
 I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO

SOPANNY

THE WORLD IS SPINNING MADLY
 IT DRIFTS THROUGH OUTER SPACE
 AND I FEEL SO SMALL
 ONLY TWO FEET TALL
 CAN I FIND A HIDING PLACE?

VUONG ANH

BUT THE SUN STILL SHINES
 AND BABIES CRY
 AND NEIGHBORS LEND A HAND
 AND EAGLES SCREECH
 THEY ALMOST PREACH
 THEY SAY, "GET IT WHILE YOU CAN
 THIS LAND IS EVERYBODY'S LAND"

*The STUDENTS join their
 classmates.*

STUDENTS

FOR THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS
 OF ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH
 THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS
 I KNOW WE'RE BOUND TO CRY
 WE'LL THINK ABOUT THE LESSONS
 AND ALWAYS WONDER WHY
 THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS OF SCHOOL

*Enter the TEACHERS who stand
 melancholy beside their old
 colleagues and begin to sing.*

TEACHERS

FOR THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS
 OF ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH
 MY FRIENDS WHO NOW BESIDE ME
 WILL GO ON BY AND BY
 WE ALWAYS DID OUR BEST HERE
 WE GAVE OUR COLLEGE TRY
 THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS OF SCHOOL

As the TEACHERS finish their farewells, MR. WHITE and MS. BEASLEY look fondly at each other, the tear-stained tissue still clutched in MS. BEASLEY's hand. Resignedly, THEY sing their farewells.

MR. WHITE & MS. BEASLEY

FOR THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS
OF ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH
THE END OF ENDLESS MEETINGS
FAREWELL TO SUITS AND TIES
THOSE BUREAUCRATIC SNAFUS
WILL SEEM LIKE PUMPKIN PIE
THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS OF SCHOOL

ALL join together for the final refrain.

ALL

FOR THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS
OF ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH
THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS
I KNOW WE'RE BOUND TO CRY
WE'LL THINK ABOUT THE LESSONS
AND ALWAYS WONDER WHY
THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS OF SCHOOL
THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS OF SCHOOL

The room is quiet as many are teary-eyed, overcome by the devastating news.

MR. WHITE

(slowly)

Well, teachers. I suppose we'd better be getting back to our classrooms. Everyone has got a lot of work to do.

HE turns to MS. BEASLEY.

MR. WHITE (Continued)

Ms. Beasley. You come with me.

MS. BEASLEY

(dabbing her eyes)

Yes, Mr. White. (sniffles) You know, I'll follow you
alwayswherever you go.

*HE puts a comforting arm around
his friend of many years.*

MR. WHITE

(sentimental)

As I, you, Ms. Beasley. As I, you.

MS. BEASLEY

(breaking down)

I never thought it would end like this.

*SHE sobs into her tissue again
as MR. WHITE escorts her from
the room followed by members
of the SCHOOL BOARD.*

*The TEACHERS begin filing out.
Each bid farewell to MR.
JOHNSON as THEY exit.*

MR. DANIELS

Well, hang in there, Mr. Johnson. Don't let 'em get you down.

MR. JOHNSON

I won't, Mr. Daniels.

MR. DUGAN

You're still young. There'll be other jobs.

MR. JOHNSON

Thanks, Bill.

MS. NEILSEN

I was afraid this would happen.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Ain't that a bitch!

MR. JOHNSON

You said it, Ms. Rodriguez.

MR. ALBERT

Well, this certainly is a rude way to end the semester. Not even cake and coffee?

MS. NEILSEN looks on the bright side.

MS. NEILSEN

Cheer up, people. Remember, it's always darkest before the dawn.

MR. ALBERT

Now, how did I know you were going to say something cheery likethat?

MS. NEILSEN

(not taking the bait)

Oh really, Mr. Albert. You don't always have to be such a fuddy duddy. (cheerful) Come on. I'll buy you a cheeseburger.

MR. ALBERT

(surprised)

Really? Well, that's very nice of you. Say, did I ever tell you how much I liked your hats?

MS. NEILSEN

(taking his arm)

You know, Clarence. I think there's hope for you yet.

THEY exit, their futures uncertain as anyone's.

The TEACHERS have left, MR. JOHNSON looks to his STUDENTS. HE is as nervous now as he was on the first day of class.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, class... this is it. I didn't expect our ending to be so abrupt and final, but... there you have it. It's over now and I suppose we'll just have to learn to live with it... at least for now. Maybe things will turn around in the future.

RICO

But teacher, it's not fair.

MR. JOHNSON

I know what you mean, Rico. I'm sorry.

ROSETTA

Will we ever see you again, teacher?

MR. JOHNSON

Oh, I expect so... I'll probably be around for a while... Then I suppose it's back to the old job interview game (with tongue in cheek), which is a fun one, too, I'm sure you can imagine...

The STUDENTS laugh.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

And where that'll lead me, I don't know. I can only hope that it's someplace half as nice as here.

The students smile.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Alright now, class. It's time. Gather up your belongings. Don't forget anything. You'd hate to lose your textbooks on the last day of school. Incidentally, the office will probably remain open for the next few weeks while final preparations are being made for the closing of the school, so if you need anything before that time...

HE turns wistful at the thought.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

You know it's funny. It probably took years to build a place like this. But with one quick vote it's over, and soon, it's all going to be gone.

The STUDENTS turn sober at this thought and quietly gather up their belongings.

MR. JOHNSON takes his place behind his DESK as the STUDENTS begin to exit and offer their teacher their final farewells.

RICO and ROSETTA approach first. RICO extends his hand to MR. JOHNSON who stands.

RICO

Goodbye, teacher. Take care of yourself.

MR. JOHNSON

(shaking hands)

You too, Rico. Take good care of Rosetta.

ROSETTA

Oh, don't worry, teacher. (grinning at RICO) He will.

THEY smile at one another. ENRIQUE and JOSE approach next.

ENRIQUE

Gracias, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you, Enrique. I hope things work out for you.

ENRIQUE

I will try my best to see that they do, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

I know you will, Enrique. You are a hard worker. It was a pleasure having you in my class. Good luck.

ENRIQUE smiles.

JOSE

(mischievous)

Break a leg, teacher. Thank you for everything. You stay out of trouble, eh?

JOSE offers the thumbs-up sign.

MR. JOHNSON

Oh, I'll try. You too, eh Jose?

JOSE

You know it, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON returns the thumbs-up sign to JOSE who exits wearing a satisfied smile.

LAVONNA and the RUSSIAN STUDENTS approach next.

LAVONNA

Thank you, Mr. Johnson... for everything.

MR. JOHNSON

You're welcome, Lavonna. It was a pleasure having you in my class. Keep up with your studies.

LAVONNA

I will.

HE turns to FANYA.

MR. JOHNSON

Goodbye Fanya.

FANYA grabs MR. JOHNSON tightly by the arm.

FANYA

(her voice breaking)

Mr. Johnson, you are a teacher from G-d.

MR. JOHNSON is taken aback by the high words of praise.

MR. JOHNSON

Well... thank you, Fanya. That's a very nice thing to say...

MR. JOHNSON turns to JOSEF.

MR. JOHNSON

Goodbye Josef. I hope you have found yourself this past year.

JOSEF

I have, teacher. Thanks to you.

The two men smile at each other. MR. JOHNSON turns to VLADIMIR who has been standing silently off to one side. The big man snuffles loudly and then without warning wraps MR. JOHNSON in a massive Russian bear hug.

VLADIMIR

(emotional)

Spasiba, Teacher. Spasiba.

Released from VLADIMIR's vice-like grip MR. JOHNSON tries desperately to regain his breath.

MR. JOHNSON

(coughing)

You're welcome, Vladimir. You're welcome.

VLADIMIR

Dosvedanya, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Goodbye, Vladimir.

MR. JOHNSON bids a final farewell to his RUSSIAN STUDENTS.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Goodbye to you all. Best wishes in America.

*The last group of students,
VUONG ANH, NGUYEN TRAN and
SOPANNY approach. NGUYEN TRAN
speaks.*

VUONG ANH

Thank you, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Thank you, Nguyen Tran.

SOPANNY

We will never forget you, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Nor I you, Sopanny.

*SOPANNY tries hard to hold back
her tears but cannot.*

SOPANNY

(breaking down)

Oh, teacher.

*SHE runs out in despair as
the others look on.*

NGUYEN TRAN

She's (a) very emotional girl, teacher.

MR. JOHNSON

Yes, she is, Tran.

NGUYEN TRAN

Maybe I go see if she okay.

MR. JOHNSON

That sounds like a fine idea, Tran. Why don't you go see if she's alright.

NGUYEN TRAN starts after her but suddenly stops in his tracks. HE turns around slowly and looks up at MR. JOHNSON for the last time, wanting to say something.

NGUYEN TRAN

You know... you still number one teacher, Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON

(chuckling)

Thank you, Tran. And you are still number one student, too, I'm sure.

NGUYEN TRAN smiles once more at MR. JOHNSON before darting from the classroom.

VUONG ANH remains and stands respectfully before his teacher. His words seem almost rehearsed, yet they are genuine.

VUONG ANH

(humbly)

I would like to thank you teacher from the bottom of my heart. You have been a very excellent teacher for all of your students. I will miss you and wish you much happiness and prosperity for your future.

MR. JOHNSON

(solemn)

Thank you, Vuong Anh. I, too, wish you the brightest of futures... the greatest of fortunes for you and yours, in America.

VUONG ANH bows respectfully to his teacher who bows to his student in return.

MEI LI, too, bows to VUONG ANH before HE exits. Now MR. JOHNSON and MEI LI are alone once again. An awkward silence fills the classroom.

MR. JOHNSON (Continued)

Well, Mei Li. I guess this is it. Have you got any plans for next year?

MEI LI

I will stay home.

MR. JOHNSON

Well, something will come up, I'm sure. There are lots of fun things to do in the city.

MEI LI

(stammering)

Mr. Johnson, I have heard a lot about Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Is it as lovely as they say? ... Do you think we could visit it together one day?

MR. JOHNSON

(surprised)

Well, that is a little unusual, Mei Li,... but I don't suppose it would hurt if we took the bus to the park and visited the DeYoung Museum. I hear they have a new art exhibit there that's supposed to be very good. Afterwards, we could grab a cup of tea next door at the Japanese Tea Garden. How does that sound?

MEI LI

Like an American Dream come true, Teacher. At last, I feel like I really am... in America.

MR. JOHNSON holds open the door for MEI LI who steps forth and exits. Before joining her, HE looks once more at the classroom where HE himself has learned so much before. Wistful yet forever hopeful, HE walks into the future, bright as the morning sunlight, trying to make its way up through the cool, dreamy fog of San Francisco.

-THE END-