

Molly: I'm sorry, Erma, and sorry starts with the letter "S" too.

Erma: I'm sorry too, Molly. I don't like to get angry.

Molly: Dress shopping is going to be fun, especially with Bert and Ernie.

Both: *(Spelling)* F-U-N, fun! Yeah! *(They laugh wildly.)*

Erma: We have to say goodbye, special friends!

Molly: And always remember to be proud of who you are! And even though you are very special and have many stereotypes about you, don't be afraid that you are different.

Both: Different can be good! *(Spelling)* G-O-O-D, good!

Erma: Special friends, the moral of today is to not use stereotypes. Even though they are mostly true, they are very wrong.

Molly: Hey, Erma, on our way, maybe we can stop by dead Mr. Hooper's Store to get some green jelly beans!

Erma: Green!

Both: G-R-E-E-N! Green! Spelling is fun!

Molly: And what's more fun than spelling?

Both: Getting married! *(Screaming and giggling)* Yeah!!!!

Scene Eleven: PBS Sign Off

PBS Voice: This concludes this week's episode of *Sunflower Street!*

Spanish Voice: *Pido disculpas por perder su tiempo.*

PBS Voice: Funding for this program was provided by PBS and viewers like you.

Spanish Voice: *Me siento violada por el servicio de radiodifusión de la marioneta.*

PBS Voice: Tune in next week for *Sunflower Street:* Episode 5 "Erma and Molly Get a Divorce."

Spanish Voice: *Obviamente, Bert y Ernie cometieron un error horrible.*

PBS Voice: Thank you for supporting the Puppet Broadcasting Service.

Spanish Voice: *Adios.*

**Heads Up, Off, Whatever:
An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette**

By Gregory T. Burns



Kisses

By Elise Sharron



A Year in the Life of Jasmine Spinner

By Kendra Sparks



You Are My Sunshine

By Bridget Grace Sheaff



The Queen of Oz

By Kristy Thomas



**Sunflower Street: Episode 4
"Erma and Molly Get a Date"**

By Bryan Denbow

NOTES

Learning interesting new trivia facts is always an adventure; however, for a group of Catholic school girls, who are encouraged to research all of their information from the Internet, it is sometimes difficult to separate the facts from fiction. *Heads Up, Off, Whatever: An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette* should be performed by a female and be entered in Humorous Interpretation. The performer must decide the age of the students, ranging from any grade in elementary school through junior high school. Also, it would be advantageous to play Sister Stein as a sweet, matronly stereotype; however, with so many younger female characters, it is imperative for the performer to distinguish each student both physically and vocally. The possibilities for character choices include, but are not limited to the following: The nerd; the know-it-all smarty pants; the Valley girl; the dark, brooding, Goth girl; and the nasal girl; the cheerleader; the bully; the Southern girl; the whiny girl; and the soft-spoken, shy girl. The choices for character development are endless. Please note, the *italicized* words found within the dialogue are merely suggestions to aid the performer in deciding which words to emphasize. This play is a throwback to old school forensics, with a universal message for today's youth: Just because something is printed on the Internet, doesn't make it true.

Location: A Classroom at St. Mary's Sacred Heart Lady of the Madonna and Lourdes Academy

Characters:

Tabitha, a young girl
Sister Stein, a substitute teacher
Lori, a young girl
Paula, a young girl
Bethany, a young girl
Jennifer, a young girl
Clara, a young girl

Tabitha: (*Finishing her book report*) ...And The Jonas Brothers' lives were never the same. And that's why they don't like the films, *Orca*, *Free Willy*, *Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home*, *Free Willy 3: The Rescue*, or the book, *Moby Dick*. The End.

Sister Stein: (*Applauding*) You did a wonderful job, Tabitha. Thank you for that *very* informative oral book report.

Tabitha: You're welcome, Sister Stein.

Both: (*Beat*) Married! (*They laugh excitedly.*)

Erma: And that is different, because puppets don't ever get married—not even Frog and Fat Pig!

Molly: That's because puppets can't make baby puppets, so why would puppets want to get married?

Erma: That's a good point, Molly!

Molly: And guess what, special friends! Bert and Ernie want to get married. They want to marry...

Both: Us! M-A-R-R-I-E-D! (*Singing happily*) We are getting married! We are getting married! We are getting married! (*They laugh.*)

Molly: And to think, it all happened because we went on a date: The big "D" word with four letters.

Erma: Bert and Ernie are so brave to ask us to marry them. They don't care what other people think! We will be the first married puppets on Sesame or Sunflower Street! They are not afraid to be called queer or strange. Bert and Ernie are so brave!

Molly: And hopefully we will make them MORE gay and happy than they already are!

Erma: I don't think that is even possible, Molly.

Molly: And it doesn't even bother me that they are insisting on still sharing their own bedroom.

Erma: Well, they are super, super best friends.

Molly: Oh no! Erma, look at the clock!

Erma: It's almost two o'clock!

Molly: Special friends, two o'clock means the big hand is on the twelve and the little hand is on the two. Never mind. You'll never understand. Telling time is a big concept.

Erma: We have to say goodbye, special friends, because we are going to be late. And being late is rude.

Molly: We are meeting Bert and Ernie at two o'clock.

Erma: Because we are going to do the "S" word with Bert and Ernie.

Molly: The "S" word that has three letters.

Erma: Molly, "shop" has four letters. 1-2-3-4.

Molly: Oh. That's what I meant, Erma. Like you always say, "I'm stupid!" Stupid starts with "S" too.

Erma: I forgive you, Molly. I know you are not perfect.

Molly: Bert and Ernie are helping us pick out our wedding dresses, and I want a beautiful, green dress.

Erma: Molly, brides wear white dresses.

Molly: I still want a green dress, because I love green.

Erma: I'm going to have a beautiful, white dress.

Molly: Erma, you could never wear a white dress.

Erma: (*Violently*) That was a SECRET between us! A secret starts with an "S." Don't make me go Sesame on you!

Molly: I love surprises!

Erma: As much as you love the color green?

Molly: (*Thinking*) I love them both the same.

Erma: You make me happy, Molly! Now put on your listening ears! Bert’s talking.

Scene Nine: Live Outside of the Sadie Hawkins Dance

Tina: Tina the Toad here WITHOUT Baby Bunny. It was past her bedtime. So, now I’m reporting live with the letter “O.”

The Letter O: Oh.

Tina: Ribbit. Ms. Letter “O”, I have to admit that normally you’re much rounder. You look more like an oval tonight, which reminds me of that joke. “What did the letter “O” say to the number “8?” (*Beat*) “I really like your new belt!” (*Beat*) But seriously, are you dieting?

The Letter O: (*Blushing*) Oh.

Tina: Ribbit. Just make sure you don’t lose too much weight. We don’t want you to get an eating disorder like the letter “I.”

The Letter O: Ooooh.

Tina: No “O”-ffense. We just like you round. It suits you.

The Letter O: Oh!

Tina: Ribbit. (*Suddenly excited*) Wait! Wait! We have a breaking story!

The Letter O: Oh?

Tina: Very close, best friends, Bert and Ernie have just made a shocking announcement to everyone at the dance! (*Excitedly*) “O”, I have to admit that I am stunned! This has to be a mistake.

The Letter O: Oh? Oh!

Tina: Ribbit...Apparently, Bert and Ernie have finally “puppeted-up” and are ...Ribbit...Bert and Ernie have publically and officially announced that they ARE...

The Letter O: (*Shrieking*) Ooooooooooooooooooooooh!
Ooooooooooooooooooooooh! Oh! OOOOOH!

Scene Ten: Inside Erma and Molly’s Apartment

Erma: Molly, the dance did not go the way we expected.

Molly: I know, Erma. Bert and Ernie really surprised us!

Erma: And everyone at the dance!

Molly: (*Looking at audience*) We have to tell our special friends in our live human audience the news.

Erma: Hi, friends! We have a lot to share with you, and sharing is good.

Both: (*Spelling*) G-O-O-D, good!

Erma: And something else that is good is taking a chance to be different!

Molly: Like you, friends! You are different, but you are good!

Erma: Bert and Ernie decided to do something that is different!

Molly: Bert and Ernie want to be...Can you guess? It starts with the letter “M.”

Sister Stein: I had no idea The Jonas Brothers had all *three* been swallowed by a *whale*. (*Pauses to let Tabitha’s book report sink in*) Girls, I can’t thank you enough for these wonderful oral book reports. (*Beat*) As your permanent substitute teacher for the rest of this semester, I’m sure all of you remember—though I frequently don’t—that I’ve never fully recovered from my chronic case of...oh, yes, *amnesia*. (*Beat*) These oral book reports are filling my brain with all *sorts* of useful information that—after the amnesia, well—I simply *forgot*. In a way, you girls have become *my* teacher, and I must say—we’ve certainly heard about some interesting people today, haven’t we? Lori presented an oral book report titled, Miley Cyrus: Disney Princess Gone Wild.

Lori: Oh, and I forgot to add that Miley’s behavior has had a crushing effect on her dad, Billy Ray. (*Beat*) It’s given him an *Achy Breaky Heart*.

Sister Stein: (*Sincerely*) And that breaks mine. (*Beat*) You girls have no idea how much your parents worry about all of you...(*Looking down at her list*) And Paula gave us a report she called, Harry Potter, the Silky Smooth Boy Who Likes to Smoke. (*Beat*) Are you sure all of your information is correct, Paula? I mean, come on. We’re talking about Harry Potter here.

Paula: I’m positive, Sister Stein. The Internet said that Harry Potter was hooked on his (*Using a short ‘o’ on the syllable, pot*) pot-ions.

Sister Stein: Paula, do you think the article might have read *potions*?

Paula: No, Sister, the word ‘*pot*’ was at the end of a line, and then there was a *hyphen*. Then after that, it said ‘*ions*’ at the beginning of the next line. And I also read on the Internet that you can get *hooked* on pot. So I put the two and two together. Now, I’m sure of it. Harry Potter’s name has a double meaning.

Sister Stein: Well, I can’t tell you girls how blessed I am that your principal chose to hire me after Mr. Clump’s sudden departure, but the school needs a handicapable teacher to make its quota—and here I am—a substitute teacher who is now part of an exemplary school like St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Lady of the Madonna and Lourdes Academy, where we pride ourselves on guiding young impressionable girls—and at the same time—letting them flourish and grow with the all of the wonders of new technology. (*Checking the clock*) Oh, and our clock’s not working, but I think we have time for one more presentation before lunch. Let’s see. Who hasn’t gone yet? (*Looking at her roll*) Bethany? Would you like to go next?

Bethany: Sure, Sister Stein, but my oral book report’s a little different. Is that okay?

Sister Stein: Why certainly it’s all right, but how is yours different? Didn’t you pick a famous person or persons?

Bethany: Yes, Sister Stein, but everyone else picked people in the movies or on TV or on the radio. (*Pause*) I picked Marie Antoinette.

Sister Stein: My goodness, you chose Marie Antoinette? That’s certainly

an interesting choice. What made you choose her?

Bethany: Well, you know how our other teacher showed us that beheading video from the Internet—the one that happened overseas? Well, the other girls and I haven't been able to stop talking about it. *(Long pause)* About the nightmares, that is. *(Long pause)* We all *have* them now. *(Beat)* Nightly. *(Beat)* So I thought if maybe I did a *report* about Marie Antoinette...then, you know—the bad dreams would stop.

Sister Stein: Is that true—about the nightmares? *(Truly concerned)* Girls, I want you to raise your hands, if you've ever had nightmares after watching that horrible, horrible video that horrible, horrible man showed you. *(Making the sign of the cross)* You poor, poor souls... *(Looking around and counting nearly every hand, until she notices one girl whose hand is not raised)* Jennifer, why isn't your hand up along with the other girls?

Jennifer: *(Pause, smiles creepily)* I thought the video was coooool.

Sister Stein: *(Disturbed by Jennifer's response)* Ohhhh-kayyyy. Well—**Bethany:** *(Interrupting)* Sister Stein, I don't want to give anything away about my book report—*(Pause)*—but I think learning about what *happened* to Marie Antoinette might make the nightmares stop for everyone. *(Smiling)* They did for me.

Sister Stein: That's very sweet of you to be so concerned about your classmates, Bethany, but before you begin—I think I need to clear up what might be an untrue rumor circulating about Mr. Clump. *(Gathering her thoughts)* And what is our rule about spreading rumors here at St. Mary's Sacred Heart Lady of the Madonna and Lourdes Academy? Anyone?

Clara: *(Raising her hand)* You can't spread a rumor about someone—unless it's true.

Sister Stein: That's right, Clara. So, girls, I think it's only right for me to tell all of you that Mr. Clump wasn't fired—or arrested—for showing all of you that inappropriate, gruesome piece of video.

Paula: *(Raising her hand and nodding her head)* Not to correct you, but I think he was, Sister Stein. My mother called the principal and everything.

Jennifer: *(Raising her hand)* My two dads called the principal, too.

Sister Stein: *(Again disturbed by Jennifer's response)* I can assure all of you. Mr. Clump was not *arrested* for that. *(Pause)* He was simply put on administrative leave barring an internal *investigation*. *(Beat)* So, now that we've cleared up that little misunderstanding, Bethany, what is the title of your oral book report?

Bethany: Heads Up, Off, Whatever: An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette. *(Beat)* By Bethany Larson.

Sister Stein: *(Writing on her evaluation sheet)* Excellent. That's a very clever title, and thank you for not giving anything away too soon. *(Looking up)* You may begin any time you're ready.

Bethany: *(Reading from her book report)* Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna of Habsburg-Lorraine, daughter of the Australian Empress, Maria

now she's deformed.

Tina: *(Resigned)* Ribbit. Bunny, you have to be quiet. Just sit there and be cute, that's what we hired you for. Anyway, only a few bystanders received minor injuries from flying cookie crumbs. Stay tuned for more live updates from the Sadie Hawkins Dance after these messages brought to you by "Chicken Fillet", whose motto is "Chicken is our pride, and anything different can stay outside!"

Baby Bunny: You know what?

Tina: *(Angrily)* WHAT?

Baby Bunny: Sometimes I get itchy, because I have lice.

Tina: *(Exasperated)* Stay tuned! Ribbit.

Scene Eight: Inside the Sadie Hawkins Dance

Molly: *(Moving to the music)* Wow, this dance sure is fun! I've never been to a dance before.

Erma: It is fun, Molly, and I've never been to a dance either. I guess it's because we've never had a date.

Molly: Is it normal for Bert and Ernie to dance all the slow dances together?

Erma: I don't think they are dancing, Molly. It looks more like they are whispering into each other's ear.

Molly: They must be telling each other really big secrets.

Erma: Of course they are! They are very best friends, and best friends tell each other secrets!

Molly: You're right, Erma. You are my best friend, and we tell each other lots of secrets. Like when you...

Erma: *(Violently and deep-voiced)* You promised you would NEVER bring that up again! Don't make me ANGRY! You won't like it when I'm ANGRY!

Molly: *(Scared)* I'm sorry, Erma. I won't talk. It's my bad.

Erma: *(Menacing)* It would be the last "bad" you ever had!

Molly: *(Changing the subject)* We sure are having fun tonight, huh?

Erma: *(Calmly)* Yeah.

Molly: Ernie sure has been drinking a lot tonight.

Erma: And do you know what drinking a lot makes me think of? "P!"

Molly: You're right. I'd have to pee a lot, if I drank that much.

Erma: No silly. The letter "P" for punch! Ernie is drinking a lot of punch.

Molly: I love "P"! I mean the letter "P", not pee like urine. That would be gross.

Erma: *(Sarcastically)* Molly, you never cease to amaze me.

Molly: Thank you, Erma!

Erma: Look, Molly! What are Bert and Ernie doing?

Molly: It looks like they are walking to the microphone to say something.

Erma: I think they are. I wonder what they are going to say.

That’s what girls do.

Molly: What’s stopping us, Erma?

Erma: Well, we have human people watching us. That makes me feel not so happy.

Molly: I told you, Erma! They are very special friends. They are such special friends that they probably won’t remember any of this. *(To Audience)* Special friends, don’t ever be ashamed of who you are! *(Talking slowly)* The fact that you are *trying* to learn, makes you even more special!

Scene Seven: Live Outside of the Sadie Hawkins Dance

Tina: Ribbit... Tina the Toad here, live outside of Sunflower Street’s Sadie Hawkins Dance! Tonight’s broadcast is sponsored by Sunflower Street’s newest restaurant, “Chicken Fillet,” and on that note, Chicken is no longer with us. Many are still asking the question, “Why DID Chicken cross the road?” Maybe Chicken just wanted to “LAY IT” on the line? Witnesses claim they saw a small EGG-splotion. In memory of Chicken, I’d like to shout out one final ...Boo-Kok! Ribbit. I’m sure you’ve noticed that standing next to me, is my new co-host, Baby Bunny.

Baby Bunny: *(Adorably)* You know what?

Tina: What?

Baby Bunny: I want to grow up to be the Easter Bunny.

Tina: Ribbit... That’s sweet.

Baby Bunny: You know what? I don’t know how to lay eggs, but I’ll try really hard.

Tina: That’s great, Baby Bunny. Ribbit... Now, let’s hop right to the news at the Sadie Hawkins Dance.

Baby Bunny: Sometimes, my mommy bites me real hard. I have marks.

Tina: That’s enough, Bunny. Ribbit. If you look behind us, you can’t help but see all the puppets arriving to the dance. What a wonderful night this is turning out to be.

Baby Bunny: My daddy has a girlfriend, but it’s a secret.

Tina: *(Impatiently)* Ribbit. Bunny, no more talking. Be a good girl.

Baby Bunny: I have 23 sisters and four brothers, but some of them died.

Tina: *(Angrily)* Ribbit! That is very sad! And on that note, tonight hasn’t been wonderful for everyone. Even though the dance has barely begun, there has already been a very unpleasant incident reported.

Baby Bunny: You know what? My daddy told me Bugs Bunny is a drag queen.

Tina: Ribbit... According to sources, a crazed, blue monster ran to the dessert table and began frantically gorging himself on cookies. Almost immediately, the cookie loving monster went into a diabetic seizure, then coma. The monster is now in intensive care at Sesame Hospital. Witnesses described it as “a frightening display of addiction and gluttony.”

Baby Bunny: You know what? My great-grandma got hit by a car, and

Therese— *(Looks up from report and addresses the class)* Thank goodness her mother only had *one* first name—*(Reading again)* —of Hapsburg and her husband, Francis I of Lorraine, was born on November 2nd in 1755. She was born a princess.

Clara: Bethany, was she a princess like Cinderella?

Lori: Or Miley Cyrus from Disney? *(Excited)* Did she go *totally wild*, too?

Bethany: No, Clara, she wasn’t like Cinderella, because they didn’t have glass slippers back then. *(Beat)* But she did like *shoes*. She had hundreds of pairs. And Marie Antoinette didn’t go *totally wild*, but she was wild about the *arts*. She liked cultural things, like plays and operas. She also liked to sing. So did her brother. I think his name was Donny.

Sister Stein: That’s so interesting, Bethany. I never knew that before. I think I have one of their albums.

Bethany: Marie Antoinette also liked puppets. In fact, she liked them so much—the Italians eventually named a *type* of puppet after her. These puppets were very special and were usually made out of paper mache or wood, and they were manipulated by strings. They were called *mari- onettes*.

Sister Stein: Well, Bethany, I am very impressed. I had no idea. The class and I are certainly learning so many new things from your report. What *else* can you tell us about Marie Antoinette?

Bethany: Well, when she got older, her mother made her leave Austria and move to France. She was forced to marry this man who would one day become the King of France. His name was Louis XVI. He was shy, but he was nice to her. He let her eat anything she liked. And while she maintained a slim waistline, her hips grew to an enormous size! That is why in all of the pictures you see on the computer, her *waist* may look small—*(Spreading her hands out as far as they can go)* but you can tell by the shape of her skirts that her *hips* are bigger than a hippopotamus.

Clara: What did she like to eat?

Bethany: Well, according to the information on the Internet, Marie Antoinette liked to eat cake.

Clara: And—?

Bethany: I think that’s all. It never said she ate anything else, and by looking at all of those pictures of her—it makes sense. They didn’t have sugar-free desserts back then, so I guess she just ate lots and lots of cake!

Jennifer: *(Creepily)* Were the cakes soft and moist?

Bethany: I’m sure some of them were, but actually, I think they were mostly hard as rocks.

Jennifer: *Hard cake?* *(Beat)* Even better—

Bethany: *(Disturbed by Jennifer’s response)* The Internet said one of her *favorite* kinds of cake was *Marble*. *(Beat)* And you don’t have to be a geologist to know that marble is *hard*. *(Beat)* And expensive.

Tabitha: I know! My mom got new marble countertops in our kitchen last

year, and it cost more than the tuition to this school!

Clara: I love cake, but I'll bet eating cake all the *time* made her sick. It probably *killed* her!

Bethany: No, Marie Antoinette died from a *headache*. And before her death, I don't think she was sick a lot. *(Beat)* She only went to the doctor when she felt *crumby*. *(Beat)* Anyway, eventually Marie Antoinette's husband's dad died, and then Louis XVI became King of France. This made Marie Antoinette the first Queen of France. They were rich. *(Beat)* They were richer than *Oprah*. *(Beat)* But everyone else in France was poor. They were *so* poor that they started a revolution. It was called the French Revolution. The poor people didn't think it was fair that Marie Antoinette and her husband, Louie XVI, could eat cake all day long, and they couldn't.

Paula: *(Concerned)* I'll bet *they* liked cake, too.

Clara: *(Sadly)* But they were too *poor* to have cake.

Tabitha: And there weren't cheap *cake mixes* at the store, like there are today—because Betty Crocker and Hines weren't born yet.

Bethany: *(Excited the girls are so into her report)* All of you are *right!*

Sister Stein: *(Elated)* THIS—is what education is all about! *(Proudly)* Sharing—and teaching each other—and giving me the one thing I *lost* during my chronic bout with amnesia—TRUTHFUL Information. *(Beat)* I just *love* you girls! *(Beat)* Bethany, please tell us more!

Bethany: Well, the people of France grew to despise Marie Antoinette and her husband, so they all went to her castle and banged on the door! They said, “Hey, Marie, stop singing about how you're a little bit country and your brother's a little bit rock-n-roll. We're hungry! Give us something to eat!” And she said, “Hey, pipe down out there! I've got kids taking a nap upstairs!” *(Beat)* Oh, I forgot to tell you. Marie Antoinette was now a mother. *(Beat)* So she tells them all to scam before they wake up her children, and one of her lady servants said, “Don't you care about them?” And Marie said, “Oh, the kids are fine. They're asleep.” And the lady servant said, “No, I mean, don't you care about the people of France? They don't have enough bread.” And Marie replied, “Oh, go let them eat cake! It's not *that* fattening.”

Lori: *(On the edge of her seat)* What happened?

Bethany: Well, the people of France wanted her *cake!* So they yelled, “Give us *cake!* We want your *cake!* *(Beat)* They were kind of like the Cookie Monster on *Sesame Street*, but they wanted *cake*—not cookies.

Paula: Did she *give* them any cake?

Bethany: No! She didn't!

Jennifer: *(Irritated)* Marie Antoinette's just like my two dads! Every time, they tell me that if I eat *all* my vegetables, I can have a *scrumptious* dessert. So I eat *all* of my vegetables, and what do they give me? Jello! Sugar-free Jello! I don't want *Jello*—sugar-free or not! I want *cake!*

Molly: But the dance isn't until tonight.

Erma: Molly, you're silly. We are girls. We have to spend all day deciding what to wear. It's a stereotype we have to live up to.

Molly: Stereotype starts with the letter “S.” Erma, what is a stereotype?

Erma: A stereotype is a commonly held view about a particular group of puppets. Stereotypes can be offensive, but they are almost always correct. People like stereotypes that make them look good, but hate stereotypes that make them look bad.

Molly: That doesn't make sense. It's silly, and silly start with the letter “S” too.

Erma: Do you know what else starts with the letter “S?” Stupid. *(Spelling)* S-T-U-P-I-D! Molly, sometimes you are stupid. In Spanish, that would be ‘you are *muy estúpido!*’

Molly: I know, Erma, but I act stupid on purpose so boys will like me. Boys don't like smart girls.

Erma: And saying “boys like stupid girls” is a stereotype. *(They laugh.)* Let's say some more stereotypes together!

Molly: White puppets are dorks!

Erma: Brown puppets like to build stuff!

Molly: Yellow puppets like math.

Both: And love debate!

Erma: Red puppets like to gamble!

Molly: Black puppet are...black puppets!

Erma: And pinkish-red puppets like to sexually harass people, even though they claim it's just tickling!

Molly: Orange puppets taste like Vitamin-C!

Both: *(Laughing)* Stereotypes can be fun!

Erma: But to be politically correct, we should never say those things out loud. Stereotypes are lots of fun, but they are wrong. *(Spelling)* W-R-O-N-G, wrong!

Molly: I never thought about it like that, Erma. *(Seeing audience)* Oh, look Erma. Someone is watching us.

Erma: Who? Where?

Molly: *(Pointing)* There. *(To audience)* Hi there, friends. How are you? You ARE very special.

Erma: Sometimes I forget we are being filmed in front of a live human studio audience.

Molly: We have to be filmed, or these uneducated humans will never learn anything. These are our friends. Hi, special friends!

Erma: I can tell you are our special friends. Welcome to our neighborhood.

Molly: We hope you learn things while watching us! We love to teach our special friends things.

Erma: But Molly, we have to start getting dressed for the dance tonight.

“CLEAR,” which is not a color found in the rainbow. Earlier today, a big, yellow bird escaped the Sesame police after he or she, no one can determine the sex, was caught roller-skating in the nude down Sesame Street with a wooly mammoth who claims he is invisible. They were last seen roller-skating towards Sunflower Street screaming “One of these things is not like the other!”

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit... Apparently, they are wanted for questioning in a crime that Sesame police can only state “is brought to you by the letter “X.” If you have any information on the big bird and wooly mammoth’s whereabouts, please text 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 to 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10.

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: In further news, the Sadie Hopkins Dance is tonight. So girls, bring your favorite boy for a very romantic night. And don’t forget to bring protection.

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: There is a chance of rain!

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit.

Scene Six: Sunrise in Erma and Molly’s Bedroom

Erma: *(Sleeping)* Zzzzz. Zzzzz. Zzzzz.

Molly: *(Sleeping)* Wawawawawa.

Erma: *(Sleeping)* Zzzzz. Zzzzz. Zzzzz.

Molly: *(Sleeping)* Wawawawawa.

Both: *(Suddenly waking simultaneously)* It’s morning! Today is the big day!

Erma: I’m so happy Bert and Ernie said they would go with us to the dance.

Molly: Bert’s only going with you, because you made him!

Erma: Hey! You stole Ernie’s rubber ducky and wouldn’t give it back, until he agreed to go with you!

Molly: Erma, you took Bert’s nose! You removed a part of his body and held it hostage!

Erma: It’s just so weird that his nose was only stapled on.

Molly: This is true.

Erma: Staying home to watch a *Golden Girls* marathon doesn’t sound like a good time to me.

Molly: I know. Who would want to miss a dance just to watch television, especially some syndicated show about old women who live together? That’s so queer and strange. I hope they aren’t just attracted to old, human women, but I don’t know how we can compete with Betty White! She’s fun.

Erma: Let’s get up and get ready for the big dance.

(Beat) If my dads would just say, “Eat all of your vegetables, and then you can have a *jiggly* dessert,” then I wouldn’t get my hopes up every night.

Clara: Jennifer, is that why you’re so creepy?

Sister Stein: Clara, be careful. That’s how rumors get started!

Clara: But Sister Stein, it’s not a rumor. It’s true. Jennifer is creepy!

Sister Stein: You’re absolutely right, Clara. *(Looking at Jennifer)* Jennifer is one scary, young lady. *(To Clara)* Please accept my apology. *(Beat)* Now, let’s let Bethany finish her report. I can’t wait to hear how this ends!

Bethany: So the people of France finally arrested Marie Antoinette and her husband, and they killed Louis XVI on January 21, 1793.

Clara: How did they kill him?

Bethany: They chopped his head off!

Clara: What happened to Marie Antoinette?

Bethany: They took her to the guillotine on October 16th of that same year, and they chopped off her head, too.

Tabitha: What did the people of France say then?

Bethany: I don’t know what the *people* of France said, but—according to the Internet—the *executioner*, after beheading Marie Antoinette, said, *(Beat)* “It was a piece of cake.”

Lori: *(Holding her stomach)* This is just like in that video Mr. Clump showed us! I’m starting to get sick to my stomach. I just know I’m going to have nightmares again tonight!

Paula: Don’t think of it that way, Lori. *(Beat)* Think of it like the Red Queen from *Alice in Wonderland* instead. That was just a cartoon.

Tabitha: Or think of it like Ozzy Osbourne, the heavy-metal rocker, who bit the head off of a bat onstage!

Jennifer: I saw that on the Internet. *(Beat)* I thought that was coool.

Bethany: Nooooo, all of you are getting it wrong. Stop thinking about the...*(Bowing her head and spoken almost to herself)* beheading—and think about *cake* instead. That’s the reason I wanted to do my report on Marie Antoinette. And that’s what I’ve been doing the past week and a half. I’ve only thought about cake—and guess what? My nightmares are gone. *(Beat)* It’s true that I’ve started craving *cake*. Actually, I’ve been *obsessing* over cake. And it’s true that my mother, who never deprives me of anything, *gives* me cake. Lots of it. In fact, I can have as much cake as I want. Mom’s become the Louis XVI of Park Avenue South. She now constantly asks me, “What kind of cake do you want today?” And I’m like, “I don’t care, just surprise me.” And she’s like, “Well, I could get you a vanilla cake with butter cream icing. *(Beat)* Or I could get you a rich Italian Crème cake with cream cheese icing.”

Lori: *(Raising her hand)* Oh! Oh! Oh! I know! I’d want a chocolate cake with whipped cream filling!

Jennifer: Ding Dong!

Lori: Sister Stein, Jennifer just called me a name!

Jennifer: Lori, you're a stupid idiot. That's what a Ding Dong *is*. It's a little chocolate cake with whipped filling inside.

Lori: Sister Stein, Jennifer just called me a stupid idiot!

Jennifer: Just remember. It's not name calling OR starting a rumor if it's true. *(Beat)* And it is, so there!

Sister Stein: Girls, please be nice to one another and let Bethany finish her report.

Bethany: *(Beat)* In conclusion, Marie Antoinette was an interesting person, and everything I've told you is true. All of my information came from the Internet, and information can't be on the Internet if it's not true. *(Beat)* And I'm sure some of you have noticed my new wardrobe that I didn't even want. *(Looking down at her pants)* Over the last week and a half, I've grown two *pant* sizes. *(Beat)* So all of you—except *Jennifer*—must make a decision. Do you want to keep having nightmares, or do you want to eat all of the cake your heart desires until you have to get new clothes? *(Proudly)* I chose the latter, but the choice is yours and yours alone to make. I do, however, want to leave you with one final *food* for thought. I love *cake*, and the nightmares have *stopped!* *(Proudly)* The nightmares—have stopped!

Miss Stein: Well, on that note, it's time for lunch. *(Looking at the school menu)* Oh, and girls, I think you'll be happy to see that the dessert on today's featured lunch—is *cake!*

and green. *(Spelling)* G-R-E-E-N. The monster was accidentally dumped from a trash can into one of their trash compacting trucks and crushed. The Sesame Trash Department is denying all responsibility asking, "Why was the crazy monster living in a trash can in the first place?"

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit.

Scene Four: Erma and Molly's Apartment

Erma: Did you hear that, Molly?

Molly: Yes. The grouchy monster was living in a trash can, and he was green! G-R-E-E-N!

Erma: Not that silly! Didn't you hear? There's going to be a dance where the girls ask the boys to go!

Molly: Boys! Do you know what boys make me think of? A word that starts with the letter "D"!

Erma: Does the word have four letters?

Molly: Of course, you know it does!

Both: Date!

Erma: And I know just which boy I'm going to ask!

Molly: Who?

Erma: I'll give you a hint. He has one, big, black eyebrow!

Molly: Bert! Bert that lives at 123 Sesame!

Erma: Yep! And you can ask his roommate, Ernie!

Molly: That's perfect! They are best friends like us!

Erma: That's right. They live together like us! They even take bubble baths together.

Molly: Not like us. But that's okay. That just means they are super, super best friends!

Erma: They've lived together for over 30 years! Of course they are!

Molly: They will be fun dates. They are always so gay and happy!

Erma: We should go ask them to the dance before some other girls do.

Molly: Great idea! But, we live on Sunflower Street. Can you tell me how you get—how you get to Sesame Street?

Erma: It's in the hood, Molly. We just need to go where all the poor people are! It's that easy!

Molly: All the other girls will be *green* with envy. Get it, green...G-R-E-E-N!

Erma: Molly, you know what they say...It's not easy being green. Just ask the dead Mr. Hooper! *(They both laugh hysterically.)*

Scene Five: A Sunflower Street T.V. News Update

Tina: Tina the Toad here with Chicken.

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit...With some breaking news brought to you by the color

Scene Two: Erma and Molly’s Apartment

Erma: (*Entering*) Hi, Molly. I’m back.

Molly: Oh, Erma! I’m so happy you’re home.

Erma: It was such a sunny day, chasing the clouds away, so I decided to go to Mr. Hooper’s Store.

Molly: Did you buy me a present?

Erma: Of course I did, Molly! I was teasing you! Green jelly beans!

Molly: Green is my favorite color.

Erma: Green is the color of money, and money is the most important thing you can have.

Molly: Green! G-R-E-E-N! Green! (*Starts eating jelly beans*) Yum, yum, yum, yum! So you bought the green jelly beans at Mr. Hooper’s Store?

Erma: Yes, Mr. Hooper’s Store on Sesame Street.

Molly: I hope you told Mr. Hooper that I said, “Hello.”

Erma: Mr. Hooper wasn’t there, Molly. Mr. Hooper is dead.

Molly: Why is he dead?

Erma: Mr. Hooper was a human, and all humans die.

Molly: We are puppets. Do puppets die, Erma?

Erma: No, puppets don’t die, only humans.

Molly: That is sad, Erma. I do not like to be sad.

Erma: Nobody does Molly. But do you know what will make you not so sad?

Molly: What, Erma?

Erma: Mr. Hooper was buried in the ground, and I bet now HE is green!

Molly: I’m going to remember Mr. Hooper just like that.

Both: (*Spelling*) G-R-E-E-N! (*They giggle*)

Molly: Spelling is fun!

Erma: Look on the television, Molly! There is “Breaking News on Sunflower Street”!

Scene Three: A Sunflower Street T.V. News Update

Tina: Tina the Toad here with Chicken.

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit... With some breaking news on Sunflower Street. The Sunflower Street Disfigured and Discarded Puppet Home is hosting a Sadie Hawkins Dance tomorrow night. A Sadie Hawkins Dance is a dance where girls invite the boys to go with them.

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit... It’s a way for girls to feel appreciated and empowered for one, single day a year.

Chicken: Boo-kok!

Tina: Ribbit... And in other news, Sesame Trash Department is being investigated for the mutilation of a monster puppet described as grouchy

NOTES

In her heartfelt narrative poem, *Kisses*, Elise Sharron introduces us to an elderly woman reflecting on her life. This selection should be performed by a female and be entered in Poetry Interpretation. This selection could also be considered for performance in Dramatic Interpretation. It’s always difficult for younger performers to portray age, and this poem is particularly challenging vocally. The narrator is almost 100-years-old; therefore, the performer could choose to deliver the entire poem using an age-appropriate voice. This would, of course, make the overall pacing of the poem slower in delivery. The performer might, however, choose to change and adapt vocally throughout the poem, thus showcasing more vocal variety throughout the performance. If this style is chosen, simply play the teaser, or first stanza, as an old woman in the present. The rest of the poem, beginning with ‘First Kiss,’ would allow the performer to play the various moments of the narrator’s life and vocally progress from a young girl to her present age. The first stanza before the section titled, “First Kiss,” would make an excellent teaser, if so desired. The drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer where to turn the pages in her manuscript.

Today I am ninety- eight years young.

Oh my goodness, that makes me sound old.

Not old yet, just getting there.

As I stand here before my six great-granddaughters,

Who are waiting patiently for me to tell one of my stories,

I can’t help but think of the memories those years have left me:

The laughter, the tears, the love, the hugs,

And, oh yes, the kisses.

**First Kiss**

Boys were officially dumb.

I mean, I already knew they were mean.

No girl really liked a boy, but then I learned that firsthand.

In my second grade class, we had assigned seats.

I sat in front of this boy named James.

James was so dumb, but not because he wasn't smart.
 He was dumb, because he was a boy.
 So one day, like every other day,
 As soon as the teacher turned to write on the board,
 James pulled my hair.
 I say "Ouch" really loud.
 Though, to tell the truth, it didn't really hurt.
 He did it every day, and it bothered me.
 One day, after I laughed at him for getting in trouble,
 He gave me a look, so I stuck out my tongue.
 At recess, I was sitting in the grass.
 James ran over to me.
 I thought he was going to pull my hair and run.
 Instead, he threw a flower in my lap.
 I smelled it, and then he kissed my cheek and ran away.
 Maybe James wasn't dumb...
 Or maybe he was not as dumb as the other boys.



Coed Kiss

I was a freshman, and I was so afraid of 'college life.'
 I was willing to do anything to fit in.
 I must have been the only freshman
 That didn't fully understand the term: coed.
 Coed meant girls and boys went to the same school.
 The boys and girls were separated by just a few buildings.
 At my first dorm party, we played games.
 The games consisted of *Spin-the-Bottle*
 And an early variation of *Truth or Dare*.
 I had played *Truth or Dare* many times before,
 But I had never played *Spin-the-Bottle*.
 During our first two rounds of *Truth or Dare*, I chose *Truth*.
 It's true. I didn't wear make-up until I was seventeen.
 It's true. I went to the prom with my cousin.
 I even had to pay him to go with me.
 Finally, I chose *Dare*.
 I was dared to kiss Maurice Watson.
 He took me around the corner of the stairwell,
 Then Maurice attacked my face.
 His lips were like a plunger trying to unclog a stopped up drain.
 When his lips finally left mine, I was covered in drool.
 I think I also had a mild concussion.

NOTES

Sunflower Street: Episode 4 "Erma and Molly Get a Date" is a clever satire, which uses tongue-in-cheek humor to spoof one of the most iconic children's shows of all time. This play should be performed by a female and may be entered in Humorous Interpretation. Only two characters comprise each scene; therefore, two females may choose to perform this selection and enter it in Duo Interpretation or Duet Acting. All of the characters found within this play are puppets, thereby, creating many challenges for the performer(s). The physical and vocal aspects present several major challenges. To what degree should the performer(s) choose to insinuate the physical constraints of portraying multiple puppets? The vocal challenges, however, present a golden opportunity for the performer(s) with unlimited vocal dynamics. Puppets rarely sound entirely human. In fact, sometimes the inflections of puppets almost sound cartoonish. This explosive comedy should provide ample opportunities for creative blocking. *Author's note:* While, at times, the play may appear to be filled with slightly suggestive innuendos, the true subtext of all lines presented is as innocent as those found on the iconic television series it satirizes. This selection is a tour-de-force for the talented performer(s) looking for the ultimate all-girl comedy!

Characters:

PBS Voice
 Spanish Voice
 Erma (A puppet)
 Molly (A puppet)
 Chicken
 Tina the Toad
 Baby Bunny
 The Letter O

Scene One: PBS Program Introduction

PBS Voice: The following children's program, *Sunflower Street: Episode 4...*

Spanish Voice: *Episodio cuatro de la calle de los girasoles.*

PBS Voice: ...is brought to you by PBS, the Puppet Broadcasting Service and viewers like you.

Spanish Voice: *Las personas ricas con el dinero a la basura.*

PBS Voice: *Sunflower Street* is filmed before a live studio audience.

Spanish Voice: *Este programa de televisión no bueno.*

could have moved a mountain that day, if I my baby was on the other side of it. I didn't sleep for months, because I knew she was still alive—waiting for me to find her and bring her home. I never thought that in the blink of an eye—in a split second—the earth would move beneath me and leave me with nothing.



I hate that Dorothy lied to all of us. When she was swept away in the tornado, she landed in an amazing place filled with friends who supported her in her quest to get back home. But Dorothy, you lied to me. You lied to Laela. You lied to us all. Ever since I was a little girl, I believed that if I had courage, a brain and a strong heart—I could always find my way home.



I still have my memories—the three of us at the museum, or at the Joplin Public Library. This is a picture of Kevin, Laela and me at Laela's first-grade graduation. These pictures represent home to me. Maybe Dorothy didn't lie about that. Even in the midst of all of this heartbreak, there is still no place like home.

Laela, I know you have the heart, baby. Just keep flying, and Mommy will bring you home one day. I promise. Mommy will bring you home.

Nevertheless, his kiss was one of the most romantic experiences I had ever had.



Mother's Kiss

Nine months is an excruciating number of months to wait. The feeling one feels when pregnant is one of life's biggest blessings. It's indescribable. I've never felt more beautiful than I did in those nine months. Finally the wait was over. After a hard labor, the nurse placed my son in my arms. I was scared, and so was he. He shivered and cried, and so did I. I held him tight and I knew that *he* knew I was Mommy, and he was safe. What a wonderful feeling! As I sat there, slowly rocking in my chair, A prelude of things to come, I looked at my creation, and he seemed to be patiently waiting on me. I calmed his fears, and he calmed mine. Caressing his warm skin, I pressed my lips gently to his forehead. A kiss to start life.



Future Kisses

Nothing makes me happier than spending time With my great-grandchildren. I love to watch them run and play— And do all the things that I haven't done in years. These legs don't move the way they use to. I hear them sing their songs, and I watch them dance. I don't do the Cha-Cha anymore, but I still love to dance. The girls always tell me that I may not dance as fast as they do, But I can still hold my own. Being around my great-granddaughters makes me feel alive. When you're my age, You hold on to any chance to feel that way...alive. There is something to be said About spending time with the younger generation.

It keeps you young in mind and spirit.
When they kiss you goodbye,
You know those kisses won't be their last ones.



Last Kiss

My last kiss happened not too long ago.
It was right before bed.
Charles, my husband and best friend for over seventy years,
Grabbed me, like he used to when we were in our 20's.
It was abrupt and a little dangerous at our age.
He spun me around, grasping my hand like he never had before.
He brought my hand to his face.
Slowly rubbing his thumb back and forth,
He leaned forward and kissed my hand.
As I grow old...*older*...I remember less and miss even more.
I miss my husband dearly.
The way he held my hand,
That was the most important kiss of all—
The kiss of my first, only, and last love...



So those were my kisses.
James in elementary school; Maurice in college;
My first born, his children and my great granddaughters,
And the best kiss of all—from my husband.
I picked those stories to tell to my babies,
Because the girls see me crying.
The next thing I know, I am in heaven.
I am covered
With all of my great granddaughters' arms, tears,
And, oh yes...kisses.



I...I was too busy that day to play with Laela. I called out to her to come inside from her playhouse. The wind hit my face so hard. As I went back inside to turn on the television, it began to rain. The weather man said to "find shelter inside a closet or a bathroom." I first ran into the bedroom to get a mattress to cover us, but I couldn't lift it. "Laela! Laela, baby, come inside!" I kept screaming her name, as I ran back to the playhouse. The rain and wind seemed to be easing into stillness. Then, I saw the tornado coming.

Have any of you ever seen a tornado up close? I remember trying to run, but it was like my legs were set in concrete. The wind began blowing so hard that I thought my skin was going to separate from my body. Above all, I am a mother, and my purpose in life is to protect my child. I kept struggling with all of my strength to get to that playhouse. My husband was in the front yard looking for us, and in that instant... Can you see him? Look up. He's there... Can you see Laela? She's there, too. It was in that moment that my husband became an angel. I watched him fly above me, and then he fell. I knew it was God's way of giving me closure. But Laela didn't land. She just flew. I tried so hard to get to her.



Have you ever been on a treadmill? You run and run, and you can reach for something, but you never quite grasp it. Never. How could the wind do this to me? It took Laela away from me. It made me watch her disappear. I think I would rather have seen her kidnapped—instead of just—being blown away. I kept running in the same place—getting nowhere. As the winds picked up the playhouse, it broke into a million pieces. There she was—flying up and up and up—until I couldn't see her anymore. She was just—gone. They're all gone. 162 people were killed that day. There was over two billion dollars in property damages. No more houses. No more schools. The courthouse, the hospital, my church—all of it was just gone. There was nowhere to go to feel safe. No place to call home. The wind took it all!

I just want my daughter back in my arms. She was just a baby. If I had just held her in my arms that day, she would still be here with me. I want her ruby slippers to bring her home to me, but she never came down. She never came down.



After the storm passed, I dug through the rubble of our house until my fingers were bloody. I could see bone, but I kept searching for her. I think I



Before May 22, 2011, Joplin, Missouri was known for—*exactly*—nothing! No one ever says, “Hey, let’s take a family vacation to Joplin, Missouri where we can do absolutely nothing. Pack up the kids!” But when this is all you know, it’s all you know. And it’s home...you know? So when this woman from New York came to my door and asked me if I would participate in her book documenting Joplin before the infamous tornado, I said yes. She asked me for a photograph that best represented Joplin to me—before the tragedy. The one I chose is of Laela, my daughter, in the hospital nursery. It was funny. Kevin, my husband, had picked up the wrong baby. He’s standing next to Laela’s crib, and the nurses are in the background laughing. I laughed so hard, I cried. This is another picture of Laela. She’s at the *Wizard of Oz Museum* in Kansas. She wouldn’t take off her souvenir ruby slippers for months. She would climb into bed with Kevin and me. She’d click her heels three times and say, “Home, Mommy. Home, Daddy.” She was too young to get the line just right, but we knew what the clicking of those heels meant. It meant she was home and safe with us.

I don’t like to talk about my story, but today is special. It is the anniversary of my husband’s death and the disappearance of my daughter.



Joplin was ready for a tornado. After all, we lived in “Tornado Alley.” That day, I could actually smell that storm coming, as I stood at the back door. “Laela! Laela, it’s time to come in, baby. There’s a storm coming!” She never wanted to come inside. My mother once bought Laela a *Wizard of Oz* playhouse. A yellow ramp led to the front door, and it had paintings of the Lion, Tin Man and Scarecrow on the inside walls. The Tin Man was always her favorite character. She thought, “If your heart is full of love, you can do anything—even fly.” And fly she did. She would fly around the room like a beam of love. She was always so full of life.

I keep talking about her like she’s dead. Rest assured—she’s not. She’s—she’s out there. She’s out there trying to find her way home. Everyone tried to tell me she’s gone, but I knew it wasn’t true. Here I am, years later, still knowing it’s not true. She’s out there, and she is going to come home. When I talk to my husband during my prayers each night, he tells me that Laela is not in heaven with him. Well, if she’s not there, she must be out in the world somewhere looking for me. So I ask him to ask God if He will just tell me where she is, so that I can go get her and bring her home.

NOTES

A Year in the Life of Jasmine Spinner chronicles a young girl’s freshman year of high school. Searching for her niche, Jasmine joins the high school Forensics Team. This narrative poem should be performed by a female and should be entered in Poetry Interpretation. Let’s be honest, competitive forensics is one of the most addictive activities in education today. All of the nuances and universalities found in forensics are embodied throughout this poem. Play those common denominators for their humor. Those in-the-know should get the jokes. Jasmine possesses the innocence and naiveté of all novices entering new territory; however, she is also a competitive person. She wants to succeed, but she always accepts her defeats with the graciousness of a true champion. The drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer where to turn the pages in the manuscript.

My name is Jasmine Spinner, and it’s my freshman year.
At my parents’ request, I’m taking speech as my elective in school.
It’s cool, but I’m not sure why Mom and Dad
Fear I lack good communication skills.
It’s ridiculous, of course.
Still, I know how to talk.
If they don’t believe me,
They should look at our Family Talk phone plan.
They’ll see. I talk 24/7 as often as I can.



My speech teacher, Mr. Stovall, also coaches debate.
I waited after school one day
And asked him how to join the Forensics Team.
It seems practices are after school three days a week,
And for those who seek a challenge,
Mr. Stovall has tryouts for new team members every Monday at four.
The more he tells me, the more overwhelmed I become.
He says there are lots of events to try,
And if I don’t win at first—he begs me to not cry.
Obviously, that’s been a problem for some newbies in the past.
He tells me the last thing the team needs is a cry baby.

It suddenly occurs to me; Mr. Stovall may be mean.
 Maybe he *makes* kids cry.
 I tell him I'll try my best,
 And for the rest of the week, I practice.



Monday's tryouts are packed with team hopefuls.
 Mr. Stovall breaks us up into groups of three
 And has us draw topics out of an improvisation jar.
 As far as I can tell, improvisation is kind of weird.
 My group picks out a topic that reads,
 'A Group of People Who All Have Beards.'
 We huddle for five minutes, and then it's time to perform.
 Since I'm a girl, I decide to portray a bearded lady.
 She has run away from the circus in search of a new life.
 Filled with strife,
 She travels through Pennsylvania and stops in Amish country.
 No one shuns her there, and a man named Luke asks her to be his wife.
 They live happily ever after and have lots of bearded children.

Mr. Stovall says I am a hoot!
 Not to toot my own horn, but I think I did an okay job.
 Mr. Stovall invites seven of us to join the team!
 I beam all the way home.



Because we have such a large team,
 All of the new members have to begin by entering Poetry or Prose.
 After that, Mr. Stovall says, "We'll see how it goes."
 He tells us to pick out a selection to read and place it in a black folder.

Dad says you can always learn from someone older,
 So I ask a few veteran team members for help
 In finding the perfect, competitive piece.
 At least they don't make fun of me.
 They suggest I read tried and true works.
 They suggest that I read Dorothy Parker and Sylvia Plath,
 Some Shakespeare sonnets and even Edgar Alan Poe.
 I ask them, "Which one has a better chance to win?"
 They glance at me and say,
 "When you find the right one, you'll know."

NOTES

Mother Nature can, at times, be friendly, and at other times, be one of the most destructive forces on Earth. In her fictitious short story, *The Queen of Oz*, Kristy Thomas introduces us to Elizabeth Queen, a young mother, whose life is forever turned upside-down after a tragic storm. This selection should be performed by a female and may be entered in either Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. Like the storm itself, this selection should build in intensity as the story progresses. Also, just like in real life, once the storm passes, there should be a certain resignation, a calm that is almost scary because it's so quiet. At the heart of this selection lie two of the most important emotions known to humankind: Love and hope. Play each with honesty and realism. This is a tour-de-force for the mature performer. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer where to turn the pages in the manuscript.

I was named after the Queen of England. My mother was not really interested in national celebrities, so she named me after the Queen. It was honestly a two-for-one, because her favorite musical group was—you guessed it—*Queen*. Come on, you know *Queen*, don't you? They were a group of men who looked like women, but don't judge. That was popular back in the day. According to my mother, she would rock out while listening to *Queen's* greatest hits on the radio. Apparently, she rocked out a little too hard one night and got pregnant. She rocked out again and named me Elizabeth. You probably won't be surprised to learn that my middle name is—wait for it—Queen. So to recap, my name is Elizabeth Queen, and today I am here to talk to you about my life; or rather, what used to be my life.



This is the photograph that best represents my hometown to me, so I am submitting it for the book. I never thought that I would be worthy enough to be *included* in a book, but an editor, who is putting together a pictorial tribute to my hometown, thinks I am. You see, I lived through 'it.' A lot of people didn't. I was born and raised in Joplin, Missouri. Now do you know what I survived? On May 22, 2011, a tornado tore through my small town and—well, it was described as a "catastrophic event that will be forever remembered in the heart of America's history." Wow, the heart of America's history? And here I always thought I lived in the good old Midwest.

only he wasn't there. Frantically, I started calling his name. I scanned the crowd, searching for him. I pushed people out of the way and screamed, "Evan? Evan!" I ran to a security guard and explained to him what had happened. He then got on his radio, and someone on the other end said they found a young boy wandering around without supervision. I almost ripped the radio out of the man's hand. "Where is he? Where is my son?" They took me to a room down a side hallway. There was Evan sitting on a bench. I was practically in tears. "Oh, honey, don't ever do that again. Do you hear me?" He looked at me, and he didn't know it was me. Evan didn't recognize me; therefore, he didn't trust me. I bent down and sang, "You are my sunshine... my only sunshine..." And for a second, he didn't believe me. For a second, Evan didn't think I was his mother. He didn't know. Then he put his arms around me and buried his face in my neck. I kept singing, because it was the only thing I could do. "You make me happy, when skies are gray. You'll never know, dear, how much..." The security guard told me they had a hard time getting Evan to come with them. They said he kicked and screamed, until they let him hold one of their badges. They explained how they were there to help him, and they weren't going to hurt him. Even then, Evan was frightened and kept saying, "I don't know who you are." Of course, Evan couldn't tell them what I looked like. So everyone was a little panicked, until I found them—though I doubt anyone was as panicked as I was. I told them about Evan's condition, but none of them seemed to really understand.



I teach my son to distrust the world. I teach him to be hard and suspicious. That's what I teach him, to keep him safe. I often ask myself, "What am I doing? What am I doing to my little boy—this child that is my responsibility—that I love more than anything in this world?"

I only have ten minutes before Evan will become a man. And what kind of man will he be? Will he grow up to be the sort of man that looks at the world and only sees danger, who knows that he may never be safe, that he'll never be normal? When you're expecting a child, you get lots of advice, but no one ever warned me about any of this. No one.



I choose a poem by Anne Sexton titled, *Cinderella*.
It's a variation of the classic children's story,
But it's all told in verse.
I choose this poem,
Because Mr. Stovall tells us we're not allowed to curse.
Plus, *Cinderella* allows me to create some original characters.
Kylie, our team captain, tells me to make good choices.
According to her, judges like contestants who can do voices.

Our first speech tournament is three weeks away.
I want to win a trophy, so there's no time to play.
Mr. Stovall tells us to practice like we're competing today.
So I do!



Speech tournaments are different than I imagined.
It's as if I landed at a funeral.
I've never seen so many black suits!

My first round of Poetry is terrifying,
But the judge writes that I am electrifying.
She loves my funny voices, and now I'm in the semi-finals!
Kylie wishes me good luck and tells me to break a leg!
I *thought* she was my friend.
Why would she say something like that to me?
Doesn't she know how hard it is to stand in front of the room
And hold your book still for seven minutes?
And Kylie wants me to do that with a broken leg?
I scarf down my over-priced slice of cold pizza,
And then I freshen up in the ladies' room.
I've got to zoom out of here!
Semi-finals in Poetry start in ten minutes!



I don't make the finals, but that's okay.
And I remember Mr. Stovall's rule: Don't cry.
I'm exhausted, but I take a moment and try to take it all in.
I learned a lot today.
I learned that speech tournaments are the number one cause

Of sleep deprivation among teenagers.
I learned that judges' scores are merely someone's opinion.
And I learned that if you want to *win* in Poetry,
You should talk about flowers or death, or the death of a flower.
Judges like those dramatic poems!
The judges want poems that sound like a bad, country song.
Luckily for me, there are tournaments all year long.
I just need to practice harder.
So I do!



We go to two more tournaments before winter break.
I change selections and read a poem called *Patterns* by Amy Lowell.
It's about a girl, who, while walking through a country garden,
Fears her boyfriend, a soldier, may not return to her alive.
I'm catching on! My poem talks about death *and* flowers!
I don't break out of prelims at the second tournament,
But I break to finals at the third!

I feel free as a bird! Life is great!
I don't place in the top three,
But that doesn't stop me from entering the race!
I am determined to win a trophy before this year is out.
I am so happy, I want to shout.
I just need to practice harder,
And I do!



I take my folder to my grandparents' house during the holidays.
Grandma sees me practicing in the garage,
And she tells Mom she's worried about me.
Apparently, Grandma thinks I might be crazy.
She sees me talking to the walls,
And she calls me inside to take my temperature.



Sure enough, all of my practicing pays off!
At the first tournament of the spring semester,
I finally place second.
It takes me a while to collect my breath.
I just won my first trophy!

Who am I kidding? So was I. He doesn't say it, but I think Bill feels responsible—like somehow this is his fault. How could it be? I was the one who gave birth to him. I fed him with my body. How could it be anyone's fault but mine? Doctors keep telling us that no one is at fault—that it's an anomaly. It's just something out of our control.



Prosopagnosia is dangerous—incredibly so. Bill and I have accepted the fact that raising Evan is going to be hard. We love him, but we worry about him constantly. I mean, think about it. Someone comes up to Evan on the street, and he doesn't recognize them. True, it's totally normal for Evan to not recognize them, but then some horrible person could—well, it's terrifying to think of the possibilities. Evan could get into a car with some stranger or something. I think most of us would agree that today's world is not a safe place, but it's especially not safe for Evan. Bill and I are constantly reminding our son that he's going to have to be more careful than other kids. In school, Evan's teachers talk about "stranger danger," but Evan has to be even more skeptical. He has to be even more distrustful. As a parent, it's not an easy thing to look at your child and tell him that he has to be cynical and afraid, because there are some people in this world who could do him harm. I wish my husband and I didn't have to teach Evan these things, but what choice do we have? This is what you do, when you love your son.



All of this has, ironically, made our marriage stronger. Sure, there are instances when Bill and I get so stressed that we say things to each other that aren't very nice. We're upset, and we say things—hurtful things. It is at those times, Bill and I don't even recognize each other—and neither of us suffers from Prosopagnosia. Then there are other times, when we realize just how lucky we are to have each other. Not many marriages survive the obstacles of raising a special needs child, but we're a team. We love each other, and we both love Evan just the way he is.



Recently, Bill came up with a brilliant idea. It's a phrase actually, and we say this phrase to Evan when we pick him up from school or even when he wakes up in the morning. We sing the first line of the song, "You are My Sunshine." When we sing this, Evan always knows it's us—simple, really.



When Evan was six, he and I went to the mall. I needed new shoes, and I told Evan to stay right beside me. It was so crowded in the mall that day. I was bumping into people left and right, and I reached for Evan's hand—

you're an only child. It's perfectly normal to feel this way, right? Then one day, I came into his room. Evan looked up at me—and he was terrified. He looked at me, as if I was someone he had never seen before. I said, "Evan? Honey, are you okay?" He kept scanning my face, as if he was desperate for some indication as to who I was. Evan looked at me like that for a while, and then he said "Are you—are you my mommy?"

I cannot describe to you the horror I felt at that exact moment. Evan didn't know who I was. He had no idea. I called in Bill, my husband, and Evan hesitantly guessed that he was Daddy. We then showed Evan pictures of people he saw every day or almost every day. Nothing. There was no reaction. He had no idea who any of those people were.



We went to see a pediatrician, and he referred us to another doctor, who then referred us to someone else, who finally told us that Evan was 'face blind.' Prosopagnosia is the correct scientific term. I had never heard this word before. Trust me. There is nothing more terrifying than hearing a doctor tell you that your one and only son has a psychological condition. Apparently, Evan doesn't have the ability to recognize faces. He can look at you, and even if he saw you this morning or sees you every day—he doesn't know who you are. He doesn't have the ability to recognize Bill as his father. He doesn't have the ability to recognize me as his mother. He lacks the ability to distinguish people by their faces. Something doesn't connect with this part of his brain—the part that recognizes traits or differences in people's faces—which, of course, explains his shyness and why he has so much trouble making friends. How can he possibly be expected to make friends? Evan doesn't know who anyone is. Think about it. 99.99% of the world's population is able to differentiate people by what they look like; however, for those rare few individuals living with Prosopagnosia, the only way to distinguish one individual from another is by a person's mannerisms—or vocal variances.

If you're diagnosed with this psychological condition, you soon learn that very little can be done. There aren't many options really. I mean, there's no surgery, no drugs. What we must do for Evan is work with him—to try to retrain his brain in a different way.



We hired a specialist who quizzes Evan on faces. She shows him two pictures, and then she asks Evan to point to his teacher or his grandfather. Evan only gets it right 50% of the time. For Evan, it's really just a game of guessing. One time, I was standing in the room, and Evan couldn't figure out which of the two pictures was me. He was so frustrated. So was Bill.

Go me!



Over spring break, Mr. Stovall makes a decision.
I listen, as he tells me I'm ready to try a new event.
He wants me to enter Dramatic.
He tells me I've proved I can do great at performing Poetry.
Now it's time for me to take on the challenge of presenting tragedy.



Acting is hard! So I look for a new selection and turn to the Bard.
I decide to perform Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
My strategy is to ham-it-up, as Ophelia slowly goes nuts.
No ifs, ands or buts, I, Jasmine Spinner, have chosen my selection well.
As far as I can tell, if Dramatic is anything like Poetry,
I've found myself a winner.
Ophelia's monologue from *Hamlet* talks about death *and* flowers!
Oh, the power of the mighty pen!



Dramatic has been more challenging for me than Poetry.
For a novice, however, I think I hold my own
Against the varsity contestants.
I don't make it out of my prelim round, but I do learn a few things.
This brings me to the events themselves.
I assumed Dramatic and Poetry would be very much the same.
The game itself, however, is very different indeed.
Most all of the Dramatics are monologues.
The majority of the contestants perform monologues
About someone who lives with a mental or physical handicap.
Other contestants perform monologues
About someone who lives with a terminal disease, such as cancer or AIDS.
The winning contestant performed a monologue
About a person living with cancer,
Who contracts AIDS during a bone-marrow transplant.
And who can forget?—
The character is also a mentally-challenged paraplegic!

I'm no longer opposed to taking Kylie's advice.
A broken leg *might* have given me a leg-up against my competition!



Our team finishes its season with a trophy case full of awards.
At our end of the year banquet, I receive Best Novice of the Year.
I accept it with humility and pride.
Next year, I will be a veteran member of our speech team.
And let me assure you, I mean business.
Jasmine Spinner is going to be a winner!

Some people play sports; some people march in the band.
I'm just glad I had the chance to find my niche at last.
Next year is going to be a blast!
I'll find my selections and memorize them perfectly.
I'll do everything I know I should do.
If practice makes perfect, I'm willing to practice all summer long.

And I do!

NOTES

Prosopagnosia is a psychological disorder which affects a person's ability to define and/or distinguish facial features. It is sometimes also called Face Blindness. In her poignant short story, *You Are My Sunshine*, Bridget Grace Sheaff introduces us to a young mother, whose son lives with this rare disease. This selection should be performed by a female and may be entered in either Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. Think about the emotional toll any parent faces when dealing with a special needs child. It is natural for all parents to worry and fear for their child's safety; however, with Prosopagnosia, every time a child leaves home, he is disconnected from the normalcy of recognizing someone he knows. For those living with this disorder, everyone encountered in the daily grind is in essence a stranger, until proven otherwise. This is a challenging selection, because there must be a fine balance between wanting to protect the child and, at the same time, preparing the child for a mainstreamed life in the future. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer where to turn the pages in the manuscript.

No one ever warned me about raising a boy. No one ever said, "Be prepared for dirt!" or "Buy extra Band-Aids" or "Don't paint your walls white!" But that was all stuff I could have guessed. I mean, I could have guessed that a boy would be messy and rambunctious. I'm not stupid. I think the hardest part about raising a boy is that, as he grows up, you watch him become a man, like his father. Let's be honest. He can't become a man like his *mother*. No, no, that's not how that works. You only have a little boy for, like, ten minutes, and then poof—he's the spitting image of your husband. He looks just like him. He acts just like him. How are you supposed to get boys ready for adulthood? It's like you get this gift from God for all of ten minutes, and then they're all grown up and leaving the nest. If all you have is ten minutes, how on earth can you prepare them for life? Ten minutes. That's what it feels like. Sometimes, it even feels like it's less than ten minutes.



Evan. We named him after my husband's father. For those of you who don't have children yet, that's often how choosing the name for an unborn child works. We had no idea there was anything different with our son, until Evan was three. He had always seemed withdrawn. But that's just, you know, something you can expect from small kids, right? Sometimes they're shy around new people. It can be overwhelming, especially if