

THE NEW MEDICINE SHOW

By Richard Johnson

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STORY OF THE PLAY

An ensemble of outlandish, zany actors seek to answer this question: "Why do we have a social order in which we rank ourselves from the most dominant to the least?"

They attempt to do this by acting out both hilarious and serious life situations to answer questions presented by the all-powerful Voice. Using the Socratic Method, the Voice teaches by asking questions, never answering them. In trying to answer the first question they are actually delving into the most awesome question of all, "What is the meaning of life?" The answer: "The greatest among us are those we consider the least."

As the 1993 Utah State High School Outstanding Play, this play is perfect for contest use by high schools and colleges. About 45 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 m, 9 w)

VOICE: A Socratic teacher.

ALPHA: female.

BETA: male.

GAMMA: female.

DELTA: male.

SIGMA: female.

RHO: female.

EPSILON: male.

LAMBDA: female.

IOTA: male.

OMICRON: male.

ETA: female.

KAPPA: female.

OMEGA: female.

BAG

SETTING

A set of steps, fifteen feet long, with a platform behind them for differing elevations. The following items must be available if not part of the set: a wheeled office chair which will represent a bus, three chairs, and two stools. Otherwise an empty stage in an auditorium.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

The actors always line up in a social order—the dominant students at the top of the line, and the more submissive towards the end. When students come forward to show action, the other students often move quickly to a frozen position in the environment that the action portrays. Directors will find that the magic of this show is to allow the actors to form their own background picture. The director can then move the background individuals or group relationships to balance the set.

The Bag has a fabric cape that hangs completely around its body. The bag's arms are folded under the costume so the bag's gender cannot be determined. A paper grocery bag is over its head, with two holes for eyes. The Voice is in the audience, near the front row, toward the center. It must be easy for him to move from his spot in the audience. He almost always seems impatient and angry.

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(Beautiful MUSIC young people might enjoy seems to come out of nowhere. The music starts softly, then begins to fill the auditorium with increasing volume. As the LIGHTS come up, young PEOPLE enter in groups of two or three. They seem to be talking to each other and have the attitude that they might be waiting for a class to start. Suddenly the VOICE shouts from out in the audience.)

VOICE: Will somebody turn off that music! *(MUSIC stops immediately.)* All right! Line up for roll call.

(The STUDENTS quickly move to stand in a line, profile. The students then, one at a time, turn and face full front, starting with the first student down to the last in a chain reaction. The VOICE calls roll. Each in turn answers in his own way. The students at the head show by their confidence their station in the group. The students show less self esteem as they move down the line, from Alpha, the most important student, to the least important, Omega.)

VOICE: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Sigma, Rho, Epsilon, Lambda, Iota, Omicron, Eta, Kappa, Omega.

(BAG has taken second place in line.)

VOICE: Bag! *(No answer.)*

OMEGA: The Bag's here.

VOICE: Today we're going to talk about the position you choose in life.

ALPHA: The sack is in the wrong position. Would you tell him to stand by someone else?

OMEGA: Stand by me. I don't mind.

(The BAG then moves to the last position in line, standing by Omega.)

DELTA: *(Using a Southern drawl.)* Left faice!

(Meaning left face. The STUDENTS respond as if he were a drill sergeant, and turn to show a profile.)

DELTA: Rat faice!

(Meaning right face. The STUDENTS again show a full front. They are trying to look serious but are amused that Delta would be audacious enough to irritate the Voice.)

VOICE: *(Loud and angry.)* Delta! You're assuming the wrong position!

DELTA: Yes sir! *(To the others.)* At ease.

VOICE: Delta, what is the class doing?

DELTA: What are we doing, sir?

VOICE: Yes. What's happening?

DELTA: We're ... let's see. We're all in a police lineup.

VOICE: Why?

DELTA: A girl is trying to identify the person who assumed the wrong position.

(EVERYONE tries to stifle a laugh.)

VOICE: Who's guilty?

DELTA: I am, sir. *(He hides a smile.)*

VOICE: You don't look guilty.

DELTA: Yeah, well, I got no conscience... .

(The STUDENTS laugh.)

VOICE: *(Angry.)* Why is everyone laughing?

ALPHA: *(The strongest of the group, she answers with a superior attitude.)* We're laughing because Delta's goofing off.

VOICE: And you think he's funny?

ALPHA: Yes.

VOICE: All right, then let's all laugh. Everyone find a reason to laugh.

End of Freeview

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