

# Not So Great Expectations

A Comedy

*By Burton Bumgarner*

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## **DEDICATION**

*For Sarah and Andrew*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Eight students who failed their literature test on Charles Dickens's novel "Great Expectations" try to redeem their grade by performing it in the classroom for their teacher. With simple costume pieces and hilariously modern accessories, the students dash from one role to another trying to re-enact major scenes to show off their knowledge of the great work. Their unique perspective is a hilarious take on the classic story.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 m, 4 w, 1 flexible)*

### **Students:**

**BRANDON:** A jock. Plays Magwich and Herbert.

**ABBEY:** A preppy. Plays Mrs. Joe and Molly.

**TYLER:** A geek. Plays Joe, Jaggers, and Convict 1 in Taxi.

**HANNAH:** A hard worker. Plays Policeman 1 and Biddy.

**STEVE:** A math nerd. Plays Pip.

**KRISTEN:** A Goth. Plays Havisham and Cabbie.

**NICK:** A bit spacey. Plays Pumblechook, Orlick, Drummle, Compeyson and Convict 2 in Taxi.

**LILY:** A friendly girl. Plays Policeman 2 and Estella.

### **Teacher:**

**Mrs. / Mr. ELIOT** (flex.): A grumpy language arts teacher.

## **SETTING**

A middle or high school classroom. A teacher's desk is DSL. Eight student desks are center and right. A paperback copy of "Great Expectations" is on each desk. One or two tables large enough for props and costume accessories is right.

## **PROPERTIES**

Eight paperback copies of "Great Expectations," clipboards and pens, headphones, cardboard boxes to carry props, *Sports Illustrated* magazine, phone, nail file, teacher's briefcase, hardback books used to symbolize gravestones, chain to symbolize shackles, broom, fast food restaurant bag, pie box from market, tablecloth, dinner plates, dining room chairs, napkins, money, cane, donut box, can of aerosol string, credit card bills, telegram, spork, suitcase, blanket and pillow, and teddy bear.

## **COSTUMES**

Properties, including costumes, are laid out on tables stage right. Costumes are not complete clothing, but accessories actors can quickly put on and remove. These are suggestions. Actual costumes can be as simple or elaborate as the director wishes.

Magwich: dirty, torn, ratty jacket, porkpie hat

Compeyson: dirty, torn, ratty jacket

Herbert: (as a child) boxing gloves, boxing trunks large enough to pull up over his pants, a towel around his neck  
(as adult) Polo or any preppie shirt, or nicer jacket and hat

Mrs. Joe: apron and bonnet, always carries a broom

Molly: maid's cap

Joe: leather apron, porkpie hat

Jaggers: nice jacket and top hat

Policemen: police or sheriff shirt and hats

Biddy: (as teacher) mortar board and academic robe

(as nurse) nurse's cap and cape

Pip: (as child) porkpie hat, scarf (as adult) nice jacket and hat, add cane for last scene

Havisham: tacky bathrobe, slippers, cane

Cabbie: baseball cap with logo, sunglasses

Pumblechook: tacky blazer

Orlick: ski mask

Drummle: muscle shirt

Estella: tiara, boa

Taxi Convicts: ratty clothes

### Prologue

*(AT RISE: BRANDON and ABBEY enter carrying a box of costume accessories which they lay out on the table in careful order. They are both listening to music on headphones. TYLER and HANNAH enter with another box and lay out props and costumes. No one talks. LILY and NICK enter holding clipboards and pens. They look over the table and check off items on their clipboard. Nick points to an item on his clipboard and Lily points to an item on the table. STEVE enters with a box with more props.*

*When all of the items are properly laid out on the table the students give each other nods, cross to their desks and sit. KRISTEN slowly enters, yawns, stretches her arms, sits at a desk and goes to sleep. Brandon and Abbey bob their heads in time to their music. Brandon reads a "Sports Illustrated" magazine. Tyler takes out his phone and plays a game. Hannah takes a nail file from her pocket and files her nails. Steve thumbs through his copy of the book on his desk. All look tired, bored or preoccupied.*

*MRS. ELIOT enters with a briefcase. She looks at the students with disgust, rolls her eyes, places her briefcase on the desk and waits. No one acknowledges her. She clears her throat. No one notices. She clears her throat louder. Again, no one seems to notice. She tries this again. No reaction. She takes a large book from her briefcase, holds it out and drops it on the floor. All but Brandon and Abbey jump and gasp at the loud noise. Kristen puts her head back down on the desk and goes to sleep.)*

**ELIOT:** *(To students, with distaste.)* Good afternoon. In case I look familiar, I am Mrs. Eliot, the language arts teacher that you've pretty much ignored since the beginning of the school year.

*(No one reacts. SHE walks over to BRANDON and ABBEY and pulls off their headphones.)*

**BRANDON / ABBEY:** Ouch! / Hey! That hurt!

**ELIOT:** I'm sure you're all about as happy to be here as I am.

**TYLER:** We're probably a lot less happy than you are, Mrs. Eliot.

**ELIOT:** I don't see how that's possible.

**TYLER:** Oh, it's possible. I'd rather be at the dentist than here with you. (*SHE glares at HIM. He cowers.*) But then I like going to the dentist. I like you too, Mrs. Eliot, but I like the dentist better. Uh...well...never mind.

(*ELIOT crosses to HANNAH.*)

**ELIOT:** (*To Hannah.*) Tell me, Hannah, why is everyone here?

**HANNAH:** Because we all failed the test on that book we were supposed to read.

**ELIOT:** Any insight into why you failed the test?

**STEVE:** We didn't read the book, and we weren't able to contribute to the class discussion or do the writing assignments. I thought I could fake it because I'm really smart. These other people should have known better.

(*OTHERS grumble in offense.*)

**ABBEY:** If you're so smart, why did you fail it?

**STEVE:** Because it didn't have any math questions.

**HANNAH:** This is language arts. Why would there be math questions?

**STEVE:** (*Shrugs.*) I just hoped there'd be math questions. I'm really good in math and science.

**STUDENTS:** WE KNOW!

**ELIOT:** (*To LILY.*) So why didn't you read the book?

**LILY:** Well...it's really long.

**ELIOT:** (*To NICK.*) You had all semester to read it, didn't you?

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