

ALL THE BASES

By Alan Haehnel

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CHARACTERS

The Checker
Timmy
Delia
Mark
Dawn
Ray
Norma
Josh

Peter
Sandy
Jane
Rigel
Lynn
Wendy
Hannah
Julie

Sarah
Kaitlin
Abby
Dylan
Mary
Zack
Angela
Holly

All characters in “All the Bases” are typical junior high or high school students. With name changes, all characters can be played by either gender. Parts can be doubled or tripled.

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AT RISE: The lights come up on a twisted set made out of recycled materials. The actors enter, all dressed in a colorful array of mismatched clothing stuffed with pillows. They should look extremely puffy and odd. They all wear hardhats with the acronym "E.E.K." printed on them. The actors take various places on the set.

ANGELA: As part of our continuing effort to provide theatre that is pleasing to everyone, we sent out a survey to you, our audience members, asking what you wanted from our next production. Following are the results of that survey.

(The actors read the following lines from pieces of paper—the surveys.)

HOLLY: I want a show that has clear educational merit.

ZACK: Keep it short. Sitting too long bothers my hemorrhoids.

MARY: You need to build self-esteem.

DYLAN: I like colorful costumes.

ABBY: I go to the theatre for the witty repartee.

KAITLIN: We had to look up the word repartee, by the way. When we first read it, we thought it was pronounced re-party, and we wondered, naturally, when the first party was. But, after a brief bit of research, we found that repartee meant. . .

SARAH: A witty exchange of words.

JULIE: So now we know. And so do you.

ANGELA: Continuing on, then.

HANNAH: I like some stage combat.

WENDY: Be sure you have a starring role for my precious child.

LYNN: I love a show with music.

RIGEL: The only plays worth doing are those by William Shakespeare.

JANE: I enjoy an interesting set.

SANDY: Don't spend any darned money! My taxes are high enough. I ain't going to have them go higher just 'cause a bunch of darned kids want to jump around onstage in some darned tights.

PETER: Our apologies to whomever wrote that, by the way; we had to edit the reply a bit. "Darned" wasn't the word used in the original. We hope we were still able to convey what we sensed was a somewhat angry tone.

ANGELA: Our next surveys requested. . .

JOSH: My child must be 100% physically safe. I have a lawyer.

NORMA: I just want some nice pictures for my scrapbook.

DAWN: Do whatever you want, but can you please, please, please not schedule your rehearsals when they will interfere with our already busy schedules?

ANGELA: And finally, your last desire.

MARK: Don't let the kids scratch or pick any embarrassing body parts.

DELIA: So. There you are. While we didn't get back a response from every survey we sent out, we are confident these replies represent the majority of your hopes for this play tonight.

JOAN: And because we care about you, our audience, and want you to know just how and when we're fulfilling your needs, we've arranged them all on this handy chart.

(A couple cast members bring out a chart on which the fifteen requirements have been listed after the words

“You want a show that is. . .

- 1. Short***
- 2. Cheap***
- 3. Educational***
- 4. Safe***
- 5. Non-schedule interfering***
- 6. Colorfully costumed***
- 7. Interestingly set***
- 8. Photogenic***
- 9. Shakespearean***
- 10. Self-esteem building***
- 11. Combative***
- 12. Musical***
- 13. Repartee-filled***
- 14. Stars your precious child***
- 15. Contains no scratching or picking of the embarrassing variety”***

After each category is a box that can be checked off. One actor stands next to the chart with a marker. This is THE CHECKER.)

HOLLY: Throughout the show, our Checker will make a mark and a sound each time we accomplish one of the lofty goals you have set for us.

TIMMY: And just so you don't think this is all much ado about nothing...
(THE CHECKER smiles and puts a checkmark in the box next to Shakespearean. HE also has a bell that allows him to make a single ding! Each time HE puts up a checkmark.) let's get on with our. . .

ALL: **(saying quickly in unison until the final word "Show," which they sing)** short-cheap-educational-safe-non-schedule-interfering-colorfully-costumed-interestingly-set-photogenic-Shakespearean-self-esteem-building-combative-musical-repartee-filled-stars- your-precious-child-contains-no-scratching-or-picking-of-the-embarrassing-variety. . . show!

(THE CHECKER dings and puts a mark next to "Musical.")

SANDY: Actually, before we can proceed with our. . .

ALL: **(as before)** short-cheap-educational-safe-non-schedule-interfering-colorfully-costumed-interestingly-set-photogenic-Shakespearean-self-esteem-building-combative-musical-repartee-filled-stars-your-precious-child-contains-no-scratching-or-picking-of-the-embarrassing-variety. . . show!

(THE CHECKER puts another mark next to "Musical.")

SANDY: Exactly. Before we can proceed with this. . .

ALL: **(starting as before)** short-cheap-edu. . .

SANDY: Abbreviate it!

ALL: **(singing)** Show!

(THE CHECKER puts a third mark next to "Musical.")

SANDY: Yes. Before we start, we must clarify a few points first.

HANNAH: Right. The shortness requirement, for instance. "Short," we realize, is a relative term. This, being a one-act play, will last no longer than approximately 35 minutes.

(THE CHECKER marks next to "Short.")

KAITLIN: For some, however, that might still be too long, particularly if certain. . . ailments are flaring up.

DYLAN: Therefore, though it is usually contrary to good theater etiquette, we will allow any of you in the audience, should you feel the need, to rise and say. . .

ZACH: Oy, I have to stand up for a minute. My butt is really giving me troubles tonight!

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DYLAN: No one will mind, and you will not be asked to leave.

ZACH: Oy, talk about burning! I've tried everything—creams, hot baths, sandpaper. . .

DYLAN: We just ask that you not overdo it.

ZACH: Oy!

NORMA: So, yes, out of respect for your posterior afflictions. . .

JANE: And because we believe that brevity is the soul of wit. . .

(THE CHECKER dings and marks next to "Shakespearean.")

ALL: We will keep this short.

(THE CHECKER dings and marks next to "Short.")

DAWN: Enough introduction, then. It's time for our. . .

ALL: Short-cheap. . .

SANDY: Cut it!

ALL: ***(singing)*** Show!

(Ding and mark for "Musical.")

(After singing, everyone suddenly cowers back, as if frightened and shocked by something in front of them.)

JOAN: What? How can you ask this of us?

JULIE: Yes, yes, yes, how can you?

LYNN: After all, we are but. . .

ALL: lowly inhabitants of this land.

PETER: Look at us. You can tell by our native, colorful costumes made of strictly second-hand clothing. . .

(Ding and check next to "Colorfully costumed"; second ding and check next to "Cheap.")

ABBY: And by our traditional and fascinating architecture made entirely of recycled materials. . .

(Ding and check next to "interesting set"; second ding and check next to "Cheap.")

MARY: You can tell by these things that we are only. . .

ALL: Lowly inhabitants of this land.

TIMMY: How, then, can you ask us to perform this task?

WENDY: This daunting. . .

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SARAH: This difficult. . .

DELIA: This dastardly. . .

MARK: This d. . . d. . . darling!

ALL: Darling?

MARK: Well, I can't think of another "d" word. Dapper? Donut? Dorky.
How about that? This dorky task.

ALL: No.

RIGEL: While we've stopped to overcome this brief challenge, now
would be a good time to point out a few other elements of our play
that you, our audience, may not have noticed.

MARK: Dumb! This dumb task!

ALL: Uh-unh.

JOAN: If you will notice, one of the items on your list of requirements for
our show is "stars your precious child."

RIGEL: Unfortunately, the person who filled out that survey neglected to
sign his or her name.

MARY: Her name. I bet it was a mother. Fathers just don't say
"precious."

JOSH: My dad does. When he's talking about his lawn-mower.

JULIE: (**Gollum-like**) My precious!

MARK: This demonic task!

ALL: No way.

JOAN: Anyway, because we weren't quite sure which of us was
someone's precious child, we decided that we should all be stars of
the show.

RIGEL: That's why, as you might have noticed, we all spend the same
amount of time onstage and say the same number of lines.

JOAN: Even the same number of syllables. We've been that careful.

RIGEL: You'll also notice that we're all playing the characters who must
solve a terrible problem.

ANGELA: That makes us all the good guys.

JOAN: And none of us is actually causing the problem.

HANNAH: That makes none of us the bad guys.

RIGEL: The good guys are the stars.

JOAN: The bad guys are the. . . not-stars.

KAITLIN: Yeah, so when the list of who played what part went up, we all
cheered. . .

ALL: I'm the star! I'm the star!

RIGEL: And amongst that crowd of cheering stars was definitely
someone's precious child.

**(THE CHECKER dings and marks next to "Stars my precious
child.")**

MARK: The diamond-studded task. Never mind; don't even reply. I know it doesn't work. D, d, d, d.

HOLLY: Plus, since no one got disappointed by having less of a role than anyone else. . .

LYNN: That built our self-esteem.

ALL: We feel cherished and valued and cuddly inside.

(THE CHECKER dings and puts a mark next to "Builds self-esteem.")

MARK: Dreadful!

JULIE: What?

MARK: Dreadful! The dreadful task!

DELIA: Say, that works.

DAWN: I like it.

ALL: Back to the play!

(They all cower back, as they did before.)

TIMMY: How, then, can you ask us to perform this task?

WENDY: This daunting. . .

SARAH: This difficult. . .

DELIA: This dastardly. . .

MARK: This dreadful task!

ALL: We cannot, we cannot, we just cannot do it!

ZACH: But wait just a moment. Just what is this task?

KAITLIN: Well, why do you ask?

ZACH: I asked you first.

TIMMY: Yes, he asked her first just what is the task.

ABBY: And she asked him back just why he did ask.

JANE: But who was the latter, the task asker or the ask asker?

KAITLIN: None of that matters. It's all in the past.

ZACH: Oh-ho, so you claim the task-asking is past?

ANGELA: Now, listen up, everyone—let's just relax!

RAY: How can we relax if we don't know the task?

SARAH: Is that the last question, the can't-relax-without-the-task ask?

PETER: Now, hang on a minute—what is the point? Why are we taxed with this tasking and asking?

½ OF CAST: Why are we taxed?

OTHER ½ OF THE CAST: With all of this asking?

NORMA: Why, why, you ask? Just look over there. . .

(All eyes turned toward THE CHECKER who dings the bell and checks off the box next to "Repatee-filled.")

ALL: Ooooooh!

(Suddenly, we hear a loud noise, like a car alarm.)

JOSH: Hands in the air! Hands in the air! Everyone, hands up!

(All of the actors raise their hands and stand stock still. The alarm changes from the typical car alarm sound to a mechanical-sounding voice coming over the speakers.)

VOICE: Alert. A cast member has experienced an irritation of an embarrassing body part. Be advised: Picking or scratching is imminent.

JOSH: Timmy?

TIMMY: Not me!

JOSH: Joan?

JOAN: Uh-unh!

JOSH: Delia?

DELIA: I'm not itchy!

WENDY: You see, in order to try to avoid all scratching or picking of the embarrassing variety. . . ***(THE CHECKER points to that item on the chart.)*** we have installed monitors in our costumes that measure the irritation levels of certain areas.

JOSH: Mark, are you having trouble again?

MARK: I'm over it! It's not me!

JOSH: Dawn?

DAWN: Currently itch free!

WENDY: When the alarm goes off, we know that someone is tempted to pick or scratch in a way that could cause embarrassment to an audience member, which we must avoid at all costs.

JOSH: It's got to be somebody!

JULIE: Maybe it's you, Josh!

JOSH: Me? I use lotion five times a day to make sure it's never me!

RAY: You can't use lotion for the inside of your nose.

(All attention on RAY, who looks extremely tense.)

JANE: Ray, don't tell me it's you!

RAY ***(slowly lowering his hand with finger extended, headed toward his nostril)*** Left nostril. Something inside. Have to try. . .

(In slow motion, the group moves toward RAY.)

ALL: Noooooo!

RAY: Can't help it! Have to scratch! Can't. . . take. . . the. . . pressure!

(By now, everyone has gathered around RAY. Several cast members have grabbed the hand that is dangerously close to his nose. His hand shakes. It is a moment of high tension.)

HANNAH: Fight it, Ray! Fight it, Buddy!

RAY: Have to scratch! It's killing me!

MARY: Ray, Ray, listen to me. Everybody's counting on you.

RAY: I can't take it!

HOLLY: Take a deep breath, Ray. In through your nose, out through your mouth. That's it. . . in through your nose. . .

RAY: That makes it worse! For the love of all that is holy, let me in my nostril!

(HE breaks from the others and is about ready to plunge his finger into his nose. The cast members cower from him.)

ABBY: Ray! Ray, before you do this. . .

RAY: Don't try and stop me. I have to.

ABBY: I won't stop you, Ray. I just want you to remember something, okay?

RAY: What?

ABBY: Remember last Tuesday when I had that rash under my armpit and I just had to get at it?

RAY: Leave me alone. Just let me pick in peace.

ABBY: What did you tell me then?

RAY: This is different!

ABBY: Nostril, armpit. . . it's not the body part that matters, Ray—it's the principle, man! What did you tell me?

RAY: I. . . I told you to think of all those who have gone before, all those who have sacrificed their itches for the greater good.

ABBY: Yeah, Ray—that's just what you told me. And you know what?

RAY: What?

ABBY: It worked. You saved me. You saved me from myself, Ray, and for that, I'll always be grateful.

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