

# ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL DROPOUT

by Jerry Rabushka

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*A Comedic Monologue*

**by Jerry Rabushka**

**SYNOPSIS:** Our speaker is about to uncover a big secret about her school—that there’s some truth to her theory that her unified school district came about by one district taking over another. But in her search to put the school board in its place, she finds out a more important truth about herself: she needs to go to “alternative school” to unlock her potential and escape her classmates’ rigid cultural code. Will that be enough to let this free spirit shine, or will she become an ... alternative school dropout?

**TIME:** Present day.

**SETTING:** Unified school district, alternative school.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(1 female)*

NARRATOR (f) ..... Plays an independent-thinking student, a principal, a variety of students, parents, politicians.

**COSTUMES:** Our speaker talks about being different and wearing purple. While she doesn’t necessarily have to wear purple, she might want to wear something that would be considered unusual or out of style for today’s high school student.

**SET:** Bare stage

**DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

When I in junior high, I read a story about “nonconforming” kids that always stuck with me. The story made fun of how everyone “nonconformed” in the same way: same sunglasses, same clothing, so that even if you’re different, you have to be different in the same way as everyone else. This comedy comes with drama, and a plea to understand how painful it can be even to be slightly different, to be the oboe player in a world of flutes. So while there’s a lot of comedy in this, make sure the actress understands and conveys the underlying difficulty of looking for acceptance for who you are when you’re still in the process of finding yourself. By making the highs high and the lows low, the actress can show a great dramatic range and help the audience, perhaps, discover a few things about themselves as well.

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**AT START:** *Our heroine speaks to the audience.*

**NARRATOR:** I went to a unified school district, (*Thinking over what that means, if anything....*) which never made a lot of sense to me. It reminded me of how the Egyptian Pharaoh unified north and south Egypt and suddenly (*Big, excited smile!*) a nation was born, only to crumble to dust... 4,500 years later. (*Bemused.*) Thanks for nothing, Cleopatra!

I kept wondering if the same thing happened here. Some school board member or superintendent conscripted an army of teachers' aides and custodians, invaded the district to the south and held it against its will until one day everyone just accepted that resistance was futile. We'd be taught history, mathematics, and even theatre, all of it forced upon us by a conquering culture. We were unified, but instead of the Nile, we had a bus route flooding county students over the city limits.

Of course, none of that was, as far as I could see at the time I thought of this, remotely true, but it seems to be that for something to be unified now, it has to have been *not* unified at some time in the past. Like the United States of America were at one point not only not united, but states could declare war on each other. So who knows, maybe we had a tax base they wanted, maybe they coveted our teacher of the year, maybe our basketball team could take them to state. I have no idea, because all this would have happened before I was born, and if there is any history, it's hidden away in the teachers' lunchroom, where no student has been allowed since the dawn of time.

But we were unified, (*As she says this line, she becomes less and less convinced that it's true.*) so we all had the same vision and strove for the same outcome. Well, we were supposed to, but you're dealing with a student body and everyone is different. The point of our unified district was that everyone could learn at their own pace and develop into what he or she wanted to be under a unified philosophy.

Other than, they couldn't.

*(As a principal or other authority figure, larger than life.)* "Be who you want to be. At our school you can grow, learn, and unlock the doors to your future. Live the dream that only education can provide!"

Then the judgment fell upon us like acid rain on a jelly doughnut.

*(As a variety of students.)* Why are you wearing that?

Why are you reading that?

Why are you eating that?

Why are you listening to that music?

*(Thinking over her answers.)* Well, it looks good on me. I like the author. It tastes good and it's healthy. I like the guitar solo, not to mention the vocal harmonies in the third verse and counterpoint to rival a Bach fugue.

School, and life in general, was horribly threatening to people who didn't dress, read, eat, or listen to the standard fare. People like me had to be rehabilitated, so the children of the more influential school board members, as well as several members of the football team and the second sopranos in the glee club, all banded together to not only unify, but coalesce. If you can get the football team and the glee club to agree on anything, it has to be really, really toxic.

Then parents and politicians got involved. And we all had to do the same thing, because what's the point of unity if you aren't actually tied together?

"But wait," I told them. "I thought you can do whatever you want."

"Not. Like. That." Screeched a second soprano. *(If desired, "sing" this line operatically.)* "You can do whatever you want as long as it meets board-approved parameters."

*(As self.)* But I don't want to meet board-approved parameters.

*(As the soprano.)* "Well, isn't that a shame," she sang.

And what happens is your friends are taxed with standing up for you and being ostracized along with you, or leaving you alone, at the

staircase, with graffiti sprayed in your locker, and they're just thankful that it didn't happen to them. (*Gets serious here, as character realizes she's "lost" her freedom to be herself.*) And one by one, those of us who dressed like that, or read those books, or ate that food... stopped.

I had to do some research, but as long as I had my favorite song going on, no one would come near me, so I managed to find out a few things without anyone looking over my shoulder. (*Sharing a big secret, and it is, because nobody was aware of this!*) I unearthed that indeed we were two school districts combined into one and that in fact, we started it, we wanted to join them, and we forced our way in with a court order in order to take advantage of their amenities, absorbing the district to the south like Rome's conquest of Cleopatra.

And we did get more—more taxes, more football, new oboes in the band room, catered lunches beyond soggy pizza, everything got better except for teacher salaries. It was a really bad idea in retrospect, but it happened 50 years ago so who knew that my life, by the act of wearing purple, would now be impacted not only with ostracization but with fists, spilled lemonade, my favorite books being taken out of the library, and my clothing being erased by a dress code that, if you read it carefully, didn't affect anyone but me and that dwindling pool of friends who so cautiously stood by my side.

(*Militant and jubilant.*) I wanted to secede. I wanted to take the districts apart after a half century—but differently. Let the students who wanted out get out. Let the students who believed that you could be anything they wanted to be... do it. Some people like to go with the crowd, and some don't, and those of us that don't deserve to be safe.

Or not, depending which side you're on.

So there was this old school building that no one had used for a while. The unification rendered it irrelevant, so it was still decorated

like it was the half century before. But now it was back in service! They redid the plumbing and electricity, put in some wireless internet and a few Peter Max paintings, and the alternative school was born. And the party started...

*(As someone else.)* Sure, an alternative education? More like an alternative TO education!

So we were still ostracized and belittled, but on our own terms. In our own space. We got to be what we wanted to be, and do what we wanted to do, and get educated, basically learn the same stuff everyone else did, but in a way that mattered to us, and in a safe space to make fun of the “normal” kids.

And we all adopted the “Alternative School Look.” You could tell one of us a mile away. Maybe two, maybe three, even if you were in an airplane 37,565 feet in the air, you knew who we were. Suddenly I fit in, and then I realized my problem. I didn’t want to. Fit in, that is. I just wanted to be different from everyone else, so when everyone changed to be like me, I wanted to be different... again. So I once again made my own path.

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