

# THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF SHAKESPEARE

By Claudia Haas

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# THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF SHAKESPEARE

*A Ten Minute Comedy Duet*

**BY CLAUDIA HAAS**

**SYNOPSIS:** Two teachers receive a grant to do Shakespeare in their middle school. But can they? Shakespeare is being banned!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(2 Either)*

REGAN (m/f)..... Middle school English teacher who has just had a conference regarding appropriate literature for middle school students. *(49 lines)*

LEE (m/f)..... Middle School art teacher who has just been awarded a grant to produce a Shakespeare play at the school. *(49 lines)*

**SETTING:** A middle school classroom or teacher's lounge. A desk and a chair is all that is needed. It is late afternoon. The school day is over.

## PROPS

- Regan has a report of acceptable subjects in literature
- Lee has a grant-award letter

**AT RISE:** REGAN is entering her classroom or lounge. She has just had a meeting with the principal and is clearly exasperated and overwhelmed. She is immersed in a folder of papers. She falls into a chair and slams the papers down.

**REGAN:** Give me strength! I just want to teach. "...Following a classical mode of instilling self-respect and care for humanity within the pedagogy of English literature." (*She thumbs through the papers.*) Say what? Are you for real?

*REGAN hears her name being called as LEE blows into the room.*

**LEE:** Regan! REGAN! We got it! We got it!

**REGAN:** What's "it." I'm not in the mood for nebulous pronouns.

**LEE:** Two thousand dollars! Whoop hoo! Celebrate!

**REGAN:** Two-thousand – I like the sound of that ....

**LEE:** The grant – to create a play – right here at Harrison Middle School. We are funded!

**REGAN:** I don't believe it. That night we went out and talked ...

**LEE:** ... and talked ... about creating a theatre program here. It's happening! The Arts Board loved it! Where's that part.... give me that ... "We applaud your willingness to start from the bottom and create a program that will enrich the lives of all the students in the school. Theatre is made to be created and it is not merely enough to study it. We were especially grateful for the detail budget proposed and how you thought of every contingency. We look forward to being at your opening production. We agree that Shakespeare is best understood through a play production and not scholarly –

**REGAN:** What?

**LEE:** -scholarly pursuit –

**REGAN:** Go back to the Shakespeare part.

**LEE:** We wrote it in the grant – remember? That we would use the grant to produce a Shakespeare play. It would tie in with the unit on *Macbeth* – or *Romeo and Juliet*. Which do you prefer?

**REGAN:** Neither.

**LEE:** O-kay. He wrote a bunch of other plays. But what's wrong with *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*?

**REGAN:** They're banned.

**LEE:** Don't be silly – they're classic works of literature. We've been using the plays for years.

**REGAN:** I just came from a meeting. Apparently there has been a study that proves that many classic works of literature have an adverse affect on the delicate mentality of the middle school student.

**LEE:** But the kids love *Macbeth*! It has blood, guts, action –

**REGAN:** Witches ... the occult ... death.

**LEE:** All tragedies have death. That's why they're tragedies.

**REGAN:** Kids are killed in the play.

**LEE:** And the murderers get their comeuppance.

**REGAN:** Then, there's the supernatural element. The study suggests that *Macbeth* is presenting students with an alternate religion. We cannot present religion in the classroom.

**LEE:** Forget *Macbeth*. We'll do *Romeo and Juliet*.

**REGAN:** *Romeo and Juliet* – I know I saw the title somewhere ... oh – here we go: violent, encourages promiscuity, promotes drug use, foul language, romanticizes teenage suicide, inspires teens to defy their parents. In a nutshell – no – don't think we're doing *Romeo and Juliet*.

**LEE:** Okay – we'll do *Hamlet*. That's considered one of the finest plays in the English language.

**REGAN:** Aside from the fact that I don't see any middle school student learning – much less acting the role of *Hamlet* ... here it is: Murder, suicide, dirty ditties by Ophelia, use of ghostly creatures. Nope. They don't approve.

**LEE:** *Midsummer*?

**REGAN:** Foul language, experimentation with the occult, includes kidnapping of wives, a scene with child abuse. That would be Egeus threatening Hermia.

**LEE:** *Julius Caesar* has no sex.

**REGAN:** Killing of a government official – not acceptable.

**LEE:** *Twelfth Night*!

**REGAN:** Cross-dressing –

**LEE:** There goes *As You Like it*.

**REGAN:** *As You Like It* is even worse. Not only cross-dressing but child neglect.

**LEE:** *Othello!*

**REGAN:** Politically incorrect race relations, conspiracy to kill.

**LEE:** Is there any Shakespeare play we can do?

**REGAN:** Let me see ... murder ... sex ... violence...patricide ... fratricide ... suicide... offensive to religion ... subordination of family values ... child neglect. They're all listed. All would be detrimental to our students.

**LEE:** I guess we could try and fashion a play out of the sonnets ....it would be difficult – but I think we're up to the challenge.

**REGAN:** No sonnets.

**LEE:** *No sonnets?* But they're beautiful –

**REGAN:** They were from a man to a man and we do not want to encourage "alternate lifestyles."

**LEE:** It doesn't say that!

**REGAN:** Right here.

**LEE:** Okay. I still want to do theatre. Even if we can't use the grant money. This has me all fired up! If worse came to worst, we could do a fairy tale.

**REGAN:** No. No fairy tales. No witches, fairies or elves. It's disrespectful of student's religion and may sway young teenagers towards the occult. Can't have that. Can't have our little darlings go to the dark side because they were in a production of *The Shoemaker and His Elves*.

**LEE:** Santa is an elf – "a jolly old elf."

**REGAN:** Santa's banned.

**LEE:** What about leprechauns? I mean – they're in the supermarket – in the cereal aisle.

**REGAN:** We are educators. We are held to higher standards than cereal boxes.

**LEE:** Well ... what's left? Folktales? You know Anansi – the trickster spider? Paul Bunyan?

**REGAN:** No good. "Middle school students are at an age where talking spiders would only confuse their outlook on the natural world."

**LEE:** You're making that up!

**REGAN:** Shh . I'm not done. "Teaching tall tales teaches young teenagers that lying is all right."

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