

# CAUTION: LIBRARIANS AHEAD

By Bradley Walton

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This script is a 10-minute version of the one-act play *Caution: Librarians Ahead*. It is designed for two actors to each play four characters. In the first and last scenes, the actors play school assistant principals. In the scenes in between, the actors will alternate between playing their respective principal characters and applicants who are being interviewed for a library job. This gives each performer a chance to show off a wide comedic range. All characters may be either gender.

### CHARACTERS TO BE PLAYED BY ACTOR #1

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL THOMAS

MR. VASSER – a taxidermist

MS. BUTLER – wants to start a fire breathing club

MS. HARRISON – very scatterbrained

### CHARACTERS TO BE PLAYED BY ACTOR #2

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL REXRODE

MR. VANDORING – deeply concerned with the meaning behind words

MR. BRIDGES – really wants to be a garbage collector

MS. FUNKHOUSER – a strong proponent of book burning

### STAGING

If performed onstage, it is recommended that the actors stand in scenes 1 and 8, and sit in two chairs angled slightly towards one another for scenes 2-6, with the interviewing principal always in the stage right chair and the interviewee in the stage left chair. The actors would then switch places for each new interview.

If performed for forensics competition, the actors should simply stand a few feet apart and, if permitted by the rules, switch places for each new interview so that the interviewer is always on the right and the interviewee is always on the left. It is suggested that the actors turn around 360° to indicate the transitions for the first and last scenes.

## AUTHOR NOTES

*I had a forensics duo who really wanted a script that would give each of them the chance to play multiple roles. Until fairly recently, my state's forensics rules hadn't allowed that, so my own script library was lacking in duo-friendly scripts with lots of characters. But I had this new one-act I'd written called Caution: Librarians Ahead, and I thought maybe it could be distilled into something workable. My forensics duo responded enthusiastically to the one-act, and subsequently, the 10-minute version you now hold in your hands was created.*

*Thanks to Maria Rose and Alison Domonoske.*

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### SCENE 1

***THOMAS and REXRODE stand at center.***

THOMAS: You ready to do this?

REXRODE: Yeah, let's get it over with.

THOMAS: We shouldn't complain.

REXRODE: No, I guess not.

THOMAS: The one silver lining to come out of the budget cuts is that we haven't had to interview for any new staff positions this year.

REXRODE: Except for this one.

THOMAS: Hey, it's only one.

REXRODE: I really hate interviews. The only thing that scares me more than some of the people who show up is the prospect of them teaching our kids.

THOMAS: Well, we're interviewing for a new school librarian, so you don't have to worry about the teaching part.

REXRODE: Librarians still teach.

THOMAS: Yeah, but they're not right there with the same group of kids every day.

REXRODE: This is the person who's going to be putting books on the library shelves for the entire student body to read for the next who-knows-how-many years. The potential for damage to young minds is... it's... *(Gestures to indicate something big, but can't come up with a word to match the size of "big" he's imagining.)*

THOMAS: It's huge. Definitely.

REXRODE: I think I'd rather be hiring an entire department full of teachers. We have no idea what the pool of applicants could be like.

THOMAS: You might be surprised.

REXRODE: That's what scares me. This is unknown territory here. People fear the unknown. I fear the unknown. I admit it. And this—if you went to Applebee's *(restaurant reference may be changed as needed)* and ordered a big steaming plate of the unknown with a side of fries—this is what you'd get served.

THOMAS: Actually, we serve that in the cafeteria here on Wednesdays.

REXRODE: Be serious!

THOMAS: It's hard to be serious when you're being melodramatic. Relax.

REXRODE: We're assistant principals. We don't get to relax.

THOMAS: Tell you what. Divide and conquer. I'll take half and you take half. Then we'll compare notes.

REXRODE: All right. Hopefully there'll be somebody worth hiring.

THOMAS: We'll probably have a tough time choosing.

REXRODE: If not, I guess we can always shut down the library and sell the books on eBay. (*Update reference as necessary.*)

## SCENE 2

**MR. VANDORING shakes hands with ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL THOMAS.**

THOMAS: Good morning, Mr. VanDoring.

VANDORING: Hello.

THOMAS: Pleasure to meet you.

VANDORING: Why?

THOMAS: I beg your pardon?

VANDORING: Why is it a pleasure to meet me?

THOMAS: Um... because I'm pleased that you're interested in working for our school system and it makes me happy that people want to work here?

VANDORING: I see. So it is actually a positive experience for you to make my acquaintance?

THOMAS: (*speaking slowly*) Yes.

VANDORING: Good. That's very good. So often people say these things and don't really mean them. The words become meaningless.

THOMAS: Words are very important.

VANDORING: The words are nothing.

THOMAS: Oh?

VANDORING: It's the meaning behind the words that matters. The thought. The emotion. The subtleties. For example, take the word "cheese."

THOMAS: Cheese.

VANDORING: Now, right there, the way you said "cheese." That's one way of saying it. Very bland, boring, and unimaginative, but perfectly legitimate nonetheless. A million times better than all those poor fools who yell "Cheese!" when their picture is taken. That becomes repetitive to the point of meaninglessness. Classic example. But if you were a starving man in a desert and you stumbled across an oasis of cheese, think how you might say it.

THOMAS: I see.

VANDORING: No! "Cheese!" With vigor!

THOMAS: (*with stilted and forced enthusiasm*) Cheese!

VANDORING: As if your life depended on it!

THOMAS: (*feeling foolish*) Cheese!

VANDORING: Cheese!

THOMAS: (*getting resentful*) Cheese!

VANDORING: Now, suppose you've eaten five pounds of Vermont cheddar and your bowels are bound up tighter than a rubber band around a sumo wrestler. Think how you'd say it then. The word is the same, but the meaning completely changes. There's no taking that one for granted. So full of misery, pain, and loathing for cows. (*In a deep, long moan.*) Cheeeese!

### SCENE 3

REXRODE: Do you enjoy working with kids?

VASSER: Well, truth be told, I've never worked with a kid before. Do you want to mount their heads, or are we talking about removing the skin from the whole body?

REXRODE: Mount their heads?

VASSER: Either way, it would be something new for me. I've done some adult mountain goats, but never a kid.

REXRODE: I'm talking about students... human students... not goats.

(*Beat.*)

VASSER: Why?

REXRODE: Because that's what we do here. We instruct the children of our community.

VASSER: So the heads you'd be mounting... are these the star athletes and honor roll kids who get perfect SAT scores and you want to hang onto them for sentimental reasons, or are they juvenile delinquents you want to display as a warning for the other kids who don't behave?

REXRODE: I don't want to display the heads of any of our students!

VASSER: Okay... good... 'cause that would be kind of creepy.

REXRODE: Why would you think that?

VASSER: Well, you said working with kids, and I just assumed—oh! I completely misunderstood you. I am so sorry. My brain gets into this tunnel vision mode sometimes. Of course you don't want me to mount the students' heads... you want me to teach them how to mount heads. I completely misinterpreted you.

Caution: Librarians Ahead - Page 7

REXRODE: Actually, no. I don't want you to teach them how to mount heads, either.

VASSER: Then why are you hiring for a taxidermist?

REXRODE: We're not. We're hiring for a librarian.

VASSER: A librarian?

REXRODE: Yes.

VASSER: *(to himself)* Then why did she say...? *(To REXRODE.)* Look, I'm real sorry. My sister just said you were hiring. I thought she was suggesting that I apply here. Now that I think about it, though, she never actually finished the sentence. She's a little scatter brained.

SCENE 4

**THOMAS is the interviewer.**

BRIDGES: What I really want to do is drive a garbage truck, but the city didn't have any openings for that, so y'know... time for plan B.

SCENE 5

REXRODE: How do you see yourself fitting in with the life of the school... the things that go on outside of the library?

BUTLER: Well, if you don't already have one, I'd like to start a fire breathing club.

REXRODE: A fire—fire... breathing?

BUTLER: Mm hmm.

REXRODE: Fire... like... fire fire. Like you'd get from matches?

BUTLER: Yes. Exactly. That kind of fire. I think circus fire breathing is fascinating, and I'm betting there would be a lot of interest if there was a club for it. There isn't yet, is there?

REXRODE: *(trying to repress his horror)* Not presently.

BUTLER: Oh, good.

REXRODE: The matter of having open flames in the school might be a bit of a problem. Definitely not something we'd want to try in the library. Might burn the books. *(Laughs weakly.)*

BUTLER: I was thinking maybe we could use the household and consumer science rooms.

REXRODE: The cooking classrooms?

BUTLER: Sure. They have stoves and ovens. If you've got students doing cooking, stuff probably lights up in there all the time.

REXRODE: More often than I'd like.

Caution: Librarians Ahead - Page 8

BUTLER: So it's probably fireproofed out the wazoo. It would be a great place for fire breathing.

REXRODE: It might be less fireproof than you think.

BUTLER: How about a sword swallowing club?

SCENE 6

THOMAS: What sorts of criteria would you use in selecting new books for the library, Ms. Funkhouser?

FUNKHOUSER: Very strict.

THOMAS: How so?

FUNKHOUSER: It's simply a matter of whether the book has any merit.

THOMAS: What do you feel constitutes merit?

FUNKHOUSER: Lots of things. It's more a matter of what doesn't constitute merit.

THOMAS: And what sorts of things would those be?

FUNKHOUSER: Foul language, obviously. Sex. Any kind of horror. Violence. Child abuse. Disrespectful depictions of teachers or the clergy. Homosexuality. Drugs. Alcohol. Tobacco. References to any movies that aren't G-rated. Characters throwing paper in trash cans when there's a recycling bin close by. Wasting water or electricity. Stories involving food preservatives. Possibly one or two other things.

THOMAS: How about puppies?

FUNKHOUSER: Depends on the breed.

THOMAS: Babies?

FUNKHOUSER: Babies imply sex, so they're out.

THOMAS: What would you do if you found any of the books in the library to be... lacking merit?

FUNKHOUSER: I'd burn them, of course.

THOMAS: *(sardonic)* Use them as fuel for the bonfire at the homecoming game?

FUNKHOUSER: Heavens, no. I wouldn't want to risk the students absorbing inappropriate ideas by breathing smoke from the books. I'd have to do it myself after regular school hours. With appropriate protective gear provided by the school, of course. Tell me, are the cooking classrooms well-fireproofed?

SCENE 7

***REXRODE looks very bored, as if HARRISON has been running her mouth for quite some time already.***

HARRISON: ...and so I was telling my brother that the school was hiring and he seemed awfully interested but I don't know why because he's a taxidermist and of course you don't need one of those but he's been out of work for a while now which is really a shame because he's had such a run of bad luck you see his wife ran out on him she was such a nasty woman we always called her the Wicked Witch of the West behind her back I dressed up as a witch once for Halloween when I was a child it's so silly how a child's mind can work I took some psychology classes in college and for a while I considered becoming a psychologist but I decided to become a librarian instead because there are books on so many different subjects and I just love it when my brain can skip from one topic to another it's like my head is flipping through the Dewey Decimal System like when I was talking about psychology that would be in the 150's whereas witches are 133.4 but Halloween is with holidays under 394 and my ex sister-in-law would be under 649.62 with the books about toilet training, because she's nothing but a pile of—

SCENE 8

***THOMAS and REXRODE stand at center.***

REXRODE: You said it wouldn't be that bad. I had a woman who wanted to start a sword swallowing club!

THOMAS: I had an applicant who really wanted to be a garbage collector!

REXRODE: I had somebody who thought we were hiring a taxidermist!

THOMAS: You didn't have anybody you thought might work out?

REXRODE: The only one I would even consider hiring was the taxidermist, except we don't have a program for that.

THOMAS: None of mine are going to work, either.

REXRODE: That's bad.

THOMAS: What do we do?

REXRODE: Plan B. Close the library and sell the books on eBay.

THOMAS: The principal would never go for that.

REXRODE: We could burn all the books.

THOMAS: I had an applicant who could help with that.

REXRODE: Really? Me, too.

THOMAS: Wonder which one would do a better job?

REXRODE: We could call them back for a second interview.

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