

HUH, LEVEL 12 AND THE GEOLOGICAL HORSES

By Alan Haehnel

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CHARACTERS

Bevin
Corinne
Josh
Jena
Ellen
Paige
Chelsea
Helen
Liz
Kylie
Josh
Faren
Joe
Nick
Caitlin
April
Cassidy
Alex
Justin
Mike
Maxine
Sue
Zach
Teacher

SET

Bare Stage or nondescript platforms, if desired.

PRODUCTION NOTES

I have included very few stage directions in this play. The staging should be very flexible and need not adhere to realism. Pace is the most important thing, so I suggest you not encumber the production with a lot of set changes. Since the play celebrates student imagination, in many ways, let the audience engage theirs to “fill in the blanks” of set and props. Since the play is broken into many scenes, shortening it should be no problem. Feel free to delete scenes where needed to get the play to the right length.

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AT RISE: Bare stage. A group of students enter. They speak directly to the audience.

ALL: Good morning, class.

BEVIN: That's right. You heard correctly, ladies and gentlemen.

CORINNE: This is called a reversal.

JOSH: Irony, if you want to get fancy about it.

JENA: For tonight, for the length of this presentation. . .

ELLEN: Which will be about the length of a typical class period. . .

BEVIN: We, who are usually the students. . .

PAIGE: The oppressed.

CHELSEA: The overworked.

HELEN: The downtrodden.

BEVIN: Are going to be the teachers!

PAIGE: The authority.

CHELSEA: The privileged.

HELEN: The God-like.

CORINNE: How could this happen, you ask?

LIZ: Is this a cosmic error of some sort? Has the third moon of the eighth planet become misaligned, causing a deep disturbance in the force?

KYLIE: That was weird.

JOSH: The reason for the switch, is simple. We have become the teachers, you have become the students simply because. . .

ALL: We know!

FAREN: Now, we admit it: in many areas, we aren't the experts.

JOE: You could ask us any number of questions that educated people might know. . .

NICK: How was the Pythagorean Theorem developed?

CAITLIN: What are the characteristics of a civilized society?

APRIL: What is the functional difference between a semi-colon and a colon?

CASSIDY: To these questions and many, many more, we have the same answer.

ALL: Huh?

ALEX: But our current topic bears no resemblance whatsoever to the aforementioned queries.

ALL: Huh?

JUSTIN: What we're talking about, ain't nothing like that.

ALL: Right.

MIKE: What we're talking about, we know about.

NICK: We're the experts.

JENA: If you want to know about this particular topic, you don't go to some teacher.

ELLEN: You don't go to some professor.

FAREN: You don't go to some high and mighty educational guru.

JOE: You don't go to some ballet-dancing plumber.

CAITLIN: Ballet-dancing plumber?

JOE: Well, I . . . sorry.

LIZ: No, if you want the truth about what we're exploring tonight, you go to the experts!

MIKE: And the experts is us!

CASSIDY: Darned tootin'!

APRIL: Got that right!

KYLIE: You better believe it!

MIKE: Let me hear an unh-huh!

ALL: Unh-huh!

MIKE: Let me hear a heck, yes!

ALL: Heck, yes!

MIKE: Let me hear a . . .

BEVIN: Wait a second, wait a second!

MIKE: Whoop, whoop?

BEVIN: How about we let them hear the topic?

MIKE: Oh. Yeah, that too.

ZACH: Before we tell them the topic, though, we better make sure they're all ready to act like students.

JENA: What are you talking about?

ZACH: You know, like at the beginning of class—we've got to make sure they're ready to be, you know, evacuated.

JENA: Educated?

ZACH: Right.

ELLEN: Well, how are we supposed to do that?

KYLIE: I'll do it. I know what he means. All right, class—have a seat!

PAIGE: They're already sitting.

KYLIE: Okay. Class, class, quiet down!

SUE: They're already quiet.

KYLIE: Well, that's good. Uh, class, take out your homework!

MAXINE: They can't take out their homework.

KYLIE: Ah-ha! See, they're not ready to be students.

MAXINE: They never got any homework.

KYLIE: Oh, right. That would explain it. Do they have pencils and notebooks?

SUE: We never asked them to bring pencils and notebooks.

KYLIE: Signed permission slips?

SUE: Nope.

KYLIE: Gym shorts?

SUE: Not required to enter the theatre.

KYLIE: What's the use of being a teacher, if you can't yell at your students for any of the good stuff?

JOE: You'll get over it.

KYLIE: All right. I guess they're ready to be students, then.

JOSH: Wonderful. The topic for our lesson today is. . .

KYLIE: Wait a minute! I know! Listen, students, if any of you have cell phones or beepers, you had better turn them off right now or I'm going to add them to my collection! Turn them off! Turn them off right now! Do it!

JOSH: Feel better?

KYLIE: Much. Now they're ready.

JOSH: I'm so pleased. Do you think we're set?

KYLIE: I think so.

JOSH: Nobody has anything else they need to clarify or get off their chest before we present our topic to our students? **(to FAREN)** You, . . . you have anything?

FAREN: I'm good.

JOSH: **(to JUSTIN)** You?

JUSTIN: Nothing from me.

JOSH: Last call—anyone? Anyone? Okay, then! The topic about which we are the. . .

HELEN: I did have one thing.

ALL: What?

HELEN: Just kidding.

JOSH: The topic. . . **(looks around suspiciously to make sure no one else is going to interrupt, then continues quickly)** The topic about which we are the experts is. . .

ALL: How We Write a Paper!

CORINNE: Now, please notice that we did not say How To Write a Paper. That would involve knowing such things as. . .

JENA: Proper format.

PAIGE: Correct Punctuation.

JOE: Clear Thesis.

NICK: Supporting Evidence.

ALL: Huh?

JUSTIN: Precisely. That's the stuff we *get* taught. This is about what we teach *you*. . .

ALL: How We Write a Paper.

BEVIN: Okay, then, step one: The Assignment.

CORINNE: The teacher stands up and says. . .

JENA: Now, this is the teacher teacher, by the way, the one who stands in front of us at school pretty much every day, not the student-teacher, like we're being right now, where you guys are the students when you're usually the teachers, but now we're the teachers who are usually the students. I mean. . .

ELLEN: I think they get it.

JENA: Do they? I don't think I do.

LIZ: Moving on. At some point, we all hear The Assignment.

(The group moves into a configuration like a typical classroom, with the students facing the TEACHER as SHE talks to them about The Assignment.)

TEACHER: Now that we have finished with our unit on geology, you will each write a paper about one chosen geological phenomenon and how it can influence the landscape. For instance, you might write about volcanoes or erosion or glaciers or even earthquakes, in order to complete the assignment...

(The "TEACHER" continues to speak about the assignment, mouthing the words.)

CHELSEA: So, the first thing we do is hear the assignment. Now, you might think that that is so obvious that it hardly even qualifies as the first step in our process of writing the paper. But we aren't all approaching hearing the assignment in the same way.

HELEN: Some of us get distracted. I mean, there's so much to pay attention to in the class, you know?

LIZ: Important stuff, like. . .

FAREN: I really like Holly's hair.

KYLIE: Jon's staring at me again.

ZACH: I am so hungry.

CAITLIN: I just got another text message. That's nasty! Who sent that?

CASSIDY: I think my deodorant just gave out.

APRIL: So, with all this stuff going on in class, it's hard to pay attention to the teacher, you know? So when she's giving the assignment, it kind of sounds like. . .

TEACHER: Earthquake. . . paper. . . Friday. . . typed. . . the. . . and. . . nose. . . of. . . yesterday. . . the.

JUSTIN: In other words, for a bunch of us, maybe even most of us, the beginning of the whole paper process is pretty much summed up in a word you've heard us say before.

TEACHER: So, I hope you all do well on this paper.

GROUP OF DISTRACTED KIDS: Huh?

SUE: But that's not all of us! I don't want you to think that's all of us, because that is definitely not true of all of us. Some of us, yes, but not all of us!

ZACH: Gee, Sue, what are you trying to say—that that's not true of all of us?

SUE: Yes!

ZACH: Just needed to be sure.

SUE: See, for some of us, as soon as the teacher starts talking about the paper, we have questions.

MAXINE: Oh, yes, that's me, too! I have questions like that.

SUE: Right. She's with me. We're definitely not distracted. We are paying complete attention because we have questions.

MAXINE: I'm very glad you pointed this out. Because during that whole part when people were demonstrating how they didn't listen and they were distracted by hair and that kind of stuff, I was really feeling vastly under-represented.

SUE: And we need to be represented.

MAXINE: I think we do. We need to be. Yes. But wait! How are we going to show how we, the Questioners, feel while the teacher is presenting the paper? The Distracted Ones have already taken us past that part!

SUE: She has to start over. The teacher. She has to begin with the explaining part, again. Rewind her. Start it again. She needs to start again.

ZACH: Susie, do you want her to start again?

SUE: Yes! Are you making fun of me?

MAXINE: Of us?

ZACH: Not at all. Why don't we have the teacher start again?

SUE: Right. So the teacher has to start again so we can show what it's like for us.

MAXINE: Yes. Us. The Questioners.

TEACHER: Now that we have finished with our unit on geology, you will each write a paper about one chosen geological phenomenon. . . Yes, Sue?

SUE: What's a geological phenomenon?

TEACHER: I'll give some examples in just a moment. Maxine?

MAXINE: Will we have a final test on the geology unit?

TEACHER: No, this paper will show me how well you have mastered the principles we have discussed. Yes, Sue?

SUE: So will the paper count as a test or as a paper?

TEACHER: It will count as a paper. Now, if I may continue, for this paper you will choose a geological phenomenon and then you will write about how it can influence the landscape.

(The TEACHER continues to pantomime speaking as MAXINE and SUE speak to the audience.)

MAXINE: See, I have my hand raised because I have another question, but the teacher is ignoring me. This is a pretty normal part of my process—being ignored. So I start to really stretch with my arm.

SUE: Ooh! I thought of another question, too, and she's ignoring me also. So I start to shake my hand.

CAITLIN: Yeah, and while they're stretching and shaking, the rest of us are rolling our eyes.

MAXINE: You'll never know if you never ask.

SUE: Yeah.

TEACHER: Maxine, Sue—I see your hands are raised; I know you have more questions.

MAXINE: Yes! I was wondering. . .

TEACHER: But, for now, I'd like the two of you just to listen. I think you'll probably find that many of your questions will be answered by my explanation.

SUE: But. . .

TEACHER: Hands down. Wait. Listen. Okay?

MAXINE and SUE: Okay.

(TEACHER continues to explain, in pantomime.)

MAXINE: Ooo, I hate this part.

SUE: It makes me crazy!

MAXINE: For us, Questioners, the hands-down-wait-and-listen order is torture!

SUE: Yes, it is! Because the questions are just bursting all around us, and we can't even ask them!

MAXINE: Like firecrackers, like popping balloons, like a swarm of bees, a zillion questions come to us. . .

(The other students gather around SUE and MAXINE like question-asking gargoyles.)

MIKE: How many pages?

JUSTIN: What font type?

CASSIDY: What if somebody else chooses our phenomenon?

APRIL: What do you mean by influencing the landscape?

CAITLIN: Can I ask my father for help?

NICK: Can we work in partners?

JOE: Do we have to have a bibliography?

BEVIN: What's the due date?

PAIGE: What if I'm not in school that day?

SUE: They fly and sting and crack in our brains, but we can't let them out!

MAXINE: We can't even raise our hands!

SUE and MAXINE: We have to just listen!

TEACHER: So, I hope you all do well on this paper. Any questions?

SUE: At last, we're given permission!

MAXINE: We're free to express our questions!

SUE and MAXINE: Except. . .

MAXINE: She did answer most of them already.

SUE: She took away our freedom of expression.

MAXINE: But wait! (*raises her hand*)

TEACHER: Yes, Maxine?

MAXINE: When is the paper due?

TEACHER: Maxine, I already answered that question. Class, can anyone tell Maxine when the paper is due?

MAXINE: Noooo!

SUE: The worst possible thing that can happen to a Questioner—the "ask the class" move!

MAXINE: Please, nobody be able to answer; please, nobody, nobody, nobody!

TEACHER: Yes, Jena?

JENA: It's due Friday, at the beginning of class.

SUE: Maybe she's wrong.

TEACHER: That's right, Jena. Thank you for paying attention. Now, any questions about requirements of the paper I have *not* already discussed?

MAXINE: Shot down. My questioning days are done.

SUE: The muscles in my shoulder contract. My hand starts to lift. Do I dare? After Maxine's defeat, I don't want to run the risk. But still, a question is forming. I'm going to risk it! I have to!

MAXINE: Sue, it's not worth it!

SUE: I must!

TEACHER: Sue?

SUE: If I'm sick on Friday, do I have to turn in the paper on Saturday or can I wait until Monday?

ALL: Oh, brother!

TEACHER: Sue, have I ever had you turn in a paper on a day we don't have school?

MAXINE: She questioned your question, Sue. It's all over.

SUE: Well I. . . it's just that. . .

TEACHER: Have I?

SUE: No.

TEACHER: So, I think you know the answer to that one already.

MAXINE and SUE: Bummer.

NICK: So, now that you have seen a couple of ways we handle the first part of writing a paper—The Assignment—we'll move on to. . .

ALEX: Pause.

NICK: What?

ALEX: Pause, please. Halt your forward momentum. Temporarily cease and desist.

NICK: Why?

ALEX: Because I am a member of the class—an anomaly, I realize, but nevertheless, not one to be ignored. I would like to report on my approach to this initial part of the paper-writing process. I believe our audience—our pupils—would find it beneficial.

NICK: Fine, fine—just speak English, will you?

ALEX: Oh, indeed I shall. You see, unlike one large segment of the class who might allow distractions to detract from their listening experience; unlike another, smaller, segment whose questions seem to push aside their awareness. . . I become a sponge, if you will, soaking up and taking notes on every salient detail of the assignment. I note not only what she states directly, but also endeavor to infer what she does not state, but will assuredly have influence on the paper. For instance, by listening to the examples of particular geological phenomenon she cites. . .

TEACHER: You might write about volcanoes or erosion or glaciers or even earthquakes.

ALEX: I sense the teacher has a slight preference for violent geological episodes rather than for gradual ones. I will play to this preference. By the end of our teacher's presentation, I have encapsulated the project into 22 distinct bullet points and have already begun to formulate a plan for completion. And that, to this point, is a summary of my particular approach. Thank you.

CHELSEA: You are a freak of nature.

ALEX: And thank you.

CASSIDY: So, that's pretty much it for step one of How We Write a Paper—getting the assignment.

MAXINE: Wait! I have a question!

CASSIDY: And in case anyone was going to ask if we have shown absolutely everybody's first step absolutely completely, down to the last detail of every individual, the answer is no. We don't have time to be that exact. Maxine?

MAXINE: (*bitter*) Question-stealing is an evil activity.

CASSIDY: Oh, well. Continuing, on. Step two of our process. . .

LIZ: Uh, know something?

CASSIDY: What?

LIZ: My father is out there.

CASSIDY: I'm glad to hear that.

LIZ: Yeah, well, a lot of people say I'm his daughter.

CASSIDY: Well, since you are his daughter, I guess that would make sense.

LIZ: Yeah, but what I mean is that, I'm not a great student. I'm one of the distracted ones. And my mom says I get that from my dad. And he's out there.

ZACH: Do you have a point or are you just mentioning random facts to be annoying?

LIZ: I do that sometimes, the random facts thing, but I do have a point this time.

ZACH: Good. (*long pause*) What is your point?

LIZ: Oh. See, my dad's out there and since I'm a bad student and since I probably got that from him and since we're supposed to be teaching him right now, we should probably figure that he got distracted, just like I get distracted.

ZACH: I see.

LIZ: He probably has no idea what we're talking about anymore. Do you, Dad? See, he's so distracted he doesn't even know I'm talking to him. Up here, Dad!

CASSIDY: What do you propose we do?

LIZ: Oh. Remind him. We should probably all remind him what we're talking about. Plus, there might be some other fathers and maybe even some mothers of bad students out there that we got our bad-studentness from and it might help them, too.

ZACH: Fine. A reminder, then. Our lesson today is called. . .

ALL: How We Write a Paper.

CASSIDY: There. Satisfied?

LIZ: Oh, I see him, now. There's my dad. He's not distracted. He's out cold. Never mind.

HELEN: All right. Step two, as we were saying, will be a condensation. It's called The Nights Between.

APRIL: That's right. Like a typical paper, we have, like, eight days—nine nights of homework-- to get it done, including the weekend. Let's say we get the assignment on a Wednesday. . .

TEACHER: Today is Wednesday, October 5th.

APRIL: And the paper is due in a week and a half. . .

TEACHER: And your due date for the paper is Friday, October 14th. Now, I will give you no other homework between now and then. It's important that you make some progress every night.

APRIL: "Some progress every night." Let's take a real look at what that progress looks and sounds like during The Nights Between.

ALL: Thursday night.

(The actors break from the classroom configuration quickly, forming into several clusters for the following scenes. The focus can shift from scene to scene with light changes or by having the cast freeze except for those featured.)

MIKE: Dude, this game has the coolest graphics. Watch this, watch this.
I can blow up three of the Megaloids with one shot.

JUSTIN: How did you do that?

MIKE: You have to pick up thirteen hundred tokens and jump through the death vortex.

JUSTIN: Cool. Let me try it!

ALEX: Now, I believe my advantageous course of action would be to brainstorm a list of at least one hundred geological phenomena, then rank them in order of least to most violent using at least five criteria. That should well help me prioritize before making my selection.

(JENA, ELLEN, PAIGE, CAITLIN and APRIL are on cell phones and at computers—all can be pantomimed.)

JENA: He did not say that.

ELLEN: He did so.

CAITLIN: Well, what did she say?

ELLEN: She said he said she didn't say that.

APRIL and CAITLIN: No way!

JENA: When?

CAITLIN: Who was there?

ELLEN: He was there, but when she came in he left, but then she said he didn't.

JENA, PAIGE, CAITLIN, APRIL: No way!

(The scene shifts to JOE and CHELSEA—brother and sister—fighting over the remote.)

CHELSEA: Hey, give me that remote. I want to watch American Idol!

JOE: Forget it! You watched that last night!

CHELSEA: Did not!

JOE: Did so!

CHELSEA: It wasn't on last night!

(Scene shifts to MAXINE and SUE sitting together.)

MAXINE: What if we choose the same phenomenon as somebody else?

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SUE: What if we choose the same phenomenon as somebody else and then we switch and then they switch to the same phenomenon we switched to?

ALL: Friday night!

(A typical mother's voice comes over the intercom.)

Mother's Voice: What about in science? Do you have any homework over the weekend?

ALL but ALEX: No!

ALEX: In fact, I do. We have a rather significant paper due next Friday. I have decided to focus my research on the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and will need transportation to the library on Saturday morning. I expect I will need eight hours there. On Sunday, I have scheduled phone interviews with leading vulcanologists from Dartmouth and Cambridge.

(The actors quickly get back into the class configuration.)

TEACHER: Well, here it is, Monday, October 10th. I certainly hope you've all selected your geological phenomenon by now! Faren, what will you be writing about?

FAREN: Uh, well, uh, I . . .

TEACHER: Nick?

NICK: I'm going to. . . that is, I'm thinking about. . . well, I want to. . .

TEACHER: Helen?

HELEN: I'm doing mine on horses.

TEACHER: Helen, horses are not geological phenomena.

HELEN: Yeah, but I like them.

SUE and MAXINE: I have a question!

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