

THE MOST POPULAR KID IN SCHOOL

By Sean Abley

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THE MOST POPULAR KID IN SCHOOL

A One Act Dark Comedy

By Sean Abley

SYNOPSIS: Ray Murphy, the student at Capital High School no one really knew or liked, has died. As the news sweeps across campus, suddenly the kid no one remembers has a school full of best friends grieving his passing. Within days of his death, Ray is posthumously transformed into a scholar and a savior, has the yearbook dedicated to him, and is elected prom king from the grave. He's now the most popular kid in school... who isn't in school anymore. With multilayered characters and realistic, truthful dialogue, *The Most Popular Kid In School* examines the issues of popularity, how the caste system in high school really works, and our tendencies toward "I knew him!" when it will benefit us the most. This is a great play for young performers who want to flex their acting muscles.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 female, 8 male, 0-1 either, 0-20 extras; doubling possible; gender flexible)

ROB (m)	Already out of high school, brother of the dead student, stoic but not sad. <i>(15 lines)</i>
TIM (m)	Never finishes his homework, has a morbid curiosity about life. <i>(67 lines)</i>
ANDY (m)	Head of the Prom Committee, in band, conspiracy theorist. <i>(46 lines)</i>
SAM (m)	An average, nondescript kid who takes the opportunity to be popular. <i>(40 lines)</i>
NICK (m)	Student council member, doesn't get girls at all. <i>(12 lines)</i>
IAN (m)	Student council member, puzzled by the other students' reactions. <i>(12 lines)</i>

COLBY (m)	The type of guy who enjoys working with his hands. (27 lines)
DEREK (m)	Yearbook staff photographer, loyal underling to Larue. (13 lines)
JULIE (f).....	An instigator, looking to get in on the action. (27 lines)
MARLEY (f).....	Yearbook editor, maybe a bit cut off from her own emotions. (47 lines)
LARUE (f)	Editor of the school paper, always looking for the scoop. (55 lines)
HANELLE (f)	Senior Class President, a natural politician. (26 lines)
VANESSA (f)	Student council member, highly emotional. (17 lines)
EMMY (f)	Sam's younger sister, typical pain in the butt for an older brother. (24 lines)
KRIS (f)	Member of the Prom Committee, unsure about the turn of events. (22 lines)
VOICE OVER INTERCOM (m/f).....	Offstage voice. (5 lines)
STUDENTS (m/f).....	There can be as many students in the group, class room and prom scenes as the production will allow. (Non-Speaking)

DURATION: 45 minutes

SETTING: Capital High School, or your own high school. Present day.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Although there are many locations in this play, a unit set is best, with many levels and areas in which scenes can be played. Lighting can define each area. *The Most Popular Kid In School* should be played with no blackouts. Lighting should transition from one scene to the next seamlessly, with actors' entrances timed so that the next scene begins immediately after the last line of the previous scene. If the set allows, each area can be preset with props and furniture. If space is limited, actors should bring out the props and furniture as if it were a natural piece of business even though they will be seen doing so. If played correctly, the audience will accept this convention throughout the play.

PROPS

- Backpacks, book bags, text books (all characters)
- Yearbook (multiple)
- Yearbook (previous year, multiple)
- Magnifying Glass
- Pad/Notebook (multiple)
- Pen/Pencils (multiple)
- Laptop (multiple)
- Cellphone (multiple)
- School Newspaper
- Prom Ballots
- Ballot Box
- Digital camera (or cellphone)
- Books for Book Drive
- Envelope (Prom King and Queen results)
- Photo of Ray
- Index Card

SOUND EFFECTS

- Class bell rings
- Tow truck backing up
- Tow truck driving away
- Large metal object being dumped to the ground

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Most Popular Kid In School was first performed on June 5-6, 2014 at Jack Jouett Middle School in Charlottesville, VA under the direction of Wendy Winkler. The cast was as follows:

Rob (Robin)-----	Gabrielle Delbiondo
Kris-----	Kristen Morris
Nick -----	Baylee Wright/Brooke Porcaro*
Ian -----	Natalie Lee/Olivia Smith*
Derek -----	Chayden Hackett
Colby (Callie)-----	Afrika Lambert
Marley -----	Gracie Kent
Tim-----	Cole Vincel
Sam -----	Liam O' Hanlon
Hanelle -----	Vienna Slade/Gabbi Bock*
Larue-----	Lucia Sweeney/Sadie Gilliam*
Vanessa-----	Jessica Kostelac
Emmy-----	Lou Floyd
Julie -----	Mahima Sindhu
Andy -----	Emma Hartman

*The production double cast these roles.

AT RISE: *Lights up on ROB. As each STUDENT speaks, they are revealed in a spotlight.*

ROB: *(To the audience.)* Hi. I have a question for you - does anyone here know Ray Murphy?

JULIE: Who's Ray Murphy?

ROB: *(To the audience.)* He has Mrs. Fox for homeroom this year.

TIM: Ray Murphy? Never heard of him.

ROB: Do you know him?

ANDY: I don't think so. What's he look like?

ROB: He's a typical kid in high school. Well, maybe not so typical. Maybe a little under average. Not popular, but not *not* popular either. To be unpopular people have to know you well enough to not like you.

LARUE: I think I heard of him. Did anybody like him?

ROB: Ray is the kind of guy who nobody really notices. He just sort of floats through. In a high school class of, say, four hundred or so, he's the guy who goes up to get his diploma at the end of his senior year, and half the student body say...

MARLEY: Who?

SAM: I knew him. Sort of.

ROB: There are hundreds of students at Capital High School. This is a story about one of them, and all of them. And just FYI, this isn't a play about the cheer squad captain going out with the quarterback of the football team. Isn't it funny how so many plays and TV shows and movies are about cheerleaders and football players and their problems? Question - who cares about the cheerleaders and the football players and their problems? Besides the cheerleaders and the football players? Exactly. Also, no vampires in love with girls in love with werewolves with emo music playing in the background. Or people "stepping up" or "stepping up to the streets" or even "stepping up in 3-D." No, this play is about people, regular people like Ray Murphy and all the other students at Capital High School. Today Ray Murphy is nobody. But by the end of this year he'll be the most popular kid at this school. But first something very important has to happen. Well, actually it already happened last night...*(Exits.)*

Lights up on classroom. TIM, JULIE, ANDY, LARUE and MARLEY sitting at their desks in class.

TIM: Come on, just let me copy the last couple of problems.

JULIE: Tim, no. I don't understand why you're in AP Calc. You never finish the assignments.

TIM: It's not like I don't know the material. You know I do, and if I had time I would have finished, but I had to finish reading "Crime and Punishment" for English this week. Which sucks, by the way. Crime on page forty, then six hundred pages of punishment. Super lame.

JULIE: Then just tell Mr. Alexander and ask if you can have an extension. Copying is cheating, and if you get caught then I get busted.

VOICE OVER INTERCOM: Attention students, there is an important announcement from the office.

ANDY: This is gonna be something really awesome or really awful. Anytime they do a random announcement, we get a half day.

VOICE OVER INTERCOM: All classes after lunch period will be canceled today –

ANDY: Yes!

VOICE OVER INTERCOM: - in observance of the death of senior Ray Murphy who was killed last night in a hit and run accident on Miller Road.

LARUE: What?

VOICE OVER INTERCOM: Counselors will be available for anyone who feels they need to process their reactions to this tragedy. Please do not leave campus until lunch period to give us time to notify your parents. Our prayers go out to the Murphy family.

The students sit in silence, stunned.

JULIE: Who is Ray Murphy?

TIM: Ray Murphy? Never heard of him. Did you know him?

ANDY: I don't think so. What's he look like?

TIM: I just said I've never heard of him. How would I know?

LARUE: He got killed? That's awful.

MARLEY: Do you know him?

LARUE: I think I heard of him. Did anybody like him?

MARLEY: I don't know. This is weird.

ANDY: I know.

MARLEY: I feel like I should be sad, but I don't think I know the guy.
Knew the guy. I mean, should I be sad?

SAM enters and takes his seat.

TIM: Hey, Sam, did you hear that announcement?

SAM: You're talking to me? You never talk to me.

JULIE: Some guy named Ray Murphy died last night. And nobody can figure out who it is. Was. You know what I mean.

SAM: Now you're talking to me, too. You haven't talked to me since fourth grade.

JULIE: Dude, stop play-acting like you're all stunned. I'm talking to you. We're trying to figure something out and either help us or don't.

SAM: Okay, okay. I don't know the guy.

TIM: How can we figure this out?

MARLEY: I'll run down to the yearbook room and get a copy and we can look him up. *(Exits.)*

ANDY: What if Ray Murphy didn't even exist? And this is some weird social experiment they're trying on us, like "Lord of the Flies" or something.

LARUE: That wasn't an experiment. They crashed. On accident.

ANDY: Yeah, but then they became all feral and killed that one kid...

LARUE: Call me naive, but I doubt that's what's going on.

JULIE: Isn't it weird we're just sitting here talking about this, and some kid is dead?

SAM: What did they say —?

MARLEY: *(Enters with a copy of the yearbook.)* Got it! Last year's copy. We're still laying out this year's, obviously. Let's look him up.

Everyone except SAM gathers around MARLEY and the yearbook. She flips through the pages.

Okay, Murphy...here he is!

ANDY: Wow, he's just sort of...a guy.

SAM: Did—

JULIE: Was he in any clubs or anything?

MARLEY: (*Flips to the index.*) Nope, nothing listed in the index. It still feels weird that I'm not sad.

JULIE: Well, you can't force it.

TIM: I wonder if he hit the other car, or if it hit him?

LARUE: Wait, did he have brothers or sisters at Capital?

MARLEY: (*Looking in index.*) Well, there are a lot of Murphys listed. But, I mean, you know, it's a common name.

LARUE: Right.

TIM: I want to see the car.

JULIE, LARUE and MARLEY: Eeeiw!

TIM: What? I didn't say I wanted to see his dead body. I just want to see the car. I've never seen a crashed car up close.

ANDY: Dude, that is morbid times ten.

SAM: I think –

TIM: Maybe. But I'm just being honest. I want to see that car.

SAM: I lied. I knew him.

EVERYONE'S attention turns to SAM.

LARUE: You're kidding.

JULIE: You did? Why didn't you say anything?

SAM: Well, I just, you know...it's hard because I just found out and...

JULIE and LARUE move over to sit next to SAM.

JULIE: Tell us everything!

LARUE: (*Taking out pad and pen.*) Do you mind if I take notes? I think this might be something I could submit to the school paper.

SAM: Oh, sure, go ahead. Um, well, I didn't know him well, but we shared some classes together. We had English together this year...

TIM: Wait, don't you and I have English together?

SAM: I mean Spanish. We took Spanish together. And he was okay. Quiet. Mr. Gonzales was always saying, "Más fuerte! Más fuerte!" when Murray would do his recitation homework.

ANDY: Murphy.

SAM: Right, Murphy. Sorry, I'm still sort of...freaked out by all this.

LARUE: What else?

SAM: Uh, well, it's hard to think...

SFX: Class bell rings.

LARUE: What do you have next?

SAM: Biology. Mrs. Elliot.

LARUE: Cool, I'm walking that way. I'll walk with you and take notes.

JULIE: One more class, then lunch, then we're outta here.

LARUE, JULIE, MARLEY and SAM gather their books and exit.

TIM: Man, that sucks.

ANDY: What?

TIM: He totally knows the dead guy.

ANDY: Yeah, he must be sad.

TIM: No, it sucks because he has all the info and now Larue's all over him.

ANDY: It's just for the paper.

TIM: Dude, I know. I want to be in the paper.

ANDY: Sorry, bud, can't help you with that one. And I have to get to band practice.

TIM: Later.

Lights shift to - student council meeting. HANELLE [President], IAN [VP] and NICK [Treasurer] all wait to start the meeting.

HANELLE: I'd love it if we could start these meetings on time for once.

IAN: Madame President, maybe you should invoke your executive power and make them do laps.

HANELLE: Hilarious. It's bad enough none of the other students care about Student Council, but when the Student Council doesn't care about the Student Council? What's the point?

NICK: It looks good on your transcripts.

MARLEY: *(Enters.)* Hey, sorry.

HANELLE: Okay, Marley's here. I'd ask the Secretary to put that in the minutes, but she's still missing.

MARLEY: Sorry, I was talking to somebody who knew that kid that got killed.

NICK: Somebody knows him?

IAN: Not anybody in my homeroom.

MARLEY: Yeah, that Sam guy? He's in my AP Calc class. Sort of nerdy, sort of has that "please beat me up" thing going on? Said he knows the guy.

HANELLE: And?

MARLEY: And he didn't say much before the bell, but apparently he was really great at Spanish.

HANELLE: He was bilingual?

MARLEY: Sounds like it.

IAN: But his name's Murphy, right? That's not very Spanish.

HANELLE: You don't have to be Spanish to speak Spanish, genius.

VANESSA enters.

Finally, our Secretary arrives. Let all rejoice at the arrival of Vanessa!

VANESSA burst into tears.

Whoa, I was just being sarcastic.

MARLEY: What's wrong?

VANESSA: Ray Murphy died! It's horrible!

MARLEY: Oh, right, I'm sorry.

VANESSA: One day he's in school, the next day he's dead. And now I'll never see him again. None of us will!

MARLEY: I know, it's terrible. I'm sorry for your loss.

NICK: We had no idea you knew him.

VANESSA: I didn't know him. *(Cries a little harder.)*

IAN: Wait, what?

NICK: If you didn't know him, why are you crying?

VANESSA: Because Shelly was crying.

NICK: So Shelly knows him?

VANESSA: No, Shelly was crying because Amber was crying.

NICK: And she was crying because...

VANESSA: Brianna was crying.

NICK: So you're crying because other girls were crying? *(To LARUE and HANELLE.)* Care to explain?

MARLEY: It's a girl thing. Sometimes. It happens. Don't be mean.

HANELLE: Okay girl, get yourself together. Take a tissue, get your laptop out so you can take notes. I know you're grieving right now, but we need to work through it, okay?

VANESSA: Okay. (*Wipes her eyes and pulls out her laptop.*)

HANELLE: Okay, I call this meeting of the Capital High School Student council to order. Let the record show that all members of the council are present. Now, I think our first business at hand is the death of Ray Murphy. Did Shelly, Amber or Brianna say anything about him?

VANESSA: Well, I think Brianna said that she saw him in the library a lot. Like, he had a permanent library pass to get out of study hall.

IAN: He must have read a lot.

HANELLE: Obviously this has rocked the school in unexpected ways. But I think this could be the perfect way to raise the Student Council's image in the eyes of the student body.

IAN: How so?

HANELLE: The students don't care about the Student Council because they feel that the Student Council doesn't care about them. So I think we show the school that we do care about them by organizing a day to grieve our fellow student. We show that we care about Ray whatshisname by, I don't know, having a plaque made, or dedicating a classroom to him, or...

VANESSA: A book drive for the library! All classics! Because he liked to read, and this can promote literacy education.

NICK: How about a memorial? We could petition the school to let us have a memorial during the day. People could talk about him, maybe the band could play...

IAN: And if it's during the day, everybody gets out of class for an hour, and so they know we care about them as well!

MARLEY: You could combine them. Memorial book drive.

HANELLE: Exactly! Vanessa, take this down in the notes. We will petition the school board to let us have a memorial book drive for this Murray guy. And it can be at any time except lunch or free period, so people are getting out of class which will make them feel even more connected to someone who isn't ever going to go to class again. (*Starts to cry.*) This is going to be so beautiful...

VANESSA starts to cry.

NICK: Oh, come on.

MARLEY: Be nice!

VOICE OVER INTERCOM: May I have your attention, please? All students are released from classes for the rest of the day. Those students who take the bus to school should wait at the bus loading area in Parking Lot B. Counsellors will meet with students in groups and individually over the next week to answer any questions you might have. Classes will resume tomorrow morning. You are excused.

SFX: Class bell rings. Everyone starts packing up his or her books.

HANELLE: Okay, Vanessa, type up a proposal for the office. Actually, make it a demand for a day of memorial and book driving for Ray Murphy. We'll hand it in tomorrow and see how it goes.

VANESSA: Got it.

ALL exit. Light shift to -the next day. TIM approaches COLBY in the hallway.

TIM: Hey, Colby.

COLBY: Yeah?

TIM: It's Tim. We're both in Study Hall fifth period.

COLBY: Uh, there's over fifty people in that.

TIM: Right, but I need a favor. For Ray.

COLBY: Who?

TIM: Ray Murphy? We got out of class yesterday because he got killed in a three-car pileup?

COLBY: Oh, right! That bilingual guy. I heard he was translating "Crime and Punishment" into Spanish. For fun.

TIM: I know. Crazy brainiac. I think we owe it to him to make sure that his accident is a cautionary tale.

COLBY: Again, why are we talking?

TIM: You're in auto shop, right?

COLBY: Yeah...

TIM: I don't know anything about cars, or how to talk to people that do.

I wanted to see if we could bring Ray's wrecked car to school.

COLBY: What?!

TIM: It's not like it sounds.

COLBY: Good, because it sounds completely crazy and gross.

TIM: I want to bring Ray's car to school so people can see, up close, what happens when you're in an accident. So everyone can feel...scared or angry or whatever in real life, rather than just what you feel when you read about it on the Internet.

COLBY: And you need me because...

TIM: I need someone who can talk to a garage or wherever the car is and figure out all the things that would need to be figured out about how to get that car here.

COLBY: So, what, you're just going to dump in on the front lawn of campus?

TIM: No. I'm still working on that part.

COLBY: Well, you'd need a tow truck at the very least...

TIM: See! Exactly. Tow truck. You can work this out for me.

LARUE enters.

Hey, Larue!

LARUE: Hey, Tim. What's up?

TIM: Well, not much. Just hanging out.

LARUE: Cool. See ya later. *(Moves to exit.)*

TIM: Oh, well, actually, there is something. You remember what I said about wanting to see the car that Ray Murphy was in?

LARUE: Yeah?

TIM: And, well, you might want to take out your notebook for this...

LARUE: Oh, okay... *(Takes out her notebook and a pen.)*

TIM: I arranged to have Ray's car brought to the school, as a cautionary tale-type thing for the students.

LARUE: That sounds pretty gruesome.

TIM: Exactly. Ray's death shouldn't be for nothing. We should all learn from it. Ray was a great guy, and we'll all miss him. But maybe we'll all learn something from him, too.

LARUE: So who signed off on this in the office?

TIM: Oh, they all did. I mean, they will officially soon. There's been some verbal "Go for it" okay's from the staff there.

LARUE: Okay, this sounds good.

TIM: This was a great guy who died too soon. But the school paper can help Ray help the rest of us.

COLBY: You're with the paper?

LARUE: Yeah. Are you part of this?

COLBY: Yeah, I'm arranging for the car to be brought here.

LARUE: Oh, cool. Name?

COLBY: Colby Anderson.

LARUE: Got it. This is good. Sam is going to write a first person piece on Ray for the next issue, and we can include this as well.

TIM: Sweet!

COLBY: I gotta go, but I'll hit you up after school with the arrangements. *(Exits.)*

TIM: Awesome. *(To LARUE.)* You need anything else.

LARUE: Photos would be good. I'm gonna go by the yearbook office and see if I can get one of Ray. He must have had his senior class photo taken already. And I'd love a picture of the car before it gets here.

TIM: I can work that out.

LARUE: Drop it off tomorrow morning if you can.

TIM: Will do.

TIM exits. LARUE crosses as lights shift to -yearbook office. MARLEY has last year's yearbook open and is examining a page with a magnifying glass.

LARUE: Hey, Marley.

MARLEY: Hey, you won't believe what I found. Take a look.

Hands Larue the magnifying glass.

LARUE: *(Examining the page.)* What am I looking at?

MARLEY: Ray Murphy in an activity photo in last year's yearbook. Right next to the faculty advisor. Compare it to his photo from last year.

Opens another copy of last year's yearbook and sets it next to the copy LARUE is examining.

LARUE: It could be him. But his name isn't listed on the photo.

MARLEY: True, but there are twelve people in the photo, not including the advisor, but only ten people named. They missed two names and I bet Ray Murphy is one of them.

LARUE: So Ray Murphy was a member of the Philanthropy Club? What do they even do?

MARLEY: They volunteer for stuff. Handing out meals for homeless people on Thanksgiving, Toys for Tots, walking old ladies across the street. Stuff like that. This guy was awesome. It's really sad he's gone.

LARUE: Interesting. Hey, do you have his senior photo for this year? I need something to run with this story we're doing.

MARLEY: Sure, I'll email it to you. What's the story?

LARUE: Well, Tim has actually convinced the office to let him bring Ray's car to school as a "cautionary tale," and that Sam guy is going to write a first person piece about the Ray Murphy nobody knew.

MARLEY: Here's another scoop - the student council is about to demand a "Day of Remembrance" for Ray.

LARUE: Oh, good one! I'll make sure to get some reactions to that from the office. I gotta run.

MARLEY: Later.

LARUE exits the yearbook office and walks into the hall. She takes out her cellphone and dials.

Hey, Derek, come in here for a second.

DEREK: *(Enters.)* What's up?

MARLEY: Do we have the page for the dedication done?

DEREK: Not yet, but the candidates are the guy who competed and won a gold medal for the marathon in the Paralympics, and the guy who owns Wiener-rama.

MARLEY: We were going to dedicate the yearbook to a guy who serves hotdogs in the mall?

DEREK: He bought a really big ad this year.

MARLEY: No, we're dedicating the yearbook to Ray Murphy. The paper is printing a special edition about him, they're dropping his car into the commons and the student council is planning a whole day of speakers and events in his memory. The yearbook has to get on the ball and make this happen for this year's edition. Figure out how to get some relevant photos. Friends, family, you might have to take some yourself.

DEREK: Got it. (*Exits.*)

Lights shift to – hallway and Sam's room. LARUE talks on the phone with SAM. split focus between hallway and Sam's room.

SAM: (*Answers phone.*) Hello?

LARUE: Hey, Sam, it's Larue. How's that first person piece coming along?

SAM: Uh, good. Slow, but good. It's, uh, tough, you know?

LARUE: I'm sure. But just so you know, your piece will be competing with news about the student council's "Day of Remembrance," which I'm assuming will be bilingual, and Tim driving the wrecked car to campus.

SAM: Oh, wow.

LARUE: But no pressure. I know the grief process is very personal and private. Which is why I want to put it on the front page. Oh, and why didn't you tell us about Ray being President of the Philanthropy Club?

SAM: Oh, well, he wanted his work to be private. Uh, he didn't want "Thanks" for his charity work.

LARUE: Oh, cool, good to know! Email it to me when you're done. Preferably tomorrow morning. And I'm sorry for your loss.

LARUE hangs up and exits. Lights down on hallway.

SAM: *(Opens his laptop and begins typing.)* "I knew Ray..." Um, hmmm....No. *(Thinks for a moment, then types.)* "Can one truly know another person? I could say I knew Ray Murphy, but that would be a lie. Because no matter how much we know someone, we don't really know them. Because everyone has deep, mysterious parts of themselves they never show others. Ray had deeply personal feelings and secrets. What classes was he in? Who were his friends? Where did he live? All mysteries only Ray knew the answers to. He kept off the grid, preferring to do good work without the accolades. For instance, as President of the Philanthropy Club, he used his bilingual skills to help the Spanish-language community...philanthropically."

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