

# A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY WITHIN...

by Kamron Klitgaard

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# A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY WITHIN...

*A One Act Ensemble Comedy*

**by Kamron Klitgaard**

**SYNOPSIS:** A group of actors are putting on a play. It soon becomes obvious that it is a play within a play. And then it becomes apparent that it is a play within a play within a play. Then it spirals out of control with one character after another revealing themselves to be the director of yet another play. The line between reality and fantasy becomes blurred and the characters start to wonder who they really are and who could've written such an atrocity. Are they truly characters within other characters? Perhaps this is just a synopsis within a synopsis.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(4 female 2 male, 10 either; gender flexible)*

DR. LENNIN (m/f) .....	Professor of literature. <i>(65 lines)</i>
CYN (f) .....	Single minded student. <i>(23 lines)</i>
RON (m) .....	Not so bright student. <i>(46 lines)</i>
NICK (m) .....	A student who becomes a director. <i>(31 lines)</i>
DAWN (f) .....	A student. <i>(27 lines)</i>
LAURETTA (f) .....	A confused student. <i>(35 lines)</i>
LISA (f) .....	Late student. <i>(22 lines)</i>
STUDENT (m/f) .....	Quiet, observant student. <i>(10 lines)</i>
PETERSON (m/f) .....	A director. <i>(27 lines)</i>
PATERSON (m/f) .....	Another director. <i>(16 lines)</i>
DIRECTOR (m/f) .....	Yet another director. <i>(7 lines)</i>
ZOMBIE (m/f) .....	A zombie. <i>(14 lines)</i>
ALIEN 1 (m/f) .....	Invading alien commander. <i>(18 lines)</i>

- ALIEN 2 (m/f) ..... Invading alien commander.  
(17 lines)
- THWACKBUCKBUCK (m/f) ..... Alien with a casual attitude.  
(4 lines)
- VOICE (m/f) ..... (2 lines)

**DURATION:** 30 minutes

**TIME:** Present day

**SETTING:** A classroom

### SET

The set should just resemble a classroom. A chalkboard or dry erase board on wheels at the front of the class would be ideal. Seven student desks or tables with chairs and a garbage can will complete the classroom look. A teacher's desk is optional but not necessary. No other set pieces should be used because as the play progresses they learn they are in different locations made to look like a classroom inside a theatre.

### PROPS

- Chalk or Dry Erase Markers and Eraser
- Laptop Computer or Tablet
- Wadded up Paper with Gum stuck inside
- Wrist Watch

### COSTUMES

DR. LENNIN – Suite and Tie or a Dress.

CYN – Typical student clothes.

RON – Comfortable student clothes.

NICK – Nice student clothes.

DAWN – Glamorous clothes.

LAURETTA – Goudy clothes.

LISA – Messy student clothes.

STUDENT – Turtle neck or typical writer's clothes.

DIRECTOR, PETERSON and PATERSON – A theatre director's clothes.

ZOMBIE – Ripped and ragged suit with dried blood splatters.

ALIEN 1 and ALIEN 2 – A large shirt with two neck holes, covered with aluminum foil and electronic buttons on the chest to make them look like a two headed Alien Commander.

THWACKBUCKBUCK – Casual hippie clothes

VOICE – Everyday attire.

### DIRECTORS NOTE

Each actor plays several characters, although the script always identifies each actor by the name of their first character. Each time we discover they are in a new play the actors should adopt a new persona.

The characters who come out of the audience, Peterson, Paterson, and Director, should just seem like they are patrons there to see the play. It should be a surprise to the audience when they speak out and stand up. This will make the audience wonder who else could be in the play. These three should not sit together but be spread out throughout the audience.

To help you keep all the plays within plays straight in your mind, here is a list, starting from the first play we see.

THE HYPHEN – Directed by Nick

HOW TO PUT ON A PLAY WHEN YOU'RE NOT REALLY IN IT –

Directed by Peterson

TIME LOOP – Directed by Paterson

ZOMBIE ATTACK – Directed by Zombie

DAWN'S DREAM – Directed by Unknown

CYN'S DREAM – Directed by Alien 1

ALIEN INVASION – Directed by Director

THE PLAYWRIGHT – Written by Student

THE END – Directed by Voice

A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY WITHIN... – Directed by you.

**AT RISE:** RON is finishing his drawing of an old sea captain using a rocket launcher on a large white whale on the chalkboard. STUDENT is sitting in a desk with a laptop computer (or tablet). STUDENT reacts with the others and sometimes works on the computer but doesn't have any lines at the beginning. CYN, NICK, DAWN and LAURETTA enter and take their seats. RON sees DR. LENNIN enter and takes his seat.

**DR. LENNIN:** Good morning, all. First off, let's talk about your papers on the panel discussion from yesterday about punctuation. I think it's clear from your papers that most of you did not understand the purpose of the assignment. So, what we're going to do is forget about that paper and start over.

*CYN raises her hand.*

**DR. LENNIN:** Cyn?

**CYN:** Do our papers count on our grade?

**DR. LENNIN:** Don't even worry about that; I must not have made it clear.

**RON:** Made what clear?

**DR. LENNIN:** What you were supposed to do.

**RON:** When?

**DR. LENNIN:** Yesterday; what you were supposed to do for your papers.

**RON:** Papers?

**CYN:** So, will it be on our grade or not?

**DR. LENNIN:** No, no! It won't count on your grade.

**LAURETTA:** But what if we did good?

**DR. LENNIN:** Well. It's "What if we did well?" And that didn't happen.

**LAURETTA:** You said most of us didn't understand.

**DR. LENNIN:** My mistake. No one understood; including you, Laretta.

**RON:** What were we supposed to do?

**LAURETTA:** Are you sure I didn't do good?

**DR. LENNIN:** Look, just forget about the papers and we'll start brand new today.

**CYN:** So, the papers we turned in yesterday aren't gonna count on our grade?

**DR. LENNIN:** No.

**RON:** Yes! I mean, dang it.

**LISA:** (*Enters, running and panting.*) Dr. Lennin! Sorry I'm late! Did I miss the final exam?

**DR. LENNIN:** No, Lisa, we're not having a test today. It's only the second week of class.

**LISA:** (*Pulling out a wadded-up paper from her pocket.*) Okay, here's my paper.

**DR. LENNIN:** This was due yesterday. (*Opens it to find gum stuck inside.*)

**LISA:** Uh, it was a sticky assignment?

**NICK:** Booooo!

**DR. LENNIN:** Look people, this is a college class. You are in college now. This is not like high school.

**RON:** (*Raising his hand.*) Um, Mr. Lennin? It's community college.

**DR. LENNIN:** Yes, Ron, thank you for reminding me; community college. And it's Dr. Lennin.

**CYN:** Don't worry, Lisa, we're starting over and our papers don't count.

**DR. LENNIN:** (*Tossing the paper in the trash.*) Alright look, you people need to...

**LAURETTA:** How do you know she didn't do good? You threw her paper in the trash!

**DR. LENNIN:** I guess we'll never know. Look, I want you to start thinking about literature instead of your grade. Have an attitude of learning, not of just trying to do an assignment because it was an assignment. This is your education we're talking about here. You're paying for this, so take advantage of it. Now, let's get back to the subject at hand: Punctuation. Let's start with the hyphen. Who knows how to use a hyphen?

*LAURETTA raises her hand.*

**DR. LENNIN:** Lauletta?

**LAURETTA:** Who are the ones that didn't do good?

**DR. LENNIN:** Lauletta, that doesn't matter now! Just forget about it. Let's focus people. The hyphen. A hyphen is... anyone?

*RON raises his hand.*

**DR. LENNIN:** Ron?

**RON:** Isn't it how you get gas out of your friend's car if you need some for the lawnmower?

**DR. LENNIN:** (*Staring blankly.*) We're taking about a hyphen. What is a hyphen?!

**DAWN:** Isn't it like a minus sign?

**DR. LENNIN:** Uh, yes, it looks like a minus sign but it has a different purpose. What is the purpose of the hyphen?

**NICK:** To subtract words from a sentence; like editing?

**RON:** I was gonna say that; like editing?

**DR. LENNIN:** Well, no, that's wrong. It's not for subtracting words.

**RON:** And that's why I didn't say it.

**DR. LENNIN:** Okay, let's look at it another way. What do abbreviations do?

*CYN raises her hand.*

**DR. LENNIN:** Cindy?

**CYN:** Whoa, whoa, whoa! Don't ever call me that. I told you, I go by Cyn, not Cindy. Cyn is short for... that other name.

**DR. LENNIN:** So, your name is an abbreviation?!

**CYN:** Yes, exactly; it's an abbreviation.

**DR. LENNIN:** Good! Now, what do abbreviations do?

**DAWN:** They make your name shorter?

**DR. LENNIN:** They Abbreviate.

**RON:** (*Quickly.*) They abbreviate!

**DR. LENNIN:** Right. Very good, Ron. So, if abbreviations abbreviate, what do hyphens do?

**RON:** Uh... Syphon ate?

**DR. LENNIN:** (*Staring blankly.*) Hyphenate.

**RON:** Right, hyphenate.

**DR. LENNIN:** Okay, look. Someone give me an example of a hyphenated word or phrase.

**LAURETTA:** Little?

**DR. LENNIN:** What?

**LAURETTA:** Little. Like lit-hyphen-tle.

**DR. LENNIN:** Little does not have a hyphen in it.

**LAURETTA:** It does at the end of a line when you can't fit the whole word in. You just put a minus sign and then finish it on the next line. Like lit-hyphen-next line-tle.

**DR. LENNIN:** Alright, that's true, I suppose. A hyphen can break up a word by syllables. But more specifically what does a hyphen do?

**DAWN:** Breaks up a word by syllables?

**RON:** I was gonna say that.

**DR. LENNIN:** But that's not what I'm looking for.

**RON:** And that's why I didn't say it.

**DR. LENNIN:** Can anyone think of an example of what a hyphen does?

*NICK has been acting like a student but now stands up with authority.*

**NICK:** Hold it! Slap your forehead.

**DR. LENNIN:** What? That's not—

**NICK:** When Ron says, "And that's why I didn't say it," slap your forehead.

**DR. LENNIN:** Fine. But more specifically what does a hyphen do?

**DAWN:** Breaks up a word by syllables?

**RON:** I was gonna say that.

**DR. LENNIN:** But that's not what I'm looking for.

**RON:** And that's why I didn't say it.

*DR. LENNIN slaps his/her forehead in frustration. The class laughs.*

**DR. LENNIN:** Like that?

**NICK:** Perfect. *(Sits back down and becomes a student again.)*

**DR. LENNIN:** Okay, let me give you an example. *(Turning to the board and seeing the picture.)* It looks like someone's been reading the text. And not understanding it. *(Writing to the side of the picture: Moby-Dick.)* Alright, what does this say? And remember our discussion on how college requires a little bit of maturity. As I've said before, this is considered to be one of the greatest pieces of literature ever written. Ron, can you tell us what this says?

**RON:** Moby minus Dick.

**DR. LENNIN:** I need a new job.

**NICK:** *(With authority.)* Wait! I think it would look better if you wrote it above the picture.

*DR. LENNIN now acts like a dumb-sounding high school student.*

**DR. LENNIN:** Like up here?

**DAWN:** I like it where s/he had it.

**CYN:** I like it up high.

**NICK:** *(Jumps off the stage and stands in the audience.)* It's really hard to be a character and the director at the same time.

**DAWN:** Clint Eastwood did it.

**LAURETTA:** Who's Clint Eastwood?

**NICK:** Yeah, write it up higher.

**DR. LENNIN:** *(Writing just Moby.)* Is right here okay?

**NICK:** *(Jumping back up onstage.)* That'll work.

**RON:** I feel like my character is really dumb.

**DAWN:** Maybe it's not the character but the actor.

**RON:** Yeah... hey!

**LISA:** How come I only have three lines?

**NICK:** You have a whole bunch later on.

**LISA:** Yeah, but not in this play.

**DAWN:** Are you supposed to say that? Are we stopped again?

**DR. LENNIN:** *(Still sounding like he has low intelligence.)* Hey you guys, guess what! Why does Moby-Dick have a hyphen?

**NICK:** Alright, we need to get back to the play.

**DR. LENNIN:** So he can syphon gas out of peoples' cars like Dennis!

**RON:** Hey, I didn't say that. My character, Ron, did.

**DR. LENNIN:** Oh, yeah.

**NICK:** *(Sitting in his seat.)* Alright, let's take it from, *Ron, can you tell us what this says?*

**DR. LENNIN:** Oh, man! All the way back there?! Fine. *(Sounding like a professor again.)* Ron, can you tell us what this says?

**LAURETTA:** It only says, "Moby." You didn't finish writing it.

*PETERSON has been sitting in the audience.*

**PETERSON:** *(From the audience.)* That's not the line!

**LAURETTA:** Yes, it is.

**PETERSON:** No, you say that later.

**LAURETTA:** Are you kidding me? It's really hard to keep track.

**NICK:** You say it the next time I start us again.

**PETERSON:** (*Standing in the audience.*) And Ron?

**RON and NICK:** Yes?

**PETERSON:** Not you, Dennis. I mean the real Ron.

**NICK:** That's me!

**PETERSON:** When you're Nick, you need to be more immature. Then when you become the director we see the mature side of you.

**NICK:** It's kinda hard to act immature when ya don't have any lines. I'm not complaining because I have plenty of lines as the director but it's kind of hard to establish immaturity as Nick when I only have one line.

**PETERSON:** And a "boo."

**NICK:** A what?

**PETERSON:** A "boo." Don't you "boo" Lisa for a bad Joke?

**LISA:** It's not bad; it's funny!

**PETERSON:** What is it?

**LISA:** Uh, it was a sticky assignment?

**NICK:** Booooo!

**PETERSON:** More immature.

**NICK:** (*More immature.*) Booooooooooooo!

**PETERSON:** That's better. Now this goes for everyone: We are doing a play within a play, so when you jump out of the hyphen play to the play where Nick is the director, and when I say Nick I mean the real Ron, your characters have to change.

**RON:** Like me. In "The Hyphen" I'm just a dumb student who can't even tell time, but in the real world it's... (*Looks at watch.*) ...little hand is on the four and the big hand is on the seven. So that's...

**PETERSON:** Well, at least try to change your characters.

**LAURETTA:** Am I changing my characters Mr/s. Peterson?

**PETERSON:** I need to see a little more from everyone.

**DAWN:** This play within a play thing is really weird. Who invented it anyway?

**PETERSON:** Well, William Shakespeare used it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

**CYN:** I heard of him.

**RON:** Isn't he in Star Wars?

**PETERSON:** All right let's pick it up from—

**DAWN:** Hey, wouldn't it be weird if we were in a play within a play within a play, and there was someone else out there behind Mr/s. Peterson who was the director of all this part that we're doing now and they stood up behind Mr/s. Peterson and they were like, "hold it, hold it, that's not right. Go back to 'Isn't he in Star Wars?'"

*All the characters look out behind PETERSON. PETERSON even turns around and looks.*

**PETERSON:** *(Walking up onto the stage.)* Sorry to disappoint you, but it's only two levels deep. No playwright would go deeper than that because it would be too hard to develop the characters. Look, I know this play within a play thing is a hard concept to understand, and it's very tricky acting wise. That's why I want you all to realize how important it is that your characters change every time you jump in and out of the play.

**CYN:** Which play?

**LISA:** *The Hyphen?*

**RON:** *Or How to Put on a Play When You're Not Really in It?*

**PETERSON:** Yes. No. I mean... Alright look, we are putting on a play called *How to Put on a Play When You're Not Really in It*. The characters in that play are putting on a play called *The Hyphen*. In our play, *How to Put on a Play When You're Not Really in It*, Ron is playing the part of Nick, who is the director of *The Hyphen*.

**NICK:** And I'm also a student, since we didn't have enough actors.

**RON:** You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick.

**PETERSON:** No, your name is Dennis. You mean that I should've cast Ron, who plays Nick, as Ron since his name is already Ron.

**RON:** That's what I meant to say.

**PATERSON:** *(From somewhere else in the audience.)* Hold it, hold it! That isn't right. Go back to "Isn't he in Star Wars?"

**DR. LENNIN:** Uh, Mr/s. Peterson?

**PATERSON:** *(Standing.)* Paterson. I'm Mr/s. Paterson. That's Mr/s. Peterson.

**DR. LENNIN:** Sorry. Mr/s. Paterson, we can't go back to that point because we'll get stuck in a time-loop again.

**PATERSON:** There's no such thing as a time-loop. But you're right, we did get stuck in a repeating cycle. Instead, let's try going back to "You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick."

**LAURETTA:** Won't we just get stuck in the same time-loop?

**PATERSON:** (*Sitting.*) It's not a time-loop. But let's see. Do it fast.

**RON:** (*Fast.*) You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick.

**PETERSON:** (*Fast.*) No, your name is Dennis. You mean that I should've cast Ron, who plays Nick, as Ron since his name is already Ron.

**RON:** (*Fast.*) That's what I meant to say.

**PATERSON:** (*Standing fast.*) Hold it, hold it! That isn't right. Go back to "You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick."

**RON:** (*Super-fast.*) You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick.

**PETERSON:** (*Super-fast.*) No, your name is Dennis. You mean that I should've cast Ron, who plays Nick, as Ron since his name is already Ron.

**RON:** (*Super-fast.*) That's what I meant to say.

**PATERSON:** (*Super-fast.*) Hold it, hold it! That isn't right. Go back to "You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick."

**RON:** (*So fast that the words are unintelligible.*) You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick.

**PETERSON:** (*So fast the words are unintelligible.*) No, your name is Dennis. You mean that I should've cast Ron, who plays Nick, as Ron since his name is already Ron.

**RON:** (*So fast the words are unintelligible.*) That's what I meant to say.

**PATERSON:** (*So fast the words are blurred.*) Hold it, hold it! That isn't right. Go back to "You should've cast me as Nick since my name is already Nick."

**LAURETTA:** STOP!!! (*Looks out at PATERSON.*)

**PATERSON:** She's right, we're stuck in a time-loop.

**LISA:** I hate time-loops.

**DAWN:** I have an idea! Why don't we skip ahead to where we get back on track with the hyphen thing?

**PATERSON:** Okay, let's try that.

**PETERSON:** Take it from—

**NICK:** Hold it! I'm the "director" of the Hyphen, so I'll say it.

**PETERSON:** Alright, go ahead.

*PETERSON and PATERSON sit back down in the audience.*

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