

a beatbybeat play

BEFORE THE BELL

A PLAY ABOUT BULLYING

ePerusal

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OK, enough legal stuff...on with the play!

CHARACTERS

ETHAN

MIKE

TREVOR

JACOB

MARIA

SONIA

KIM

KAYLA

MARC

DILLON

DOMINIQUE

EDDIE

JADEN

KEVIN

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

SETTING

A middle school or high school. 20-minutes before the first bell rings.

SCRIPT NOTATION

A slash - "/" - indicates that the rest of the line after that slash is to be spoken over by the next character's dialogue. The line should be read in its entirety, to convey the sense of people attempting to speak over each other.

MUSIC & SOUND EFFECTS

The music cues were composed to underscore transitions and moments the chorus addresses the audience. The Director Book provides specific notes for when to start and stop each track. ([Click here to preview Music Cue #1](#))

TRACK	NAME
1	Opening (Music)
2	Announcement (SFX)
3	Five Minute Bell/Announcement (SFX)
4	Transition #1 (Music)
5	Announcement (SFX)
6	Five Minute Bell/Announcement (SFX)
7	Transition #2 (Music)
8	Short Announcement (SFX)
9	Five Minute Bell/Announcement (SFX)
10	Fight Underscoring Part 1 (Music)
11	Final Bell (SFX)
12	Flight Underscoring Part 2 (Music)
13	Curtain Call (Music)

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BEFORE THE BELL

Story by Kerry Kazmierowicztrimm & Denver Casado

Script by Kerry Kazmierowicztrimm

(We open on a blank stage.)

(Eight students - MARC, JADEN, KAYLA, DILLON, SONIA, KIM, DOMINIQUE and EDDIE - enter. They stand in a line at the front of the stage, facing the audience. Here, they function as a chorus. ETHAN, MARIA, and JACOB enter upstage of the chorus at the same time, getting into places without being noticed by the audience.)

(During the following, the chorus speaks directly to the audience. After they each say their line, they turn away from the audience, get into positions to start the first scene, and freeze.)

SONIA: That shouldn't have happened.

MARC: I thought they were just talking to him. Maybe scaring him a bit, but that's it. I didn't expect them to...

KIM: I mean, he *was* kinda asking for it.

KAYLA: Someone needed to do something.

DOMINIQUE: I wanted to help, but those guys freak me out.

EDDIE: Hey, better him than me.

DILLON: It was just a joke, he didn't have to take it so seriously.

JADEN: I woulda told a teacher or something, but there were so many of us, I figured someone else must be going to get some help. *(beat)* You know?

(As EDDIE turns into his position, we now see MARIA, JACOB, and ETHAN - frozen, mid conversation, in the middle of the stage. As the ANNOUNCEMENT starts, everyone unfreezes. The kids are in little clumps throughout the stage, creating a semi-circle, within which MARIA, JACOB and ETHAN stand. Unless indicated, the kids in the clumps pantomime their own conversations, like they're all hanging out outside the school before classes start.)

(The kids talk quietly amongst themselves during the following:)

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.): Good morning, students. Today is Friday the seventeenth. The weather is expected to be bright and mild all day, so all extra-curricular activities will happen as scheduled. Tickets are still on sale for tonight's pep rally, which also get you into the first game of our basketball season - go Panthers! After the game, the ticket will get you into the cafeteria, where there will be refreshments, healthy snacks, and a DJ. Final bell is in twenty minutes, so start heading to your lockers. And have a productive day!

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(Once the announcement ends, we hear ETHAN, JACOB and MARIA talking - already mid-friendly debate.)

ETHAN: *(to JACOB)* But he's immortal. *Immortal.*

JACOB: Tell that to his home planet.

ETHAN: What does that have to do with anything?

JACOB: If everyone on his planet can be blown up, then so can he.

ETHAN: That's an insane argument.

JACOB: How?

ETHAN: If Earth blew up, there'd be no winner - they'd all be blown to pieces.

JACOB: Yeah - including Superman.

ETHAN: But also Batman. You can't say Batman would beat Superman in a fight if the only way Superman loses is cuz Batman is also blown into little, tiny bat-pieces.
(then) Right, Maria?

MARIA: I never saw it.

JACOB: Saw what?

MARIA: Batman versus Super / man.

JACOB: *(horrificed)* / No!

ETHAN: *(grossed out)* No, no, no.

JACOB: *(to MARIA)* Are you insane?

MARIA: What?

JACOB: That movie's the worst.

ETHAN: Like actually the worst.

MARIA: You were the ones talking about it.

ETHAN: We were talking about what would happen if they actually got into a fight. Not that really badly shot film.

MARIA: *(joking)* I think it was shot on digital.

JACOB: You know what he means - this is a serious discussion.

MARIA: *(smiles, enjoying this)* Oh, yeah?

JACOB: Yes.

(As she takes a comic from her backpack.)

MARIA: More serious than the new comic I just got?

ETHAN: We're talking Batman and Superman - not Wonder Woman.

(MARIA goes to show JACOB the comic.)

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JACOB: *(to MARIA, re: ETHAN)* Yeah, he's got a point, we're- *(sees the comic, suddenly super excited)* Dude, how'd you get that?!

MARIA: *(shrugs, pleased with herself)* Amazon.

(ETHAN, a little annoyed he got ignored, comes over and looks at the comic.)

ETHAN: You did not get that on Amazon.

MARIA: How do you know?

ETHAN: Cuz it's crazy rare.

MARIA: Maybe I just got lucky.

JACOB: *(re: the comic)* Dude, that is nuts. I've been looking for this one for, like, years.

MARIA: *(tries to suppress a smile, to JACOB)* Yeah, well...happy birthday.

ETHAN: What?

JACOB: *(confused)* Yeah, uh, what?

MARIA: It's your birthday present.

(A surprised beat.)

JACOB: *(not sure what to say)* My, uh, my birthday's not for a couple weeks.

MARIA: Yeah, but it just got here last night, and I couldn't wait, I guess, so... *(a slight beat, then joking)* Just don't expect anything else on your actual birthday.

JACOB: *(still surprised, but really pleased)* Thanks, Maria. This is awesome.

(JACOB hugs MARIA as she smiles and blushes a bit. ETHAN watches, looking a little jealous. The hug ends.)

MARIA: *(embarrassed but pleased)* It was nothing.

(JACOB admires the comic during the following.)

ETHAN: *(quietly, to MARIA)* How much did that cost you?

MARIA: *(waves it off)* Not important.

ETHAN: *(quietly)* Maria, that's like a lot of money. *(stops, realizing)* You like Jacob.

MARIA: *(knows what he means, but trying to ignore it)* Of course I like him - he's my best friend. And you, too.

ETHAN: *(quietly, to MARIA)* Not like that. Like-

MARIA: *(suddenly nervous, changing the subject, louder so JACOB can hear)* What were you saying about Superman? Before I interrupted you.

ETHAN: *(trying to stay on topic)* Maria, do you-

MARIA: *(ignoring ETHAN, to JACOB)* Jacob, Superman's better than Batman, right?

JACOB: Pfft - no. Batman's a ga-jillion times better than Superman.

MARIA: Ethan, you have anything to say about that?

(A slight beat as ETHAN decides whether to push the topic of MARIA liking JACOB. Finally, he sighs, then:)

ETHAN: Superman is the best superhero ever - like, literally. End of story.

MARIA: What makes him so special?

ETHAN: *(getting really into it again)* Everything. Everything about him is special. He can fly, he's super strong, and, most importantly, invincible.

JACOB: One, no, he's not - take a look at everyone who blew up on Krypton.

ETHAN: *(exasperated)* That's not-

JACOB: *(barreling on)* And two - his near-invincibility is what makes him super boring.

ETHAN: No. No, it doesn't. It...Knowing he can't get hurt, or beat up - it's a hall pass, you know?

JACOB: *(confused)* To, like, go to the bathroom?

ETHAN: *(passionate)* To be, like, free, I mean. It gives him the freedom to be himself. Without being scared of being hurt for it.

(Beat.)

MARIA: *(gently)* You talk to your parents?

(ETHAN looks away, shrugs.)

MARIA: Ethan, you need to talk to someone-

ETHAN: No, I did, I did.

MARIA: Really?

ETHAN: Yeah.

JACOB: What'd they say?

ETHAN: That everything Mike and Trevor are saying isn't true.

JACOB: *(obviously)* Well, yeah.

ETHAN: And that bullies are bullies cuz they're scared and insecure.

(Beat.)

MARIA: And?

ETHAN: *(shrugs, trying to make light of it)* And what? That's what they said - to remember that. And to ignore them. *(imitating his dad)* "Words can't hurt, Ethan. Not if you don't let 'em."

MARIA: *(still concerned)* ...Maybe the guidance counselor could do something?

ETHAN: Dr. Krueger said they can't do anything unless they catch Mike and Trevor picking on me. And even if they do, they can't do much about rumors and insults. But if they catch Trevor and Mike physically hurting me-

MARIA: *(more concerned)* They haven't, though, right? You'd've told us if they'd touched you.

ETHAN: No, they haven't. And probably won't. So, the best Dr. Krueger could offer was breathing exercises.

JACOB: Breathing exercises? In case, what, they try to choke you?

ETHAN: For my anxiety.

(Beat.)

MARIA: *(deciding to focus on the positive)* Well...we got your back.

ETHAN: *(embarrassed but appreciative)* You don't haveta.

JACOB: You kidding? We'll go Batman on their butts.

ETHAN: Superman.

JACOB: Batman.

MARIA: *(definitively)* Superman.

JACOB: But-

(JACOB sees MARIA's face - let ETHAN have this one.)

JACOB: *(agreeing)* Superman.

(ETHAN smiles.)

ETHAN: *(to JACOB)* So, we gaming tomorrow night?

JACOB: Um, is cold pizza my favorite breakfast?

ETHAN: Sweet.

MARIA: *(hesitant about asking)* Hey, so, uh, my plans fell through for tomorrow night.

ETHAN: Oh, yeah?

MARIA: Yeah.

ETHAN: That's a bummer.

(A slight beat.)

JACOB: *(to MARIA)* Did you, um, wanna join us?

ETHAN: /What?

MARIA: I mean, yeah, if that's cool.

ETHAN: I thought you hated video games.

MARIA: I don't hate them. I just haven't played them. But I was thinking- *(a quick, embarrassed glance at JACOB)* -it might be fun.

JACOB: *(shrugs, cool with it)* I mean, yeah, /sure-

ETHAN: *(a little thrown)* Wait.

JACOB: Whaddayamean, "wait?"

ETHAN: *(a little weird about it)* No, it's just...I only have two controllers.

JACOB: I'll bring one of mine.

ETHAN: Yeah...But, like, what if there's not enough pizza?

MARIA: *(getting embarrassed)* It's okay, I don't have to.

ETHAN: I'm not saying you can't, /it's just-

JACOB: Maria, it's cool, you can-

MARIA: *(trying to be positive)* I'm sure I'll have homework I can do. Free me up for the rest of the weekend.

(ETHAN feels bad, has trouble making eye contact with her. An awkward beat.)

MARIA: I, uh, forgot one of my books. I'll be right back.

(MARIA exits. Once she's gone:)

JACOB: Dude, what was that?

ETHAN: I didn't mean to upset her, I just... *(awkward)* ...gaming is our thing, you know?

JACOB: *(still not seeing why it's a big deal)* Yeah, so? We can all game. It'll be fun.

ETHAN: *(sighs)* Yeah, yeah, you're right. When she gets back, I'll tell her I want her to hang. I was just thrown, cuz, you know, she's never wanted to before, but yeah, yeah, she should come.

JACOB: Cool.

ETHAN: So, what game do you think we should play? It needs to have at least three players, so-

(During ETHAN's line, KIM and SONIA cross downstage in the middle of a quiet but heated conversation. They stop walking when they see JACOB and ETHAN, whisper even more intensely to each other. When JACOB notices KIM and SONIA:)

JACOB: *(whispers, to ETHAN)* Hey, hey, shh!

ETHAN: *(hasn't seen KIM and SONIA)* Why?

(JACOB discreetly gestures toward KIM and SONIA.)

ETHAN: *(awkward)* Oh.

(MARIA, unnoticed by JACOB and ETHAN, comes back on during JACOB's line:)

JACOB: So...do we still have a deal?

MARIA: What deal?

JACOB: *(didn't realize she was back)* Oh, hey. Ethan and I made a deal that if-

ETHAN: *(looking nervously at MARIA, quickly)* It's not important.

JACOB: *(incredulous)* Not important?

ETHAN: *(giving MARIA another worried look)* I just mean, we don't have to discuss it now-

JACOB: The pep rally's *today*.

ETHAN: Yeah, but-

JACOB: If we're gonna ask Sonia and Kim to go with us, we need to do it now.

MARIA: *(a little stunned)* Like...as a date?

JACOB: *("what else?")* Well, yeah.

MARIA: *(to ETHAN)* You'd go with...?

ETHAN: *(awkward)* Uh, Sonia.

MARIA: *(to JACOB, not wanting to believe it)* Which means you'd go with Kim.

JACOB: *(a worried glance in SONIA and KIM's direction)* Shhhh! *(then, to MARIA)* Yeah.

(ETHAN watches MARIA as this information hits her hard. JACOB is oblivious, distracted by the sight of KIM.)

ETHAN: *(with sympathy, quietly to MARIA)* Maria-

JACOB: *(to ETHAN, whispers)* Dude, you promised - you'll ask out Sonia if I ask Kim. You know you wanna, you're just scared to admit it.

ETHAN: *(still worried about MARIA)* I mean...

JACOB: Don't make me talk to them on my own. Please.

(Beat.)

(ETHAN is torn. Then:)

ETHAN: Okay, yeah.

JACOB: Sweet! *(then, calling to KIM)* Hey, Kim!

(JACOB starts to cross toward KIM and SONIA.)

ETHAN: *(whispers, panicked)* No, not right now!

(But JACOB's already crossed to KIM and SONIA. KIM smiles at JACOB. SONIA looks sullen.)

KIM: 'Sup?

ETHAN: *(to MARIA, quietly)* Hey, you okay?

MARIA: *(trying to cover her hurt)* Why wouldn't I be?

(ETHAN still looks at MARIA, concerned.)

JACOB: *(trying to act cool)* So, me and Ethan were-

(JACOB gestures to his side, expects to see ETHAN there. JACOB is surprised when he realizes ETHAN's still over with MARIA. JACOB tries to cover his confusion.)

JACOB: (to KIM) I, uh, mean "I." I was thinking. About the, uh, pep rally. Today.

KIM: Uh-huh.

JACOB: And I was wondering if you were going. (*quickly, changing his phrasing*) I mean, if you wanted to go - with me.

KIM: Really?

JACOB: (*getting more awkward*) I mean, you know, only if you, uh, wanna. Or you could go to the rally and not go with me. You can do that, too. That's totally...up to you.

KIM: (*genuinely excited, smiles*) Of course I'll go with you! (*then, feeling like she showed too much excitement, pulls back*) I mean, yeah. That'd be cool.

(*Unnoticed, MARIA looks crushed.*)

JACOB: (*overjoyed*) Sweet. Sweet. (*turns to ETHAN, whispers*) Dude, come on!

MARIA: (*quietly to ETHAN*) Go ahead.

(*ETHAN takes a step toward JACOB, KIM and SONIA, but stops again, uncomfortable.*)

KIM: (*to JACOB, teasing*) It's funny, for a second I thought you'd be going with Ethan.

(*SONIA, sullen and distracted, looks at the floor.*)

JACOB: (*laughs, but confused*) Whaddayamean? Ethan's gonna be there. (*to SONIA*) I mean, especially if... (*whispers toward ETHAN*) Dude, don't make me ask her for you.

(*ETHAN takes a deep breath, crosses over to them.*)

ETHAN: (*starting to ask out SONIA*) Yeah, Sonia, I was-

KIM: (*to JACOB, wants the attention*) No, I thought he'd go as your date.

(*ETHAN freezes, horrified.*)

SONIA: (*exasperated*) Kim! Seriously?

KIM: (*innocently*) What?

JACOB: I dunno what you mean.

(*KIM whispers to JACOB. We can't hear what she's saying, but it's clearly making JACOB uncomfortable.*)

ETHAN: (*to KIM*) What are you saying? (*to JACOB*) Jacob, what'd she say?

SONIA: (*uncomfortable, not making eye contact*) She's saying you're gay. And that you're in love with Jacob. (*then*) ...Is it true?

(*ETHAN is dumbfounded.*)

MARIA: (*coming to ETHAN's aid*) Of course it's not.

KIM: Mike says it is.

ETHAN: Mike? And you believed him?

KIM: (to ETHAN, re: JACOB) You are a little possessive.

ETHAN: Possessive?

KIM: Always spending time with him.

ETHAN: (defensive) Cuz he's my best friend.

JACOB: Yeah. (then, quietly to KIM) And, hey, he was about to ask out Sonia - how can he be gay?

KIM: (quietly to JACOB) Really?

JACOB: Yeah.

KIM: (looks at ETHAN, to JACOB, a little too loudly) Doesn't seem like he wants to ask her.

(It's clear everyone heard her. The silence is very awkward.)

(Beat.)

KIM: (like everything's fine) Anyway. (to JACOB, re: her and SONIA) We gotta get to our lockers. Seeya later?

JACOB: (at a loss) Uh, yeah...yeah.

KIM: (smiles) 'Kay.

(KIM crosses to SONIA. SONIA keeps her head down as she exits.)

(JACOB, MARIA and ETHAN are left in an uncomfortable silence.)

MARIA: We should get to /class-

JACOB: (to ETHAN) Why would he say that?

ETHAN: (hoping JACOB is talking about something else) Who say what?

JACOB: Mike. Say that you love me.

(Two students, MARC and DILLON, cross downstage during the following. They stand nearby, but engrossed in their own unheard conversation.)

ETHAN: I don't- (stops, then) Cuz Mike's a jerk.

JACOB: But you didn't answer her. About if it's true.

ETHAN: Are you serious?

MARIA: Guys-

JACOB: I just-

ETHAN: (very defensive) Are you being serious right now?

JACOB: If people are saying it-

ETHAN: Mike. Mike's saying it.

JACOB: And others.

ETHAN: Because of Mike.

JACOB: And Kim said you were seen...

ETHAN: "Seen?" Seen doing what?

JACOB: (*uncomfortable*) Never mind. (*then*) But...if you are, I should know - you know?
Cuz it's about me, too.

ETHAN: How is this about you?

JACOB: If you're...gay and...in love with me, then that's not fair to me.

ETHAN: (*incredulous*) Not fair?

MARIA: Ethan-

JACOB: To not know, I mean.

(*Beat.*)

ETHAN: I cannot believe you're asking me this.

JACOB: I just want to know-

ETHAN: (*defensive, trying to guilt JACOB*) It shouldn't matter.

JACOB: So...are you saying you are-

ETHAN: I'm saying you're supposed to be my friend.

(*Beat.*)

JACOB: (*hurt, not making eye-contact*) I'm gonna go to my locker.

MARIA: Jacob, /wait-

ETHAN: (*upset, cold*) Fine.

JACOB: (*not looking at them*) Seeya at class.

ETHAN: (*hurt, trying to hide it*) Whatever.

(*JACOB walks off.*)

ETHAN: (*to MARIA, re: JACOB*) Can you believe that?

MARIA: ...It was a little harsh.

ETHAN: Seriously.

MARIA: (*delicately*) No, I mean, what you said to him.

ETHAN: What?

MARIA: You know he's still your friend. He just didn't know how to respond.

ETHAN: There's nothing to respond to! It's a stupid rumor.

MARIA: (*very gently*) Ethan, it's...okay, you know. If you have feelings for him.

(*ETHAN is at a loss. Then:*)

ETHAN: We are not discussing this.

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PERUSAL ONLY

MARIA: I'm your friend, you can tell me.

ETHAN: It's just some stupid thing Mike said, probably cuz Trevor told him to.

MARIA: I mean...you are possessive when it comes to Jacob.

ETHAN: *(can't believe he's hearing this)* What? Why? Just cuz I didn't wanna game with you?

MARIA: Not just that.

ETHAN: *(lashing out)* Just cuz you're in love with Jacob doesn't mean I am.

(This hits MARIA hard.)

(Beat.)

(ETHAN realizes that he went too far.)

ETHAN: I didn't mean / that-

MARIA: I'm gonna go find Jacob.

ETHAN: Maria, wait-

MARIA: I'll talk to you later.

ETHAN: Let's talk now.

MARIA: *(kind, but firm)* No. No, I really don't want to. Not when you're like this.

(MARIA starts to walk off. ETHAN starts follow.)

ETHAN: I'm sorry, okay?

MARIA: *(still walking off)* Just gimme some space - please.

(ETHAN stops as MARIA exits.)

ETHAN: *(loud, upset)* Mike and Trevor are jerks! Idiots with nothing better to do than pick on me. It's not my fault they're losers!

(Hearing this, MARC and DILLON stare at ETHAN. ETHAN sees this.)

ETHAN: *(embarrassed, defensive)* What are you looking at?

(Offended, MARC and DILLON walk away as they whisper and glance back at ETHAN.)

(ETHAN starts pacing back and forth, breathing heavily and starting to panic.)

ETHAN: *(to himself)* Breathe. Remember what Dr. Krueger said. Breathe deep, into my hands.

(He puts his hands on his back, breathes deeply into them.)

ETHAN: *(a breath for each number, calming as he goes)* ...Ten... Nine... Eight... Seven... Six... Five... Four... Thr-

(The school bell rings, startling ETHAN.)

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.): Five minutes to first period. Five minutes.

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(The students start to collect their stuff, pick up their backpacks, etc, and walk toward their classes. ETHAN takes another second to close his eyes and breathe. He then starts walking-)

MIKE (O.S.): Trevor, here's over here!

TREVOR (O.S.): Ethan!

(ETHAN stops, mortified.)

ETHAN: *(under his breath)* Please, no.

(With panic in ETHAN's eyes, everyone onstage suddenly freezes.)

(After a beat, the chorus turns toward the audience. ETHAN exits while the chorus shifts into their positions during the following (note: MIKE enters during the following, getting into his starting position then freezing):

SONIA: They're jerks.

KIM: Hey, no one died, so what's the big deal?

JADEN: I have to look after myself.

DOMINIQUE: Those guys are big.

EDDIE: Best thing I can do is stay outta their way.

DILLON: 'Til the end, it was pretty funny.

MARC: If he just stayed quiet, everything woulda been good.

KAYLA: They definitely started it.

(The chorus lands in their starting positions and unfreeze. They have whispered conversations again, while MIKE, sitting on the ground, looks at his binder and textbook - struggling with his homework. He's concentrating very hard, muttering to himself.)

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.): Good morning, students. Today is Friday the seventeenth. The weather is expected to be bright and mild all day, so all extra-curricular activities will happen as scheduled. Tickets are still on sale for tonight's pep rally, which also get you into the first game of our basketball season - go Panthers! After the game, the ticket will get you into the cafeteria, where there will be refreshments, healthy snacks, and a DJ. Final bell is in twenty minutes, so start heading to your lockers. And have a productive day!

(Once the announcement ends, we hear what MIKE's saying:)

MIKE.: *(reading from the textbook)* "The equation is balanced by a device called a variable. A variable is an unknown number represented by any letter in the alphabet, but most commonly 'x.' The value of each variable must remain the same in each problem."

(MIKE sets down the textbook, looks at the binder.)

MIKE: *(muttering to himself)* 'Kay, so "x." Where's "x?" *(finding it)* "X!" Okay. So. If "x" is a number, it must be... *(struggling)* Must be...

(MIKE, getting frustrated, picks up the textbook again.)

KAYLA (O.S.): Mike!

MIKE: (under breath) Crap.

(KAYLA, a very smart student MIKE's age, crosses to him.)

KAYLA: Hey, I was waiting for you at the picnic tables. That's what we said, wasn't it?
(checking her notes) I thought that's what I wrote down.

MIKE: (trying to hide his homework) Yeah, no, I just got distracted.

KAYLA: It's just, Mrs. Johnson asked me to help you with this, and I really don't want to let her down. (then) Or you.

MIKE: Yeah. (a slight beat) We should probably get to class, right?

KAYLA: Mike-

MIKE: Don't wanna be late-

KAYLA: (a little louder) Mike, your homework.

MIKE: ...What about it?

KAYLA: Can I see it, please?

(Beat.)

(MIKE takes out the homework, hands it to KAYLA.)

MIKE: (trying to be hopeful) I think I'm getting better. (then) A little.

KAYLA: (looking at the paper) Oh, God.

MIKE: (embarrassed) It's not-

KAYLA: (still looking at the paper) Oh, God.

MIKE: (defensive) Hey - I tried the tricks you showed me, they didn't work.

KAYLA: I thought you said you were getting better.

MIKE: I-

KAYLA: If anything, this is worse.

MIKE: (defensive) And who's fault is that?

KAYLA: (a little hurt) That's not fair. I'm trying to help.

MIKE: Yeah, cuz Mrs. Johnson told you to.

KAYLA: Yes, so?

MIKE: Not cuz you really wanna help.

KAYLA: Of course I-

MIKE: (suddenly sulking) No one does.

(Beat.)

KAYLA: I want to help. I really do. I don't want you to get held back. /Do you?

MIKE: *(whispers)* Shhh! *(looking around, making sure no one heard)* How do you know that?

KAYLA: *(quieter)* I'm sorry, it's just, when I was hanging back to go over notes with you, I heard Mrs. Johnson give you the letter to give your parents saying that if things don't get better soon, you're gonna be held back. *(then, quickly)* I didn't mean to eavesdrop. *(then)* What'd they say?

MIKE.: *(sulking again)* Who?

KAYLA: Your parents.

MIKE: Oh. Nothing.

KAYLA: *(confused)* "Nothing?" What do you mean, "nothing?"

MIKE: I mean they didn't say nothing.

KAYLA: *(confused)* That doesn't make sense. *(then, realizing)* Mike - you did give them the note, didn't you?

MIKE: Yeah.

KAYLA: Please don't lie to me.

MIKE: *(confused)* Whatayamean, "lie?"

KAYLA: If you didn't give them the letter, you'll be in so much more trouble.

MIKE: I gave it to them.

KAYLA: Then what did they say?

MIKE: They didn't say nothing.

KAYLA: *(confused)* But why wouldn't they say-?

MIKE: *(frustrated)* Cuz they don't they care. They're never around, they never check my homework, I dunno if they even look at my report cards. They don't say nothing. So, if I fail it don't matter to them cuz they don't care.

(Beat.)

KAYLA: That can't be true.

MIKE: I ain't lying.

KAYLA: No, I know. I just...where are they? If they're not home.

MIKE: *(shrugs)* Working.

KAYLA: Okay, so they're probably just busy, right? I'm sure they care.

MIKE: I ask 'em to look at my stuff, they say I must not be paying attention in class. "That's what school's for. What we pay taxes for," they say. Ground me, like it's my fault I don't know something. That sound like they care?

KAYLA: *(not wanting to make him feel worse)* ...I don't know.

(Beat.)

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MIKE: Whatever. (*vulnerable*) I just - I can't fail, okay? I can't get held back. Cuz then my friend, he'll, he'll just keep going, and I won't. And he's what I got. All I got. And I won't have him no more. I'll just be here, alone, with everyone thinking I'm dumb.

KAYLA: (*sympathetic*) You're not dumb.

MIKE: (*defensive*) I know I'm not.

KAYLA: (*backing off*) Okay.

MIKE: I just need... (*an idea*) Hey...Hey. Can you give me the answers?

KAYLA: (*not fully comprehending*) ...Give them to you?

MIKE: Yeah, yeah. Just 'til I start to get it. Math, I mean.

KAYLA: (*worried*) You wanna copy my work?

MIKE: Only for a while. So I have time to figure it out. Then I'll stop.

KAYLA: (*uncomfortable*) But that's cheating.

MIKE: You're supposed to be helping me. Help me by not letting me fail before I have a chance to get better. Please.

(*KAYLA thinks about this.*)

KAYLA: ...It would only be for a little while?

MIKE: Yeah.

KAYLA: And in the meantime you'd keep working to improve?

MIKE: Every day, yeah. (*then*) Think about how happy Mrs. Johnson would be that you helped me improve so quickly.

(*A beat.*)

KAYLA: I don't think that's a good idea. (*off MIKE's disappointment, quickly*) If she caught us, we'd both get suspended - or worse. I- (*then, correcting herself*) -we can't risk it.

(*SONIA and KIM cross to the SR side of the stage, whispering to each other. They giggle, in their own world.*)

MIKE: (*quietly, to KAYLA*) I'll pay you.

KAYLA: (*really worried*) What?

(*KAYLA looks toward SONIA and KIM, anxious.*)

MIKE: Money. My lunch money.

(*MIKE goes to take lunch money from his pocket, discovers he doesn't have any.*)

MIKE: Mom and Dad forgot to leave some before they left this morning, but they sometimes remember. And when they do - you can have it.

KAYLA: (*a little firmer*) I think we should just go over the homework - together.

MIKE: But I don't-

KAYLA: Mike, please - I'm not gonna help you cheat. But I'll help you. Now, I get that quadratic equations are confusing. So there's a trick you can use if all else fails.

MIKE: There is?

KAYLA: Yes. If you can't remember the formula, you can figure out "x" by just choosing a number at random and seeing if, when you use it to solve the equation, the number you come up with is the same as the number on the other side of the equal sign. And if it isn't, you pick a different number and try again. It takes longer, but you'll get the answer eventually.

MIKE: *(a bit more hopeful)* So...I can pick any number?

KAYLA: Yes. *(then)* Well, if all the numbers in the equation are single-digit, you probably don't want to choose a three-digit number. Probably. Does that make sense?

MIKE: Uh...

(Clearly MIKE's confused again, getting frustrated.)

(MIKE hears SONIA and KIM laughing, is worried it's about him. MIKE is distracted by their presence during the below:)

KAYLA: *(looks at the binder)* Let's start simple - three "x" plus five equals fifteen. Now, can you choose a number for me, Mike? *(beat)* Mike?

MIKE: *(to SONIA and KIM)* Something funny?

(After a second, SONIA and KIM notice he's looking at them.)

SONIA: *(genuinely confused)* Excuse me?

MIKE: *(louder)* I said, something funny?

SONIA: Were we talking to you?

MIKE: Heard you laughing. Got something you wanna say, say it.

SONIA: Well, we don't, so-

MIKE: Don't lie.

SONIA: I'm not.

MIKE: *(trying to embarrass her)* You crushing on me? That it?

SONIA: *(perplexed)* What? /No.

KIM: *(laughs)* Trust me, it's not you she's crushing on.

SONIA: Kim, shut /up.

KIM: *(to SONIA)* I can't believe you find him cute.

MIKE: Who?

KAYLA: Mike, we should really-

KIM: Ethan Leyden.

SONIA: (*upset*) Kim! I told you not to tell anyone.

KIM: Oh, you know I'm teasing.

MIKE: Ethan?

SONIA: I already said, we weren't talking to you. (*to KIM*) Come on.

(*She goes to walk away.*)

MIKE: (*calling after them, to upset SONIA*) Don't matter - cuz he's gay.

(*KIM and SONIA stop.*)

KIM: (*intrigued*) What?

SONIA: Kim, let's /just-

MIKE: Tries to hide it, but everyone can see he's in love with Jacob. Don't take a genius to see that.

KIM: (*genuinely concerned*) Jacob isn't gay - is he?

MIKE: (*making it up as he goes*) No...That's why Ethan pulls up pics of Jacob on his phone and practices kissing them.

KIM: (*loving it*) Oh, my God!

SONIA: He does not.

MIKE: Saw him. In the locker room.

KIM: That makes so much sense. (*to SONIA*) You even said, he's so possessive of Jacob.

SONIA: (*embarrassed*) I said he's protective of Jacob. And I didn't mean it in a bad way.

KIM: But you're right - he's always around Jacob.

SONIA: (*starting to sulk*) That's cuz they're best friends.

KIM: We're best friends, I still don't wanna stick my tongue down your throat.

SONIA: (*getting upset*) ...I'm going to my locker.

(*SONIA goes to leave.*)

KIM: Oh, come on, wait - Sonia. (*to MIKE and KAYLA, conspiratorially*) She really liked him. (*following after SONIA*) Sonia!

(*KIM quickly follows after SONIA.*)

(*MIKE turns, sees KAYLA looking upset with him.*)

MIKE: What?

KAYLA: That wasn't nice.

MIKE: Don't mean it's not true.

KAYLA: Ethan's not a bad guy. He's nice. And pretty smart.

(This annoys MIKE more than she realizes.)

KAYLA: And even if he is... *(not wanting to say "gay")* ...you know... *(then)* I don't think it's your business.

MIKE: *(starting to feel ashamed)* Yeah? Cuz I don't think my homework is your business.

KAYLA: I'm your tutor.

MIKE: Cuz, what, Mrs. Johnson told you?

KAYLA: And because I want to help.

MIKE: No, you don't. You want everyone to know how smart you are. And how nice you are. But you're not. Everyone knows you're a stuck-up teacher's pet and that's why they hate you.

(This stings KAYLA badly. She struggles but maintains her composure.)

(Upstage, TREVOR (the other bully) enters on his phone, facing away from MIKE and KAYLA. He remains upstage during the following.)

KAYLA: Take that back. /Please.

MIKE: No. No, it's true, so I won't.

KAYLA: You can't just say things like that-

MIKE: Yeah, I can. And if you don't leave me alone, I'll say worse.

(She believes him.)

(Beat.)

(She hands his binder back to him, then walks away.)

(Giving up on his homework, MIKE puts his binder and textbook in his backpack. As he does, he notices TREVOR on his phone upstage.)

(MIKE turns back downstage, starts prepping himself for talking with TREVOR, wanting to sound cool. He pulls out his phone, looking at joke he has saved on there.)

MIKE: *(practicing)* Trevor, hey - you hear this one? *(stops, then tries again)* Yo, Trevor - check this out. *(grimaces at that one, tries again)* Hey, Trevor, I got a joke for you. *(happy with that, he looks at the joke on his phone, reads it)* What do you call a Jedi in denial? *(then, still reading, still and awkward delivery)* Obi-Wan. Cannot. Be. *(shakes his head, tries again, much more natural)* Obi-Wan Cannot Be. *(happy with it)* Nice.

(MIKE sees TREVOR get off the phone.)

MIKE: Yo, Trevor. *(realizes he said it wrong)* I mean, hey.

(TREVOR sees MIKE, they meet center stage. TREVOR seems distracted, not very interested in the conversation with MIKE.)

TREVOR: Hey.

(TREVOR looks at his phone. MIKE notices TREVOR's lack of interest, gets a little self-conscious.)

MIKE: You, uh, wanna- *(stops, then)* I got a joke for you. *(no response)* Trevor?

TREVOR: Hm?

MIKE: You okay?

TREVOR: *(defensive)* Yeah - why?

MIKE: No, nothing, I just, I got a joke for you. *(a little self-conscious)* I know you find 'em funny, so...

(A slightly awkward beat since TREVOR's still distracted.)

TREVOR: *(trying to be interested, failing)* Okay, yeah.

MIKE: *(trying to make it sound natural, failing)* 'Kay, so - what's a jedi that- *(correcting)* -I mean, what do you call a jedi... *(then)* In denial. A jedi in denial.

TREVOR: Dunno.

MIKE: Obi-Wan Kenob- *(stops, corrects himself)* I mean, Can't- *(stops again)* Cannot Be. *(a slight beat, then lamely trying to explain)* He's Cannot Be.

(TREVOR nods solemnly.)

TREVOR: *(his mind elsewhere)* Mm.

(TREVOR looks at his phone, like he's willing it to ring.)

(MIKE's disappointed by the reaction, but tries not to show it.)

MIKE: Yeah, you're right, it's not funny.

TREVOR: What?

MIKE: I said it's not funny.

TREVOR: *(confused)* Then why'd you say it?

MIKE: *(struggling)* ...I-

(TREVOR's phone rings. He instantly picks it up and turns upstage away from MIKE.)

(As soon as he knows TREVOR isn't looking, MIKE crosses downstage and hits himself in the face.)

MIKE: *(whispers, as he hits himself)* Stupid! Stupid!

(JADEN moves downstage, to a place where he ends up seeing MIKE hit himself. JADEN stops, stupefied by the sight of MIKE hitting himself.)

(MIKE sees JADEN watching him - stops hitting himself.)

MIKE: *(defensive)* What are you looking at?

JADEN: ...Nothing.

MIKE: *(more defensive)* "Nothing?" What, you mean like I'm nothing?

JADEN: *(alarmed)* What? No.

MIKE: So, what'd you see?

JADEN: *(carefully)* Just you, Mike.

MIKE: You think it's funny, what you saw?

JADEN: No.

MIKE: It make you laugh?

JADEN: No.

MIKE: What didn't?

JADEN: What?

MIKE: What didn't make you laugh?

JADEN: *(confused)* I don't...

MIKE: *(self-consciously angry)* Just say it - me hitting myself. You thought it was funny.

JADEN: I didn't, I swear.

MIKE: *(feeling like he trapped JADEN)* So you did see it! *(a little more confident)* You're not so smart, you know that? *(a beat, then defensively angry)* Quit staring at me.

(JADEN looks away from MIKE, takes a step the way he'd been heading - past MIKE - but thinks better of it, and goes back the way he came.)

(MARC and DILLON cross downstage, see MIKE. Start to cross to him-)

MARC: Mike, hey-

(Suddenly, they hear TREVOR yelling upstage, into the phone.)

TREVOR: *(loud, mid-sentence)* -I don't care-

(TREVOR keeps speaking into the phone, but the rest of what he says can't be heard. Thrown by how upset TREVOR already seems, MARC and DILLON hesitate.)

DILLON: *(to MIKE, re: TREVOR)* Is, uh, this a bad time?

MIKE: *(to MARC and DILLON)* What do you want?

MARC: We just wanted to tell Trevor something, but it can-

MIKE: *(defensive)* Why Trevor?

MARC: What?

MIKE: Why not me?

MARC: *(surprised by this)* I mean...

MIKE: *(suddenly suspicious)* Is it about me?

MARC: *(getting worried)* What? No, no, it's about Ethan.

MIKE: What about him?

MARC: He's saying - well, yelling - yelling stuff about you and Trevor.

MIKE: *(already getting upset)* What kinda stuff?

DILLON: *(regretting this choice)* It's, you know, it's not a big deal, really. Let's just-
(MIKE crosses toward them.)

MIKE: Tell me.

MARC: *(quickly)* Losers. He's calling you losers. And jerks and idiots. *(quickly)* We wouldn't'a said nothing, but he's yelling it for everyone to hear, and-

DILLON: *(jumping in)* -and we thought you should know.

(Beat.)

(Suddenly, MIKE cross upstage to TREVOR, who's still on the phone. MARC and DILLON follow.)

MIKE: Trevor, hey-

TREVOR: *(to MIKE, but not looking at him)* Not now, Mike.

(TREVOR goes back to talking into the phone, but we don't hear what he's saying.)

MIKE: But it's important.

TREVOR: *(to MIKE, harsher)* I said not now.

(MIKE is surprised, a little hurt by this tone from TREVOR. TREVOR goes back to talking into the phone - still unheard - as MIKE turns back to MARC and DILLON.)

MIKE: *(to MARC and DILLON)* Ethan just said this, like just now?

(While DILLON nods:)

MARC: Yeah.

MIKE: So everyone heard?

MARC: Yeah.

(MIKE turns back to TREVOR.)

MIKE: *(back to TREVOR, almost desperate)* But he called us losers and jerks - and, and idiots.

TREVOR: *(to MIKE, confused)* Who?

MIKE: Ethan. Said we're pathetic. And dumb. Yelling it so the whole school can hear him.

(This is enough to distract TREVOR from the phone for a second.)

TREVOR: *(shocked, to MIKE)* Ethan? But he- *(then, firmer)* Just gimme a minute, 'kay?

(TREVOR goes back to talking into the phone, unheard. After a second of this:)

TREVOR: *(loud, upset)* No!

(TREVOR stares at his phone, fuming - clearly the person hung up.)

MIKE: (*approaches TREVOR tentatively*) Trevor...We can't let Ethan say that. Stuff like that. That, that crap about us. Can we?

(*Beat.*)

(*TREVOR looks up, rage in his eyes.*)

TREVOR: Where is he?

MARC: Near the picnic tables-

(*TREVOR's already started moving, MIKE in tow.*)

(*The bell rings.*)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Five minutes to first period. Five minutes.

(*TREVOR has trouble seeing through all the students, getting increasingly frustrated.*)

TREVOR: I can't see him.

(*MIKE spots ETHAN walking near the edge of the stage.*)

MIKE: Trevor, he's over here!

(*MIKE points - now TREVOR sees him, too.*)

TREVOR: Ethan!

(*ETHAN hesitates, facing away from TREVOR and MIKE. He mumbles something that we can't hear.*)

TREVOR: Look at me when I'm talking to you.

(*Everyone freezes.*)

(*After a beat, the chorus turns toward the audience. MIKE and ETHAN exit while the chorus and TREVOR shift into their positions during the following:*)

SONIA: They should be expelled.

KIM: (*shrugs*) Boys fight - it's kinda funny.

JADEN: I get picked on enough by my brothers, I don't need it here.

DOMINIQUE: (*a bit defensive*) There's nothing I coulda done. Nothing.

EDDIE: If it's gotta be him or me - I choose him.

DILLON: Yeah, Trevor can be mean, but it's always funny.

MARC: It just went too far.

KAYLA: There has to be something wrong with you to do something like that.

(*The chorus lands in their starting positions and unfreeze. This time, the announcement starts partway through.*)

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.): ...after the game, the ticket will get you into the cafeteria, where there will be refreshments, healthy snacks, and a DJ. Final bell is in twenty minutes, so start heading to your lockers. And have a productive day!

(As the announcement ends, TREVOR enters. TREVOR looks around, thinks no one's paying attention for the moment. He stoops a bit, goes to touch his back, as-)

KEVIN (O.S.): Hey, wait up!

(TREVOR stands back up straight as KEVIN, TREVOR's brother (8-9 years old), comes onstage.)

TREVOR: Hey, Kev.

KEVIN: *(joking)* You running from something?

TREVOR: *(joking)* Yeah, you. Tough guy.

KEVIN: *(smiles)* Shut up. *(then)* You not so tired now?

TREVOR: What do you mean?

KEVIN: Last night. You went to bed so early.

TREVOR: Right, yeah, I was just tired.

KEVIN: *(teasing)* Lazy.

TREVOR: *(playing along)* That's me.

(A slight beat.)

KEVIN: He wasn't angry, right? About the trash?

TREVOR: *(waves it off)* Nah, you know Dad. Alotta hot air, but... *(trails off for a second as he touches his back, then)* But all good. Don't worry about it.

KEVIN: I dunno why you didn't just tell the truth. *(shrugs)* I forgot to take out the trash, so what?

(TREVOR pauses for a second - like he's considering telling KEVIN the truth - but quickly changes his mind.)

TREVOR: You're right, it's no biggie - so don't worry about it.

(During the below, JADEN crosses the stage. When he spots TREVOR, he slows down, a little nervous as he passes TREVOR.)

KEVIN: Yeah, but-

TREVOR: Hey, if I wanna take the blame for your screw-ups, that's my right. As your older brother.

KEVIN: *(re: JADEN, amused)* Why he look at you like that?

TREVOR: Like what?

KEVIN: Like you so scary.

TREVOR: *(fake-serious)* Maybe I am, Kevin. Maybe I am.

(Beat.)

(KEVIN laughs.)

KEVIN: Yeah, okay, and I'm, like, the Easter Bunny.

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TREVOR: *(smiles a little)* What'd you want, anyway? Lunch money?

KEVIN: Yeah.

TREVOR: Yes, what?

KEVIN: *(purposefully defiant)* Yes, Trevor. *(off TREVOR's look)* "Yes, please."

TREVOR: Thank you.

(TREVOR goes to take money out of his pocket, remembers he doesn't have any.)

TREVOR: Ya know, I just remembered, I left it in my locker. I'll get it to you before lunch. How much you need, three?

KEVIN: *(hopes he's not pushing it)* ...Five?

TREVOR: *(a little incredulous)* Five?

KEVIN: Have you had the chocolate-covered strawberry ice cream cone?

TREVOR: *(a bit amused)* No.

KEVIN: It's so good. *(then)* But if you don't got it, it's okay.

TREVOR: No, no, I'll get it. I'll get you five. Just wait 'til after the meal for ice cream, 'kay? I know we're not eating as good as we do when Mom's home, but I still gotta keep you eating right.

(KEVIN's mood noticeably slumps.)

TREVOR: *(quickly)* Just, ya know, 'til she's back. *(a joke)* Then she can be the one worrying about you.

KEVIN: It'll be soon, right?

TREVOR: *(lying)* Yeah.

KEVIN: *(hopeful)* You spoke to her?

TREVOR: I-...not since she left, but-

KEVIN: *(disappointed)* Oh.

TREVOR: -you know how it goes - she takes off for a couple weeks, stays with Grandma, then she's back and everything's awesome.

KEVIN: I wish she'd stop. Leaving, you know?

TREVOR: I know.

KEVIN: It's, like, selfish.

TREVOR: *(gently disagreeing)* Well-

KEVIN: Doing that to us. And Dad.

TREVOR: She wouldn't if she didn't have to.

KEVIN: She don't have to just leave like that. It's like, like she don't even love us.

TREVOR: *(stern)* Hey. Don't ever say that.

KEVIN: But it's-

TREVOR: No. If there's one thing I know, it's how much she loves you. She wouldn't do something like this unless she had good reason.

KEVIN: Like what?

TREVOR: What?

KEVIN: What good reason?

TREVOR: ...You just gotta trust me. 'Kay?

(Beat.)

(TREVOR playfully fake-fights KEVIN - gently punching his shoulder.)

TREVOR: I said, "'kay?"

(TREVOR puts KEVIN into a playful headlock, gives him a brief noogie.)

KEVIN: *(laughing, trying to fend off TREVOR)* Okay, okay!

(TREVOR lets KEVIN go.)

TREVOR: Where you wanna go when she gets back? Last time, dad took us to Applebee's to celebrate. Before that, I chose Water Slide World. This time, it's your turn. What are you thinking?

KEVIN: *(enjoying the moment)* Hmm... *(a thought)* Oh! *(embarrassed, changing his mind)* Nah, never mind.

TREVOR: What?

KEVIN: Nothing.

TREVOR: *(encouraging)* Just tell me.

KEVIN: ...I always wanted to go to the zoo.

TREVOR: *(surprised)* The zoo?

KEVIN: I know, it's dumb.

TREVOR: No, no, I just didn't know that. Yeah, the zoo. That'd be awesome. I think we could talk Dad into that.

KEVIN: Yeah?

TREVOR: Yeah. What animal do you most wanna see?

KEVIN: *(smiles)* The polar bear.

TREVOR: *(laughs)* A polar bear? Why?

KEVIN: Cuz it reminds me of the abominable snowman, which is my / favorite monster.

TREVOR: Your favorite monster, yeah. Cool. I'm down.

KEVIN: Sweet! And that'll be soon, right?

TREVOR: Soon, yeah. *(trying to make himself believe it)* Real soon.

(KEVIN is very pleased with this.)

TREVOR: Now, get to your locker. I don't want you late for / class.

KEVIN: *(used to this lecture)* I won't, I won't.

(KEVIN goes to exit.)

KEVIN: *(calling back)* Seeya!

TREVOR: Bye, Kev.

(KEVIN exits.)

(TREVOR watches to make sure KEVIN is out of sight. Once he's certain KEVIN's gone, he puts his hand on his back and winces. Making sure no one's paying attention to him, he faces upstage (so his back is facing the audience) and lifts the back of his shirt, so it doesn't touch his back. We can see some bruising and welts on his back. He takes deep breaths, trying to control the pain.)

(He touches a particularly painful spot, bending over from the sudden pain. At that moment, EDDIE quickly crosses forward, followed at a distance by DOMINIQUE. EDDIE calls back to DOMINIQUE - not looking where he's going.)

EDDIE: *(still moving)* Come on, Dominique, we gotta go practice before-

(EDDIE bumps into TREVOR. TREVOR, startled, jumps back, screams, and puts his hands up as if to protect himself - an instinctive, scared reaction.)

(Seeing this, and not sure how else to react, DOMINIQUE starts to nervously laugh.)

(TREVOR, breathing heavily from the scare, glares at DOMINIQUE. She stops laughing.)

EDDIE: *(nervously, to TREVOR)* Sorry, man. *(to DOMINIQUE)* Let's go.

(They go to exit.)

(TREVOR keeps his voice down throughout, so other students can't hear him, but it's still very threatening.)

TREVOR: Hey.

(EDDIE and DOMINIQUE stop walking.)

TREVOR: Come here.

(EDDIE and DOMINIQUE don't move)

TREVOR: Come here.

(EDDIE and DOMINIQUE, terrified, cross over to TREVOR.)

TREVOR: What's your name?

EDDIE: *("me or DOMINIQUE?")* Uh, you talking to me or...?

(Beat.)

EDDIE: Eddie. I'm Eddie.

DOMINIQUE: Dominique.

TREVOR: 'Kay. So...Eddie. Dominique. What you laughing at?

EDDIE: I wasn't.

DOMINIQUE: We weren't.

TREVOR: No?

DOMINIQUE: No.

TREVOR: *(calm)* No. Cuz I just imagined it. Cuz I'm some moron who just makes stuff up. That it?

EDDIE: No.

TREVOR: No?

DOMINIQUE: No.

(TREVOR suddenly gets right in DOMINIQUE's face.)

TREVOR: *(intense)* Then why were you laughing?

(DOMINIQUE, terrified, jumps back. She stares at the ground, too scared to make eye contact with TREVOR.)

DOMINIQUE: *(quietly)* I'm sorry.

TREVOR: You're what?

DOMINIQUE: *(a little louder)* I'm sorry.

TREVOR: You think I care if you're sorry?

DOMINIQUE: *(quieter again)* No.

(TREVOR stares at DOMINIQUE for a beat. Still staring at the ground, she's so scared she seems like she's about to cry. Suddenly, TREVOR switches his focus to EDDIE.)

TREVOR: *(to EDDIE)* And you. You're worse - just standing there when your friend's about to cry. I bet you'd run away if you could, and just leave her here. You think that makes you a good friend?

EDDIE: No.

TREVOR: A good guy?

EDDIE: No.

TREVOR: No - it makes you a coward. And I hate cowards.

(EDDIE and DOMINIQUE stare at the ground.)

(Beat.)

TREVOR: Gimme your money.

EDDIE: *("which one?")* Uh, who?

(Beat as TREVOR stares at EDDIE.)

(DOMINIQUE and EDDIE take money out of their wallets. TREVOR takes the money, counts it.)

TREVOR: *(counting)* One, two, three... *(reaching the last bill)* Four?

DOMINIQUE: That's-that's all we got.

(TREVOR just stares at them. Finally, EDDIE nervously takes out another dollar. TREVOR takes it. As he puts the money in his pocket:)

TREVOR: *(to himself)* And five. *(to DOMINIQUE and EDDIE)* You gonna laugh again?

EDDIE: No.

DOMINIQUE: No.

TREVOR: *("good")* No.

(TREVOR steps out of their way, allowing DOMINIQUE and EDDIE to pass. They walk away as fast as they can. Once they're gone, TREVOR stops acting tough, goes back to showing that he's in pain.)

(TREVOR takes out his phone, looks at it, deciding whether to make a call. He starts to dial - changes his mind. Goes to put his phone away - changes his mind again. He quickly hits the "Call" button. He tensely holds the phone as it rings. We can tell by his reaction that it goes to voicemail.)

(During the following, we see MIKE enter upstage, look at TREVOR, then go back to facing upstage, practicing his joke.)

TREVOR: *(into the phone)* Hey, Mom. Just calling to see when we can expect you to...come back. It's just, um, it's a been longer, a little longer this time, and, um, well, Dad's been saying some stuff. Stuff like... *(his voice starting to break)* ...like you aren't gonna come back this time. That this time's for good. And I- *(trying to convince himself)* I know he's angry. That he's lying. But please. Come back. Just come back. So he'll stop saying it. And so he'll stop... *(touches his lower back)* ...stop being him. For a little. *(a slight beat)* Say "hi" to Grandma for me. I love you, Mom.

(TREVOR hangs up, looking like that took a toll on him.)

(Seeing that TREVOR got off the phone, MIKE calls to him.)

MIKE: Yo, Trevor. *(realizes he said it wrong)* I mean, hey.

(TREVOR walks upstage, meeting MIKE center stage.)

TREVOR: Hey.

(TREVOR looks at his phone. MIKE notices TREVOR's lack of interest.)

MIKE: You, uh, wanna- *(stops, then)* I got a joke for you. *(no response)* Trevor?

TREVOR: *(looking at his phone)* Hm?

MIKE: You okay?

TREVOR: *(defensive)* Yeah - why?

MIKE: No, nothing, I just, I got a joke for you. *(a little self-conscious)* I know you find 'em funny, so...

(A slightly awkward beat since TREVOR's still distracted.)

TREVOR: *(trying to be interested, failing)* Okay, yeah.

MIKE: *(trying to make it sound natural, failing)* 'Kay, so - what's a jedi that- *(correcting)* -I mean, what do you call a jedi. *(then)* In denial. A jedi in denial.

TREVOR: Dunno.

MIKE: Obi-Wan Kenob- *(stops, corrects himself)* I mean, Can't- *(stops again)* Cannot Be. *(a slight beat, then lamely trying to explain)* He's Cannot Be.

(TREVOR nods solemnly.)

TREVOR: *(his mind elsewhere)* Mm.

(TREVOR looks at his phone, like he's willing it to ring.)

(MIKE's disappointed by the reaction, but tries not to show it.)

MIKE: Yeah, you're right, it's not funny.

TREVOR: What?

MIKE: I said it's not funny.

TREVOR: *(confused)* Then why'd you say it?

MIKE: *(struggling)* ...I-

(TREVOR's phone rings. TREVOR instantly picks it up and crosses downstage, away from MIKE.)

(As soon as he knows TREVOR isn't looking, MIKE crosses upstage and hits himself in the face.)

(During the following, JADEN enters upstage, has the same interaction with MIKE, this time unheard.)

TREVOR: Mom, hey! Thanks for calling me back so fast! *(listens, then smiling)* I missed you, too. How's Grandma? *(listens, then)* Kevin's good, yeah, he's good. Grades are improving. I don't let him watch TV 'til he's done with his homework. And he wants- *(laughs a little)* Get this - when you come back, he wants to go to the zoo. *(laughs a bit more)* Can you believe that? He used to be scared of Mrs. Myers' poodle, now he wants to go see a polar bear. *(listens, then he seems confused)* Whaddayamean, "when you come to visit?" *(listens, then his mood gets worse)* You mean, for like a couple weeks. That you'll be staying with her for a couple more weeks. *(listens, then getting upset)* That doesn't make sense- *(listens, then cutting her off)* Of course I want you to be safe, I just- *(listens, then trying to be positive)* 'Kay, 'kay, then you're taking us with you, right?

(Upstage, JADEN exits.)

TREVOR: *(into phone)* Me and Kev. We'll move with you to Grandma's. We'll- *(listens, then incredulous)* But the summer's months from now.

(DILLON and MARC enter upstage, start talking to MIKE. TREVOR doesn't notice.)

TREVOR: *(listens briefly, then annoyed)* I don't care if you pull us outta school! We'll go to another school. *(listens, then scared)* You can't leave us with him. He'll- *(listens, then annoyed)* Of course I'll take care of Kevin. I'm already taking care of him more than you are. *(listens, then backs off)* I'm sorry, no, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. Mom, I- *(stops, then)* No, I-. I'm just- *(his voice breaking)* -scared, okay? Really scared. He's - Dad - I...I haven't seen him like this before. *(listens, then)* Not this bad. *(really scared, vulnerable)* I don't know how much more I can take. It...it really hurts. *(listens, then upset)* He's not gonna "get better" if you don't come back!

(MIKE crosses toward TREVOR, followed by MARC and DILLON.)

MIKE: Trevor, hey-

TREVOR: *(to MIKE, but not looking at him)* Not now, Mike. *(back into phone, quickly)* Mom, just give it one more-

MIKE: But it's important-

TREVOR: *(to MIKE, harsher)* I said not now.

(MIKE talks with MARC and DILLON, unheard.)

TREVOR: *(listening to phone, then)* No, it's nothing, I can talk, I just-

MIKE: *(back to TREVOR, almost desperate)* But he called us losers and jerks - and, and stupid.

TREVOR: *(to MIKE, confused)* Who?

MIKE: Ethan. Said we're pathetic. And dumb. Yelling it so the whole school can hear him.

(This is enough to distract TREVOR from the phone for a second.)

TREVOR: *(shocked, to MIKE)* Ethan? But he- *(then, firmer)* Just gimme a minute, 'kay *(turns away from MIKE, back into phone)* Mom, listen- *(listens, doesn't hear anything)* Mom, you there? *(a slight beat)* Mom? *(realizes she's no longer on the line, frustrated)* No! *(TREVOR keeps looking at his phone, fuming.)*

MIKE: *(approaches TREVOR tentatively)* Trevor...We can't let Ethan say that. Stuff like that. That, that crap about us. Can we?

(Beat.)

(TREVOR looks up, rage in his eyes.)

TREVOR: Where is he?

MARC: Near the picnic tables-

(TREVOR's already started moving, MIKE in tow.)

(The bell rings.)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Five minutes to first period. Five minutes.

(TREVOR has trouble seeing through all the students, getting increasingly frustrated.)

TREVOR: I can't see him.

(MIKE spots ETHAN walking near the edge of the stage.)

MIKE: Trevor, he's over here!

(MIKE points - now TREVOR sees him, too.)

TREVOR: Ethan!

(ETHAN hesitates, facing away from TREVOR and MIKE. He mumbles something that we can't hear.)

TREVOR: Look at me when I'm talking to you.

ETHAN: *(trying to be friendly)* Hi, Trevor. Mike.

TREVOR: What are you doing?

ETHAN: What do you mean?

TREVOR: Acting nice. Like we're friends. You think we're friends?

ETHAN: ...I don't know.

(Beat.)

TREVOR: You dunno?

ETHAN: I mean-

TREVOR: You dunno if we're your friends. Like if you like us or not. You dunno? *(then)*
You do know.

ETHAN: Trevor-

TREVOR: *(harder, taking a step toward ETHAN)* You do know - so say it!

ETHAN: *(getting nervous, quickly)* No, we're not friends.

TREVOR: No, cuz friends don't tell the whole school that you're stupid losers.

ETHAN: *(looking away, starting to panic)* ...I didn't...

TREVOR: Didn't what? Didn't say it? Cuz that'd mean I'm lying. Is that what you're saying?

ETHAN: No-

TREVOR: So you did say it.

ETHAN: I wasn't thinking.

TREVOR: No, you weren't. You know, you're pretty dumb, aren't you?

(Everyone freezes - except SONIA, who speaks directly to the audience (like the opening), articulating her inner-monologue.)

SONIA: I can't watch this. Sometimes I really hate this school.

(The action unfreezes as SONIA walks off. Seeing SONIA exit, KIM follows her offstage.)

KIM: *(as she exits, to SONIA)* Hey, wait up!

TREVOR: *(to ETHAN)* Say it. I wanna hear you say how dumb you are.

(By this point, the kids still onstage are watching - some of them, including MARC and DILLON, laughing. MIKE sees this, wants the students to think he's funny, too:)

MIKE: *(louder, to make sure everyone can hear)* Yeah, say it.

ETHAN: *(quietly)* ...I'm dumb.

TREVOR: Louder.

ETHAN: *(a little louder)* I'm dumb.

TREVOR: I can't hear you.

MIKE: Yeah, I can't hear you, too.

ETHAN: *(loud, embarrassed)* I'm dumb, I'm dumb, I'm dumb!

(The action freezes as JADEN turns to the audience.)

JADEN: Someone else will help. I just need to stay out of it.

(The action unfreezes as JADEN exits.)

TREVOR: You better than us?

ETHAN: No.

(The other students laugh some more.)

TREVOR: *(quickly, intense)* No - cuz you're a loser. A no-good loser that everyone else would be better off without. You make everyone else's life worse and they'd all be happier if you just disappeared. Isn't that right?

ETHAN: ...Yes.

(A beat as TREVOR stares at ETHAN, taking comfort in his misery.)

TREVOR: *(firm, confident)* That's right.

(TREVOR, satisfied, starts to walk away. The other students start to move off, too. MIKE, sensing this, jumps back in:)

MIKE: *(to ETHAN, loud)* And who's gay?

(A slight beat.)

TREVOR: *(not sure what MIKE's talking about)* What?

MIKE: *(quietly, to TREVOR)* Sonia was laughing at me earlier, so I told her- *(louder, so others can hear)* -Ethan's gay. *(to ETHAN)* Gay for Jacob. *(then)* Say it.

(The students whisper to each other and snicker - clearly this rumor's going to spread fast. MIKE likes the reaction this is getting.)

MIKE: *(to ETHAN)* You heard me - say it.

(Everyone freezes as EDDIE and DOMINIQUE turn to the audience.)

DOMINIQUE: I'd help, but... *(an embarrassing admission)* ...Trevor and Mike really scare me.

EDDIE: *(re: ETHAN)* Hey, better him than me.

(The action unfreezes as EDDIE and DOMINIQUE exit.)

(A beat as ETHAN looks at the floor, unable to make eye contact. MIKE doesn't like being ignored, starts to feel self-conscious.)

MIKE: Ethan. Say it.

ETHAN: *(quietly)* No.

MIKE: What?

ETHAN: *(louder)* No, no, I won't, cuz, cuz you know what? *(anger and frustration pouring out of him now, to both TREVOR and MIKE)* Cuz my parents are right - you are losers. You're dumb, and, and no one likes you. You think being jerks to me is gonna make you cooler? Calling me gay makes you more liked? Well, screw you - I don't give a crap what you say. Cuz you're nothing.

(A shocked silence.)

(Then, the final bell rings.)

(The action freezes as MARC and DILLON turn to the audience.)

DILLON: It was just supposed to be a joke.

MARC: I am not getting in trouble for this.

(The action unfreezes as Dillon and Marc exit.)

(A long beat as ETHAN, MIKE and TREVOR stare at each other. KAYLA (the last chorus member onstage) watches nervously.)

ETHAN: I, uh, gotta get to class...

(ETHAN starts to back away. When he turns his back on TREVOR and MIKE, TREVOR quickly crosses toward ETHAN.)

KAYLA: *(a warning)* Ethan!

MIKE: *(to KAYLA)* Shut up!

(ETHAN turns back around as TREVOR reaches him - and pushes him to the ground. The moment ETHAN lands, the action freezes. KAYLA turns to the audience.)

KAYLA: Someone needs to do something.

(The action unfreezes as KAYLA runs offstage.)

(ETHAN tries to get to his feet, but TREVOR kicks him in the stomach.)

MIKE: *(under his breath)* Oh, no.

(ETHAN is now on his stomach, his hands covering his head to protect himself.)

TREVOR: *(to ETHAN)* Get up. I said get up.

(TREVOR smacks ETHAN's hands, trying to knock them off his head.)

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(During this, KEVIN steps onstage (at an angle where TREVOR doesn't notice him), watching in horror.)

TREVOR: *(to ETHAN)* Don't you dare ignore me. *(to MIKE)* Help me flip him over. *(a slight beat as MIKE hesitates, then commanding)* Mike.

(Mike moves forward to help TREVOR turn over Ethan. Ethan tries to struggle, but the two larger kids are able to turn him over.)

(TREVOR pins ETHAN to the ground with his knees and punches him. TREVOR stands back up, looks at MIKE.)

TREVOR: Kick him.

MIKE: W-what?

TREVOR: Kick him.

MIKE: *(really doesn't want to)* Trevor, I don't think-

TREVOR: *(yelling)* Do what I said!

(MIKE, scared, rushes forward and kicks ETHAN.)

(TREVOR stares at ETHAN, who isn't moving, as MIKE starts to cry.)

(Overwhelmed, MIKE runs off. TREVOR turns to look at MIKE - and sees KEVIN.)

TREVOR: *(surprised)* Kev?

(KEVIN looks at TREVOR, suddenly afraid.)

TREVOR: *(friendly)* Hey, I-

(TREVOR takes a step toward him. Terrified, KEVIN quickly backs away.)

KEVIN: *(scared)* Don't.

(TREVOR is hurt and confused by this response. He tries to move more quickly toward KEVIN.)

TREVOR: Kevin-

(Freaked out, KEVIN runs off. This clearly hurts TREVOR. He stands shocked for a second, then:)

TREVOR: Kev, come back.

(TREVOR exits after KEVIN.)

(ETHAN lies on the ground alone for a beat...)

(...then KAYLA suddenly runs on, followed closely by JACOB and MARIA.)

KAYLA: Over here!

JACOB: *(seeing ETHAN)* Ethan!

MARIA: Oh, God. *(to KAYLA)* Go get the nurse.

(KAYLA nods as she runs off.)

(MARIA and JACOB both kneel next to ETHAN.)

ETHAN: *(mumbling)* Jacob?

(ETHAN tries to move so he can see them better. MARIA gently puts a hand on his shoulder.)

MARIA: Hey, hey, don't move 'til the nurse gets here. It's okay now.

JACOB: Yeah, yeah. We're here now, buddy. We're here.

(They freeze as the chorus members - plus KEVIN - file back onstage and stand in a line in front of MARIA, JACOB and ETHAN.)

KEVIN: How could I not know my own brother was like that?

SONIA: How could anyone do something so awful?

KIM: How is this my problem?

JADEN: What could I have done?

DOMINIQUE: Is it my fault if I can't help?

EDDIE: Why am I the one who has to help?

MARC: Why'd it have to go so far?

DILLON: Why can't he just laugh it off?

KAYLA: Is there more I could have done?

(The chorus opens in the middle, leaving space for ETHAN, MARIA and JACOB, all three now standing. They step into the line on the following lines.)

JACOB: All are fair questions.

MARIA: But maybe not the right ones.

ETHAN: Or maybe it's not about asking questions at all.

(The chorus looks offstage - where TREVOR and MIKE enter.)

MIKE: Maybe it's about listening.

TREVOR: To the other person's story.

ETHAN: To their pain.

MIKE: Frustrations.

TREVOR: Insecurities.

ETHAN: But also their hopes.

MIKE: Goals.

TREVOR: Likes.

ETHAN: It's not a solution...

(The chorus, MARIA and JACOB back up into a semi circle around MIKE, TREVOR, and ETHAN.)

CHORUS: ...But it's a start.

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(ETHAN, MIKE, and TREVOR stare at each other for a second, then sit on the floor and begin talking to each other, trying to share their stories. The chorus watches them. The lights slowly fade out during the following...)

TREVOR: My dad's angry a lot. Takes it out on my mom. 'Til she finally left.

MIKE: *(a little surprised, feels sorry for TREVOR)* I didn't know that.

ETHAN: Me neither.

TREVOR: *(shrugs)* Well... *(to ETHAN)* What about you?

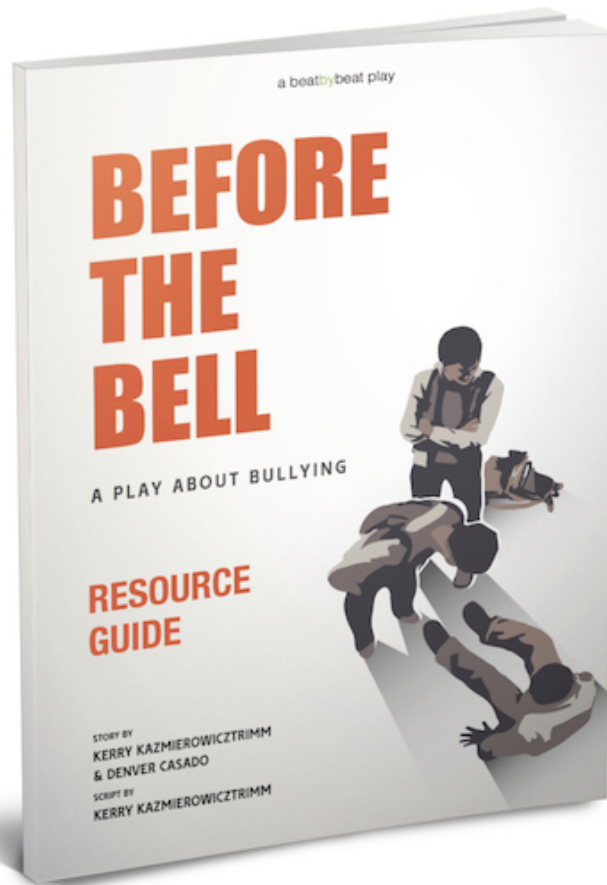
ETHAN: Oh. I guess, I'm scared of losing my best friend. My other friend, Maria, is around a lot more, and, I mean, I like her, but I'm afraid he's gonna lose interest in me.

MIKE: *(a moment of understanding)* Yeah. Yeah, I get that...

(...fade to black.)

END OF PLAY.

The following pages are a preview of the extra resources that come with this play, including the Resource Guide, Director Book & Sound Cues.



The BEFORE THE BELL Resource Guide provides teachers and directors with a comprehensive toolkit for exploring the themes of the play. It contains 40 pages of 22 meaningful and engaging activities for continuing the conversation in the classroom or during rehearsal.

The next 2 pages are a preview of this resource:

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Section 1: Classroom/Rehearsal Activities

	Strategy	Objective
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	The Truth About Me (as yourself) PAGE 8	Participants share truths about themselves to find commonalities amongst the group.
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1.2 Before Reading the Play	Poster Dialogue PAGE 11	Share thoughts related to bullying before extensive work on the play.
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BUILDING COMMUNITY / IDENTITY ICEBERG

Objective: Explore what identity means, consider which identities can and can't be seen, and name identity markers that the group is interested in sharing/discussing.

Materials Needed: Paper, Pencils, Poster/Chart Paper, Markers and Post-It Notes

Time Needed: 20 minutes

In "Before the Bell", characters wrestle with their identity. In this activity, we're going to explore what identity means.

Let's begin by brainstorming a list of identity categories. Ask the class to provide a list of things in which one can identify by. Write them on the board. Possible responses could be: gender, religion, familial relationship, profession, etc.

Based on these categories, we have various identity markers that someone may use to describe themselves (such as Indian, male, gay, brother, adopted, etc).

Ask the class to take out a notepad, and give them one minute to create a list of identity markers about themselves.

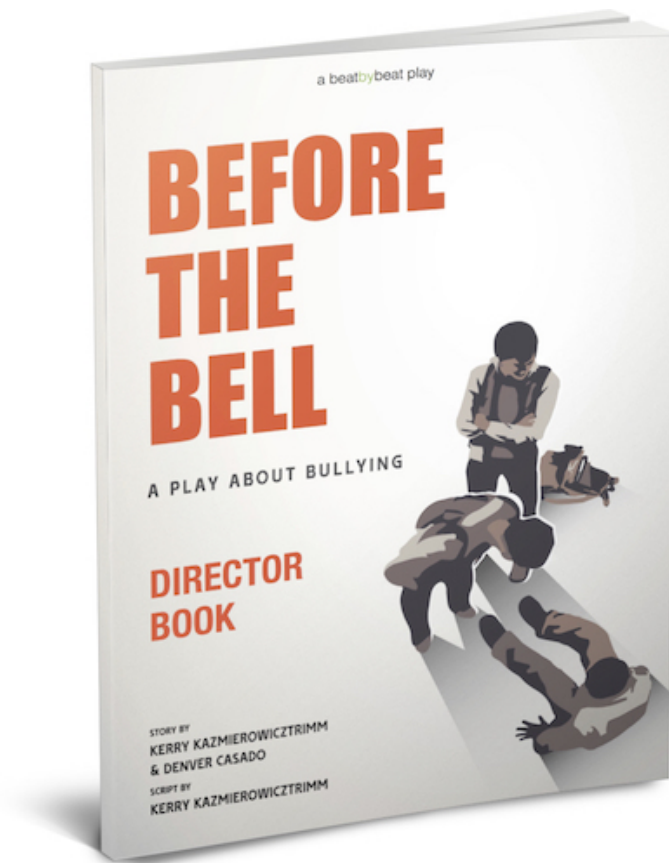
From this list, they must pick five they are comfortable sharing. They should write each one on a different post-it note.

On a large piece of poster/chart paper (or dry erase board) draw a horizontal line across the page to represent a "water line". Then draw a curved vertical "mountain" across the page to represent an "iceberg", which starts below the "water line" where a large formation sits below the water and small portion sticks out above the water.

Look at your post-it notes. Decide which identity markers can be seen and which are hidden. Place your post-it notes on the iceberg. If the identity marker can be seen, place it above the water line. If it is hidden, place it below the water line. There's no right or wrong answer, it's up to you to choose where it goes.

Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to write down your identity markers?
- What types of identity markers did we as a group choose to include/exclude?
- What do you notice about where identity markers are placed on the poster? Why do you think that happened?
- How does the metaphor of an iceberg relate to how others perceive us?
- Were any identity markers surprising to see either above or below the water line?



The BEFORE THE BELL Director Book contains the full script with embedded playwright notes on character relationships, staging suggestions and cues for when to play the incidental music and sound effects. On the bottom of each page is a blank stage template to keep track of your blocking.

The next 3-pages are a preview of this resource:

BEFORE THE BELL Director Book

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

ETHAN. Sensitive, bouts of anxiety, generally keeps to himself. Friends with Jacob and Maria. Has been best friends with Jacob since childhood, and protective of the time he gets to spend with him. Gets harassed by Mike and Trevor, but ultimately stands up for himself, which leads to physical confrontation.

Line Count: 115

MIKE. Friends with Trevor, looks up to him. Bullies Ethan. Easily provoked. Has a hard time academically and very self-conscious about it. Short fuse, lashes out when feeling threatened. Feels the need to push people away. Comes from neglectful family.

Line Count: 124

TREVOR. Friends with Mike, older brother of Kevin. Abused at home by his dad. Loyal, acts like a parent to Kevin, tries to protect him. Has built up resentment and anger that boils over when provoked. Unable to control his body or emotions.

Line Count: 127

JACOB. Best friends with Ethan since childhood. Friends with Maria. Simple, outspoken. Well intentioned, oblivious to Maria's feelings toward him. Has a crush on Kim.

Line Count: 73

MARIA. Friends with Ethan and Jacob. Tries to fit in and be "one of the guys". Warm-hearted. Has a crush on Jacob, but shy about it. Cares for Ethan.

Line Count: 59

SONIA. Friends with Kim. Well-intentioned and genuine. Has a crush on Ethan. Sort of exists in Kim's shadow.

Line Count: 20

KIM. Friends with Sonia. Popular at school. Can be a bit mean at times, but it comes from a place of insecurity. Has feelings for Jacob.

Line count: 30

KAYLA. Mike's tutor. Well-intentioned and does genuinely want to help Mike. She also always wants to please her teachers.

Line Count: 54

BEFORE THE BELL

Story by Kerry Kazmierowicztrimm & Denver Casado

Script by Kerry Kazmierowicztrimm

(We open on a blank stage.)

(Eight students - MARC, JADEN, KAYLA, DILLON, SONIA, KIM, DOMINIQUE and EDDIE - enter. They stand in a line at the front of the stage, facing the audience. Here, they function as a chorus. ETHAN, MARIA, and JACOB enter upstage of the chorus at the same time, getting into places without being noticed by the audience.)

(During the following, the chorus speaks directly to the audience. After they each say their line, they turn away from the audience, get into positions to start the first scene, and freeze.)

SONIA: That shouldn't have happened.

MARC: I thought they were just talking to him. Maybe scaring him a bit, but that's it. I didn't expect them to...

KIM: I mean, he *was* kinda asking for it.

KAYLA: Someone needed to do something.

DOMINIQUE: I wanted to help, but those guys freak me out.

EDDIE: Hey, better him than me.

DILLON: It was just a joke, he didn't have to take it so seriously.

JADEN: I woulda told a teacher or something, but there were so many of us, I figured someone else must be going to get some help. *(beat)* You know?

(As EDDIE turns into his position, we now see MARIA, JACOB, and ETHAN - frozen, mid conversation, in the middle of the stage. As the ANNOUNCEMENT starts, everyone unfreezes. The kids are in little clumps throughout the stage, creating a semi-circle, within which MARIA, JACOB and ETHAN stand. Unless indicated, the kids in the clumps pantomime their own conversations, like they're all hanging out outside the school before classes start.)

(The kids talk quietly amongst themselves during the following:)

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.): Good morning, students. Today is Friday the seventeenth. The weather is expected to be bright and mild all day, so all extra-curricular activities will happen as scheduled. Tickets are still on sale for tonight's pep rally, which also get you into the first game of our basketball season - go Panthers! After the game, the ticket will get you into the cafeteria, where there will be refreshments, healthy snacks, and a DJ. Final bell is in twenty minutes, so start heading to your lockers. And have a productive day!

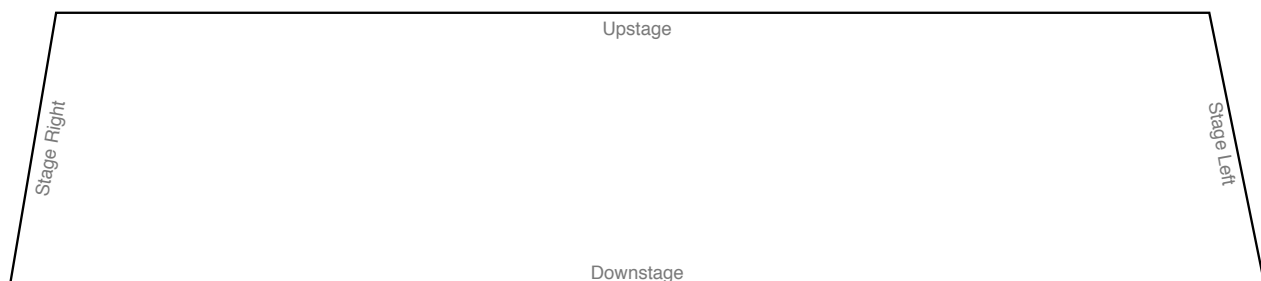
TRACK #1: Opening

This is a variation on the classic Greek chorus, but rather than the cast simply recounting events that happened, we're just hearing little snippets of each character's perspective on what happened. There are a couple of ways you can have the actors approach this dialogue: 1) that these are their inner-monologues - what they were thinking after the bullying occurred, and the audience is hearing those thoughts out loud. Or 2) as if they're talking to someone they know about what happened and they're trying to justify why they didn't do anything to help; in that case, tell them to imagine a friend of theirs out in the audience and they're speaking directly to that person.

The members of the chorus should act like they're carrying on their own conversations, but they shouldn't make any noise (or, at the most, minimal whispering). However, pretending to talk (lips moving, but no sound coming out) will probably feel weird to the cast at first, so a good way to get them used to it could be to have them, during rehearsals, have an actual conversation with their group members, and then have them recreate the same conversation for the performance - but with no sound.

TRACK #2: Announcement

5



BEFORE THE BELL Director Book Preview (3/3)

BEFORE THE BELL | a beatbybeat play

JACOB: (to MARIA, re: ETHAN) Yeah, he's got a point, we're- (sees the comic, suddenly super excited) Dude, how'd you get that?!

MARIA: (shrugs, pleased with herself) Amazon.

(ETHAN, a little annoyed he got ignored, comes over and looks at the comic.)

ETHAN: You did not get that on Amazon.

MARIA: How do you know?

ETHAN: Cuz it's crazy rare.

MARIA: Maybe I just got lucky.

JACOB: (re: the comic) Dude, that is nuts. I've been looking for this one for, like, years.

MARIA: (tries to suppress a smile, to JACOB) Yeah, well...happy birthday.

ETHAN: What?

JACOB: (confused) Yeah, uh, what?

MARIA: It's your birthday present.

(A surprised beat.)

JACOB: (not sure what to say) My, uh, my birthday's not for a couple weeks.

MARIA: Yeah, but it just got here last night, and I couldn't wait, I guess, so... (a slight beat, then joking) Just don't expect anything else on your actual birthday.

JACOB: (still surprised, but really pleased) Thanks, Maria. This is awesome.

(JACOB hugs MARIA as she smiles and blushes a bit. ETHAN watches, looking a little jealous. The hug ends.)

MARIA: (embarrassed but pleased) It was nothing.

(JACOB admires the comic during the following.)

ETHAN: (quietly, to MARIA) How much did that cost you?

MARIA: (waves it off) Not important.

ETHAN: (quietly) Maria, that's like a lot of money. (stops, realizing) You like Jacob.

MARIA: (knows what he means, but trying to ignore it) Of course I like him - he's my best friend. And you, too.

ETHAN: (quietly, to MARIA) Not like that. Like-

MARIA: (suddenly nervous, changing the subject, louder so JACOB can hear) What were you saying about Superman? Before I interrupted you.

ETHAN: (trying to stay on topic) Maria, do you-

MARIA: (ignoring ETHAN, to JACOB) Jacob, Superman's better than Batman, right?

JACOB: Pfft - no. Batman's a ga-jillion times better than Superman.

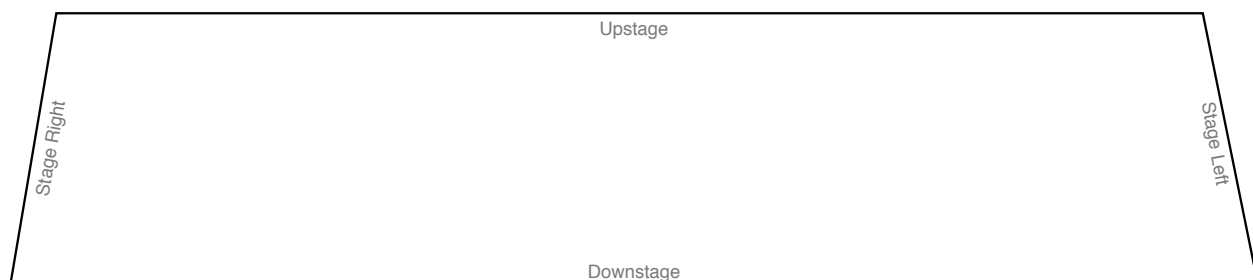
MARIA: Ethan, you have anything to say about that?

Jacob's feelings towards Maria: Jacob has been friends with her long enough that he just sees her as "one of the guys." So when she does something really nice for him, he just sees it as one friend doing a nice thing for another.

This is the moment that first raises the question in the play, "Is Ethan gay?" The answer is, at least for the story, it doesn't matter. It's not about whether he's actually gay or not - it's about the fact that people are treating him badly because they think he might be different. However, for the actor playing Ethan and the director, it's important that they make a choice as to whether Ethan thinks he might be gay. That choice, however, doesn't have to be shared with the rest of the cast, because the point is they're all drawing their own conclusions about Ethan.

Another choice the director and the actor playing Ethan should discuss: Why does Ethan so badly want to confirm that Maria has feelings for Jacob? Some possibilities: 1) he knows that Jacob has feelings for Kim, and therefore is concerned that Maria's going to find out and get hurt. 2) Ethan has feelings for Jacob himself, and therefore is feeling a little jealous. (Or it could be that he's feeling both.)

7



BEFORE THE BELL Sound Cues



A screenshot of the composition project for *Before the Bell*.

The BEFORE THE BELL Sound Cues contains 14 high-quality music and sound effects (MP3s) to enhance the live performance of the play. The music was composed specifically for this piece by award-winning composer Denver Casado. The cues underscore the scene transitions and the final fight sequence.

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