

Liberty University English Department

The Impact of Creative and Performing Arts in the Chicago Public School System

A Thesis Submitted to
Dr. Durrell Nelson

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Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

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Liberty University English Department

T h e s i s A p p r o v a l S h e e t

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D e d i c a t i o n

I dedicate this work to every public-school student who has ever felt unseen, unheard, and uninspired. May the performing arts forever be an available platform and outlet for your creative expression.

-L.A. Holts

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

I ' d l i k e t o t h a n k m y L i b e r t y U n i v e r s i t y p r o f
Program. You all have made this challenging experience enjoyable, insightful, and inspirational.
Your words of encouragement, prayers, and practical wisdom have been the driving force of my
d e t e r m i n a t i o n . I ' d l i k e t o t h a n k A u d r e t t a H o l t s a n d f a m i l y f o r t h e i r
s p o n s o r s h i p a n d s u p p o r t d u r i n g m y p u r s u i t o f
Johnson for the encouragement and push to c o n t i n u e m y e d u c a t i o n . I ' d l i k e
l i s t e n i n g t o t h e l o n g h o u r s o f m e r e a d i n g m y
my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me the supernatural strength to know that I can do all
things through Him that strengthened me.

T h e s i s

This thesis examines the importance of creative and performing arts through the multifaceted production, "Mop and Bunkies" which was also created to bring awareness to Chicago's inner city gun violence, poverty, absentee fatherhood, and lack of access to quality public schools, in high crime areas. By analyzing the thematic elements, artistic techniques, and socio-political impact of the play, this study seeks to shed light on the potential of theater as a powerful medium for social change and educational reform.

S e c t i o n 1 : A r t i s t s

A. IMPETUS

In the bustling halls of public schools, a quiet revolution is taking place, one that champions the importance of creative arts in education. As a fervent advocate for the creative arts, I have navigated the labyrinth of the public school system, driven by an unwavering passion for artistic expression. In this artists' statement, I will share my personal journey, emphasizing the significance of fostering creativity within the structured environment of public education.

From a young age, my affinity for the creative arts became apparent. Drawing inspiration from the thunderous applause of the audience or the harmonious sounds of the gospel choir, I found solace and joy in expressing myself through various artistic mediums. I believe public schools, as crucibles of knowledge and personal development, need to recognize and harness this innate creativity within students. By incorporating art, music, theater, dance, and other creative outlets into the curriculum, schools can create an encouraging environment for students to explore and nurture their passions.

The creative arts provide a unique avenue for self-expression, allowing students to communicate thoughts and emotions that may be challenging to articulate through traditional means. In a time where standardized testing and academic benchmarks dominate the educational landscape, it is crucial to remember that a child's ability to express themselves creatively is equally valuable. The

arts offer a language that transcends the limitations of words, fostering a sense of identity and empowerment in students.

Being a former performing arts student within the public school system in grammar and high school, I know how much the arts enhanced my childhood and gave me the confidence to thrive in every other area of life. I've had the pleasure of gracing the stage as a teen in theater and music. I've won excellent marks in classical singing competitions and have written and directed plays as an adult. I've excelled academically throughout school.

to Egana-delSol, "Although the aim of art-based programs is often to increase artistic competency in the targeted medium (painting, drama, music, etc.), these programs often incorporate other metrics, such as increasing test scores in mathematics or reading comprehension, as secondary or tertiary objectives" (Egana-delSol 39) My passion for the performing arts is as powerful as the air that I breathe, and I cannot ignore the impact that being in the arts had on my academic success. I have a desire to blow life into the students who have been starved of their creativity, by being an example of how the arts can affect every area of education in a positive way.

Confidence & Resilience

Engaging in creative pursuits within the public school system has a profound impact on a child's confidence and resilience. Whether it's performing in a school play, showcasing artwork in an exhibition, or participating in a musical ensemble, students learn to embrace challenges and overcome obstacles. These experiences instill a sense of pride and accomplishment, nurturing a

resilient mindset that extends beyond the realm of the arts into other facets of academic and personal growth.

Critical Thinking

The creative arts are not mere extracurricular activities as some would say, they are essential catalysts for developing critical thinking skills. Discussing literature, interpreting a painting, analyzing scripts, or composing a piece of music requires students to think critically and make informed decisions. These cognitive abilities are transferable to other academic disciplines, contributing to a well-rounded education that prepares students for the complexities of the real world.

Inclusivity and Diversity

Public schools serve as melting pots of diversity, bringing together students from various backgrounds and cultures. The creative arts provide a platform for celebrating this diversity and fostering inclusivity. Through collaborative projects, students learn to appreciate different perspectives, cultivating empathy and understanding. The arts have the power to break down barriers and create a sense of unity among students, promoting a harmonious learning environment.

In a world driven by innovation and creativity, the role of the public school system in nurturing the artistic passions of students is paramount. My journey through the public education system has been shaped by my unwavering belief in the transformative power of the creative and performing

arts. By recognizing the importance of self-expression, building confidence, cultivating critical thinking skills, and fostering inclusivity, public schools can become incubators of creativity, preparing students not only for academic success but also for a future where their unique voices contribute to a vibrant and dynamic society. As we advocate for the retention and enhancement of creative arts programs in public schools, we invest in the holistic development of future generations, ensuring that the flame of passion for the arts continues to burn brightly in the hearts of students.

B. BACKGROUND

I'm no stranger to the creative world. I've been deeply involved in film, television, and stage for over two decades. With a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Fiction Writing, I graduated in the top 10 percent of my class, setting the stage for a career marked by passion and accomplishment.

My journey spans a diverse range of productions, with over 30 productions under my belt. From notable performances in "Five on the Black Hand Side" and "The Temple" to memorable roles like Stacey in the Emmy award-winning Christian Soap Opera, "The Awakening," and leading the musical "Shining Through," my experience in the industry has been both extensive and varied. In addition to my acting career, I've ventured into writing and directing, contributing significantly to the world of television, film, and stage. My signature plays, including "13 Women," "13 Men," "Dance Me a Poem," and "Doors," reflect my creative prowess. I've even ventured into the world of online education with private writing courses.

As a published author with twelve self-published books to my name, such as "Prophetic Directing for Stage & Film", "Stage Parents Playbook: Tips on Safe Filming", "Overcoming Audition Rejection: Practical Tips for Actors & Actresses", "The Heart of a Servant" Currently, I'm making waves as the writer of the sitcom "The Coleman Show" on Amazon Prime and Tubi.

Beyond the screen and stage, my vocal background is rooted in classical training since the age of 12. I've seamlessly blended my musical and theatrical talents, professionally coaching actors, and

speakers for over 20 years. From opera to speech and communications, I've honed my skills, helping others overcome the fear of public speaking and pursue careers as motivational speakers and life coaches.

But my talents don't stop there. As a stage combat choreographer, minister of prophetic spoken word, special effects make-up artist, and creator of original Sand Creation art, I've explored various avenues within the creative realm. Giving back, I've sponsored the Children's Film Festival in past years, contributing to the next generation of creatives.

A l t h o u g h m y b a c k g r o u n d i n t h e a r t s i s e x t e n s
experiences had I not been exposed to the arts within the Chicago public school system. Having experienced private performing arts schools and public performing arts schools, the key component was the freedom of creative expression.

C. Process for Work

Embarking on the journey of creating a reader's theater performance for a master's thesis is both a challenging and exhilarating endeavor. For me, the process involves careful consideration of every element, from script development to casting, rehearsals, and ultimately capturing the essence of the performance on film.

Script Development

The foundation of any compelling reader's theater performance lies in a well-crafted script. The initial stage involves me conceptualizing a narrative that not only aligns with the objectives of the thesis but also captivates the audience. My script should be rich in dialogue, providing my actors with opportunities for expressive delivery while allowing the audience to engage with the narrative solely through spoken words.

Casting the Play

Once my script takes shape, my next crucial step is casting. Unlike traditional theater productions, reader's theater places emphasis on vocal performance rather than physical presence. Careful consideration must be given to selecting actors who can convey the nuances of the characters through voice modulation, tone, and inflection. Casting becomes a collaborative process, aligning my vision with the talent of the chosen actors.

Rehearsals

With the cast in place, the rehearsal process commences. In reader's theater, rehearsals focus on refining vocal delivery, timing, and the overall flow of the performance. Since actors are not required to memorize lines or engage in elaborate blocking, rehearsals are an opportunity to explore the emotional depth of the characters solely through their voices. My role during rehearsals is to provide guidance, offer insight into character motivations, and ensure that the essence of my script is conveyed effectively.

Technical Considerations

As a master's thesis project, the reader's theater performance may require additional technical considerations. This includes selecting an appropriate venue for filming, considering lighting and sound requirements, and coordinating with any technical support personnel. The goal is for me to create an engaging recording that does justice to the performances of the actors and the spirit of the message of my script.

Filming the Play

The culmination of the process involves capturing the reader's theater performance on film. This step requires meticulous planning to ensure that the visual element complements the strength of the vocal performances. I will work closely with a cinematographer to achieve my desired

cinematic quality. Multiple takes may be necessary to create a final product that aligns with my artistic vision.

Editing the Submission

Post-filming, the final step involves editing the footage to create a cohesive and polished presentation. I may collaborate with other editors to fine-tune the recording, ensuring that it aligns with the creative vision and meets the academic requirements of my master's thesis. Once the editing process is complete, my final project is submitted, showcasing the culmination of months of dedication, creativity, and collaboration.

Creating a reader's theater performance for my master's thesis is a multi-faceted journey that combines the artistry of scriptwriting with the intricacies of vocal performance and film production. As a playwright, navigating this process involves not only crafting a compelling narrative but also collaborating with a talented cast, orchestrating rehearsals, and overseeing the technical aspects of filming. The result is a unique and immersive experience that captures the soul of live theater while offering a distinctive approach to storytelling. In undertaking this work, students can be inspired to pursue their creative endeavors.

D. Vision for Work

Creative works such as theater productions play a pivotal role in shaping the holistic development of students. Unfortunately, schools facing budget cuts often find themselves forced to make difficult decisions, with art programs being among the first to suffer. My vision seeks to reimagine the educational experience for underserved children by championing the integration of theater programs into schools that have faced financial constraints.

Access to the Performing Arts for All

The heart of my vision lies in giving students access to the performing arts within lower-income areas. By implementing theater programs in schools with budget cuts, I aspire to provide underserved children with opportunities to explore their creativity, hone their talents, and experience the transformative power of live performances. Every child, regardless of socio-economic background, deserves to experience creative expression as part of the educational process.

Educational Enrichment Beyond the Classroom

Theater programs go beyond the confines of traditional classroom learning. They provide a platform for experiential education, fostering skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. By introducing these programs into underserved schools, I aim to supplement

academic curricula with hands-on, immersive experiences that not only enhance cognitive abilities but also instill a lifelong love for learning.

Cultural and Social Inclusivity

The performing arts have the unique ability to break down barriers and promote cultural and social inclusivity. By bringing theater programs to underserved schools, I aim to create environments where students from diverse backgrounds come together to celebrate their differences and share common experiences. The stage becomes a microcosm of society, fostering understanding and empathy among students.

Building Confidence and Resilience

Underserved children often face challenges that can impact their self-esteem and confidence. Theater programs provide a supportive space for students to express themselves, build confidence, and develop resilience. Through rehearsals, performances, and collaborative projects, students learn the value of perseverance and gain a sense of accomplishment that extends beyond the stage into other areas of their lives.

Community Engagement and Support

Implementing theater programs in underserved schools necessitates community engagement and support. Local artists, educators, and community members can play crucial roles in mentoring, coaching, and providing resources. This collaborative effort not only enriches the educational experience for students but also fosters a sense of community pride and ownership in the success of the theater programs.

Advocacy for Arts Education

My vision extends beyond individual schools to a broader advocacy for arts education. By showcasing the positive impact of theater programs on underserved communities, I seek to garner support at local, regional, and national levels. Advocacy efforts may involve partnering with policymakers, community leaders, and philanthropic organizations to secure sustainable funding and resources for ongoing arts education initiatives.

Implementing theater programs in schools facing budget cuts is not just about creating opportunities for artistic expression; it's about empowering underserved children to dream, discover, and thrive. This vision envisions a future where every child, regardless of economic circumstances, has access to the transformative power of the performing arts. By weaving theater into the fabric of underserved schools, we pave the way for a more inclusive, enriching, and empowering educational experience—one that transcends budgetary constraints and unlocks the boundless potential within every student.

E. Literary Context for Work

The integration of creative programs into underserved schools is not just an educational initiative; it is a narrative woven into the fabric of literature, echoing the timeless themes of empowerment, resilience, and social change. Looking into the literary context of my vision, I discover echoes of similar stories that champion the arts as a catalyst for societal progress and individual growth.

The Power of Arts in Literature

Literature has long recognized the profound impact of the arts on the human experience. From Shakespearian plays that explore the intricacies of the human condition to August Wilson's dramatic narratives illuminating the African American experience, the written word has often celebrated the transformative power of the performing arts. By integrating theater programs into underserved schools, a continued literary tradition that recognizes the arts as a mirror reflecting the complexities of society, takes place.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of arts education in public schools, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. This essay aims to explore the positive impact of performing arts education on low-income students in public schools. By examining scholarly literature, my essay will demonstrate how access to performing arts programs can benefit students academically, socially, and emotionally. Through analysis of empirical studies and expert opinions, this essay will provide evidence supporting the argument that performing arts

education can contribute to the holistic development of low-income students, ultimately narrowing the achievement gap and fostering equitable opportunities in education.

Academic Achievement

Research suggests a strong correlation between participation in performing arts programs and academic achievement among low-income students. According to Hattie and Marsh (2005), "Engagement in arts education can enhance cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, which are essential for academic success". Furthermore, a study by Johnson (2012) found that, "students who participated in music education demonstrated higher standardized test scores and improved grades compared to their peers who did not have access to such programs". These findings underscore the academic benefits of integrating performing arts into the curriculum, particularly for low-income students who may face additional barriers to academic success.

Social and Emotional Development

In addition to academic gains, performing arts education can positively impact the social and emotional development of low-income students. "The performing arts encourages children to explore their emotions, expand their imagination, and helps them develop their own, unique voice. Each discipline of music, dance, and drama engages a child's brain, body, and emotions in different ways to encourage their confidence and find joy in self-expression. We cannot underestimate importance of " e, developing a creative mind and fostering personalities and

imaginations as our students make their journey through school, to become happy and well-rounded individuals (Noid, 2022). Through participation in theatrical productions, music ensembles, and dance performances, students have an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, build confidence, and cultivate empathy. According to Bolton (2010), involvement in the performing arts fosters a sense of belonging and community among students, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Moreover, a report by the National Endowment for the Arts (2012) found that students who engage in performing arts activities exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and resilience, which are crucial for navigating challenges both inside and outside the classroom. These findings highlight the role of performing arts education in promoting social cohesion and emotional well-being among low-income students.

Equity and Access

Despite the numerous benefits associated with performing arts education, access to such programs remains limited for many low-income students in public schools. According to the American School of Arts and Sciences, "While 88% of Americans agree that arts education is an essential component of a well-rounded education, there has been a persistent decline in support for arts education, particularly in communities (Rutter, 2021). This that inequity perpetuates existing socioeconomic divides and deprives students of valuable learning opportunities. To address this issue, policymakers and educators must prioritize equitable funding and resource allocation to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have access to high-quality performing arts education. By investing in the arts, schools can empower low-income students to reach their full potential and break the cycle of poverty.

Education as Liberation in Literary Works

Literary masterpieces often depict education as a pathway to liberation, and the introduction of theater programs into underserved schools aligns seamlessly with this theme. Characters like Matilda, from Roald Dahl's novel, showcase the liberating force of education in overcoming adversity. In the context of my vision, theater programs become the key to unlocking the creative potential of underserved children, offering them a liberating and educational experience.

Theater as a Symbol of Resilience

Literary works frequently depict characters who find strength and resilience through artistic expression. The journey of characters like Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" or Anne Frank in her eponymous diary underscores the power of resilience in the face of adversity. By introducing arts and theater programs in underserved schools, students are provided with a medium through which they can navigate challenges, develop resilience, and emerge stronger, echoing the literary narratives of triumph over hardship.

Inclusivity and Diversity

Literature champions the importance of inclusivity and diversity, themes that resonate with the vision of theater programs in underserved schools. Works such as Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God" or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun" celebrate the

rich tapestry of human experiences. Similarly, theater programs become a platform for underserved children to share their unique narratives, fostering inclusivity and embracing the diversity within their communities.

Community Empowerment in Literary Narratives

Literary narratives often explore the impact of communal efforts. In stories like "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee or "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck, communities come together to bring about change. The vision of implementing theater programs aligns with this theme, emphasizing community engagement and support as crucial elements in empowering underserved schools. The theater becomes a stage where communities unite to uplift their children through the arts.

Conclusion

Performing arts education plays a crucial role in enriching the lives of low-income students in public schools. From enhancing academic achievement to fostering social and emotional development, performing arts programs offer a myriad of benefits that can positively impact students' lives. However, access to these programs is often limited, highlighting the need for greater equity and inclusion in arts education. By prioritizing funding and resources for performing arts programs in public schools, policymakers and educators can create a more equitable educational landscape and ensure that all students have an opportunity to thrive. As we strive for educational excellence and social justice, let us recognize the

transformative power of the performing arts in shaping the lives of low-income students and building a brighter future for generations to come.

F. Significance of Topic as a Christian Scholar

As a Christian scholar, the significance of advocating for and implementing arts programs in underserved schools extends beyond educational enrichment; it embodies a commitment to instill Christian values. This vision aligns seamlessly with my Christian views, emphasizing compassion, justice, and the empowerment of the marginalized. In exploring the significance of this topic, we can explore Christian principles that serve as the foundation of the power of performing arts in underserved communities.

Creative Expression

Rooted in the Christian idea that every individual is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)—the introduction of theater programs recognizes the divine spark within each child. By providing a platform for creative expression, as Christian scholars, we embrace the notion that the arts are a means through which we individuals can reflect the creativity instilled in us by our Creator. Theater becomes a space where the image of Christ is celebrated and nurtured.

Theological Foundations of Empowerment

As a Christian scholar, I can draw inspiration from theological foundations that emphasize the empowerment of the marginalized and the call to seek justice. The vision of implementing theater programs in underserved schools resonates with the biblical mandate to uplift those in need. It becomes a tangible expression of my commitment in serving the least among us, recognizing that

the performing arts can be a catalyst for empowering underserved children to reach their full potential.

Cultural Engagement and Redemption

The Christian faith encourages us believers to engage with and redeem culture. Theater and the arts, as a cultural expression, offers a medium through which Christian scholars can engage with the narratives and experiences of underserved communities. By bringing the arts into schools facing budget cuts, I am contributing to the redemption of educational spaces, transforming them into environments where the redemptive message of hope and transformation is implemented into daily life.

Love in Action

At the core of the Christian faith is the commandment to love one another (John 13:34). Implementing theater programs in underserved schools becomes a tangible manifestation of Christ's love in action. Through mentorship, community engagement, and the provision of resources, I'm able to exemplify the transformative power of love, recognizing that the performing arts can be a conduit for expressing and receiving God's love within educational settings.

Cultivating Virtues through the Arts

I recognize the importance of cultivating virtues such as empathy, compassion, and perseverance. The theater, as a vehicle for storytelling and shared experiences, becomes a fertile ground for nurturing these virtues in underserved children. By instilling values aligned with Christian

teachings, I ' contribute to the holistic development of students, preparing students to navigate life's challenges with resilience and grace.

The significance of implementing theater programs in underserved schools for me lies in the alignment with foundational Christian principles of love, justice, and the recognition of G O d ' s image. It is a testament to the belief that faith is not confined to the sanctuary but extends into the realms of education, social justice, and cultural engagement. By championing the arts in underserved communities, I then can embark on a journey of faith in action, where the transformative power of theater and creative arts become a tangible expression of God's love for all His children.

S e c t i o n 2 : T h e C r i t

A. Introduction

Mop and Bucket Blues is a play that highlights the disparities in the urban public school system for performing arts programs. By shining a light on the effects of creative arts on students, my goal is to bring awareness and cause the school systems to reconsider not cutting budgets to programs that help low-income communities thrive in the arts. Mop and Bucket Blues is set in Chicago Il., where gang violence and school dropouts are at an all-time high. This critical paper will present the benefits of having performing arts in schools and the impact of creative expression from a critical perspective as well as statistics of the negative effects of gun violence, school dropouts, poverty, and absentee fathers. Although Mop and Bucket Blues is a play, the audience will be educated with real life statistics and facts based on Chicago crime while also showing how performing arts' helps to curve the negative public schools.

B. Gun Violence in Chicago

Gun violence, poverty, absentee fathers, and lack of funding all play a role in the inequality and disparity of urban schools in Chicago.

Gun Violence: Gun violence in Chicago's inner cities

While specific statistics may vary depending on the timeframe and data source, here are some general statistics on gun violence in Chicago:

Total Number of Shootings: According to the Chicago Police Department (CPD), there were over 1,800 shootings recorded in Chicago in 2023. This includes both fatal and non-fatal shootings.

Homicide Rates: Chicago has consistently ranked among the cities with the highest homicide rates in the United States. In 2023, the city reported over 617 homicides, do to gun violence.

Gang Involvement: A significant portion of gun violence in Chicago is attributed to gang activity. According to a report by the University of Chicago Crime Lab, approximately 43% of shootings in Chicago involve gang members as either victims or perpetrators.

Youth Involvement: "More than 90% of youth shooting victims were not enrolled in school. Earlier analysis by the University of Chicago Crime Lab documented 8% of those arrested were for homicides, 9% for shootings, 32% for robberies and 49% for carjackings were youth 17 years

and younger. Gun violence disproportionately affects
(University of Chicago Crime Lab.)

Gun Recovery: The CPD routinely conducts gun recovery operations to remove illegal firearms from the streets. In 2023 the CPD seized over 10,000 illegal guns as part of these efforts, which was an 18% increase from 2022, according to WTTW Chicago News Article.

Community Impact: Gun violence has profound effects on communities, including trauma, fear, and economic instability. According to a study by the Urban Institute, neighborhoods with high rates of gun violence experience lower property values and reduced economic opportunities.

C. Poverty

Poverty Rates: Chicago has a poverty rate higher than the national average. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of the latest available data, approximately 21.3% of Chicago residents live below the poverty line.

Income Inequality: Income inequality is pronounced in Chicago, with significant disparities between affluent neighborhoods and economically disadvantaged areas. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning reports that the top 20% of earners in Chicago earn 52% of the total income, while the bottom 20% earn just 3%.

Racial Disparities: Poverty disproportionately affects communities of color in Chicago. African American and Hispanic residents are more likely to experience poverty compared to their white counterparts. According to data from the Urban Institute, the poverty rate among African Americans in Chicago is approximately 25.3%, while among Hispanics, it is 23.9%, compared to 8.2% among whites.

Education and Employment: Access to quality education and employment opportunities is a key factor in poverty reduction. In Chicago, disparities in educational attainment and employment rates contribute to persistent poverty. According to the Chicago Urban League, the unemployment rate among African American residents is 15.2%, which is 7.1% higher than the citywide average.

Affordable Housing: Affordable housing is a significant concern for low-income residents in Chicago. The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless reports that 55% of renters in Chicago are considered cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

Food Insecurity: Many Chicago residents experience food insecurity, lacking consistent access to nutritious food. The Greater Chicago Food Depository estimates that 1 in 7 Cook County residents, which includes Chicago, are food insecure.

Health Disparities: Poverty is associated with adverse health outcomes. Residents of low-income neighborhoods in Chicago experience higher rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. The Chicago Department of Public Health reports that life expectancy can vary by as much as 30 years between neighborhoods with the highest and lowest poverty rates.

Homelessness: Homelessness is a visible manifestation of poverty in Chicago. According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, on any given night, there are approximately 80,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in the city.

D. Absentee Fathers

Absentee Fathers: According to fatherhood early on, are " 17.8 Mi
without a biological, step, or adoptive father

Fatherless homes are affected in the following ways:

Greater Risk of Poverty

More Likely to Have Behavioral Problems

Greater Risk of Infant Mortality

More Likely to Go to Prison

More Likely to Commit Crime

More Likely to Become Pregnant as a Teen

More Likely to Face Abuse and Neglect

More Likely to Abuse Drugs and Alcohol

More Likely to Suffer Obesity

More Likely to Drop Out of School

The absence of fathers in inner-city communities has far-reaching negative impacts on families, children, and communities as a whole. One of the most significant consequences is the

disruption of family stability and cohesion. Absentee fathers contribute to single-parent households, leaving mothers to bear the primary responsibility for raising children. This can strain familial relationships, increase parental stress, and create financial hardships as single mothers struggle to provide for their children's needs. The absence of fathers in the home deprives children of paternal guidance, emotional support, and positive male role models, leading to feelings of abandonment, insecurity, and identity issues.

Moreover, the absence of fathers in inner-city communities exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Research indicates that children raised in single-parent households, particularly those without father involvement, are more likely to experience economic hardship, lower educational attainment, and limited opportunities for upward mobility. Absentee fathers often fail to contribute financially, adding additional strain on already limited resources within households. This lack of financial support leads to reduced access to essential resources such as healthcare, education, and extracurricular activities, further widening the gap between them and their more privileged peers.

Furthermore, the impact of absentee fathers extends beyond individual families to affect the broader community. Children growing up without the guidance and support of involved fathers are at increased risk of engaging in delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, and involvement in criminal activities. Absentee fathers' lack of supervision makes their children more vulnerable to negative peer influences and recruitment into gangs or other criminal networks. This perpetuates cycles of violence and crime within inner-city neighborhoods, undermining community safety and cohesion. Additionally, the absence of fathers contributes to social

disorganization, as communities struggle to provide support systems and resources for at-risk youth without strong familial foundations.

Addressing the negative impact of absentee fathers in inner cities requires comprehensive strategies that focus on strengthening family structures, promoting responsible fatherhood, and addressing systemic barriers to parental involvement. Efforts to provide support services, mentorship programs, and economic opportunities for fathers can help mitigate the root causes of absenteeism and promote positive paternal engagement. Additionally, investing in education, job training, and community development initiatives can empower families and communities to break free from cycles of poverty and violence, creating a more equitable and prosperous future for all residents.

Mop and Bucket Blues is a metaphor for Mr. Payton or JJ, the janitor, of the main school being highlighted within the play. As Mr. Payton mops and cleans the areas of the school that have become worn and filthy through time and neglect, such has occurred within the student body. The neglect of parental involvement, the lack of fathers in the homes, the pressure to fit in and the stench of violence that has plagued the students, must be addressed and something has to be done. With the help of Mr. Payton, the coaching staff, and the new young principal, clean-up is on the way.

The title of Mop and Bucket Blues also exposes the mental state of mind that inner-city children experience while in school. The scene of Terrance being taken away by the Department of Children and Family Services, a day before he is seen by college scouts, is one example of

" blues " that the students face throughout the on their education when their worlds are tumbling down around them?

What does the mop and bucket represent? It represents the idea that someone cares enough to fill the bucket, dip the mop and scrub out all of the imperfections that lay out before us. The mop is only as effective as the person willing to use it. The students have lived with the disappointment of the lack of care within their lives. Before Mr. Payton, the coaching staff, music teacher and the new principal, there have been no adults willing to put in the time, resources, or energy to clean up the neglected places in their lives.

E. Lack of Funding for the Creative Arts in Public Schools

Funding for the arts in public schools is crucial in providing students with a well-rounded education that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Arts education encompasses disciplines such as visual arts, music, theater, and dance, which offer unique opportunities for students to explore their talents, express themselves, and develop important skills for success in school and beyond. By investing in arts programs, public schools not only enrich the educational experience but also nurture the holistic development of students, empowering them to become innovative thinkers and engaged citizens.

In addition, arts education has been shown to improve academic performance and overall student achievement. Research indicates that students who participate in arts programs demonstrate higher levels of academic motivation, engagement, and persistence. By integrating arts into the curriculum, as stated before, schools can enhance students as problem-solving, critical analysis, and communication skills, which are essential for success in all academic disciplines. Additionally, arts education has been linked to improvements in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development, providing students with a comprehensive learning experience that prepares them for lifelong learning and future endeavors.

Finally, funding for the arts in public schools promotes equity and access to education for all students. Arts programs serve as a platform for celebrating diversity, fostering cultural understanding, and promoting inclusivity. By providing opportunities for students to explore diverse artistic traditions, perspectives, and forms of expression, schools can create inclusive

learning environments that celebrate the unique identities and experiences of all students. Additionally, arts education can bridge socioeconomic and cultural divides, offering students from underserved communities the chance to access enriching experiences, develop their talents, and pursue their passions. As such, investing in arts education not only benefits individual students but also promotes social equity and strengthens communities by ensuring that all students have access to high-quality educational opportunities.

" | In hard economic times, arts education programs often fall victim to budget cuts in favor of other subjects like math and science. Even in strong economic times, arts are denigrated as a distraction from learning skills that will get students hired after graduation (Eva LaRuffa, ipaintmymind.org)

" | In 2012, Chicago created the Arts Education Plan (AEP) with the goal of creating a policy and programming blueprint that would increase access, equity and quality of arts education for CPS students. The AEP began awarding grants for art teacher training and mandated that every elementary school should provide two hours of arts instruction per week (ipaintmymind.org)

" This phenomenon is detrimental to students be beneficial. In adults, participating in art activities can be linked to increased civic engagement and greater social tolerance, so teaching students these skills early can improve the likelihood of continued participation in arts activities down the road. In schools, arts education can improve

school climate and empower students with a sense of ownership over their work, just to name a few (psu.edu, 2019)

" One of the most impressive indicators of academic achievement in school databases is actually an extracurricular one. As shown in the chart below, among low-SES and high-SES students alike, high school seniors with arts-rich backgrounds were significantly more likely than students with less art exposure to achieve high academic achievement. (The Arts and Endowment for the Arts.)

Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies

F. Creative Arts Impact on the Inner City

I had the pleasure of being part of the cast of "Stacy" in the final season, which was a prime time slot during the Liberty Theater Hour on channel 38 in Chicago. Students from the inner cities had the opportunity to audition for small roles within the series which gave a creative outlet from the norm. By being part of the production, many of them stayed on the right path and looked forward to participating. During the timeslot of the show, the local police reported a decrease in crime in Chicago and the surrounding areas because the gang members were inside, watching the show, rather than being outside, breaking the law.

"The Awakening," a winning soap opera produced by Liberty Temple in Chicago, captivated audiences with its gripping portrayal of the lives of inner-city families and the harsh realities they face, including poverty, single-parent homes, and gang life. Set against the backdrop of Chicago's urban landscape, the show follows its characters, shedding light on the pervasive challenges that many residents of the city endure on a daily basis. Through its compelling storylines, the show offers a glimpse into the complexities of life in the inner city, highlighting the profound impact of socioeconomic disparities and systemic injustices on individuals and families.

One of the central themes of "The Awakening" is the importance of faith in overcoming life's trials and tribulations. As the characters grapple with issues of identity, purpose,

and redemption. For many, the allure of gang life and the pursuit of material wealth provided only temporary solace, ultimately leaving them empty and disillusioned. However, through encounters with the gospel message and the love of Jesus Christ, characters found hope, healing, and a renewed sense of purpose. The show shared the significance of spiritual transformation in the lives of those who were searching for fulfillment and meaning beyond the confines of their circumstances.

Against the backdrop of societal challenges, the show served as a beacon of hope and inspiration, offering viewers a message of hope in the midst of despair. By shining a spotlight on the transformative power of faith and the unconditional love of God, the show encouraged viewers to look beyond their circumstances and embrace the possibility of a brighter future. Through its emotional storytelling and powerful portrayal of the human experience, "The Awakening" has found its audience, reminding them of the enduring truth that salvation is available to all who seek it, regardless of their past or present circumstances.

Productions like "The Awakening" and performing arts education play a crucial role in the holistic development of students. The positive impact of performing arts education, supported by statistical evidence, on various aspects of students' academic, social, and emotional well-being, lends inspiration and to the growth of the students.

Academic Achievement: According to a study conducted by the Arts Education Partnership, students who participate in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic

achievement compared to their peers who do not engage in the arts. The College Board reported that students who took four years of arts and music classes in high school scored an average of 100 points higher on the SAT compared to students who took only one-half year or less. Data from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) revealed that students from low-income backgrounds who have access to arts education are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college than those who do not.

Social and Emotional Development: Research by the NEA indicates that involvement in the arts contributes to positive social behaviors such as teamwork, communication skills, and empathy. A meta-analysis published in the Review of Educational Research found that students who participate in arts programs demonstrate higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem compared to their peers. The Journal of Youth Development published a study showing that students engaged in performing arts activities reported lower levels of stress and anxiety and higher levels of overall well-being.

Cultural Awareness and Diversity: Studies have shown that exposure to diverse cultural experiences through the performing arts promotes greater cultural understanding and appreciation among students. The NEA reported that students who participate in arts education programs are more likely to develop a sense of cultural identity and pride in their heritage. Data from the U.S. Department of Education revealed that schools with strong arts programs have more culturally diverse student populations and lower rates of discrimination and prejudice.

Community Engagement and Civic Participation: Research conducted by Americans for the Arts found that students involved in the arts are more likely to engage in community service and volunteer activities.

The NEA reported that schools with vibrant arts programs serve as hubs of community engagement, attracting parents, local artists, and community members to events and performances. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics showed that students who participate in the arts are more likely to vote and participate in democratic processes as adults.

The statistical evidence presented highlights the significant positive impact of performing arts education in public schools. From enhancing academic achievement and social-emotional development to fostering cultural awareness and community engagement, performing arts programs play a vital role in nurturing well-rounded individuals and creating vibrant, inclusive school communities. As policymakers and educators consider the value of arts education, these findings underscore the importance of prioritizing and investing in performing arts programs to ensure the holistic development and success of all students.

G. Cultivating Virtues through the Arts

The essence of the performing arts in cultivating virtues and fostering a deeper spiritual self resonates profoundly with the teachings of the New Testament. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus commands his followers to "love your neighbor" with empathy and compassion towards others. Through theater, individuals are granted the opportunity to step into the shoes of different characters, experiencing their joys, struggles, and triumphs. This immersive storytelling enables participants to develop a greater understanding of human emotions and perspectives, thus cultivating virtues of empathy and compassion.

Also, the parables of Jesus in the New Testament serve as powerful narratives that convey moral lessons and spiritual truths. In Luke 15:11-32, the parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates themes of forgiveness, redemption, and the unending love of God. By engaging with theatrical performances inspired by biblical stories, students can reflect on timeless truths and principles, deepening their spiritual understanding and connection with divine wisdom. Through the transformative power of storytelling, individuals are encouraged to embody virtues such as forgiveness, humility, and grace in their interactions with others.

Implementing arts programs in underserved schools aligns with the Christian values of justice and equality. In Galatians 3:28, the apostle Paul writes, "there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." By providing access to performing arts education regardless of socio-economic background, we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every individual.

and diverse artistic experiences, students are empowered to embrace their unique identities and celebrate the richness of human diversity, fostering a community rooted in love, acceptance, and mutual respect.

In essence, the integration of theater and creative arts in underserved schools becomes a manifestation of faith in action, embodying the principles of love, justice, and reconciliation taught in the New Testament. By nurturing virtues such as empathy, compassion, and perseverance through the transformative power of storytelling, we equip students with the spiritual resilience and moral fortitude to navigate life's challenges. In the process of artistic creation, we are called to cultivate environments where the arts flourish as expressions of divine creativity and vehicles for spiritual growth and enlightenment.

H. Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of performing arts programs in Chicago public schools holds immense potential to address the multifaceted challenges faced by underserved children and communities. By providing a creative outlet for self-expression, storytelling, and shared experiences, the performing arts offer a transformative platform for nurturing virtues, instilling values, and fostering a deeper spiritual self. However, the absence of such opportunities often leaves children vulnerable to negative influences and societal pressures, leading to outcomes such as gang involvement, school dropout, gun violence, and diminished self-confidence.

Undoubtedly, the performing arts serve as a powerful antidote to the pervasive issues plaguing underserved communities, offering a beacon of hope and possibility for positive change. Through engagement in theatrical productions, music ensembles, dance performances, and visual arts projects, students gain invaluable life skills, including teamwork, communication, creativity, and resilience. Furthermore, the arts provide a safe and inclusive space where students can explore their identities, express their emotions, and cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose.

However, the stark reality remains that many children in Chicago lack access to quality arts education and creative outlets, perpetuating cycles of poverty, violence, and despair. To truly harness the transformative potential of the performing arts, concerted efforts are needed to ensure equitable access to arts education for all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. This requires investment in resources, infrastructure, and support systems that prioritize the holistic development and well-being of every child.

At the heart of it all, the impact of performing arts in Chicago public schools extends far beyond the set and stage, shaping the trajectories of young lives and shaping the fabric of communities. By embracing the arts as a catalyst for social change and spiritual growth, we can empower children to rise above adversity, embrace their full potential, and contribute positively to society. This is a vision for "Mop and Buck" environments where creativity flourishes, virtues thrive, and every child is given the opportunity to shine.

S e c t i o n B u c k l e t & u e s t

Mop and Bucket Blues

Drama

by
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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
JJ	Janitor	55	Male
RaRa	Gang Leader	19	Male
Draker	Gang Member	17	Male
Tone	Gang Member	16	Male
Sox	Gang Member	17	Male
Rock	Gang Member	17	Male
Little C	New Gang Member	13	Male
Coach Adams	Football Coach	40	Male
Terrance	Student Athlete	17	Male
Jesse	Abusive Step Father	40	Male
Sheila	Mother of Terrance	30	Female
Ms. Smith	School Staff	60	Female
Ms. DaSilva	Music Teacher	50	Female
Charity	Wife of Curtis	32	Female
Coach Duffy	Assistant Football Coach	50	Male
Curtis	New Principal	34	Male
Curtis Jr.	Son of Curtis and Charity	15	Male
Coach Gills	University Scout	65	W Male
Coach Hardy	University Scout	60	W Male

ACT SCENE 1

This play gives the backstory of some of the main characters and why they ended up where they are in life. The location of this piece is set in Chicago, Illinois, present day. The narrator, JJ, introduces the different characters and some of the issues that will be addressed within the play, such as poverty, gun violence, absentee fathers, food insecurities, and the lack of school funding for activities to name a few.

The narrator JJ is the janitor of the public high school where most of the play will take place. Being the janitor, JJ moves around invisible but hears and sees everything. The mop and bucket are a metaphor for how the school system, DCFS, and the lives of underserved communities need to be cleaned up.

JJ enters SR to CS.

(Spotlight on JJ. He is wearing a janitor's uniform. JJ is in his late 50's, medium build, African American man.

JJ is preparing for the school day in his janitor's closet. JJ whistling while mopping floor. He pushes around his mop and mop bucket as his props. He looks up and realizes audience is looking at him. He gets wide-eyed.

(Sound of water splashes in bucket.)

JJ

Whoo Wee! Don't scare me like that. I almost wet my shoes up. Where I'm from, that's bad luck. My name is Jimmy, and I am thee world-renowned, play with me if you want to, dodging these bad kids Payton, and no I am not related to the football player. (Beat) But you can call me JJ for short. They call me JJ because my name is Jimmy and I'm the school janitor. Get it JJ, Janitor Jimmy, (waves his hand off) well, you get it. Welcome. I'm usually the only one up this early, but I'm happy to have some company. Besides, I have a lot to tell you and I'm tired of talking to myself. (Beat) Do you know where you are? Chicago, home of the Bulls and the Bears, the White Sox, and The Cubs.

Garrett's Popcorn and Deep-Dish Pizza, but don't let that fool you. You on the South Side, better known as the wild hundreds. Where they say the schools have been forgotten. Well, I've worked in this high school for over 20 years, and I've seen fifteen principals come and go. The gangs are all but taking over. I've been to more student funerals than I care to admit. I've seen frustrated teachers walk off the job in the middle of their lessons. I've seen coaches argue with politicians for more funding because kids were playing football with cracked helmets. I've seen kids get misplaced in the system and lost in foster care, never to be heard of again. I've seen gang bangers influence good kids and turn them into criminals. I've seen too much, but yet, I stay. (Beat) In some ways, this mop and water represent a long overdue need. The entire system needs to be washed and cleaned up. So, I stay, hoping that one day, things in this city, things in the public school system, will change. (Beat) Let me get back to work before these kids shake off their morning sleepiness. Stay alert. Stay prayed up cause your gonna meet some people today that will challenge what you think you know about inner-city living. What you see is just scratching the surface. I encourage you to look deeper. Cause everything isn't as it seems.

Jimmy is Whistling and swinging mop
bucket from left to right. He grabs his keys
and just as he is touching the door to leave
out of his closet,

(As Jimmy is about to exit, Mr. Duffy
enters SL. Running full speed.)

Coach Duffy bangs on the door.

COACH DUFFY

JJ! Come with me, quick! There's a food fight happening in the cafeteria. It's bad.

JJ looks at Mr. Duffy like he's an alien. JJ
doesn't budge.

JJ

Come on man! It's too early for this. They should still be walking around like zombies
and wiping the cold out the corners of their eyes.

COACH DUFFY

They have the lunch ladies running for their lives. The steel gate to close off the kitchen
is jammed again and somehow the kids are protesting because they were served oatmeal
for the fourth day in a row.

JJ grabs Mr. Duffy's arm.

JJ

Wait a minutes, oatmeal is hot and sticky, let's wait this one out, you know, until it cools down a bit cause I'm not in the mood for 3rd degree burns this morning. I got to keep my youthful appearance. Hey now.

COACH DUFFY

JJ, Seriously? You choose right now to make jokes? You know you're the one that will have to clean up the mess?

JJ

I'd much rather clean up oatmeal than blood. I'm still traumatized by last weeks incident in the boys restroom, its criminal what they did to that boy. Besides, where is security?

COACH DUFFY

Budget cuts, we are the security.

JJ

I don't get paid enough for this Mr. Duffy. I'd be mad too if I was served oatmeal all week with no sugar and no butter, I'm surprised they waited this long to revolt. I didn't sign up for Shaw Shank Redemption you know.

Mr. Duffy pauses for a moment to think about how to get JJ to go to the cafeteria with him. A light bulb pops in his mind.

COACH DUFFY

You must of forgotten the new principal might be arriving today. We can't start off like this, he won't stay five minutes if he sees this.

JJ

Well, heck Mr. Duffy, you should have led with that. I didn't know Coach Adams came through in the clutch. I forgot about the arrival of the next victim. I mean principal.

COACH DUFFY

Okay, possible new principal. I heard he hasn't said yes yet, but getting him here is half the battle. The least we can do is dress it up and keep the gang violence tucked away until his contract is signed.

JJ

That sounds like a set up but better him than us.

COACH DUFFY

Exactly, now can you come on out this closet so we can get these kids in order?

JJ

Watch it Coach Duffy.

JJ and Coach Duffy run and exit stage left.

JJ is swinging his mop and bucket beside him as swishing sounds are heard.

(Lights Outs)

ACT 1 SCENE 2

Curtis and Curtis Jr. enter SL throwing at football to each other.

CURTIS

Junior, you ready for football season? I see you've been working on your arm strength. I'm proud of you son.

CURTIS JR.

Thanks dad, you noticed huh? I've been working on a little something, something. Me and the fellas been in the gym.

CURTIS

And not in your room playing video games? I'm shocked and amazed. For you and your friends to be putting forth a bit of effort could only mean one thing. Girls.

CURTIS JR.

Dad, I don't, we don't I mean that doesn't matter about, nobody is thinking about no girls. Well, I'm not, I'm a young Christian man. My head is in the books.

(Curtis grabs his heart.)

CURTIS

Oh, I didn't know where you were going with that when you started talking about where your head was, you know what. Never mind.

I'm glad you and your friends are taking initiative, now if I could only get you to start eating healthy, instead of endless bowls of Captain Crunch, we could do something.

CURTIS JR.

Dad, you take things too far. Besides, I eat veggies all the time, you're just never around when I'm eating them.

CURTIS

Like what? And veggie chips don't count.

CURTIS JR.

I don't know why not, the word veggie is literally in the title.

CURTIS

I knew it. Son, you can play with your mother, but I know you. You and your little friends eat junk food all day. If you want to make to the pro's, you need to take your health more seriously. You only got one shot for a chance or lose, opportunity comes...

Curtis Jr. Cuts his dad off.

CURTIS JR.

I know you not trying to quote Em from 8 Mile? Dad we just watched the movie for the 12th time yesterday.

CURTIS

I know, I was trying to be relatable.

CURTIS JR.

If eating more veggies will stop you from trying to rap, ever, I'll become vegan tomorrow.

CURTIS

Deal.

(Charity V.O. Off stage.)

CHARITY

Curtis! Jr.! Dinner is ready, ya'll come in.

House phone rings in the distance.

CHARITY

You have a call on the house phone.

Curtis Jr. grimaces with embarrassment.

Curtis throws the football to Curtis Jr. with a

bit more speed and force. Curtis Jr. almost

fumbles the ball but recovers.

CURTIS

See, thats all that sugar.

Lights Out.

Curtis enters SR into home kitchen, holding football as he has just finished playing with his son. The house phone is laying down on counter. Curtis Jr. enters behind Curtis SR.

Curtis walks towards the house phone and kisses Charity on the lips.

CURTIS JR.

Mom, please get rid of house phone, it's embarrassing. No one and I mean no one has a house phone anymore.

Charity, walks over to Curtis Jr.

CHARITY

Yeah, but when the power goes out and your little charger is dead, you'll be all over here trying to call your little friends who won't be able to answer you because their parents got rid of the house phone. Now, go wash up for dinner.

Curtis Jr. huffs and exits SR. Charity picks up the phone as Curtis throws the football up in the air slightly.

CHARITY

Hello, Coach Adams, how's it going? Yes Jr. is great, still working on his throwing arm, I'd rather he be an engineer, but his father is hell bend of him making it to the pros and retiring us early.

CURTIS

Babe, did he call for me?

CHARITY

Yes he's right here. Babe, Coach Adams. I'm just talking his ear off, sounds like it's urgent.

CURTIS

Thanks babe.

Curtis Sr. Takes phone from wife and kisses
her on the cheek.

CURTIS

This is Curtis. What you say there?

COACH ADAMS V.O.

Curtis! How's it going out there in the burbs? You miss the city yet?

CURTIS

Coach Adams! How's it going? Now you know I don't miss nothing about the smog, traffic and high property taxes! My wife will talk you out of a bad decision won't she?

COACH ADAMS V.O.

That's alright, I had to catch up on what Junior was doing. Look Curtis, I have a situation and I need a favor. Another principal over here has abandoned ship. We need you. The intermit guy is trying to cut the football program and you know football is all some of these boys have.

CURTIS

Look coach, you know I'm down for the kids but there's a reason why there has been five principals in the last three years. I was thinking about a career change. Jr. is getting older now, I'm getting him ready for the NFL.

COACH ADAMS V.O.

Curtis, if it wasn't an emergency, I wouldn't be calling you. I'm trying to keep these boys out of jail and the ground, but you know these hire ups don't care about our boys. Would you just consider a meeting?

Curtis takes a moment. There is silence on
the phone.

CURTIS

Coach, alright, but I can't make any promises. I need to talk it over with Charity.

COACH ADAMS V.O.

That's all I'm asking, just a meeting, thanks Curtis.

CHARITY

What was that about?

CURTIS

Coach Adams has another one of his urban dilemmas.

Curtis Jr. Enters SR.

CURTIS JR.

I know what that means, we moving back to the hood.

CHARITY

Jr., it's we're and who's moving back to the hood? I wish I would. You know how long we have been saving to get out here in this nice quiet area where my son can fumble the football all he wants to in peace?

CURTIS JR.

Ma!

CURTIS

You mean our son? Jr. Your mom is just kidding, she said that to keep you humble.

Charity ignores Curtis and remains serious.

CHARITY

What ever, Curtis, don't try to make me laugh. You aren't Batman. You can't go running every time these coaches shine the bat signal. We just got here and I can see the twinkle in your eyes. Sometimes you have to say 'no'.

CURTIS JR.

Ooooh, oooh, can I be Robin?

Jr. Takes football from Curtis.

CHARITY/CURTIS

Junior!

CURTIS

Charity, come on now, gifts are for service and I can't hide in the suburbs forever.

CHARITY

We've been here all of two minutes. Babe, I can actually lounge in my lawn chair and talk to my neighbor over the fence without the automatic guns' soundtrack in the background. Besides, you have too much on your plate already. You're superintendent for 2 districts and the sports advisor for all those other schools. I still can't figure out how you pulled that off.

CURTIS

Charity, automatic gun soundtrack? Don't you think your being a bit dramatic?

CURTIS JR.

You act like you forgot... tat tat tat. (Rihanna)

Jr. Takes the song a bit too far, starts dancing
and simulating hitting the deck.

CURTIS/CHARITY

Junior!

Jr. Jumps up off the floor and wipes off his
knees.

CHARITY

All the times Jr. and I had to hit the deck and pray stray bullets didn't pierce our windows
and hit us. I'm over it. And out of everything that I said, that's all you heard?

Jr. Watches his parents go back and forth,
his head following the argument like a
tennis match.

CURTIS

Okay, you have a point but having a meeting to appease Coach Adams won't harm
anything. I owe that man a lot, the least I can do is hear him out, babe.

And no, that's not all I heard. I pulled off being over two districts because of the shortage.

People don't want to work with kids like they use to.

CHARITY

Okay, remember owe no man nothing but love, you said, hear him out, and that better be all you do.

Charity mumbles under her breath.

CHARITY

Because there's a shortage my behind.

CURTIS

Okay, you got it sweetheart. Thanks for the reminder.

(Lights Out)

ACT 1 SCENE 3

(Lights up at school. JJ is mopping the floors while fussing at the students to get to class. The students are off stage.)

JJ

I can't get these kids to mind any authority for nothing. I tell em to go right, they hook a left. I tell them to quiet down, they yell louder. I tell to pick up after themselves, they throw down more garbage. That's okay. I'm keeping the faith that this school will turn around. Just like my mop and bucket, sometimes you need to get in the crevices and creases for the dirt thats a little more hard to reach.

(JJ exits SR.)

(RaRa and four of his gang members, Sox, Rock, Tone, and Draker enters SL. RaRa is wearing sagging pants and a white tank top with Timberland boots, unlaced.)

RaRa watches Jimmy off into the distance.

The gang takes out money and discretely count the money out before handing it to Tone, who then hands it to RaRa

RARA

JJ still hanging on, huh? I don't even know why he bothers keeping the floors clean. It don't even matter. This school and everyone in it belong to me. (Beat)

RaRa and gang give each other hand shakes
in agreement.

TONE

I know that's right, RaRa. It's a waste of time, ya feel me?

DRAKER

Tone, why you beat that boy so bad? RaRa said to scare him, not kill him.

Gang laughs at Draker's question.

DRAKER

What's so funny? I think it's bad for business.

RARA

I gave Tone permission to use his discretion. I guess I should have been more specific.

Gang members laugh harder. Draker rolls
his eyes. Not finding anything funny about
almost killing an innocent kid.

RARA

Draker, what's the matter with you? You getting soft? Tone did what needed to be done. When I say give me your money, don't ask no questions, just give up the money. The kid started talking about it was his lunch money and he needed it. You can't be talking crazy to us. Especially in front the school.

STONE

Right, they may get ideas to start rising up, so I had to make an example out of him. I think he understands now.

DRAKER

Okay, so what happens if he decides to snitch.

RARA

Then Tone will finish what he started.

SOX

RaRa, I'm not with all this talking, we can finish it now. I know what hospital he's in.

ROCK

Sox, you always ready to off somebody. Dang. Besides, didn't you dropout a month ago?

SOX

These people don't know the difference. You know you need me. I sit in class to look at girls.

Gang members laugh while Draker shakes
his head.

DRAKER

You stupid, Sox.

TONE

Which is why his stupid behind dropped out. Couldn't keep up. Always ready to take
someone out.

RARA

Enough, we not moving on him just yet. I know for a fact he won't say nothing, for one,
his jaw is wired shut.

TONE

Call em' little Kanye.

Gang members except for Draker laugh and
shake hands.

DRAKER

Ye recorded an entire album with his jaw wired shut or did ya'll forget?

Draker sings "Through the Fire" choir
through his teeth while side eyeing gang
members.

DRAKER

Besides, ya'll to loud.

RARA

Draker! First off, who you talking too? Nobody asked you to remind us of no Kanye album! Second of all, they call me RaRa because I make noise. This my school. Ain't nobody checking me or us. The teachers are scared of me, so they don't say nothin'. The staff, and why you think principals keep running? Because of us. Can't nobody touch us. Me, and my crew, have single-handedly run off five principals in the six years I've been here.

(Beat)

DRAKER

My bad. I'm tripping, you right.

Rara takes a deep breath.

RARA

That's better, now don't ya'll have some business?

TONE

Yeah, we will meet up at the spot later.

RaRa reaches in his waistband and pulls out little baggies of drugs. He disperses the baggies among his gang. They all look around, making sure the coast is clear and stuff baggies in their places.

SOX

Alright, we out. Rock, light me up.

ROCK

Sox, where is your lighter?

Rock lights Sox's cigarette as Sox, Rock, Draker and Tone exit stage left.

RARA

Growing up, I wanted to be a famous hip-hop dancer like Tupac. I wanted to go to the performing arts high school downtown, but my mother couldn't afford it. That's all I ever wanted but I was tired of my mom's telling me "No". I am the oldest of five kids. I know you looking at me and thinking what happened... life happened. I never wanted this, but my environment forced my hand. You probably judging me because I've been held back twice but what you don't know is I did it on purpose. It's much easier to serve our customers from the inside. Anyway, (Beat) I'm looking for your sons like Draker, Sox, Rock and Tone. You make it too easy for me.

You send them right into the lion's den already bleeding and wounded. Me and my crew can smell the blood a mile away. It's survival of the fittest. Too many kids, no fathers in the home, and you have the perfect recipe to stir up a new family. These boys will do anything I tell em', even beat an innocent boy within inches of his life because they have no self-esteem. They have no identity. So, they become who I tell them to be.

(Lights fade to black as RaRa exits SR.)

Just before RaRa gets out of his light, he
flashes a weapon hanging out of his pants.

(Blackout as he turns around and exits.

Sound of street noise can be heard
throughout the theater.)

JJ enters SL with a map of Chicago in his
hands. JJ makes sure the gang member is
gone.

(Lights up.)

JJ

One of the reasons I know everything that goes on around here is because I pretend to mind my business. Yep, you heard it right. One of the perks of cleaning the school is I have all the keys at my disposal. If you think I'm just cleaning toilets, taking out the trash, and mopping the floors, you crazy. This right here is a gang map. Allow me to show you.

JJ tacks up gang map. Map is shown on projector so audience members can see what he is looking at.

JJ

Here lies the problem. I keep hearing these politicians tell these single mothers to just pack up and move their sons out of the community. But if you look at this here map, the rival gangs would be much more ruthless towards any students that come from the opposing territories. So, my question is, where do these kids go? Where is there a safe place? It's almost impossible to concentrate on schoolwork when they are in the middle of a war zone. I will say this, the music teachers and coaches are trying to make a difference, but my question is, will it be enough?

JJ goes to board, removes map, and snaps it.

(Black Out.)

(Sound of whistle being blown in
blackout.)

ACT 1 SCENE 4

Coach Duffy is putting air in footballs and checking air pressure as Coach Adams speaks off-stage.

COACH ADAMS VO

See you guys early tomorrow. Let's get here on time fellas.

(Sound of rambunctious sports team leaving locker room. Lights Up. Coach Adams ENTERS SL wearing a jogging suit and a whistle around his neck. Holding a clipboard. Coach Adams is holding back tears.)

COACH DUFFY

Rough practice today, huh Coach Adams?

COACH ADAMS

Coach Duffy, this ain't getting no easier. We had four boys late for practice today because their families are in crisis. Two are brothers.

They had to get to school the long way because instead of paying their bus fare, they decided to stop at the corner store to get something to eat.

COACH DUFFY

Man, that's a lot. I have suggested one hundred times to the school board to open the kitchen earlier for our student athletes. They can grab milk and cereal without the lunch ladies being in there.

COACH ADAMS

I thought that was a good idea but the board is saying the kids would steal all the cereal and milk before everyone has gotten a chance to eat.

COACH DUFFY

That's stupid, because I told them that JJ is already on the premises and I didn't mind coming in and watching. Hell, they could even send the milk and cereal to our offices before practice and we could pass them out. Some of these boys can't even run good cause their stomachs are touching their backs.

COACH ADAMS

Yeah, my wife is threatening to divorce me if I keep spending our retirement fund on food and toiletry's for the team.

COACH DUFFY

Catherine ain't goin no where. She loves your morning breath.

(Coach Adams changes the subject.)

COACH ADAMS

You always in my business, where's Jackie?

Coach Duffy gets quiet. They both laugh.

COACH ADAMS

So back to the brothers' that went to the corner store. Now normally, that would have been frowned upon except they told me that they didn't have any food in the fridge because their mom sold her food stamps to get her tire fixed so she could get to work. What are we supposed to do with that?

COACH DUFFY

You talking about the new kids?

COACH ADAMS

Yeah, I can't punish them for that. I'm just happy they were open enough to tell the truth.

COACH DUFFY

You know why?

COACH ADAMS

Why?

COACH DUFFY

RaRa and his crew haven't gotten to them yet. If RaRa finds out these boys are hungry, it's over. They'll join his gang faster than a quarterback throwing a touchdown pass.

COACH ADAMS

Duffy, we can't let that happen. (BEAT) You know how you always joking about my wife never leaving me , right?

(Coach Duffy suspicious.)

COACH DUFFY

Yeah.

COACH ADAMS

I have a confession. She put out me out. I've moved into a garden apartment two blocks from here.

COACH DUFFY

Coach, what? Why?

COACH ADAMS

The wife said she couldn't sit by and watch me spend all of the money we have saved on these kids. Told me to make a choice. So, I told her I would move closer to the school so she wouldn't have to see it. She helped me pack and everything. Man, she called me on my bluff. We still together, I'm just giving her some time to come to her senses.

COACH DUFFY

What you mean come to her senses?

COACH ADAMS

I can't abandon these boys. Everyone else has, we can't. My wife and I are older now. She's tired, hell, I'm tired but I think our help has finally arrived. My wife will be ok. She's just tired of me trying to mop up the ocean.

COACH DUFFY

Yeah, we need help. I'm running on E, your marriage is hanging on by a string. We are football coaches who work in a district with no funding, and no support. I know you're not telling it all. I see you struggling.

COACH ADAMS

Duffy, if I'm being honest, I'm basically spending more than half my paycheck to fill in the gap. I'm depressed most of the time because I can't even make a dent in the issues I'm trying to solve by being here. I'll give an example. I bought the boys' new cleats; I tell em' to leave them in their lockers for safekeeping. Over the weekend, the locker room is broken into, and all of the cleats have been stolen. But I gotta keep being strong, so they don't fall apart.

COACH DUFFY

Adams, why didn't you tell me that's what happened? I thought the team took their cleats home. I had them doing extra laps. Oops.

COACH ADAMS

I was at my wits end. The wife, my savings being depleted, the crisis the boys face, I didn't wanna drag you into it. Plus, extra laps never hurt no one.

(Beat)

I'm just trying to keep most of them away from RaRa and his gang. But it's hard because the boys recognize the inequalities of their lives, especially when we play the other teams from wealthy areas.

COACH DUFFY

You right about that Coach Adams. Two weeks ago when we played New Trier, the first things they saw were the freshly manicured lawns and how clean it was, like somebody cared. Like last month, when a sewer pipe busted in the girl's bathroom, and the board refused to close the school. We had raw sewage spilling out onto the floors for a week. JJ was out on sick leave and the district couldn't bother to hire a temporary janitor to clean it up. The plumbing company said they couldn't repair anything until it was cleaned up.

(Coach Adams takes over conversation.)

COACH ADAMS

So what did we do? We got the water off in half the building. So, guess who had to clean it? Me and a couple of the other teachers.

It was either that or the kids would have had to use the teacher's restroom in the teachers' lounge, and they weren't having that. As bad as it is Duffy, we have to stay. It's hard but oftentimes, we are the only upstanding men that these kids get to interact with.

COACH DUFFY

You right about that.

(Beat)

(Terrence enters the office with a football
that was missed by Coach Duffy.)

Terrence hands Coach Duffy the football.

TERRANCE

Hey Coach Adams, Coach Duffy, I found this one behind the bleachers.

Terrance spiral throws football to Coach
Duffy.

COACH DUFFY

Thanks Terrance, let me go put it with the others and straighten up so you boys can have a little pride in your space.

(Coach Duffy EXITS SL. Terrance
attempts to leave but is stopped by
Coach Adams.)

COACH ADAMS

Terrance, before you go, let me talk to you for a minute.

TERRANCE

Okay. No problem. What's up Coach?

COACH ADAMS

Thank you for pressing your way to practice today. You're looking real good out there. I can see where you've made some adjustments.

(Terrance is a bit emotional because
someone is giving him a compliment.)

TERRANCE

I've been really trying. Thanks for seeing my progress, Coach. It means a lot.

(BEAT)

COACH ADAMS

Look, I'm not suppose to say anything but Coach Duffy and I have some big time college scouts coming out to practice and they are coming to see you. You have real talent Terrance, enough to get you out of here. You have your phone?

TERRANCE

Yeah, it's on.

COACH ADAMS

Okay, good, I'll text you the evening before they come. Should be real soon, but I need you to be preparing. If I have it my way, this will go real fast for you, and look, one more thing, and this is important, don't share what I told you with no body. I wasn't suppose to tell you. I could loose my job.

TERRANCE

I won't tell a soul Coach Adams.

COACH ADAMS

Well since you're here, let's do some suicides.

TERRANCE

That's light work Coach. I got maybe an hour, then I need to get home and help my moms bring in the groceries. Her bum of a boyfriend won't lift a finger.

COACH ADAMS

Well we better get to it.

Coach Adams looks out into the audience
and blows his whistle.

(Black Out.)

ACT 1 SCENE 5

RaRa and his gang are showing off their guns to a new recruit in the school yard. The new recruit, Little C, is mesmerized by the boldness and sense of family that RaRa has with his gang. Little C has a busted lip and black eye as he has just been jumped into the gang. Little C is a freshman, frail, naive, has a bruise on his face.

RaRa is passing out large sums of money to his gang while the new recruit, Little C, watches.

RARA

Look Little C, you are family now. So you don't have to worry about how your mama paying her bills or where she getting ya'lls next meal from. Those EBT cards are a joke, unless you wanna eat ramen noodles every day, it's never enough. As you can see, I take care of family.

LITTLE C

RaRa, I'm just happy to be here. I'll do anything to see my mama not have to struggle.

ROCK

First, we need to know what you're good at.

LITTLE C

I'm good at playing the piano and singing. The music teacher, Ms. DaSilva said I have a real shot at getting a full ride to college when I become a senior if I keep up the good work.

Gang laughs out loud. Draker looks like he
has compassion towards Little C.

RARA

Little C, do you know where you are? College? Naa, man. We got bigger plans for you.

SOX

Yeah, maybe you can be a good lookout.

LITTLE C

Look out for what?

ROCK

Not what, who.

TONE

Yeah, who. See when we take care of business...

(RaRa interrupts his gang, preventing
them from saying too much.)

RARA

Yo, ya'll talking way too much. Let me do the talking. So, anyway, I need to know if you're up for any job I have for you to do. You are on a probationary period, once I see you really for us, then you get your jacket.

LITTLE C

Like I said RaRa, I'm down for anything. You could give me heat right now and I'll do whatever.

(Gang look at each other except Draker,
and laugh.)

DRAKER

Heat? What you think this is, SVU? Slow down little homie, you doing too much.

RARA

Yeah, but Draker, I like his passion.

RaRa takes the bullets out of his gun, wipes off his finger prints from gun and hands gun to Little C. Draker tries to block the handoff, RaRa snatches his arm back, gives Draker a stern look, and hands gun to Little C. Draker backs down.

LITTLE C

Man this is heavy.

Sox rolls his eyes at Little C for being so
naive.

SOX

Are you serious right now?

(Beat.)

RARA

You got food at home?

LITTLE C

Yeah, we straight, we got cereal and milk. My moms working a double tonight so she can
get groceries Friday.

RaRa pulls out a wad a money and breaks
off a couple hundred for Little C.

RARA

You don't have to worry about that anymore. Go get your little sisters some McDonalds.

LITTLE C

For real? Thanks RaRa!

Little C starts singing the McDonalds jiggle,
and is about to run off. RaRa stops him.

RARA

Little C, you with us now, you in the real world. Get the star dust out of your eyes. It's time to be a man. You feel me? You can't be out here trying to be a star if you running with me. Once and for all, you gotta choose.

SOX

RaRa, he already made his choice when he got jumped in.

ROCK

Yeah, we going backwards at this point.

RARA

Fellas, calm down. We're handling it now, in case he forgot how serious it is to be one of us.

Little C pauses a moment, looks at the wad
of cash.

LITTLE C

RaRa, I got you. Singing ain't never paid me like this.

Little C EXITS SL.

DRAKER

RaRa, why you let little man hold the Glock? Don't we need to feel him out first?

RARA

Naw, man, we got something big coming up and I need a little young rider who can take a charge. He's perfect, so he's on the fast track.

SOX

I knew you was on one. We ain't never jumped in that fast.

DRAKER

You gotta give it to him, Little C got pipes. Man he would make us a killing if we decide to get into the music scene.

RaRa picks up his gun with pen, careful not to touch it to leave finger prints. RaRa puts gun away. Gang catches on.

ROCK

Welcome to the big leagues Little C.

Gang all laugh while Draker is looking at them with serious look on his face. All dap each other up.

(All except Draker EXIT SL.)

(Draker EXITS SR.)

(Blackout. 15 Minute Intermission)

ACT 2 SCENE 1

(Lights Up)

JJ's whistling can be heard getting louder.

Audience can hear mop bucket rolling on
the floor.

JJ

What do you do when the gifted have the odds stacked against them? I look at these kids and I wrestle with hopelessness that hangs in the air. I pour a little pine sol in my mop water, hoping the stench of failure will leave the air. But it's saturated through the walls. I pour bleach in my mop water in hopes of scrubbing the stain of desperation and despair off the floors, but they seeped through a long time ago. What once was manageable has now infected the minds of the students. But I'm holding on to hope. I continue to believe that my mop and bucket will find the right formula, the right mixture, to get the stains out.

JJ is pouring different cleaning solutions
into the bucket as he talks about the mixture
that might work.

JJ

A coach here, a principal there, some care, money, a bit of sacrifice, courage, and a whole lot of God, these stains are coming out.

JJ smacks the mop on the floor and begins to scrub with all of his might.

(Curtis ENTERS SL.)

Curtis is lost, looking around.

CURTIS

Here we go.

A deep sigh rolled up his throat and escaped his partly opened lips.

CURTIS

Lord, for your glory and not my own. Give me enough wisdom to make an impact in the lives of the students whom this system has casted aside.

JJ

Hello. Welcome, welcome. You must be the new man in charge! Come on in. Be careful, I just mopped the floors. Everyone is in the cafeteria, waiting to meet you. I'm Mr. Payton but you can call me JJ, by the way. My job title says janitor;

however, I am security, maintenance, councilor, and sometimes assistant coach, but trust me, my paycheck reflects janitor only.

Curtis laughed. The stress and anxiety lifted.

CURTIS

Thank you, Mr. Payton, I mean JJ. I'm Curtis Hanes. I appreciate the warm welcome, I was so nervous this morning. But I must tell you, I'm here for an informal inquiry meeting with the possibility of taking the position of principal. I was invited by my long-time friend Coach Adams.

JJ laughs like he knows something Curtis
doesn't know.

JJ

I like your honesty. The others before you always came in with an air about them, like they were perfect and had it all together, you see where that got them. But it's something different about you. You've come in here like you have nothing to prove, no ego, and that's gonna get you far.

CURTIS

I appreciate that JJ. In my opinion, ego crushes authenticity. I rely on a higher power, and I know it's not me but He who lives in me, that I am able to do anything.

Now I know this is a public school and I can't say that in front of the students and staff, but I needed to get that out before this meeting.

JJ

Your sanctified secret is safe with me. Personally, if the past principals had your attitude, maybe they would have still been here. Follow me, right this way.

Curtis steps over the mop.

(Black Out.)

ACT 2 SCENE 2

The music teacher, Ms. DaSilva, is waiting in the music room for Little C. She is watching the clock and looking at her watch while reading the sheet music and scoring the song for Little C.

MS. DASILVA

Where is this boy? Like I don't have better things to do than to be getting up at the crack of dawn, trying to help him with his parts.

Ms. DaSilva looks at the clock one more time.

MS. DASILVA

Let me go grab some coffee.

(Just as Ms. DaSilva is about to leave,
Little C, runs into the music room, out of
breath.)

MS. DASILVA

Wait, wait, I know you are not showing up here an hour late. Why are you late Charles?

LITTLE C

Ms. DaSilva, please don't call me that. Call me Little C. And I'm sorry I'm late. I had to wait for my mother to get home. I couldn't leave my baby sisters alone.

MS. DASILVA

Why would I call you Little C? That doesn't even sound right. You're mother named you Charles, and that's what I'm gonna call you. I was just about to leave.

(Beat.)

MS. DASILVA

Did your mother make it home okay?

LITTLE C

Yes, she made it. She said the buses were running late. I ran here as fast as I could.

Ms. DaSilva lightly grabs Little C by the chin because she notices bruises on his face and a black eye.

MS. DASILVA

What's this on your face?

Little C snatches away.

LITTLE C

Nothing.

MS. DASILVA

Do you know how long I've been a teacher?

LITTLE C

I remember, 100 years.

MS. DASILVA

You think you're funny, you should go on the road with that show.

LITTLE C

Sorry, I think you said 22 years.

MS. DASILVA

That's better, and how many times do you think I've seen students get caught up with the wrong crowd?

LITTLE C

I'm not sure, probably a lot.

MS. DASILVA

And how many times have I seen gifted students throw their lives away for people who care nothing about them?

(Little C gets quiet as he is catching onto

Ms. DaSilva's line of questioning.)

MS. DASILVA

I know you are old enough to make your own decisions. I think you're very talented and have a great shot to attend any college of your choice. You're playing a very serious game Charles. A game where there aren't any winners. This classroom is your crossroad. I want to help you, that's why I'm here. I've shown up for you. In cold, in rain, when no one else has because I want to help you. But Charles, you have to want to help yourself.

(Beat.)

MS. DASILVA

I'm gonna ask you a question. Do you want to be a professional singer and musician? Do you still have dreams on being somebody's somebody? If your answer is yes, then I'll skip my coffee, but I need you to choose, right here, right now, which path you want to walk on. I can't take another heart break.

(Beat.)

Little C stares at Ms. DaSilva.

(Voice over is heard of RaRa telling
Little C to keep his head out of the
clouds.)

RARA V.O.

Little C, you with us now, you in the real world. Get the star dust out of your eyes. It's time to be a man. You feel me? You can't be out here trying to be a star if you running with me. Once and for all, you gotta choose.

Little C slowly backs away from Ms.

DaSilva and runs out of the music room. Ms.

DaSilva slams her fist on the desk in defeat.

(Blackout.)

ACT 2 SCENE 3

TERRANCE, age 17, student athlete, is sleeping at home with shorts on. Half the covers are off of him. His leg is dangling off of the bed. He is snoring and sleeping hard. The alarm clock is unplugged. Terrance begins to stir as he hears pots and pans banging from the kitchen. JESSE, age 40, abusive boyfriend to Terrance's MOTHER SHEILA, 34, is always antagonizing Terrance.

TERRANCE

What is that?

Terrance mumbles under his morning breath.

Terrance jumps up, hopping to his feet.

Tripping on the sheet that is hanging off the twin bed.

TERRANCE

Dang it, who unplugged my alarm clock????!!!

Jessie sticks his head in Terrances' bedroom.

JESSIE

I did, what about it Terrance? You should be able to wake up on instinct by now. You a grown man, sleeping in a twin mattress in your mama's house.

TERRANCE

Jesse, gone head with all that man. I'm in high school! And stop touching my clock, you making me late for school, again. I can't be late or I'll get kicked off the football team. What don't you understand about that?

JESSIE

Boy please, you don't have a chance in hell to do anything concerning football. I'm helping you out. You know, so you won't be disappointed later.

TERRANCE

Get a job, you bum. Why you got my mama taking care of you anyway?

JESSIE

Is that what you think? That's your problem, you think you know everything. If you must know, you and you mama are living off my settlement from my workers comp case.

TERRANCE

You have to have had a job to get workers comp, so I know that's not true.

JESSIE

You know what! That's why I'm gonna get you kicked out of here. You are worthless, you know that?

Terrance raises up in Jessie's face. House keys heard from front room.

JESSIE

You better be glad your mother is home. You don't want none of this.

TERRANCE

Yeah, okay.

(Sheila ENTERS SR.)

Jessie is looking over his shoulder, speaking to Sheila, while still in Terrance's bedroom doorway.

SHEILA

Hey babe, what ya'll in here doing?

JESSIE

Nothing much, how was your shift?

SHEILA

It was good. Nothing exciting. Terrance, shouldn't you be up for school?

JESSIE

Yeah, this bum overslept again. You gonna have to do something with him, he act like he using drugs or something.

Sheila kisses Jessie on the lips as she is about to walk past Terrance's room.

TERRANCE

Ma, he's lying.

Sheila interrupts Terrance.

SHEILA

So, Terrance, you not late?

TERRANCE

Yes, but he unplugged my alarm clock.

SHEILA

Boy, why would he do that? I know what happened. You be pugging up that game at night and then you forget to plug the alarm clock back up. I know one thing, don't have that school calling my house Terrance. Get up on time and be out of my house before I get home. You are too old for this.

JESSIE

That's what I said. He's a grown man. He should be able to feel when he about to oversleep anyway. You on that stuff ain't you?

Terrance is rambling around his bedroom as Sheila and Jessie disappear. Terrance is very frustrated and on the verge of tears. Terrance throws on his t-shirt and jeans and grabs his book bag. Terrance walks towards door.

SHEILA

I know you lying. Boy, if you don't go wash your behind and brush you teeth. What's wrong with you?

JESSIE

On that stuff. Only an addict forgets to wash their behind. Breath smelling like cheese and underarms.

Terrance throws his book bag down and disappears stage left.

JESSIE

Babe, have you thought about what we talked about?

SHEILA

Jessie, let me think about it some more, he's still my son.

JESSIE

Yeah but it's time you start living your own life. He needs to move out. I'm tired of the disrespect, plus, we need some privacy, I can't even walk around naked if I want to.

(Sheila takes a moment to think.)

SHEILA

Yeah, we do need some privacy. But, don't you think we should wait until he finishes school, it's only one more year.

JESSIE

Hell naw. I thought you wanted to be married by this time next year. It ain't gonna happen with that menace living here.

Sheila pauses again to consider what Jessie is saying. Terrance is heard walking back towards them.

SHEILA

Let's talk about it later.

Terrance grabs his book bag and EXITS SR.

(Sound of door slamming off stage.)

SHEILA

And stop slamming my door.

JESSIE

Yeah, we may change the locks by the time you get back!

(Lights Out)

ACT 2 SCENE 3

(Lights up as JJ enters SL. JJ is wearing a mask and frowning.)

JJ

Now I've cleaned up some messes during my 20 years of working but raw sewage?

(Realizes he's wearing his mask, snatches it off.)

JJ

That's how I know The Good Lord loves me because the 2-weeks I was gone on my tropical vacation...

(Rephrases his statement. Coughs.)

JJ

I mean the two weeks I was out on sick leave, almost deathly, that's when the pipes busted. They called me too. I ignored them.

(Beat.)

JJ

Coach Adams and Coach Duffy are trying to make a difference. Adams shared a small percentage of what it's like working in a school district without funding or concern.

He also told you about the brothers on his team being late. Remember, he mentioned four kids but only told you about two. Well, I guess I can tell since I got a little time.

Mops floors and shares story.

JJ

One of the boys got taken from his mother in the middle of the night by DCFS. Yeah, apparently one of the neighbors called because the mother's boyfriend nearly beat the boy to death. They swooped in like thieves in the night. Now the boyfriend, who was paying all the bills, is locked up. You get where I'm going. The foster system is horrible. You don't believe me? Let him tell you.

(Lights fade to black on JJ while lights
fade up on Terrance. Terrance has a
black eye, busted lip and is holding a
football.)

TERRANCE

I don't know these people, you feel me? One minute I'm sleep in my bed, in my house, with my moms and her raggedy boyfriend Jesse in the room down the hall, and next thing I know, loud banging on the front door. I jump up out my sleep, Raggedy Man Jesse is fumbling around in the dark, trying to hide his "work" (work, illegal drugs) while moms' yelling, "who is it?" At the top of her lungs but really, she's stalling.

They yell back, through the door, “DCFS”, so I peek outside and it's two police officers standing behind some old lady with a briefcase. All I can think about is the text I got from Coach Adams about the scouts being at practice in the morning to see me. But instead of getting ready for practice, I'm told to pack a bag and was taken away all because my noisy neighbor said I got beat up by Raggedy Man Jesse. First off, I didn't get beat up, he was talking crazy to my mother, and I stood up for her. He punched me and I punched him back. Somehow, between the punches, my neighbor, a Karen, tells the police that he almost beat me to death and now I'm being placed in Foster Care.

(Beat)

TERRANCE

Football is all I got. I ain't got nothing else. I have two choices, football or the streets and it seems one was just snatched away from me.

(Beat)

TERRANCE

I don't care where they put me, I'm making it to football practice.

Terrance slams football in hand.

(Lights Out.)

ACT 2 SCENE 4

(Sweeping sound. JJ whistling gets louder. Lights up as JJ enters SR. JJ is sweeping.)

JJ

Sometimes people mean well, but one call can alter the entire lives of everyone in a household. My advice to all you neighborhood watchers, be sure before you dial. Be sure. Ask yourselves some internal questions. First question should always be, is this my business? Next question, has anybody died? Next question, is calling the police the only option? Next question, can grace be extended in this situation? See how it works? These kids don't have a lot of options and the Foster Care system can be worse off than where they are being taken from, so just make sure before you make that call. (Beat) These kids that I see every day, are different. You don't realize the impact of fatherless homes. The lack of self-esteem, the high school drop-out rates. The number of young people joining gangs so they can have a place to belong. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 18.4 million children, 1 in 4, live without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home. Sometimes you don't realize how important having two parents are. That is, until you begin to see the breakdown of your children's emotional and mental stability. It doesn't just affect the boys either. I looked it up. Here, let me show you.

JJ pulls paper out of his upper pocket and tacks it up on the board. Paper appears on the projected screen for audience to see.

JJ

Like I said, fathers are important. When they aren't around, trouble often replaces them.

ACT 2 SCENE 5

School cafeteria with lunch tables, a podium and mic.

Teachers and staff are gathered for an important meeting.

Curtis is put on the spot.

COACH ADAMS

Hello Everyone, thanks for coming out on such short notice.

Curtis enters the room and Coach Adams gestures for Curtis to come to the front of the room next to him.

COACH ADAMS

Here is the man of the hour. Curtis Hanes, please come up here and introduce yourself.

(Curtis is confused as he is being put on the spot. Curtis stands in front of the mic with Coach Adams with a bewildered look upon his face.)

CURTIS

Thank you Coach Adams. Hello, everyone.

EVERYONE

Good morning.

CURTIS

Good morning. I'm Curtis Hanes and I'm here to observe the meeting and see what may be needed. I was invited by Coach Adams.

COACH ADAMS

Come on now, Curtis, you're being way too modest. This is Curtis Hanes, I coached him as a young athlete. He's like a son to me. He was an all-star running back before his injury. He is now working over districts 12 and 13 as a superintendent and advises several other schools districts on how to utilize sports programs to grow student enrollment and turn failing schools around. That's not even the half of it.

MS. DASILVA, age 44, the music teacher stands up.

MS. DASILVA

I'm Ms. DaSilva, the music teacher here. We need you for sure because the staff is getting to the point where we have more substitute teachers than we do full time teachers. At one point, the lunch ladies are filling in for some of the absent staff.

Curtis takes a seat on the front row.

(Curtis is overwhelmed by the sudden attention, realizing the meeting is for him.)

COACH ADAMS

Thank you Ms. DaSilva, but we want to stay on track. I've invited Curtis here for the football program. He can't do everything.

MS. SMITH

What a minute. I thought this was a meet and greet for our new permanent principal. Now you're saying he's here for the football program? Half the staff have nothing to do with the football program so why are we here?

Curtis' eyes get big as they dart around the room, Curtis' anxiety is growing. Curtis loosens his tie and takes a big gulp. Coach Adams interrupts Ms. Smith.

COACH ADAMS

As always, thank you for chiming in Ms. Smith. We haven't ironed out all of the particulars for our guest just yet. But I have a feeling, things are looking up for our school. Curtis is the best at what he does.

MS. DASILVA

I understand that he's the best for the football program, Coach Adams, but the music program is just as important as the sports. This interim Principal is trying to cut out all the activities and these kids won't have nothing left. Somebody needs to do something.

COACH ADAMS

We are doing what we can with what we have. I'm going to look to Curtis to help me put together a proposal so we can get some money in here. Once we get that going, he can come in and help with the activities for the football program. These boys need to know that we are fighting for them.

MS. SMITH

And the other areas too, right?

Coach Duffy stands up, ignoring Ms. Smith.

COACH DUFFY

Assistant Coach Duffy here. Look, I feel like every time we take one step forward, we get knocked five steps back. I'm getting too old to be fighting with the system, poverty and the administration. If we can't get anyone to come in here and be consistent in helping with these programs and our school, I don't know how much more I'll be able to take.

COACH ADAMS

Well you said it Coach Duffy, consistency. That's why I called this meeting with Curtis. He has the knowledge, the resources and he knows how to get things done.

COACH DUFFY

I hear you Coach Adams but the way he's looking, seems like he wasn't aware that this meeting was for him. Now, we need some transparency here if we are to get anything done.

Curtis stands up again and goes to microphone, adjusting his tie.

CURTIS

Ummm, Coach Adams literally saved my life. When I was a fatherless lost soul roaming the streets during school hours. He took an interest in me and I turned my life around. I was these kids. And I owe Coach Adams my life. I know a lot is going on right now but I am willing to step up and help in any way that I can.

MS. DASILVA

That's what we need. I have a young man, likes to be called Little C, just this week, walk out of his private vocal lesson because he had something better to do. Very gifted kid. I haven't heard a voice like his in years, but the streets are calling him. I recorded our vocal lessons from 3-weeks ago. Can I play it?

COACH ADAMS

Yeah, Ms. DaSilva, thats a good idea.

Ms. DaSilva plays a video for the staff and Curtis to see of Little C singing his heart out. After it's done, everyone claps.

MS. SMITH

Wow! He's absolutely amazing. Now that kid has a future in music!

MS. DASILVA

Yes, when I first heard him singing by his locker and asked him what he wanted to do, he said he wanted to sing at Carnegie Hall in New York.

COACH ADAMS

Yes, and he will if you keep working with him Ms. DaSilva. With your connections, and vocal training, he will be well on his way.

MS. DASILVA

Yes, I've been waiting on a student with his level of talent to pour into. Between the kids dropping out and the administration working against us, we need some help! While you filling out paperwork for grants, don't forget about the music program.

COACH ADAMS

Thank you Ms. DaSilva, we will take that into consideration. And for you, Curtis or shall I say Mr. Hanes. When you say you will step in and help, do you mean as in new principal?

Curtis swallows hard again and looks at
Coach Adams with a, what have a done,
look.

COACH ADAMS

Welcome to the team Curtis! As you know, you have to live in the city in order to be on staff so, Coach Duffy and I have already taken the liberty of printing out a list of homes that are available in the area.

RaRa and gang barge into meeting.

RARA

Ain't no need for all that Coach Adams. Ya'll seemed to have forgotten to invite me and my crew to your little meeting.

COACH ADAMS

This meeting is for staff and employees only, Marcus.

RARA

Whooo, now you know I identify as RaRa. Lets be respectful.

Daps up his crew.

COACH ADAMS

And I also know you may feel like staff as long as you've been in school, but this meeting is not for you.

ROCK

You got jokes, huh? How's your wife Coach Adams? I hear she may be needing some company all alone in that big house since you've moved out. She old but she still fine.

Coach Adams charges towards RaRa and his
crew.

SOX

Calm down, he just kidding. Now where were we?

RARA

Yeah, where were we? This the new principal, huh? Ain't no way ya'll brought this preppy jelly back negro up in here.

Curtis rises up and wipes off his pants after holding back Coach Adams. Boldness comes over him.

CURTIS

I know exactly who you are, Marcus Lamar Rogers. Age 19, 3rd time senior. Leader of Black Good Fellas Mafia. Abandoned by your grand mother at the age of nine when you were accused of throwing her favorite pet dog off the 5th floor projects and raised by the state. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Curtis Hanes, former All American Running back, as of this moment, former superintendent of district 12 and 13 and new permanent Principal for this school. Now I don't know what you're use to doing, but Marcus, you are not staff, and you and your flunky's need to exit my meeting.

RARA

Do you know who I am?

MS. SMITH

He literally shared your entire life, didn't you hear him?

TONE

I know you didn't just add your two cent, which yo Ronald McDonald looking self. Did you forget what happened to your car last time?

An argument erupts in the lunch room between the gang and the staff. Just as Curtis is about to throw hands, JJ runs in with horror on his face.

JJ

Hey! Police just discovered our student Charles' body face down in the pound behind that warehouse that was burglarized last night.

MS. DASILVA

What?

RaRa and gang stop in their tracks and run out of the meeting.

(Gang exit SR.)

Draker lingers behind, shocked, looking at Ms. DaSilva whom is in tears and being consoled by Ms. Smith.

(RaRA yells off stage.)

RARA

Draker! Let's go!

(Draker exits SR.)

MS. DASILVA

This has to stop. He was gifted. He shouldn't have even been there!

(Blackout)

ACT 2 SCENE 6

Curtis is home after a long day with Coach Adams and the staff. He is mustering up the nerve to tell his wife that he has taken the job and is praying for grace.

Curtis is pacing the floor as his wife and son

Enter SR.

(Charity has shopping bags in her hand and her son is eating a funnel cake. Neither Charity nor Curtis Jr. Is paying attention to Curtis' mood. Charity is going through her bags.)

CHARITY

Babe, look what I got.

CURTIS JR.

Dad, before you start fussing about this funnel cake, just know that mom got it because she wanted to try it and decided it was too sweet and you know how you always complaining about us wasting food, and since I didn't see any starving kids from Africa, it was my duty to make sure it wasn't wasted. Now I know I'll have to put in extra work, but I'm okay with that.

CURTIS

It's fine Junior. Just leave some room for dinner.

Charity and Junior stop in their tracks.

Charity squints towards Curtis. Curtis

avoids her gaze.

CURTIS JR.

Huh?

CHARITY

Naaa annnn. Jr. Go outside and play.

CURTIS JR.

Mom, don't you think I'm a little too old to go play. Now had you said go find you some business, then I would have...

CHARITY/CURTIS

Junior!

CURTIS JR.

Oh, ummm, yeah, ooh ummm. Okay then. I'll just go randomly wander around the neighborhood with my funnel cake.

Charity gives her son a stern look. He jumps to it and runs off. Exits SR.

CHARITY

Curtis, what did you do?

Curtis backs up a little bit from Charity.

CURTIS

I see you got some really nice items there.

CHARITY

Don't make me repeat myself.

CURTIS

Okay, listen, Charity, just hear me out. Something happened at the meeting beyond my control.

Charity starts to close in on Curtis, who then
backs up a little bit more.

CHARITY

Curtis, don't tell me you did what I think you did.

CURTIS

That depends on what you think I did.

CHARITY

How was the meeting, Curtis?

CURTIS

Why must you pronounce my name that way?

CHARITY

Husband, that made a promise to me concerning this meeting, how did it go?

CURTIS

You can call me Curtis, that fine.

CHARITY

Curtis!

CURTIS

Okay! Charity, I took the job. On the spot. We were in the meeting and everything was set up for me to listen then the members bombarded the meeting and started threatening me and you know I couldn't have that. I had to step up and confront them and then they threatened Coach Adams' wife and I had to hold him down and we were about to start scrapping but the janitor bust in and announced the police found the body of a student behind the warehouse face down in the creek and RaRa and his crew jetted out the meeting which let me know they had something to do with the boys death. So Coach Adams, JJ, Coach Duffy and I have spent the last few hours installing and setting up hidden cameras all around the school in the areas we know RaRa and his crew hang out, so we can get a confession and be done with them.

(Beat)

Curtis is having a mental breakdown as he allows the bad news to sink into his soul.

CURTIS

They found Little C face down, in a creek bed, babe. Did he drown? Was he violated? Did he suffer? I can't get the image out of my head that someone's baby boy had the life snatched out of him and for what? What? Because he felt hopeless? Displaced? No support? Did he feel the weight of this world on his shoulders? Baby, that could have been our son. We got to save our sons.

Curtis takes a breath and exhales the weight of the world. Charity's entire disposition shifts from angry to compassionate. Charity grabs Curtis and pulls him close. He releases a loud sob.

CHARITY

Baby, I'm so sorry. It's okay. I'm here for you.

Curtis takes a few moments to let out the pain and anger and frustration.

CURTIS

Babe, I'm so angry. I can't sit by and watch not another student die prematurely because of gangs. I have to do something, babe. I have to before this violence reaches our doorstep. Everyone is so complacent until it's there child that gets got. I can't let happen to ours, not Junior! I will die first.

CHARITY

Curtis, I get it. Okay, I understand. What ever you need me to do as your wife, I will do it as long as it doesn't place our son in harms way.

CURTIS

I would never put our son in harms way. I have a plan. I've prayed about it and I think it's the best course of action for now. Babe it won't be easy but it is temporary.

Charity sits and braces herself.

CHARITY

Okay, I'm listening.

CURTIS

I'd like us to keep Junior in his current school. So I wanted to know how you would feel about us bringing my mother here to live in the house so he can stay enrolled in his football program?

Blackout

ACT 2 SCENE 7

School locker room. Curtis is meeting with Coach Duffy while Coach Adams is trying to stall the scouts for Terrence who is late for his tryout.

COACH DUFFY

I didn't think Terrance would blow his opportunity to get a full ride to college like this, not Terrance. He's a good kid.

CURTIS

Do you think something happened to him?

COACH DUFFY

Nope, he has had a problem with being on time for a while. He is a beast on the field but the practical side is garbage. I don't know how long Coach Adams will be able to hold the scouts here. They already scared to be in the neighborhood as it is.

CURTIS

You can bring a horse to water...

COACH DUFFY

But you can't make em drink.

CURTIS

Man, I feel sad for him. So, you said you think he really has a future in football?

COACH DUFFY

Curtis, truth be told, he's twice as good as you were. Help me bring this equipment to the office.

CURTIS

I guess a little manual labor won't hurt, but first thing Monday, I'm looking to hire you and Coach Adams an assistant.

COACH DUFFY

Now see, I knew you'd make yourself useful. How did you get ahold of that grant so fast?

CURTIS

Let's just say, I know a few wealthy people who don't know what to do with their money.

Curtis and Coach Duffy disappear CS with equipment, Coach Adams is heard pleading with scouts to stay a few more minutes.

(Scouts and Coach Adams Enter SR)

COACH ADAMS

I know he'll be here, just a few more minutes, trust me, you won't be disappointed.

COACH HARDY

Too late. Look, Coach Adams, this was a one time favor, but we can't recruit a student that doesn't care about such a huge opportunity.

COACH GILLS

Yeah Coach Adams, I had to convince the school to pay for our trip here as it is.

Coach Adams throws down his hat in frustration.

COACH HARDY

Yeah, we need to get on the road, we have a few stops before we head back out in the morning.

COACH ADAMS

Sorry for wasting your time guys.

(Terrance Enters SL)

Terrance runs full speed ahead towards Coach Adams and the Scouts. Coach Adams has to help him come to a stop he is running so fast.

TERRANCE

Coach Adams! I'm here. I'm here. I'm ready. Hello, I'm Terrance, So sorry...

COACH HARDY

Let me stop you there son, you missed your window. We have other athletes who respect our time, to check out. Have a great day.

TERRANCE

Wait, I...

COACH GILLS

Save your breath. Excuses are for losers.

Curtis and Coach Duffy come back into the athletic department just as the two scouts are about to leave. Coach Hardy sees Curtis.

COACH HARDY

Curtis Hanes? The All American running back? You got to be kidding me!

Curtis and Coach Hardy shake hands and hug while Coach Gills waits his turn to do the same.

COACH GILLS

Look alike Curtis, AKA Road Runner, AKA Too Quick Rick! What are you doing over here?

CURTIS

Coach Hardy! Coach Gills! So good to see you! I am the new principal here. You're the scouts Coach Adams invited out?

COACH GILLS

We were and now we're aren't. The new principal, huh? We have been looking to expand our coaching staff over at the university, you should call us next week.

Curtis looks at Terrance who is almost in tears and Coach Adams who is almost willing Curtis to ask them for a favor on behalf of Terrance.

CURTIS

Look, I know you said you have to leave, but, Terrance here is the real deal. Look, I know he's late and I know in no other world would you even consider giving him a second chance, but I am vouching for him. And I'm asking, for old times sake, will you please stay, for me?

(Beat)

Scouts look at each other, at Terrance who has had hope return to his eyes. Coach Hardy looks at his watch.

COACH HARDY

I'll agree if Coach Gills agrees.

Coach Gills takes a second, and reluctantly agrees.

COACH GILLS

Curtis, you must be due for a miracle from God. Okay 20 minutes. That's all we have.

Kid, you better impress and show us your best.

Coach Adams and Coach Duffy rejoice, while Terrance runs to suite up.

COACH ADAMS

Go suite up!

TERRANCE

I'll be right back! I won't be long at all.

(Terrance Exits SL)

CURTIS

Thank you, you won't regret this.

(blackout)

ACT 2 SCENE 7

Street scene. Sheila and Jessie are walking down the street. Sheila is carrying the groceries while Jessie is scratching off a lottery ticket. Jessie looks unkept and Sheila looks stressed.

SHEILA

Jessie, would you please at least carry these groceries. What are you doing, you aren't going to win.

(Jessie makes fun of how proper Sheila speaks.)

JESSIE

You aren't going to win. Why you gotta talk like that. You don't know what I might win. And when I do, guess who gonna have her hand out, begging... you.

SHEILA

Jessie, can you grab a bag please? I don't want to smash the bread.

JESSIE

You got it. You're a strong black woman. Besides it all goes down the same way, don't nobody care about no smashed bread.

SHEILA

Are you serious right now? It's bad enough you don't have enough money to get the car fixed, the car that i needed to get to work that you totaled because of your drinking and driving. The least you could do is carry these bags for me. Be a gentlemen for once.

JESSIE

Sheila, please, you knew who I was when you met me. I ain't changing. You not about to treat me like your little flunky. If you want some help, ask the parodical son, not me.

SHEILA

I know you're not talking about Terrance. It's because of you that he left four years ago, in the first place.

JESSIE

Don't blame me. And if you want to be technical, he was taken by DCFS. He should have been more respectful. Loser.

(The 2029 NFL draft is being watched on
a smart phone by people walking down
the street.)

ANNOUNCER

The 4th place draft pick running back, Terrance...

(Everything goes dim. Sheila and Jesse are staring at the smart phone while listening to the announcer of the NFL draft.)

JESSIE

Dang.

(Blackout.)

ACT 2 SCENE 8

JJ's whistling is getting louder. He has his mop and bucket Center Stage. JJ begins to ring out his mop as Lights Up.

JJ

These kids need us. They need us to clean up those hard-to-reach places in their lives. Just like this mop and bucket, I see a mess, I mop it, rinse it and repeat. I remember one year when a local church wanted to partner with our school, but the school board stopped it. Separation of Church and State. That's the problem right there. The youth pastor told me that sometimes God sends you into hard places to soften the ground for those that will come after. That stayed with me because somebody has to step up and become the voice for the kids that don't have one. I could have taken a job anywhere, but I made a choice to be here, cleaning up the muck and mire these kids call their reality. I get these floors nice and shiny so maybe when the kid's heads are hanging low, and they have the blues, they will get a glimpse of their reflection, and maybe through that reflection, they will lift up their heads. We all have a part. We can all do something. It's not in your own strength anyway. (Beat) We have a new principal, Curtis Hanes. Still here four years later. The school is thriving. It's funny what a little money can do. Terrance got drafted into the NFL. Part of his signing package was for the franchise to adopt his old high school. He threatened to go to a different team if they didn't give us 10 million to his old high school. Come to think of it, all athletes should do that.

Anyway, after Terrence ran away from his foster home, Curtis begged his wife if they could take him in and adopt him. She said yes and Curtis Jr. gained a brother and finally got serious about football. He was 16th pick in the draft. Mr. Duffy retired. Mr. Adams moved back in with his wife, and RaRa, he and his crew are rotting in prison. Oh, Draker made a deal. In exchange for telling the police what went down, he got probation and a second chance in life. Second chances, that's what it's all about really. As for me and my mop and bucket, I think I'll stay awhile, lend a helping hand as I pretend to mind my business.

JJ starts whistling as he splats the mop on the floor one last time. He grabs his "wet floor" sign and places it over the section that he has just mopped. JJ dips the mop into the bucket of water and slowly exits SR.

(Spotlight on Wet Floor sign, to Fade down.)

(Blackout.)

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