

# REMOTE EDUCATION

by Kelly Meadows

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*A Comedic Duet*

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**SYNOPSIS:** Why can't Lydia focus on her remote history class? Perhaps it's her favorite social media personality having a meltdown. Perhaps it's her family undermining the teacher's lesson. Perhaps it's her best friend luring her to a forbidden get together. Will she ever get *herself* together, or will history remain a mystery? Each actress plays three distinct roles.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(2 females)*

TEACHER (f) ..... Ms. Johnson. Also plays Sophia, a social media influencer, and Morgan, Lydia's friend. *(34 lines)*

LYDIA (f) ..... A student. Also plays her mother and her early 20s brother, Harold. *(33 lines)*

**TIME:** During COVID (or any) pandemic.

**SETTING:** This is a remote class, where Lydia is in her room at a computer while the teacher is on her side of the stage either in an otherwise empty classroom or in her own home.

## SET

While the two characters interact, they always stay on one side of the stage and would not cross over to the other. Much of the action can be pantomimed, however for a full production, Lydia would be at a desk with a computer and some books, a phone, etc. Teacher would do more or less the same. Remember that this isn't a classroom, so they don't have to face each other if it's better staging to have them face front.

## **COSTUMES**

Some quick accessories can help define each of these characters. Ms. Johnson can dress more conservatively but add a few bangles or a quick hairpiece, something that looks glamorous, when it's time to play Sophia. For Morgan, maybe a jacket, think of something that "irritating friend" always wears that you wish she wouldn't.

For Lydia, she's trying to be a good student, but she's also at home, so she's probably dressed down. For her brother, a loose fitting sweatshirt, preferably with holes, might add some character. For her mother, pop on some oversized, gaudy-but-tasteless junk jewelry.

If there's no time to leave the stage, these additions and removals can be incorporated into the action by keeping them in character.

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

The author knows several teachers who have expressed the frustrations suffered by the teacher in this show: the student won't pay attention, all kinds of things are going on behind her in the house, and it's hard to teach when you can barely get anyone to show up for class. Likewise, students—if they actually want to learn—often find it hard to concentrate with so many distractions. This is not the time to be subtle; these interruptions are a big irritant, so the more they're played up to type, the more fun that can be had and the more your audience members will be reminded of their own issues with remote education. If you've had these issues yourself, it's a great start to draw on some inspiration. Finally, entrances and exits can be played to great effect by funneling all the previous emotion into your body movements as you "turn and go."

**TEACHER:** (*Teaching an online class but acting more like a social media personality.*) Greetings students, and welcome back to my channel! If you're just tuning in, I'm Ms. Johnson and you're watching *The Mystery of History*. Today – a tale of love, scandal, power, and false accusation in a European *Game of Thrones* that shook the world to its core. An erupting volcano with ash still scattering 500 years later. Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII. Was it love or ambition that put her on the throne and then sent her to the chopping block? And, did you read and report on chapter eight as instructed?

**LYDIA:** (*To audience.*) Ever since we went remote, Ms. Johnson's tried to turn herself into a social media star.

**TEACHER:** Lydia, are you paying attention? (*Obviously, she's not.*) Lydia! (*LYDIA snaps back to listen, caught by surprise.*) Lydia, what year did the wedding take place. 1522, 1533, or 1981?

**LYDIA:** (*To audience.*) Of course I was paying attention. (*To TEACHER.*) 1981! (*To audience.*) Oh, to clarify, I was paying attention to something else. How was I supposed to get all into Queen Anne when my favorite influencer was wearing a stunning red outfit on a tropical island, taunting us with a sumptuous travelogue while we'd been shut up inside for weeks during a pandemic?

**TEACHER:** (*As Sophia, take a few seconds to get into character and "luxuriate." If adding a costume, this can be done on stage for greater effect.*) This is Sophia Lavonne, with your Fashion Minute on the Hour! These trying times are stressing me out, so I have no choice but to go on an extravagant South Pacific getaway! It's so nice to leave the pandemic behind and get a little R&R away from the prison of my nineteen room luxury Malibu beach smart home! Oh, we're adding a twentieth. I can't wait to share!

**LYDIA:** (*To audience.*) That didn't go over well with approximately fifteen million less privileged teenagers such as me, stuck at home—even our pets were getting on our nerves. (*Shouting offstage.*) "Mom, feed the fish already! I can hear them from here!" For us, the South Pacific was a dream—or a very old musical. (*As if she is typing, to Sophia, with a dismissive sigh.*) Sorry Sophia, but your boredom—and your wardrobe—is irrelevant at a time like this, so go away.

**TEACHER:** *(As Sophia.)* Your anger is unjustified and exponentially misplaced. I can't help that my job is wearing expensive clothing in exotic locations, just like for some, their job is a racetrack jockey or... a roadside grape merchant... or... *(With a dismissive laugh.)* a school teacher. Lame.

**LYDIA:** So sorry Sophia, but you're no longer relevant. Go into your glamorous room at your glamorous hotel and close your glamorous door. Don't worry, I'll stay here.

**TEACHER:** *(As Sophia. Desperately trying to cling to relevance, but angry as well, stomping about.)* I have to travel! I have to look good, even though *(Snotty.)* that's a lot easier for me than it is for you. So sad for you that I make a living by modeling clothing you can't afford in places you're not allowed to visit. *(Full of self-pity.)* Yet all I get is jealousy and envy from people who claim to be my fans. *(Now full on angry.)* Well you know what? Without me you'd all be wearing sandals and sun dresses! *(Short pause, starts to exit.)* Even in winter. *(Does a very vigorous "turn and exit" loudly and expressing full on victimhood, to return as TEACHER.)*

**LYDIA:** So, pay attention? Hardly! We had to let go of the Tudor scandal of 1533 and jump onto the current international outrage that infested our computers, cell phones, and personal lives! Sophia Lavonne was losing millions of followers by the minute, and suddenly she couldn't influence a pig to eat slop.

**TEACHER:** *(Returns, now as herself trying to play on the influencer craze.)* Anne Boleyn was one of the biggest influencers of *her* time, but she lost every follower in one quick slice. *(Pretends to chop off a head.)* LOL.

**LYDIA:** That's because she got trolled by the King of England. SMH. *(To audience.)* Well, at least I had a head to shake.

**TEACHER:** You seem to think that because I'm teaching remotely that you can get away without reading the assigned material. Now, since we've ruled out 1981, what has your research told you about 1533?

**LYDIA:** *(Sassy, partially to TEACHER and to audience as well.)* Nothing could be more *remote* than 1533, except maybe... December 1532. And you know what else, at least when there was a plague, kids could just stay home and do what they wanted since they didn't have Zoom learning.

**TEACHER:** In 1533 young women stayed home and did what they were told. So why don't you try living in *that* moment?

**LYDIA:** (*Explains to audience, moving toward the edge of the stage so she can return to the action as a new character.*) You know what we didn't have when we really *went* to school? Our parents, who now worked from home along with us. Our deadbeat brother, who never left home because he couldn't afford a candy bar. Apparently, my mother knew more secrets about the king and queen than my instructor, thanks to her addiction to The History Channel and to speculative historical fiction. She was armed with the hidden truth and ready to accuse. (*Comes back as her mother, a know-it-all.*) So, you're Lydia's teacher, or her so-called teacher so-called teaching so-called history. I'm not going to allow you to pollute my daughter with your malicious misinformation and mudslinging malarkey a moment more!

**TEACHER:** I'm sure you think you know your history, Mrs. Callaburton, but there is a lot of new information available since you took this class 200 years ago.

**LYDIA:** (*As her mother until indicated otherwise, this argument should rise in intensity as it goes on.*) You're not telling them what really happened.

**TEACHER:** It's documented, in England, in 1533.

**LYDIA:** I mean what really happened. You know exactly what I mean.

**TEACHER:** This is what really happened, and I have no idea what you mean.

**LYDIA:** What everyone knows happened and what you're too cowardly to teach.

**TEACHER:** (*Really annoyed.*) I'm teaching what everyone knows happened!

**LYDIA:** According to who? The people that did it and wrote it down?

**TEACHER:** Yes. Those people. The people that were there.

**LYDIA:** I want Lydia to interpret, not just parrot names and dates.

**TEACHER:** She can't interpret the information if she doesn't know it to begin with. She'll never learn to parrot with a magpie for a mother.

**LYDIA:** It's a shame how much you get paid for not doing your job.

**TEACHER:** It's a shame you're not devoting as much time to *your* job as you are to mine.

**LYDIA:** (*Letting up.*) Speaking of which, break time is over. (*Threatening.*) But I'll be back, and I'll be listening. (*Walks out dramatically, all high and mighty, as TEACHER walks off throwing up her hands. LYDIA comes back as herself, and notices that her phone is lit up.*) Oh look, it's Morgan! (*Picks up the phone, a bit of a whisper.*) Morgan, why are you calling me, we're in class!

**TEACHER:** (*Comes back and plays Morgan until indicated otherwise. Morgan is more into herself than anything else in the whole world.*) Come on Lyds-ster, we're all going over to the joint. It's still open and everybody's there. (*With a giggle.*) Masks optional, but you might want one with that face.

**LYDIA:** What joint, and we're not supposed to go out.

**TEACHER:** The place, the joint, the thingy. Either you know or you don't. We have to do this underground so nobody finds out.

**LYDIA:** My mom will have a meltdown and my grandmother's staying here and I don't want to infect her.

**TEACHER:** Oh look, it's Safe Sailing Sally, Mask Wearing Mary, Survivalist Sadie. Lowbrow Lydia. What's life if you can't have a good time? (*Pompous.*) This is history class, so "Give me liberty or give me death!"

**LYDIA:** You might just get both at once.

**TEACHER:** If you were my friend, you'd go.

**LYDIA:** If you were my friend, you'd stay home. And there's a test in a week, so at least one of us needs to pay attention.

**TEACHER:** (*Snaps back as TEACHER and finishes the sentence loudly along with LYDIA, shocking LYDIA and bringing her back to the classroom. If she's wearing any "Morgan" accessories, she can pull them right off.*) Pay attention! If we were in the classroom, I'd...

**LYDIA:** (*Frustrated and losing it.*) But we're not. Practically the entire country is sent to its room! We're all doing the best we can except for my burnout burned down brother. So I'll ask my mother what *really* happened, and you can talk to students who want to hear *your* version of this supposedly earthquaking quack-smack. (*Leaves.*)

**TEACHER:** (*Exasperated, searching other students.*) Does anyone else remember what we discussed yesterday, which seems like it was five years ago?

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