

TEACHER SHORTAGE

by Kelly Meadows

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TEACHER SHORTAGE

A Comedic Monologue

by **Kelly Meadows**

SYNOPSIS: There's a teacher shortage and the school is hiring anyone it can find to fill in! When it brings in a wicked witch to teach English Lit, students start to disappear. The kids come to realize that the better they perform, the better chance they have of surviving to the next semester. Will the school do anything about it, or will they just brag about their lower student-teacher ratio? See what a "Teacher Shortage" means for your school!

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: Classroom, school in general, school board meeting.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female)

NARRATOR (f)..... Plays a high school student, a teacher (the wicked witch), and other teachers and parents as indicated. [The story is told mainly from the point of view of the student.]

COSTUME: Current day clothing, but perhaps a witch hat or other Halloween attire for the scenes as the witch can add to the performance.

SET: Bare stage, or a classroom setting.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: This play offers the performer two very distinct roles among some smaller characterizations, and it's important to play up the difference between the "normal" student and the wicked witch—this will give your performer the best chance to show off their talents. Can you make the witch wicked and sympathetic at the same time? It also gives you a great chance to poke some fun at some of the problems plaguing education these days.

AT START: *A teacher speaks to her students.*

NARRATOR: *(As a crabby teacher.)* Class? Class? *(Claps hands.)*
Class!

(On a tirade.) I don't know why they even use that word, since you've exhibited not even the faintest bit of "class" since day one. You're nothing but a group of selfish, squalid, scumbags that I have the misfortune to attempt to instruct. Oh, and I know I'm not supposed to say this, but I get paid whether you do the assignment or you don't. So, I'd rather you didn't, as it gives me less unpaid work to do at the end of my day.

(As student, begin by reacting to the preceding speech and explaining what's going on.) There was a teacher shortage, and as our city and state passed legislation to make the job increasingly odious and impossible, the district was having trouble finding qualified replacements and very quickly stopped trying. Soon, just about anyone could be a teacher. Students like me had to deal with the results.

(As another crabby teacher, alternating with herself. Holds up a book if one is available.) This book. Read it. Tonight.

(As herself.) But it's 506 pages.

Then you'd best get started. Read it and report on it. Tomorrow. What's it even about?

If you'd read it, you'd know.

It's in Chinese.

(Loud.) I said TOMORROW!

(As student.) It came down that no one was going to do any real teaching, and no one was going to be taught. It got so bad the band director started moonlighting as the football coach and the drama teacher told us we didn't have to come to rehearsal as long as we learned our lines. I mean we've been saying that all along, but... the play was a disaster.

Finally, they brought in a sweet old lady, the kind that doesn't have a disciplinary bone in her body, the kind that thinks all she has to do is give an assignment and suddenly we'll be... motivated. The kind you almost do your work for because you feel sorry for her. (*Thinks it over.*) Almost.

But it was too late. We'd stopped learning, and we'd stopped knowing how to learn. We're the generation of the black Zoom screen during the COVID epidemic, the mask on, mask off, on-off, on-off whatever generation, the socialize-through-plexiglass generation. We had no social skills and didn't want any.

Mrs. Broomflyer was the new English teacher, the fifteenth we had that year and it was only October. It was her job to have us read and internalize all the depressing 19th century novels that they've been shoving down poor children's throats since 1901; the books where instead of saying "she wouldn't answer the door," they say "she refused to be inconvenienced by his importunate knocking." Then on page 326 she finally answers the door and the action... finally... begins.

We endured the misery of *Wuthering Heights*, the misery of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the misery of *Silas Marner*, and we proceeded to get more and more despondent until we started reading Charles Dickens on our own as a pick me up. How is it possible that there wasn't a single book worth reading from the last 120 years and that we had to go back to 1879? A good bio of Nicki Minaj, for example, would hold my interest from page one.

"Well," said Mrs. Broomflyer, "I read these books when I was your age."

"And, well," said the students, "they were much, much newer when you were our age."

(*Start getting "darker" and more concerned.*) Then we noticed some changes. Kids started to disappear. Classes got smaller and the teacher-student ratio was actually getting down to manageable

proportions. But... there were serious questions. Very. Serious. Questions.

Turns out that in their haste to fill the English Lit position, they'd hired the wicked witch who lived on West Squealer Avenue on the outskirts of town. She'd long ago sold her gingerbread house for a brick bungalow—actually, she traded it in at the bakery—and was quietly and ever so patiently waiting for her chance to indulge. It explained why we didn't study *Grimms Fairy Tales*. She felt wrongly portrayed. While we were busy trying to decipher *The House of the Seven Gables* so we could write a compare and contrast to *Anne of Green Gables* and *Aesop of Greek Fables*, Mrs. Broomflyer made her move.

She was strategic.

First, the “bad kids” started to disappear. And no one worried, because well, we wanted them out of the classroom anyway. The bullying stopped and the real learning began. Was she eating the children? I mean that's what witches do, but no one could prove it. It wasn't like you wait for her to burp and be like “wow that's Caden,” or something like that. So, we just buried our brains in our books and plowed on to the end. On the other hand, once we got wind of it, everyone started to behave. Even the football team and the homecoming queen! We didn't want to be next.

The kids with lower grades were soon to follow. We'd say the stupid kids, the slow kids, the dumb kids, but they might just have been unmotivated or had a distracting home life. They might have been crushing on Harry Styles and not paying attention. Either way, they started to vanish, along with the actors who only get three lines in the school plays and the trumpet players who languish at the back of their section, hitting one right note out of every three. As a consequence, the rest of us really started to buckle down. She seemed like such a kindly old lady with a great knowledge of Victorian, gothic, and... the complete works of Edgar Allen Poe. If good grades would be our saving grace, then so be it. No one ever had to encourage us to study ever again.

Finally, the school board asked her to explain herself. The board had ignored practically every problem in the district where they couldn't grandstand on an agenda, but this, they finally acknowledged, had to be looked into. She seemed a lot... well... plumper than she had when we first hired her, but as there was no replacement, they decided to keep her in the classroom and let her feast—I mean teach—unabated.

Parents were outraged!

(As various parents.) Where's Caden?

Where's Jennifer?

Where are my children? I send them to school hoping they'll at least come home at the end of the day, and, Mr. Superintendent, the day is done, the salad is soggy, and the French fries are forgotten.

(As herself.) Finally, we got an answer...

(As Mrs. Broomflyer; take a moment to get into character, with an "evil laugh" or something to let the audience know you're about to become the witch.) You might think I'm a heinous old witch, and you'd be right, but... look at it from my perspective. I mean, a golden opportunity was offered up to me like never before! Here I am, gifted a job in a school full to the brim with plump, juicy children when for years I'd been eating Spam and Vienna sausages and telling myself it was the kid down the block. I knew I shouldn't have taken this job, but I'm a wicked witch with a mean streak. So, you tell me.

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