

The Truckee Elementary Grade 6 Drama Club presents:
BLOOD AND SNOW: THE DONNER PARTY'S FATAL FORAY
INTO THE SIERRA NEVADA WILDERNESS

Characters:

The Staff:

Mrs Hazel

Ms Kringelbach-Greenglass

The Players/Grade 6s:

Molly

Charles

Iris

Ezra

Abigail

Scene 1

A harsh spotlight sputters to life, illuminating Mrs Hazel in a harsh circle. She has a wholesome, "Minnesota Nice" type of charm to her. Cute sweater, big hair, clipboard.

Mrs H: Hello and good morning! I am of course, Mrs Hazel from the grade 6 class, and it is my honour to welcome you to this very special play! Now before we get to the main event, I've got a couple quick announcements... Let's see. Next Monday it's the 24 Hour Famine, an overnight fundraiser in support of global aid! As such we have to remind you folks: *please, do not feed your children after 8 PM the night before.* Thank you. Next up, get ready to laugh: it's the Grade 8's stand-up comedy showcase. Those kids have been working their lil keisters off preparing fresh new sets for you, and trust me, they cover it *all*: homework, bedtime, the entire shebang. It'll be a real good time! You'll laugh and laugh and laugh! Finally, Wednesday is the lunchlady's funeral. All are welcome. But without further ado, it's time for the main event! Now all week long, my Grade 6s have been busy learning about *Pioneer Times*. I know... Fun, right? And they've been working with the drama teacher to throw together a couple little scenes. I for one can't wait to see what they've come up with! But first, let's welcome to the stage to say a few

words of introduction, Truckee Elementary's drama teacher extraordinaire and the director of the wonderful play we're about to see: Ms Kringelbach-Greenglass.

Ms Kringelbach-Greenglass staggers through the curtain next to Mrs Hazel. She wears many flowing layers, scarves, necklaces, rings, etc. She flings herself about into a series of dramatic poses as she speaks.

Ms GK: Greetings, you idiots, greetings. My name is Hecuba Kringelbach-Greenglass, and you may recognize me from last year's production of *Peter Rabbit* which in addition to directing, I also understudied and was ultimately forced to perform the leading role after the actor left the show, citing "creative differences."

Mrs H: His appendix exploded.

Ms GK: In our version, Peter was reimagined as Petra Rabbitski: an edgy burlesque performer from Berlin who is lured into the world of cryptocurrency. I also appeared in a one-woman musical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* entitled *Oh, Wuther!* which debuted at the Sunny Valley Fringe Festival this past November. (*Very tepid applause*) Thank you so much. Now, I know that after the sold-out run of *Petra Rabbit*, many of you "parents" are feeling a little trepidatious— no, best not to mince words— a little *dickless* when it comes to Truckee Elementary's upcoming slate of theatrical experiences—

Mrs H: Parents *and* faculty. And are we married to "dickless"?

Ms K-G: Well, I hate to disappoint you philistines, but your worst fears have been realized. What you're about to see will make *Petra Rabbit* look like... like...

Mrs H: Peter Rabbit?

Ms K-G: Yes! Exactly. These wunderkinds have been busting their tiny humps all week creating an original work the likes of which this world has never seen. It is a story about the perils of colonialism and the hubris of the white-skinned conqueror; a tale about the cruelty - and perseverance - of humankind, as well as a desperation so all-consuming that is unlike anything your feeble minds could ever comprehend. And if any of you have a problem with it, you can take it up

with my old friend: *(whips out a piece of paper)* Dr Mrs Permission Slip. Always read the fine print, people.

Mrs H: Cunning as always, Ms Kringelbach-Greenglass. Legally, our hands are tied.

Ms K-G: So with that, let us welcome our pint-sized players to the stage. Unfortunately, most of the cast is absent due to an unfortunate bout of “long COVID,” but worry not: our smallish Stanislavskis have come up with some clever ways of filling in the gaps. Presenting the cast of the Grade 6 drama club... *(the kids enter as they are introduced:)* Charles, Molly, Ezra, Iris, and Abigail.

The children enter wearing the bases of their pioneer-era costumes, their hair neatly combed and/or braided. They are all as sweet as ice cream cake. Abigail in particular is especially tiny and adorable.

Mrs Hazel: My goodness, don't you all look cute—

Ms K-G: *Not now, Geraldine, they're working!!!*

A kid hits a button on the boombox and a wistful, twangy guitar can be heard through the old speakers.

Molly: *Ahem.* This play takes place in the 2000 miles between Missouri and California, which is the home of many tribes including the Sioux Nation, the Pawnee, the Shoshone, the Ute, and the Miwok, to name but a few.

Charles: The grade 6 drama club solemnly acknowledges these people's ongoing title to these lands, and we condemn the violent actions used by our ancestors to take it from them.

Children: SHAME! SHAME! SHAME!

Iris: For a complete list of content warnings, please scan the QR code in the program. If you would like to speak with an active listener at any point, Timmy Munez is out by the water fountain with juice boxes and an open heart.

Ezra: As this is a workshop performance, we welcome constructive criticism. There are feedback forms and tiny pencils in the lobby. So without further ado, it's time for:

As a handmade banner unfurls behind them:

Children: THE TRUCKEE ELEMENTARY GRADE 6 DRAMA CLUB'S PRODUCTION OF... *BLOOD AND SNOW: THE DONNER PARTY'S FATAL FORAY INTO THE SIERRA NEVADA WILDERNESS: A TRAGEDY IN SEVEN ACTS!*

They bow and vanish into the wings: the picture of childhood excitement and surgical precision.

Mrs H: Did they say Donner Party? And *seven acts*?!

Ms K-G: You had plenty of time to weigh in on the subject matter before right now, Mrs Hazel, and frankly it's too late.

Mrs H: It's only supposed to be a couple of scenes— And I think I did ask to read a script a month ago. Remember? You called me a capitalist and banished me from rehearsals?

Ms K-G: And don't think I won't do it again.

Mrs H: But the Donner Party— Aren't they the ones who, you know...

Ms K-G: No spoilers, Mrs Hazel! Places!

Mrs H: But— But—

Abigail: *(Re-entering, with that adorable childish twang:)* Excuse me, Missus Muwphy?

Mrs H: Abigail dear! Is everything alright?

Abigail: Lisa was supposed to pway the nawwator but she got measles because her parents don't wike people who use pwonouns. Will you pway the nawwator instead? *(And so forth with her adorable, childish lisp)*

Mrs H: I would be happy to help! But I don't know any of the lines—

Abigail: *(Thumping a huge promptbook into Mrs H's arms)* Here's the script. And don't fuck it up! *(Exits)*

Mrs H: Abigail— *(Completely turned around)* Ms Kringelbach-Greenglass!

Ms K-G: NO TIME!

She hits the boombox again. A lonely harmonica calls out. Mrs H pulls out her cheaters and begins to read.

Mrs H: "This is a true story. The events depicted in this film took place in Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California in 1846. At the request of the survivors, the names have not been changed. Out of respect for the dead, the rest has also been told exactly as it occurred." Hmm.

Ms K-G produces a sabre and cuts a rope with ritualistic dignity. The banner clatters to the ground, revealing little Charles standing ready, a cardboard top-hat on his head.

Charles: *(As Reed)* My name is James Reed and I am a prominent businessman! But I wish there was a way I could forge my own path...

Abigail crosses, dressed like a newsie.

Abigail: Extra extra, read all about it! Pioneers head west! Nothing but blue skies and sunshine out in beautiful California!

Charles: California? Say, that gives me an idea. I shall put out a notice in the local paper. You there!

Abigail: Huh?

Charles: I wish to help settle California, but I'll need help if I want to survive the journey. Therefore, I shall run an ad in your newspaper. Take this down: *(As Abigail writes)* "Who wants to go to California without costing them anything? You can have as much land as you want. The government of California gives large tracts of land to persons who have to move there. Come on, boys!"

Abigail: Catchy!

Charles: And now we play the waiting game.

Iris enters as Tamsen Donner, a bonnet tied under her chin, nearly colliding with Abigail as she goes to exit.

Iris: Excuse me, are you the prominent businessman James Reed? My name is Tamsen and I saw your notice in the newspaper. My husband and I are interested in going to California with you. Along with our five young children, my brother-in-law, his wife, and their seven young children.

Charles: Where is your husband?

Iris: Right here. *(Reveals a stuffed animal wearing another cardboard hat)* James Reed, meet George Donner.

Charles: *Donner*, eh? I like the cut of your jib. Surely you are an adventurer, same as me. Well Mr and Mrs Donner, we leave at dawn!

Iris: But James Reed, isn't it true that settlers should depart for California no later than June? We're already well into August, 1864! What if it snows and we get stuck in the mountains?

Charles: Ha ha, oh Tamsen Donner, you do make me laugh. Worry not: I know a shortcut!

Iris: A shortcut?

Charles: Yes! It was just discovered by the prominent, white, cis-gendered frontiersman, Lansford Hastings.

Iris: He sounds important.

Charles: He is! It's called *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California: Containing Scenes and Incidents of a Party of Oregon Emigrants; a Description of Oregon; Scenes and Incidents of a Party of California Emigrants; and a Description of California; with a Description of the Different Routes to and Modes of Traveling by Land to Oregon and California; and a Table of Distances.*

Iris: Catchy. What does it say?

Molly: *(Bounding out as Lansford Hastings, wearing britches and a powdered wig)* The most direct route for the California emigrants would be to leave the Oregon trail.

Iris: *Leave* the Oregon trail?

Molly: The route to Sacramento lies through alternate plains, prairies and valleys, and over hills amid lofty mountains. The Indians are entirely inoffensive. A company of emigrants will find no difficulty in coming through with wagons. By taking the route here pointed out, no great obstacle will be met with, but such as common prudence, and skill, and strength may readily overcome! Huzzah! *(Exits)*

Charles: You see, the cut-off is 200 miles shorter than the Oregon Trail, meaning we will be in California in time for tea.

Iris: Well James Reed, I hope you know what you're doing.

Charles: I definitely do.

Children: Westward ho!

The buzz of Ms K-G's pitch-pipe. The children sing a spirited rendition of "Home on the Range" as Ms K-G changes the scenic drops. A hand-painted landscape with a large, yellow sun burns.