

Casting the Bard



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Casting the Bard

COLLECTION. This collection of three short plays provides a humorous behind-the-scenes look at theatre. In “Casting the Bard,” three exhausted drama teachers find themselves stuck in a precarious position—they have to cast for the role of Puck in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” but they only have three students to choose from. The students vying for the role all have major negatives, but trying to decide which student is the best of the worst is the hardest job of all. In “Just a Few Brief Notes...” the director of a school production of “Tom Sawyer” struggles to direct a surfer cast as Huck; an uptight shoe-wearing Tom Sawyer; and a Becky Thatcher who thinks she’s tongue-zilla. And in “The Art of Compromise,” a playwright attempts to compromise with an avant-garde director who wants to transform his modern courtroom drama into the story of a Viking mother brainwashed by a Russian hypnotist.

Performance Time: Approximately 45 minutes.

Casting the Bard

(1 M, 1 F, 2 flexible)

LAVELLE: Burned-out pseudo-drama teacher; acid-tongued soothsayer; flexible.

FLORA: Drama, voice and diction teacher; hypoglycemic peacemaker; flexible.

OTLEY: Young firebrand school drama teacher and former phys ed teacher; flexible.

LESTER HOFFHINDS: Student techie.

"Just a Few Brief Notes..."

(2 M, 1 F, 1 flexible)

DIRECTOR: Egomaniacal, pretentious student director; flexible.

CHUCK: Smaller-than-average tough kid; plays Tom Sawyer.

BREE: Good girl looks, bad girl attitude; plays Becky Thatcher.

IRVING: California surfer dude to the max; slow delivery, spoonful of brains; plays Huckleberry Finn.

The Art of Compromise

(1 F, 2 flexible)

LEON: Fast-talking no-nonsense literary agent; flexible.

MARISKA: Avant-garde director, seemingly from the planet Bizarre-O; wears high heels, a blouse, and skirt; female.

HECTOR: Uncompromising playwright.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change names, pronouns, etc. accordingly.

Setting

Casting the Bard: A school auditorium. A long table with three chairs is set CS. Audition sheets and 8 x 10 pictures litter the tabletop.

"Just a Few Brief Notes...": The empty stage of a school production of "Tom Sawyer."

The Art of Compromise: New York City, an agent's office and a rehearsal hall. There is a pair of chairs on one side of the stage to indicate the agent's office and a pair of stools on the other side to indicate the rehearsal hall.

Props

Casting the Bard: Table, 3 chairs, picture, 8x10 glossy photo of a stocky Samoan with a frizzy mop of hair, script.

"Just a Few Brief Notes...": Clipboard, antacid tablets.

The Art of Compromise: 2 Chairs, 2 stools, antacid tablet, notepad, cell phone, purse.

Sound Effects

The Art of Compromise: Cell phone ringing.

*“As if teaching high school drama
wasn't torture enough.”*

—Odey

Casting the Bard

(AT RISE: The almost bare stage of a high school auditorium. Lavelle, Flora, and Otley are positioned around the table. All are fatigued and aggravated. NOTE: If Lavelle and Otley are female, make changes to the script accordingly.)

LAVELLE: I hate high school Shakespeare productions. The kids with talent don't want to try out because it's Shakespeare, and the kids with no talent can't do iambic pentameter. Today was torture, and we start rehearsals tomorrow afternoon.

OTLEY: As if teaching high school drama wasn't torture enough.

FLORA: At least you don't have to give these kids VD...that didn't come out right. I meant my voice and diction class. Sorry, I'm punchy.

OTLEY: Four hours of auditioning the "Mutant Freshman from Mars" can do that to you.

FLORA: Yes, but as their voice and diction teacher, you have no idea the pain of hearing them butcher the Bard with poor enunciation. Lord, it was like listening to a bunch of auctioneers do "Midsummer Night's Dream."

OTLEY: Or in the DeMarco kid's case..."Midsummer Night's Scream."

LAVELLE: Oh, he can't help that. Both his parents are almost completely deaf.

OTLEY: Yeah, well, will you remind him that I'm not! Talk about playing to the back row—he was playing to the parking lot.

FLORA: Yes, but his enunciation was perfect.

(The lights go down except for a few blue gels.)

LAVELLE/OTLEY/FLORA: *(Shout.)* Lester!

LESTER: (*Over speaker.*) Sorry...are you guys still down there?

OTLEY: Yes, Lester, and we could use a little light to finish our casting.

(*Lights come back up.*)

LESTER: (*Over speaker.*) Sorry, I've been over at the library, and I just assumed you'd finished.

LAVELLE: An assumption I'd like to share, but we're still stuck on two characters.

LESTER: (*Over speaker.*) Oh, that's too bad. Well, I'll be getting my stuff from the lockers and taking off. Will you guys turn off the lights when you're done?

OTLEY: I think we can manage that, Lester. Goodnight. (*To Flora and Lavelle.*) Now there's a kid with a good attitude. In the drama department forever, and always runs lights, audio, or stage manages, and is glad to do it.

FLORA: I'm just sorry it's his senior year. We're all going to miss him.

LAVELLE: I agree, but getting back to the business at hand...are you still against my freshman "Puck" prospect little Kevin?

OTLEY: Oh, yeah, Kevin "marbles in his mouth" Borenstein.

FLORA: Which one was he?

LAVELLE: Number 38, the short blondie...

FLORA: Oh, yes, him...lots of energy...but he needs a translator.

LAVELLE: Mr. Otley, Miss Flora, with all due respect...look, I do admit he was a little nervous, and he went a little fast—

OTLEY: A little fast?! Lavelle, the kid was breaking the sound barrier. All I heard was Oberon's lines followed by a sonic boom.

LAVELLE: But he'd be so cute as Puck.

FLORA: I agree with you, Mr. Lavelle. He was a sweet, angelic little freshman. So small, in fact, he made me want

to call my brother-in-law, the endocrinologist, but we cannot cast on looks alone.

LAVELLE: But the only other prospect we have for "Puck" is Jamie Garcia...number 22...

(Otley looks at the picture.)

OTLEY: Oh, yeah, "Three-Chins" Garcia, he'd do...

LAVELLE: I refuse! There is no way our fly system can support lowering that big flab monster on wires.

OTLEY: I don't know...I got an uncle in construction, maybe we could borrow some cables...

LAVELLE: No! We will not have an obese "Puck"! A chubby "Oberon," maybe. A portly "Theseus," definitely. But no fat "Pucks"!

OTLEY: But then we're right back to the Borenstein kid. Remember, "The Fast and the Furious" Borenstein? Besides, I hear he can be unprofessional.

FLORA: I hear he's undirectable, as well as unintelligible. Miss Schuler gave him VD first semester, and she says he is a little headstrong.

LAVELLE: And I had him in beginning acting. You just have to know how to work with him to get the best out of—

OTLEY: Hold the phone, Lavelle. I thought our job as drama teachers was to teach the kids how to take direction, not try to figure out how to direct each individual kid.

LAVELLE: Our job as drama teachers? I understand you came over from the phys-ed department 12 years ago to help construct sets. Just when did we go from Knute Rockne to Lee Strasberg?

OTLEY: Look, I'm here to coach...uh...teach.

LAVELLE: You're here to educate. And I always thought education was a circular endeavor, not a one-way street. We learn from the kids, the kids learn from us. Otherwise all you're doing is spewing out information you hope they'll remember at test time.

OTLEY: I should live so long – they'll remember it at test time!

FLORA: Gentlemen, please. We are here to cast "Midsummer Night's Dream," not re-enact the hostilities between the clans in "Romeo and Juliet."

OTLEY: You're right...you're right...but have we at least reached consensus on the rest of the cast? It's only taken three and a half hours since we finished auditions to do it, but we're there, correct?

(They both nod.)

FLORA: With two exceptions.

OTLEY: Yes, the aforementioned Robin Goodfellow, and...uh...

FLORA: Lysander.

OTLEY: Lysander...but there are at least five viable choices there.

LAVELLE: And I still say Kevin Borenstein would make a great Puck.

OTLEY: As long as he comes with subtitles. So, we have one vote for, one vote against the Borenstein brat as Puck. Flora, you have the tie-breaking vote.

FLORA: *(Looks back and forth between them.)* Well...uh...I feel...that is, I think...uh...I'm...I'm not sure.

OTLEY: Oh, great! Ya wanna order takeout, Mr. Lavelle?

FLORA: Perhaps we should table the discussion about Puck for the time being. We still have Lysander to cast. *(Holds up picture.)* What do you think of number 29, Mr. Otley? Ashton Dobler.

(Otley looks at the picture.)

OTLEY: That one? As an actor, he'd make a good doorstep.

FLORA: Mr. Lavelle?

LAVELLE: Oh, not that one. He's not the leading man type. Look at how thin he is.

OTLEY: Maybe he should play Puck.

LAVELLE: Are you kidding? He's six-foot-three! Just how big a fairy do you want prancing around that stage?

OTLEY: Yeah, it'll remind everyone too much of when we did "West Side Story" last semester, and don't worry, Lavelle, I don't want pizza-face stick-boy for Puck, either.

FLORA: Mr. Otley! I hope you don't talk that way to the students.

OTLEY: Didn't use to. But I got my tenure last year, and now I tell it like it is.

LAVELLE: I can hardly wait for my tenure...

OTLEY: So you can tell the kids what you really think?

LAVELLE: No, so I can tell you what I really think!

FLORA: Well, let me tell you what I really think! I think we'd better finish casting this show so that I can go home and get something to eat! We've been at this since five. It's 8:30!

(Long pause.)

LAVELLE: Do we have a little problem with low blood sugar, Miss Flora?

[END OF FREEVIEW]

*“I thought only girls
could be thespians...”*

—Irving

"Just a Few Brief Notes..."

(AT RISE: *The near-barren set of a school production of "Tom Sawyer." Chuck, Bree, and Irving sit lazily on stage. The Director, also a student, paces, holding a clipboard. NOTE: If Director is female, make changes to script accordingly.*)

DIRECTOR: Thank you for staying. Now that I've released the remainder of the cast, I just have a few brief notes for you, the principle performers. We must be ready...check that, no, we need to be more than ready for the opening of the first all-student production of "Tom Sawyer" here at [Filmore Junior High]. [*Or insert name of a local school.*] This is the first time they've let me, an [eighth] grader, direct...although if I had been in charge of ["Paint Your Wagon"] last year... [*Or insert name of last year's school production*] ...well, no sense dredging up that horror again...

CHUCK: If this going to take long, can we change out of our costumes? This shirt itches.

DIRECTOR: To act is to be uncomfortable, Tom. Get used to it as you explore your thespian existence.

IRVING: I thought only girls could be thespians...?

DIRECTOR: Shall we get to the notes so we can all go home? I've got geometry homework from [Miss. Nentwig] I've got to finish tonight. [*Or insert name of your school's geometry teacher.*]

BREE: Sounds good to me.

DIRECTOR: Ah, the voice of reason, Becky Thatcher. As you all know during the rehearsal process, here at [Filmore Junior High], we pride ourselves in digging deep into each character and exploring all avenues of the creative process—

CHUCK: Can we at least take off our shirts and suspenders? It's kinda hot under these stage lights.

DIRECTOR: Tom! I'm talking here. First and foremost, general note for Tom and Huck...we must do a better job of getting Native-American Joe off the stage during the blackout at the end of scene two.

CHUCK: You mean Injun Joe?

DIRECTOR: Yes, but according to the school board we can only call him that in the context of the play. When we refer to him offstage we have the options of "Lakota Joe," "Apache Joe," "Crow Joe," and "Native-American Joe."

CHUCK: How 'bout "Cup of Joe"?

IRVING: How about "Joe Mamma"?

(Chuck and Irving exchange a high-five, pleased to death with themselves. Bree rolls her eyes at them.)

BREE: Boys. *(To Director.)* How about just "Joe"?

DIRECTOR: Very well, for the purposes of this note session we shall refer to him as "Just Joe"! Mr. Sawyer's Starbuck's comment notwithstanding. Shall we continue? What seems to be the trouble with getting Just Joe offstage at the bottom of two?

CHUCK: His bottom. It weighs two tons.

DIRECTOR: Max Gonzalez doesn't weight that much.

IRVING: No, really, dude, the guy's like Shamu the Latino! It's really hard for even, like, the two of us to drag him all the way into the wings. I mean, he's a load, dude.

CHUCK: I'm sayin'! That guy's two tamales short of a Mexican buffet!

DIRECTOR: Well, what would help you manage him in the future?

CHUCK: A forklift.

BREE: Wait a minute. I'm just standing in the wings waiting to come on for scene three...I could help them.

DIRECTOR: Excellent suggestion, Becky.

BREE: Sabrina.

(Tom starts to itch.)

DIRECTOR: Yes, yes, whatever. Now on to the whitewashing sequence...Tom, will you quit scratching!

CHUCK: Well, it itches.

DIRECTOR: But we don't scratch.

CHUCK: But it does itch!

DIRECTOR: *(Shouts.)* But we *don't* scratch!

(Chuck grabs the Director by the front of the shirt.)

CHUCK: But it *does* itch.

DIRECTOR: *(Scared.)* Okay, okay, let's be calm. Didn't Ghandi say that violence is never the answer?

CHUCK: I wasn't planning on knocking the snot out of Ghandi.

(Director laughs it off, as he breaks away from Chuck.)

DIRECTOR: Now then where were we...? Ah, yes, the whitewashing scene. Are you having some kind of trouble with the paint canisters, Tom?

CHUCK: They won't open. And the bucket I have to pour them into leaks on the right side.

IRVING: Is that stage right or audience right? *(Snorting laugh.)*

CHUCK: Okay, butthead, it leaks on the side. *(To Director.)* It still leaks, okay?

DIRECTOR: Very well. Note to stage crew: "Fix bucket and pre-open paint canisters for our manually challenged Tom Sawyer."

CHUCK: Hey!

DIRECTOR: Tom...

CHUCK: Chuck...

DIRECTOR: I don't care! You're a [seventh] grader, ordinarily I wouldn't even be talking to you!

CHUCK: Hey, my shrink says that when you do that you minimize my self-worth and invalidate my existence. I could be scarred for life!

DIRECTOR: Don't I wish! Very well. Chuck! You are playing Tom Sawyer...tell me—Chuck!--who *is* Tom Sawyer?

CHUCK: Uh...he's me whenever I take off my shoes and put on suspenders?

DIRECTOR: (*Grabs him. Shouts.*) No! Tom Sawyer is youth! He's boyhood! He's the carefree innocence of the child! He's energetic! He's carefree! He's gay!

(*Chuck breaks away from the Director and goes to the other side of the stage.*)

CHUCK: Whoa!

DIRECTOR: Never mind! Just listen to me now. Tom Sawyer is the kind of boy who always maintains a devil-may-care attitude. He exudes the splendor of youth. He skips... (*Demonstrates.*) ...trah-la, through the woods...uh...check that one. But the most important thing for you to remember is that Tom Sawyer is light—

CHUCK: In the loaf—?

DIRECTOR: No! He's light-hearted. He's free! He worries about nothing! (*Director grabs Chuck and shakes him maniacally.*) Can you give me that kind of freedom and lack of worry, Chuck?!

(*Chuck looks at Director threateningly.*)

CHUCK: You're touching me.

DIRECTOR: (*Dusting him off.*) Oops. Sorry, sorry, sorry. So, what do you say, Chuck?

CHUCK: I'll try.

DIRECTOR: Good! Work on it!

[END OF FREEVIEW]

*“So does this mean
we’re going to have to suffer
through a Viking stigmata
on stage in the second act?
Or, will Rasputin be crucified
on a coat rack?”*

—Hector

The Art of Compromise

(AT RISE: *New York City, an agent's office and a rehearsal hall. There is a pair of chairs on one side of the stage to indicate the agent's office and a pair of stools on the other side to indicate the rehearsal hall. Leon is pacing and Hector sits watching him. NOTE: If flexible characters are female, make changes to the script accordingly.*)

LEON: What is wrong with you—you stupid, arrogant, uncompromising tub of goo?!

HECTOR: And good morning to you too, Leon.

(Leon's cell phone rings.)

LEON: Hold on... *(Into phone.)* Leon Cowsill. No! Look, that maniacal moron has already cut the play for time, for content, and because he didn't want to build a staircase. I'm not going back to my client with any more cuts. Hey, you tell him if he wants to write his own play and butcher it, go ahead, but he's through with this one! *(Hangs up cell phone. To Hector.)* You need to learn the art of compromise, ol' buddy.

HECTOR: Yeah, right, Cowsill. And just where was all that righteousness when I was working with Cyrus Pertwee last summer?

LEON: Don't give me that, Marquez. Cyrus Pertwee's a genius, and that script, quite frankly, wasn't your best. Besides, you've had problems with every director you've worked with except for Mark Doyle, and that's only because he allows you to have veto power on casting and practically lets you serve as uber-director.

HECTOR: I just love Mark Doyle. I've enjoyed every play he's done of mine. I only wish every director could be so secure. He's such a...such a...

LEON: Doormat?

HECTOR: He isn't threatened by the fact that I just might know something about the play I wrote.

LEON: Oh, would you get over your cheap self, you stupid lug nut?! I remember when I found you doing community theatre in [Tallahassee]! *[Or insert the name of another city.]*

HECTOR: Hey, don't knock community theatre. It was my proving ground.

LEON: Yeah? And what did you prove? Writing plays for an audience of old farts that think Sinatra is still playing Vegas? They could never get the deeper nuances of your work, even *when* they could hear it. But I did! And I agreed to represent you, and I got your foot in the door up here where *real* theatre is done without the smell of Ben Gay or the sound of snoring in the first act! But, old friend, you haven't had a hit in three years, a money-maker in two. What's wrong with writing something a little lighter? Another comedy, maybe?

HECTOR: I don't want to be remembered for some screwball comedy about four hookers trekking through the Nevada desert disguised as nuns.

LEON: Ah, your last big hit!

HECTOR: It made money, maybe...but it was so far off Broadway, it was practically in Hoboken!

LEON: But it *made money*, and you've got a kid about to start college, don't you?

HECTOR: Don't remind me. *(Hector takes out an antacid tablet and begins chewing on it.)*

LEON: Are those for acid?

HECTOR: Yeah.

LEON: Give me one.

HECTOR: Get your own.

LEON: C'mon, every time I talk to you before lunch I get acid reflux so bad I can feel my esophagus melting. Give it up! *(Hector breaks off a small piece of a tablet and hands it to him.)* What is this?!

HECTOR: Fifteen percent.
(*Leon hesitates a moment, then chews it anyway.*)

LEON: Oh, and speaking of indigestion, I just got word about your new courtroom drama...

HECTOR: "Nine Tenths of the Law"?

LEON: Yeah, that one. It's set to go into pre-production Off-Broadway this week.

HECTOR: How far off?

LEON: Massapequa, but that's not the big problem. They assigned you a director.

HECTOR: Assigned?! What happened to Mark Doyle?

LEON: He got a chance to go on a national tour of "The Full Monty" as an actor. [*Or insert the name of another popular show.*]

HECTOR: Oh, great, so while Mark's getting big bucks, I get stuck with...with...who exactly?

LEON: (*Hesitating.*) Uh...well... (*Wincing.*) ...Mariska Kovatch.

HECTOR: Mariska Kovatch!? Not the one from the Kennedy Center?

LEON: She's very hot right now, and she's done Off-Broadway before...

HECTOR: Wasn't she the one who directed that performance art piece, where the big Hawaiian dude wrote hieroglyphic symbols with his own feces?!

LEON: Hey, but that got great reviews at the Kennedy Center.

HECTOR: Yeah, but the smell coming out of that theatre by the second act was unbearable.

LEON: The producers seem to think she'll do a good job with this script.

HECTOR: They obviously didn't see her all-Korean production of "To Kill a Mockingbird"!

LEON: She does tend to work outside the box.

HECTOR: She's so far *outside* the box, she forgets what she has *in* the box!

LEON: Well, she's your director. You have a meeting with her at that rehearsal hall on East 68th Street this afternoon at three. I'm sure everything will work out. Just be calm. Be diplomatic. Be kind. In other words, be everything you're usually not. And would you please think about writing another comedy?

HECTOR: You just worry about getting Samuel French to remember I exist, okay?

LEON: You're hopeless. But I still love ya, though I don't know why. Probably because you were my first successful client. Remember when "Memoirs of the Socially Awkward" hit?

HECTOR: Of course.

LEON: Ah, those were happy bucks back then. And speaking of happy bucks, *think* about what I said. About the screwball comedy? You need the money.

HECTOR: Even if I feel like a sellout?

LEON: As long as you sell for a good enough price. Your creditors don't really care how you feel. Don't forget, 68th Street at three.

(Leon exits SR. Mariska struts in SL, wearing heels, a blouse, and a skirt. Hector crosses to the stools SL. Note: In this sequence, Mariska is oblivious to Hector's pointed one-liners.)

MARISKA: *(Notices Hector.)* Oh, you must be Hector Marquez!

HECTOR: Marquez.

MARISKA: I'm Mariska Kovatch.

HECTOR: I know.

MARISKA: I am just so glad to be working with you. Did you see my show at the Kennedy Center?

HECTOR: Smelled it. *(Clears throat.)* I mean...it was...quite different.

MARISKA: I simply love performance art, don't you? (*Slight pause.*) Of course you do. And speaking of art, your play... "The seven percent solution"...

HECTOR: Uh...you mean "Nine-Tenths of the Law"?

MARISKA: Of course. I knew there was a fraction in the title.

HECTOR: Actually one's a fraction, one's a percentage...

MARISKA: I simply have these marvelous ideas about how to conceptualize your play. I read your play. Five times!

HECTOR: Couldn't get it the first time, huh?

MARISKA: And on the fourth read, I began to see this piece as something beyond a simple courtroom drama about a lesbian couple in a custody battle with a born-again ex-husband—

HECTOR: He's not really born-again, he's just—

MARISKA: I saw a symbolic battle between liberal thought, and the menace of conservatism.

HECTOR: Uh...okay...?

MARISKA: We'll showcase this battle royale in the perfect setting—I see the courtroom as a cathedral!

HECTOR: Cathedral?

MARISKA: Representative of course. I've already hired the choir.

HECTOR: Choir?

MARISKA: They go on either side of the pipe organ, serving as the backdrop for the judge's bench.

HECTOR: Oh no...

MARISKA: And for the climactic scene where the lesbian mother is cross-examined...I'm going to have her take the stand, dressed as a Viking! At that point the lights change, the choir sings, and the opposing attorney turns to her, dressed as Rasputin. The dull legalese will be enhanced by a flood of hypnotic light as he tries to weave his spell over the Viking mother with his mesmerizing gaze.

[END OF FREEVIEW]