

Questions

A Play by Ingram Connor Griffin

[SETTING]

A classroom. Four desks are placed in a row facing the audience. A student sits in each. One student can be seen pantomiming typing on a computer; two are talking to each other from “across the room;” one is lying down sloppily on his/her desktop, arm dangling off the side of the desk. A teacher, Mrs. Sanders, enters, followed by a confident student teacher, Connor.

MRS. SANDERS: (surveying the room irritably) Alright guys, come on. Class is starting and we’re not going to sleep or dawdle. Now, as you know, the day of our lovely test is finally here. I have no doubt in my mind that you know the material, but just in case, I’ll give you ten extra minutes of prep time, so use your time wisely.

(the students shuffle through their bags to get out their notes, two continue talking, pantomiming)

(steps toward the student teacher, who is standing near the back of the classroom) Now after they’re finished with their tests, they’ll be forming their rough drafts on a paper they’re writing. Do you want to help them with that, sort of nudge them in the right direction?

CONNOR: Absolutely, writing is my strong suit. I’d love to help them out.

MRS. SANDERS: Thanks. Alright, guys, that’s enough study time! Please refresh your pages and go to the link I’ve provided and start your test.

(one continues to study) Okay, you know what I said, now come on. (She forcefully grabs the student’s notes and sets them aside as he/she groans)

Beat.

STUDENT ON FAR LEFT: Man, I got a 60!!

STUDENT SECOND-FROM RIGHT: (grinning) I got a 90, man, check it out! (student on far left groans)

MRS. SANDERS: Alright now, time to start on your writing! Now today, we’re only going to focus on the brainstorming process, so if you get that far, you’ve done exceptionally well for the day. Remember that brainstorming is just gathering your thoughts and organizing them on paper to focus on the subject you want to write about. Ideally, after you’ve done this, you will be able to start on your first paragraph which is, anybody?

MIDDLE STUDENT: The thesis.

MRS. SANDERS: Right; excellent! So let’s start. If you need help, I’ll be coming around the room. (pulls the student teacher to the side) How about you help that student over there? He (she) seems to be having trouble. (motions towards the far left student)

CONNOR: I’d be glad to.

MRS. SANDERS: Thank you so much! (begins to go over to each student and help)

(the student on the far left is messing with his phone)

CONNOR: (to student) How's everything coming along?

STUDENT: (slightly annoyed) I got it.

CONNOR: Okay, just let me know if you need anything. (steps back and looks around the room, then walks upstage)

What am I supposed to do? I know the other student teachers have to be better at this than I am. As a future educator, I have to keep pressing, but I don't want to get on the student's bad side... and who am I to even give orders around here? This isn't exactly my turf; it's Mrs. Sanders's. This isn't even my first semester and here I am already experiencing reality shock. Is this even where I'm supposed to be? What kind of teacher am I supposed to be? What am I even doing with my life?

MRS. SANDERS: (to the student on the far left) Okay, how about we try this? (student reluctantly puts his phone away and pays attention)

CONNOR: Why couldn't I think of that? Or do I even have that authority as a student teacher? Are they even going to take me seriously? *scoffs* Doubt it. Well, there are still some students left who may need a little push.

(walks to student second-from-right) Are you understanding everything okay?

STUDENT: No, this is confusing me a bit. (plays on phone)

CONNOR: Well what do you want to write about? (student shrugs shoulders) What are you interested in? (student shrugs shoulders again) Uh.. well, okay. How about this? *types on "computer"* What do you know about the recent presidential election?

STUDENT: Trump won.

CONNOR: Well, yeah, but any underlying issues? What about the Flint Water Crisis or the Black Lives Matter movement? (student stares blankly) Does any of that interest you?

STUDENT: (goes back to the phone) Not really.

MRS. SANDERS: Connor, could you come over here and help James a little bit? (gestures towards middle student, busily typing on the computer)

CONNOR: Sure. Hey, James.

JAMES: (goes to shake hands) What's up? (the two shake hands)

CONNOR: You need any help?

JAMES: Yeah. I'm working on something different than everybody else. I got a test coming up pretty soon and I'm taking practice assessments, but I don't understand some of it.

CONNOR: Okay, let's see what we've got. *reads off the "screen"* "...What kind of writing is this?" Okay, what do you think?

JAMES: (shrugs shoulders) I'm not really sure.

CONNOR: Alright, let's use process of elimination here. What about this one?

JAMES: Well it can't be a play because it's not written with just characters talking.

CONNOR: Right. What about the next one?

JAMES: Fiction. Hmm.. It looks like it could be.

CONNOR: Okay, why do you say that?

JAMES: Well it's set in a real-world location but the events that took place don't look like they actually happened.

CONNOR: Good, we'll come back to that one.

JAMES: It can't be the other two though. I don't think...

CONNOR: Okay, why not?

JAMES: Well it's not poetry because it doesn't have verses or rhythm, you know. And it can't be a news article because it's not structured like one. It's gotta be fiction.

CONNOR: Sounds good to me. Go ahead and click submit. See, you know this stuff.

JAMES: Yeah man, I guess I do. I appreciate it.

CONNOR: Yeah, anytime. You're gonna do great on that test.

JAMES: Thanks man.

(bell rings)

MRS. SANDERS: Alright, everybody, I'll see you next week! (to Connor) Thank you so much for your help today, it really makes a difference. (students file out)

CONNOR: It's my pleasure. I really like James. He knows his stuff, he just needs a little push.

MRS. SANDERS: Yep, he's a scholar alright.

CONNOR: (upstage) You can make a difference. How do you know? Just take a look at the students who thank you with bright eyes. It shows. It may take some time and some students will be more difficult to reach than others. You may go through the very same questions that I did. You'll find there will be days when you ask yourself, "Is it really worth it? Did I make a mistake?" Well, we're all students when you think about it. Life is a constant discovery. It may take a lot of searching, but you'll find the answers to these questions one day. Just never give up.