

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Drama Club I

Unit 5 of 8

Herb Gardner won awards for his first play, A Thousand Clowns -- some adjectives ascribed to it by New York critics are "sunny", "wishful", "sensible and demented", and "filled with laughter, warmth, sweetness and daffiness"! Gardner had his beginning in the theater by selling orange drinks and checking coats at two Broadway theaters when he was a teenager. In A Thousand Clowns, the hero, Murray, is raising Nick, aged twelve. Murray has an untraditional outlook on life that Nick's school teachers are not in tune with, to say the least. Much of the humor in the play comes from the role reversal of a child's vs. an adult's outlook on life, reflected in the dialog between Nick and Murray.

NICK: Murray, you don't want a job is the whole thing.

MURRAY: Would you just concentrate on being a child? Because I find your imitation of an adult hopelessly inadequate.

NICK: You want to be your own boss, but the trouble with that is you don't pay yourself anything. (NICK *decides that what he has just said is very funny. He laughs.*) Hey -- you don't pay yourself anything -- that's a good line -- I gotta remember that.

MURRAY: That's what *you* said last week.

NICK: Look, Murray. (*He puts the paper down and stands up*) Can I speak to you man to man?

MURRAY: That was cute a year ago, buddy, but that line has got to go.

NICK: (*Takes off his glasses*) Murray, I am upset. For me as an actual child the way you live in this house and we live is a dangerous thing for my later life when I become an actual person. An unemployed person like you are for so many months is bad for you as the person involved and is definitely bad for me who he lives with in the same house where the rent isn't paid for months sometimes. And I wish you would get a job, Murray, please.

(MURRAY *tries to control himself but cannot hide his laughter; he sees that NICK is offended by this and tries to stop. NICK walks away from him, goes to his alcove.*)

MURRAY: (*Goes to NICK in the alcove*) Kid, I know. I'm sorry. You're right. You are. This is terrible.

NICK: You're not kidding.

MURRAY: Nick.

NICK: Yeah?

MURRAY: Nick, y'know when I said I was looking for work last week? (*Somewhat ashamed*) Well, I went to the movies. Every day. In the afternoon.

NICK: *Murray*, you mean you really...

MURRAY: Now don't give me any of that indignant crap. I happen to be admitting something to you, and it is bad enough I should have to discuss my adult problems with a grotesque cherub, without you giving me dirty looks on top of it.



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HARBELL, INC. presents JASON ROBARDS • BARBARA HARRIS in
 "A THOUSAND CLOWNS"
 Produced and Directed by FRED COE
 Released thru UNITED ARTISTS

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1. Describe what you get of Nick's and Murray's personalities through this short scene.
2. Write ten more lines for this scene in the voice of Nick and Murray.
3. In plays, do you think it's appropriate to incorporate comedy in serious situations? Why or why not?

4. Write a scene (twenty lines or more) where there is a role reversal between what is expected of two characters.

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

Appendix Drama Club I: Unit 5 of 8

Citations:

<http://www.nesssoftware.com/www/img/stills/ThousandClowns.jpg>