

# **Eight Hours**

by

Michael W. Kramer

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## Synopsis:

The play covers the career of Dennis Martin, a high school English teacher, from his first day as a new teacher until after he has retired. Each scene skips ahead approximately six years as he experiences some of the trials and tribulations of teaching from students who cheat to coaches who care only about keeping students eligible for the big game. In the end, a former student takes his spot in Room 305, a suitable closing to his career.

Scene: Room 305 in a typical public high school

## Scenes:

Scene 1: August 1971, Before First Hour

Scene 2: September 1977, Second Hour

Scene 3: October 1983, Third Hour

Scene 4: December 1989, Fourth Hour

There will be a 15 minute lunch period after scene 4. Please get your food and eat it quickly so that you are not tardy for your fifth hour class.

Scene 5: January 1995, Fifth Hour

Scene 6: February 2001, Sixth Hour

Scene 7: March 2007, Seventh Hour

Scene 8: May 2013, The end of Eighth Hour

## Dismissal

## Adult Characters:

Dennis Martin, the main character, is a career high school teacher in a public school. The play begins with his first day of teaching and ends after he has retired. He is often torn over whether his decision to be a teacher was the right one. He is never quite sure that what he is doing is making a difference or important.

Grace Stevens begins teaching six years after Dennis. They later marry and raise a family. She starts a second career in banking after their children begin school.

Ben Larson is about 10 years older than Dennis. He is the principal throughout much of the play. He is a well-meaning administrator who keeps things running.

Gloria Richards is nearing retirement as the play begins. She is full of clichés and a negative attitude that indicate she should have retired years ago.

Dr. Joe Wells is about 15 years older than Dennis. He has been teaching in the school for years. What he lacks in charisma, he makes up for in wisdom.

Coach Jim Barker is about 10 years younger than Dennis. He is dedicated to sports. Education is really only of secondary importance.

Mary James is president of the Board of Education. She is a professional and a politician.

Kim Krause is a young teacher who will probably win a teaching award some day if she sticks with it. She's that good.

Pat Becker used to be a good teacher. Now s/he puts in time at work to be able to do what s/he really wants to do--participate in community theatre and wait for retirement.

Students Characters:

The same actors and actresses should portray the students in each scene in which they appear. Their costumes should change to represent the changing times, but the essence of their characters should remain the same to show the commonality across time.

Depending on the available cast size, additional student characters may be added to make the classroom full. This can be accomplished by dividing some of the parts into 1 and 2 as suggested in the script and then give each part a different name or simply by having more students in the scenes. These extras should ad lib to add to the general commotion and activity in the scenes.

Valerie (1&2): The typical conscientious student, who participates in class a lot.

Sally (1&2): Someone for whom school interferes with more important things like her social life, although she would have no social life if it weren't for school.

Kate (1&2): An average student.

Chris (1&2): A pretty good student, but not remarkable in any other way. Chris becomes a first year teacher in scene 8.

Crystal: A bright student who is not interested in school.

Jamie: A quiet, bright student who rarely volunteers.

Doug (1&2): A last minute, popular guy.

Peter (1&2): A good-natured joker, who likes working more than studying what's in books.

Aaron (1&2): A typical student, but one who is not going to take anything from anyone either.

Paul (1&2): Seems to enjoy creating conflict at times, although usually he is indistinguishable from other students.

Sample Dialogue From

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*Scene 4: Near the end of Fourth Hour, December 1989*

*(Dennis is handing back papers to the whole class as they are about to leave. He calls out names and talks as he does this. Cut, add, or change names depending on the cast size.)*

DENNIS:

That's all the time we have for today. I have your term papers to give back to you as I promised. Here you go Bob. I must say that many of you really did a good job. Kate. Some of you. . .Sue, Bill. . .should be quite proud of your work. Valerie. . .John. On a couple of your papers I asked you to see me after class. . .Deb. . .Michael. Please see me today if at all possible. . .Jason. . .Sarah. Now I know you are all looking forward to Christmas vacation starting tomorrow. . .Jeff. . .Sally. . .but . . .Karen. . .remember that when we get back. . .Tonya. . .we have to get ready for the semester final.

PETER 2:

Couldn't we just skip the final, Mr. M?

DENNIS:

Sure we could Peter, except I wouldn't want to deprive you of the opportunity to improve your grade. *(Hands out the last couple papers, keeping one.)*

PETER 2:

How can you improve on perfection?

DENNIS:

You can't. But we're sure that you can improve on your grade.

*(The class laughs as the bell rings. Students get up and leave the room during the following with only a couple students holding back to talk to Mr. Martin.)*

DOUG 2:

What did you get?

PETER 1:

Same as always, a C.

KATE 2:

Did you do okay?

SALLY 2:

Good enough. I don't think it will matter what I get on the final. I won't even have to study.

AARON 2:

Anybody know what's for lunch today?

PAUL 2:

I don't know but I heard your mamma made it.

AARON 2:

Hey . . .*(They run off, leaving Valerie and Jamie standing, with Crystal still seated).*

VALERIE 1:

Mr. Martin, you said to see you on my paper.

DENNIS:

Yes, and you too, Jamie.

JAMIE 2:

What is it?

DENNIS:

First off, you both did extremely well on your papers.

VALERIE 1:

Thanks.

JAMIE 2:

Thanks.

DENNIS:

I was wondering, sometimes students want to see sample term papers to get an idea of what to do. With your permission, I'd like to make copies of your papers to show anyone who asks.

VALERIE 1:

Sure. *(She hands him her paper).*

DENNIS:

Thank you. Part of the reason I'd like to use both of your papers, Jamie, is because your paper takes almost the opposite position of Valerie's. This would show that it's not what stand you take, but how well you defend it that matters. Sometimes students don't believe

that.

JAMIE 2:

I don't really want other people to know it was my paper.

DENNIS:

Oh, they wouldn't know. I'll take your name off the cover. (*Valerie is disappointed.*) In fact, I won't use yours until next year when you are both gone.

JAMIE 2:

Okay then. (*Jamie hands it to Dennis.*)

DENNIS:

Thanks a lot. I'll make copies by the end of the day. If you want to take them home today, stop by after school.

JAMIE 2:

Okay.

VALERIE 1:

See you then.

(*He puts their papers on his desk, still holding one paper.*)

CRYSTAL:

(*As she approaches*) How come you didn't give me my paper back?

DENNIS:

I wanted to talk to you first.

CRYSTAL:

You want to make copies of mine, too?

DENNIS:

Not exactly.

CRYSTAL:

So then why didn't you give it back?

DENNIS:

I was wondering if you could tell me about how this paper got written.

CRYSTAL:

What do you mean?

DENNIS:

Just tell me how you researched it, wrote it, and so forth.

CRYSTAL:

Well, we went to the library like you said we should and we looked up all the books we could find on the subject. Then we took notes and then we wrote the paper.

DENNIS:

Could you show me your notes?

CRYSTAL:

I don't have them with me.

DENNIS:

Can you bring them in tomorrow?

CRYSTAL:

I think I threw them away already.

DENNIS:

I see.

CRYSTAL:

What's the problem, Mr. Martin?

DENNIS:

Something bothers me about this paper.

CRYSTAL:

What? We did exactly what you said to do.

DENNIS:

I'd like you to read the first paragraph of your paper to me.

CRYSTAL:

What for?

DENNIS:

I'd like you to read it and then tell me what it means. Here.

CRYSTAL:

*(Very tentatively with difficulty on some words.)* A number of theorists have hypothesized that there is a symbiotic relationship between children's symbolic play during independent time and their social-cognitive development during their formative years.

DENNIS:

That's enough. Tell me, what does that mean?

CRYSTAL:

Well, it means. . . it means. . . It's what the books said.

DENNIS:

So is this a direct quote from a book?

CRYSTAL:

I don't know. But what we're saying is that children learn from playing, not just from school.

DENNIS:

I see. That's certainly an interesting point.

CRYSTAL:

What's the problem?

DENNIS:

Here in this next paragraph you have this direct quote from Eisenberg's book. Am I reading that correctly?

CRYSTAL:

Yes. What about it?

DENNIS:

I went to our library. Is this the book you got that quote from?

CRYSTAL:

I think so.

DENNIS:

It's the book listed in your bibliography.

CRYSTAL:

Then I guess it's the book we got it from.

DENNIS:

According to your paper, this quote is from page 53. Let's look at page 53. Where on page 53 did you find this since page 53 is a blank page between chapters?

CRYSTAL:

We went to other libraries, too. Maybe it was a different book.

DENNIS:

But this is the book listed in your bibliography.

CRYSTAL:

Maybe we got the wrong page number.

DENNIS:

Why do you keep saying "we"? I thought this was your paper.

CRYSTAL:

I meant me.

DENNIS:

Did you have help on this?

CRYSTAL:

A little.

DENNIS:

From whom? Your Mom? Your brother?

CRYSTAL:

No.

DENNIS:

Who then?

CRYSTAL:

My friend, Boyd helped me on it.

DENNIS:

Boyd Robinson?

CRYSTAL:

Not him. He doesn't go to this school.

DENNIS:

So your friend Boyd helped you?

CRYSTAL:

Yes, some. It's a really hard assignment and I needed help.

DENNIS:

How much did he help you?

CRYSTAL:

Some, like I said.

DENNIS:

Did he write some of the paper for you?

CRYSTAL:

It's my paper. I wrote it.

DENNIS:

Then how come you have trouble reading it?

CRYSTAL:

I can read it.

DENNIS:

Try this sentence.

CRYSTAL:

Which one?

DENNIS:

This one.

CRYSTAL:

Methodological problems associated with experimental studies have confounded examination of the transactional relationship by decontextualizing the language.

DENNIS:

Can you tell me what that means?

CRYSTAL:

It means. . .we, I mean I. . .(*breaking down almost*).

DENNIS:

Did you write this paper, Crystal?

CRYSTAL:

I told you I did.

DENNIS:

The quotes are not correct to the books in our library. You can't tell me what it means. Did you write the paper?

CRYSTAL:

All right. I had help.

DENNIS:

Help or did someone else write it?

CRYSTAL:

*(Becoming defiant again.)* So what if someone else wrote most of it.

DENNIS:

Or all of it?

CRYSTAL:

What difference does it make? It's just a stupid paper.

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