

Erasures

By Don Zolidis

About the play: At an all-black middle school in Houston, a new teacher has discovered a conspiracy to cheat on the standardized tests. She's caught between reporting the truth or sympathizing with their plight.

About this scene: Monica, the Principal, has just been confronted by her teacher, who has suggested appealing to the school district for help.

MONICA, 30s-60s, African American. The Principal of the school.

MONICA

Every year they raise that standard. Every year we gotta meet a higher score – I had to tear up choir, I had to tear up band, I had to cancel every damn program in the school that the kids liked so we could double up on reading and math and only that, cause that's the only thing that matters to these people – listen to me – what are we doing here? Are we doing this to pass a test? Is that why you come to work? Is that why you signed up? It sure as hell wasn't why I signed up. I'm trying to educate the children. Okay? I want to *educate* them. I'm here at six in the morning, I'm here at six at night, and I'm spending every goddamn ounce of love I got to help these kids, and they were going to Fail this Test. No way around it.

CAITLIN

So you work harder to –

MONICA

THAT AIN'T THE POINT! Don't you get that? That can't be the point of coming here day in day out. We could have them here ten hours a day, twenty percent of our sixth graders can't read when they get here – for the most part we got no support anywhere, we got thirty-five kids in the class, we got no money for any fine arts program, and if all of a sudden we end up failing this damn thing, you know that they do? They take away more money –

CAITLIN

And they fire you –

MONICA

And they fire me. That's right. They send me home. They say, let's blame Monica, she's the problem, let's bring somebody else in here. If that's worth it. Or they blow the whole thing up and say sorry black kids, you got nowhere to go, ain't our fault, you just failed the test. Sorry. Maybe next life you'll try harder. Try harder. Fuck trying harder. Fuck that.

CAITLIN

There has to be some way to do this other than –

MONICA

What? What way? Who'm I gonna talk to? Who's going to listen to a principal at a black school? You think there's a whole bunch of people just waiting to hear from me? They don't give a shit. If the minorities can't pass the test you know why that is, right? Cause the black kids are stupid. They're inherently stupid. Don't matter how much education you waste on `em, don't matter how much money you throw at `em, just lock `em up and build more prisons and be done with it.

CAITLIN

I don't think that's fair –

MONICA

That's not fair? That's not fair that you said that? Is that what you're saying? Forty years ago this school was fifty percent white, you know that? All of Houston's schools were. How many white kids you see walking around here? They left. The white kids go to private schools, they go to Catholic schools, they move out to the suburbs, anywhere so they don't need to be near us. They take their money with them, and then everything falls to shit. And then they come back and say, `well, you didn't try hard enough. Let's close your school, or sell it to the same company that runs the prisons and we'll act real sad that you didn't make it – but seriously, we're not a bunch of racists. It's just too bad that all the black poor kids are failing in the black poor schools that we made. Can't figure out how that happened. Maybe it's genetics.'