Don Zolidis
donzolidis@gmail.com

Math

A satire in one-act

By Don Zolidis

©2022 Don Zolidis ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright Protection. This play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States of America has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

Reservation of Rights. All rights to this play are strictly reserved, including, without limitation, professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction now known or yet to be invented, such as CD-ROM, CD-1, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments. Amateur and stock performance rights to this play are controlled exclusively by Don Zolidis. No amateur or stock groups or individuals may perform this play without obtaining advance written permission from Don Zolidis.

Restriction of Alteration. There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the play unless directly authorized by Don Zolidis. The title of the play shall not be altered.

Author Credit. Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this play is required to credit Don Zolidis as the sole and exclusive author of the play.

AI training. For avoidance of doubt, Don Zolidis reserves the rights in any manner for purposes of training artificial intelligence technologies to generate text, including without limitation, technologies that are capable of generating works in the same style or genre as the play.

Math by Don Zolidis
© Don Zolidis

One-Act Comedy
13 actors, any gender

Algebra should be illegal! At least that's what Dahlia told her dad, who took her complaints straight to the school board. Now, parents are protesting polynomials, and algebra is outlawed at Dahlia's school. Math books are considered dangerous, and teachers are closely watched to make sure they don't talk about radicals. But Dahlia's starting to think that maybe math isn't all that bad... If Dahlia's father is already on his way to the capitol to introduce a bill banning algebra from schools across the state, how fast will Dahlia have to travel to stop him?

Cast of Characters

DAHLIA, a struggling Math student
MS. WILLIAMS, a math teacher

DAHLIA'S FATHER
DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Other Students:
JACE
HUNTER
TREY

The School Board:
GINA
BARRY
TOTO

SAMANTHA
TODD

TRISH, teacher-observer

MR. BRIAN, a substitute teacher (may be played by the actor who plays Barry)

TRAIN CONDUCTOR, (may be played by the actor who plays Toto)

Gender of the Characters: Any character may be any gender. Please adjust pronouns accordingly.

Expanding the Cast: Feel free to place additional students in the classroom. Those roles may double as some of the School Board members or later roles.

Addressing the Audience: When Dahlia addresses the audience, all action on stage should freeze – if possible, the lights can change as well. When Dahlia is ready to re-enter the scene, she snaps, and all action starts instantaneously.

(The only exception is if you need a set change happening upstage. Whenever possible, scene changes should be done with Dahlia's monologues and light changes. Slow-moving set pieces rolling off and on will kill the momentum of the show.)

"We don't need no education. We don't need no thought control."

- Pink Floyd

"We don't need ANY education. We don't need ANY thought control."

- Your English Teacher

"Teachers! Leave them kids alone."

-Pink Floyd, again

"Teachers! Leave THOSE kids alone."

-Your English Teacher, again

The stage is divided between a classroom and a kitchen table.

At rise, the classroom is lit. The kitchen area is mostly in darkness.
A class is happening.
Music, (something like the beginning of "Time" from Pink Floyd or another song emphasizing the slow passage of time, is playing.)*
**If you cannot get the rights to those songs, the sound of a monotonous ticking clock will work as well.*

DAHLIA, a regular-looking student, is front and center.
She is having a hard time of it.

The teacher, MS. WILLIAMS, is teaching silently.
The other students are following along with various degrees of success.
Everyone FREEZES. The music stops.

Dahlia looks at the audience.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*
I've been a student for most of my life. In that time, there is one universal truth that I have come to understand: Algebra class is the death of all that is good and wonderful in the world. It's almost like it exists inside a time warp, where the regular flow of time is interrupted, and algebra class stretches into near infinity. Some day, if I die, and I am punished for eternity, it will look a lot like this classroom.
Short pause.
It's also right before lunch.
She snaps her fingers and the action starts up.

MS. WILLIAMS
And then you can divide each side of the equation by negative six and the result is…
She writes on the board.
X equals nine. Any questions?
Everyone raises their hand simultaneously.
Anyone have any questions that are not about what time this class is over?
Several hands go down.
Trey.

TREY
Um… I don't get it.

MS. WILLIAMS
What don't you get?

TREY

The whole thing. Um… This class I guess. What is X?

MS. WILLIAMS

That's what we're solving for.

TREY

Huh. Yeah see that's the part I don't get.

HUNTER

I have a question.

MS. WILLIAMS

Hunter, wait a moment.

HUNTER

What time is lunch?

MS. WILLIAMS

It's the same time it is every day, Hunter.

HUNTER

And that time is when?

MS. WILLIAMS

Soon. Please. It is soon.

JACE

I also have a question.

MS. WILLIAMS

Yes, Jace.

JACE

When are we going to get to the higher order math I'll need to excel on my standardized tests?

MS. WILLIAMS

Well, we are –

JACE

Because I am determined that my future will be unlimited. Higher order math will be key to securing a good scholarship –

MS. WILLIAMS

Yes, probably true, but –

TREY *(coughing into his hand)*

Nerd.

MS. WILLIAMS

Does anyone have any real questions?

DAHLIA

Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS

Yes, Dahlia, what is it?

DAHLIA

When are we ever gonna use this stuff?

MS. WILLIAMS

Well, for the assignment –

DAHLIA

I mean in real life – when am I ever going to need algebra? Am I gonna get like mugged or something and the mugger's going to be like, `quick, solve for x or give me all your money!'

The other students laugh.

Is there like a gang of math mafia roaming the streets robbing people who can't do binomial division? Am I going to need this for anything?

The action FREEZES.

Dahlia steps out and talks to the audience.

My teacher, Ms. Williams, had that look in her eyes that I recognized from a lot of my teachers. Kind of hopeless, sad resignation, like she was mentally counting down the number of days until retirement. Ms. Williams was in her second year teaching – I wasn't sure how many days she had until she could retire, but I guess that being really good at math would help you with big numbers.

Dahlia snaps her fingers. Action resumes.

MS. WILLIAMS

This will help you later in life when you are doing your homework tonight.

The bell rings.

Everyone gets up suddenly.

HUNTER

Yes! Lunch!

MS. WILLIAMS *(over the clamor)*

Make sure to do the odd-numbered problems for tomorrow!

All the students rush off.

Dahlia speaks to the audience as she heads to her house.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

Homework. As if we didn't get enough learning in school. Now we're supposed to learn at *home?* Impossible. I did what I always did with my homework. Avoided it as long as possible until I couldn't stand it any more. Then I mostly did this.

She sits at the table, groans and pulls at her hair as she stares at the paper.
Looks at her phone.
Sets her phone down.
Looks at her homework.
Groans. It's painful beyond measure.

This is killing me. Arrrrrghghghg.

No one is paying attention to her.

I said IT'S KILLING ME. ARRRRHGHGHG.

No one.
She looks at her phone.
DAHLIA'S MOTHER enters.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER *(entering)*

Sweetie, put your phone down and concentrate.

DAHLIA

This is torture. Math was invented as a torture device. This is like jabbing flaming needles directly into my brain.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

I'm sure it's not like that at all.

DAHLIA

I feel like I've been punching my brain all night and I knocked it out. My brain has been put in a chokehold and is unconscious.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

What are you trying to study?

DAHLIA

Algebra. None of this makes any sense. I bet it's an elaborate lie made up by dead people.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Can I help you with it?

DAHLIA

No. No one can. It's the end of the world.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

How `bout I look at it with you?

DAHLIA

Mom, have you ever used algebra in your life?

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

I don't think so.

DAHLIA

So why am I tortured into learning it if no one ever uses it?

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

You learned about frogs in biology class.

DAHLIA

Yeah but I might own a frog one day, or at least encounter one in a zoo or something. Or in their natural habitat, which ranges from tropical forests to frozen tundras to deserts.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

See, you did learn something!

DAHLIA

But this is pointless. It's hurting my brain. My brain is on fire. I'm probably being traumatized by this. You know what PTSD is? I've probably got PTSD from Math class.

DAHLIA'S FATHER enters.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Who's got PTSD?

DAHLIA

I do. From Math.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

What.

DAHLIA

Algebra should be illegal.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Let's just look at it. Okay?

DAHLIA

Fine. Here.

She hands over the paper.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Let me see that.

DAHLIA

Dad. Mom is helping me.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Yes. But I am your father. And I will stop at nothing to help my baby girl. Other parents go to 2. I go to 179.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Okay. Okay… so…

DAHLIA

I'm supposed to solve for X.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Right. So how do I solve for X?

DAHLIA

Well that's the big question, isn't it, Mom?

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Huh.

DAHLIA

See you don't get it either.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

What is X supposed to be?

DAHLIA

That's the question.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Right, but X is a letter.

DAHLIA

Exactly.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

I don't understand how X can be a letter and a number.

Dahlia's Father snatches up the paper.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Let me see that. Who told you to do this, your *teacher?*

DAHLIA

Yeah.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Where does she get the right, that's what I want to know.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

It's homework, Jim.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

So she's just expanding her sphere of control into our *home*? Not on my watch.
He looks at the paper.
I can't even understand this.

DAHLIA

You've got it upside down.
He flips it over.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

This is what they're trying to teach you? Why are there letters next to the numbers?

DAHLIA

Because it's algebra.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

X? What the heck is X supposed to be?

DAHLIA

That's what I'm trying to find out.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

I didn't know either.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

It's a letter. That's what X is. There. Just write that. Problem solved. Solve for X. X is a letter! Boom. Done.

DAHLIA

I'm supposed to come up with a numerical answer.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

You're supposed to turn letters into numbers? Are you supposed to be able to do magic?

DAHLIA

That's what I said! It hurts my brain.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

No. No thanks. We're not doing this. It's time to invoke Classic Rock lyrics.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Jim, I don't want to talk about Classic Rock.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Classic Rock taught me everything I need to know. Everything. Remember what Pink Floyd said: We don't need no education. We don't need no thought control. Teacher, leave them kids alone.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Okay, this is beginning to sound like a crusade.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

You're darn right it's a crusade. This is about my baby girl's safety. That teacher thinks she can mix numbers and letters like a madman and stick red hot pokers into her brain. No! Your math teacher just messed with the wrong guy.

DAHLIA

I don't know that she's specifically trying to mess with you.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Well she did. She just grabbed the tiger by the horns. And when you do that, you get *burned.* The horns are hot. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got some important things to do like watching football and yelling my suggestions at the television. One of these days that coach is going to listen to me.

They FREEZE.
Dahlia speaks to the audience.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

There was a little voice in my head saying that it was probably best not to involve my parents in school at all – not since the incident in fifth grade with the science fair. He knows what he did. But I silenced the voice because I had never been good at standing up to my Dad, and, let's face it, I didn't want to do the homework.

Scene changes back to the classroom.
The students enter and freeze.
Dahlia returns to her spot and snaps her fingers.

MS. WILLIAMS

All right all right all right time for algebra class – that's a little Matthew McConaughey impression for you. You ever see *Dazed and Confused?* Don't, because it's inappropriate.

HUNTER

What was the name of that movie again?

MS. WILLIAMS

Don't worry about it. Just trying to identify with you guys so you think I'm cool.

TREY

I don't think that's working.

MS. WILLIAMS

Good to know, thank you! All right all right all right time for homework! What-what. Sorry I can't make that sound fun. I hope y'all remembered to show your work.

HUNTER

Wait. We had to show work?

MS. WILLIAMS

Yes, that's been the rule the entire semester. So I can see where you made the mistake.

JACE

What if we don't make mistakes?

MS. WILLIAMS

Everybody makes mistakes Jace. That's how you learn.

JACE

That's not how you score a perfect on standardized testing.

MS. WILLIAMS

Friends? These are the same policies that have been in place the entire school year.

Hunter raises her hand.

Hunter.

HUNTER

What time is lunch?

MS. WILLIAMS

Arggh. Just turn in your homework please.

Hunter, Trey, and Jace turn in their homework.

Dahlia?

DAHLIA

Hi.

MS. WILLIAMS

Hi.

DAHLIA

Um… so the homework?

MS. WILLIAMS

Yes.

DAHLIA

I didn't do the homework.

MS. WILLIAMS

Why not?

She FREEZES.

Dahlia speaks to the audience.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

Do I tell the truth? Do I say my parents have opted me out of homework? Would she even believe that? Or do I say what's really on my mind?

She snaps her fingers.

I don't feel that Algebra is going to be useful in my life, so I'm choosing to spend my limited mental energy on more important things.

She speaks out again to the audience.

And that's when she called my parents.

The scene changes behind Dahlia as she steps out.

The students exit.

Dahlia's Father and Mother get ready to enter.

I didn't want them to go, honestly. I was hoping they would just send a note that would excuse me from future learning in algebra class. But my Dad…. Well… he had other plans.

She moves to the side to watch as Ms. Williams welcomes Dahlia's Mother and Father into the scene.

MS. WILLIAMS

Hi there. I'm Jocelyn Williams, Dahlia's Algebra teacher.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Uh huh.

MS. WILLIAMS

I know we met briefly at the back to school night, but that was a while ago.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Seems like ages!

MS. WILLIAMS
Right. Um… well Dahlia is doing okay in class, but lately she's had a bit of an attitude.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Oh an attitude? You think she has an attitude?

MS. WILLIAMS
Right.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
I don't know where she would've gotten an attitude.

MS. WILLIAMS
I'm just trying to get her to a place where she'll get excited about learning algebra.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Let me tell you something – Because I looked at that so-called "assignment" you gave out. When I was growing up, numbers were numbers and letters were letters.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
Exactly.

MS. WILLIAMS
Well – um… in Algebra… a letter denotes a variable.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
We don't like variables. At one point in her homework, X equals six. Then in another question, X equals negative fourteen. You can't just *decide* to be a different number if you feel like it. It's unnatural.

MS. WILLIAMS
I don't think you're understanding the point of Algebra –

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
And why are they X, anyway? What are they trying to hide?!

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Why don't these numbers come clean and explain themselves?

MS. WILLIAMS
Algebra is a tool –

DAHLIA'S FATHER
To do what? Mix numbers and letters together to create some kind of freakish half-number, half-letter. That's not how it works!

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
You know what happens if you put three X's together?! Triple X. That's not a coincidence.

MS. WILLIAMS
Well, it can really be any letter, honestly. It doesn't have to be X.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
It seems like it's always X. I see X all the time.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
And we don't like it. We didn't raise our daughter to be exposed to all these X's in school.

MS. WILLIAMS
Look, I'm sorry that you have problems with certain letters. But Dahlia still needs to do her homework in order –

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
Math makes her upset.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Thank you.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
It impacts her self-esteem.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Yup.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
Therefore, we don't think she should have to do homework at all.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Algebra is painful for our daughter. We don't think she should be exposed to it at all. It is dangerous and deceitful. You know what she was learning about last week? Radicals. You're teaching our daughter about radicals.

MS. WILLIAMS
A radical is a square root or –

DAHLIA'S FATHER
I know what a radical is! And I sure as heck don't want my daughter becoming a radical!

MS. WILLIAMS
It's literally a square root.

DAHLIA'S FATHER
No thank you. What are you doing in school teaching about radicals?

MS. WILLIAMS
Guys, I think this is a misunderstanding. Algebra is just a system –

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Oh it's a *system* – listen to this. You're teaching our daughter a *system.*

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
I am uncomfortable with all of this. X's, radicals, systems. It sounds you're like corrupting our child. Who knows what she's learning about?

MS. WILLIAMS
I post my lesson plan every week on the website so you can see.

DAHLIA'S MOTHER
Oh sure so we can learn about these math concepts too?

DAHLIA'S FATHER
That's how they get ya. Right there. Pretty soon we're learning about x and z and radicals. Nope.

MS. WILLIAMS
You know what, guys? I think we're done here. I actually have a class to teach, so I'll talk to you later. Thank you for being invested in Dahlia's education. A lot of parents wouldn't even have bothered to come in here and yell at me for a while.

Lights change.
Dahlia steps out to speak to the audience.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*
If I had normal parents, that would have been the end of it. I was not blessed with normal parents, however. If you ever hear the phrase, "hey do you want to go to the school board meeting with me?" you should say no. You should say no very quickly. But I still wanted to get out of homework, so…

Lights up on the School Board.
Three Members, (GIANA, BARRY, and TOTO) enter and sit impressively.
Dahlia's Father and Dahlia take up a position waiting nearby.
Giana bangs a gavel.

GIANA
All right, this meeting of the local School Board is convened. You all know me – I'm Giana Tartaglia, the president of the school board and –

Dahlia's Father raises his hand.

Yes, we'll get to you in a moment. First order of business today is talking about authorizing a standard of living pay increase for our teachers.

BARRY

Do the teachers really need money? What if we gave them a jeans pass?

GIANA

What is a jeans pass?

BARRY

It's permission to wear jeans for a day. We can either to sell them to teachers or award them as tiny little rewards – like crumbs from the table of joy.

TOTO

Love it! Yes!

BARRY

Now I do have one other extremely cool idea – it's called a "token of appreciation." It's one of these.

Barry produces a wooden token.

GIANA

What is that?

BARRY

It's a wooden token.

GIANA

What is it good for?

BARRY

Appreciation. We show the teachers we appreciate them by giving them a token of appreciation. Got it?

TOTO

Love it! Yes!

GIANA

But what good is the token?

BARRY

It gives them warm feelings.

GIANA

Can they use those for, say, rent or food?

BARRY

No it's just a token. Okay I see what you're saying. What if we included a jeans pass along with the token of appreciation?

TOTO

Ooh!

GIANA

Huh. I think maybe the teachers could use a raise –

Dahlia's Father raises his hand again.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Excuse me I have something important to say that requires interrupting all of you.

GIANA

Sir, we're not ready for open comments yet.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Oh I see. That's how it's gonna be, huh? We pay your salary!

GIANA

The School Board isn't paid.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Well if you were paid, we'd pay that!

GIANA

Sir, do you mind?

TOTO

I want to hear what this angry person has to say!

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Thank you. I'm a father. And a person. And a man.

TOTO

Yes! Love it!

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Sweetie, get up here.

Dahlia reluctantly stands next to her father. Waves awkwardly.

This is my daughter, Dahlia. It has come to my attention that *algebra* is being inflicted on my sweet innocent child. Look at this face. Is this a face that needs algebra? Look at it! I don't know

a lot about higher level math, but I know that this beautiful girl is irreparably harmed by learning algebra. You know what she said the other day? Algebra should be illegal.

DAHLIA

Well I –

GIANA

Algebra is not going to be illegal, sir –

DAHLIA'S FATHER

I did some research the other day and you know what I discovered? You know who coined the term, algebra? A man by the name of Muhammad Ibn Musa Al-Khwarizmi in the 9th century AD! Think about that.

GIANA

What does that have to do with anything?

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Why are we learning foreign math?! I want our kids to learn American math and not this foreign stuff using Arabic numerals!

Toto applauds.

TOTO

Yes! Woo!

GIANA

They're all Arabic numerals!

DAHLIA'S FATHER

And you're just fine with that, aren't ya?

GIANA

Everyone uses Arabic numerals.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Then they've already won. Think about it. What else are they learning?!

DAHLIA'S MOTHER

Won't someone think of the children?!

DAHLIA'S FATHER

I want a system of American numbers!

GIANA pounds her gavel.

GIANA

All right look. This is very entertaining and everything, but I don't think you're making any sense.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Or maybe I'm making too much sense!

GIANA

I think this is done.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

What are you trying to hide?!

GIANA

Sorry the School Board is not going to support removing Algebra from the curriculum. If you have a problem with that, you can run for School Board in the election next month.

They FREEZE.
Dahlia steps out.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

I was actually relieved that it was going to end. But there was a little part of me that knew what was coming.

She points.

GIANA *(as an echo)*

If you have a problem with that, you can run for School Board in the election next month.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

And I started to get a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach –

GIANA *(echo)*

You can run for School Board in the election next month.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

And that pit became a gaping black hole.

She snaps her fingers and the scene changes.
The School Board exits.

Dahlia's Mother emerges with a giant sign that says "VOTE FOR JIM".
Other PARENTS gather with signs denouncing Algebra.
Dahlia's Father enters with a bullhorn.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

They want to silence me because I'm "not making any sense" and "disturbed" – well let me tell you something – I am disturbed! I am disturbed about letters and number canoodling together, in disgraceful cohabitation! It's time to put common sense back into the schools! When I was a kid,

we split up the numbers and letters and there were no problems whatsoever as far as I can remember!

You know what my daughter came home with the other day?

He brandishes a worksheet.

A polynomial worksheet! Polynomials! Alternative lifestyle numerical expressions have no business in our schools!

Cheering from the parents.

Vote for me and I will put the numbers back in math and save our children from this scourge!

He FREEZES.

Dahlia steps out to speak to the audience.

DAHLIA

He won the election in a landslide. Apparently there was a lot of festering anti-mathematic sentiment in the community – just below the surface. People came from all over. I saw a little old lady body slam an accountant because she thought he was promoting algebra. It was nuts.

Lights back up on the classroom.

Ms. Williams is teaching silently, just as she did at the beginning of the play.

Dahlia snaps her fingers.

MS. WILLIAMS

All right all right all right –

Hunter laughs.

HUNTER

Dazed and Confused reference! I watched it. Totally inappropriate.

MS. WILLIAMS

Yes – okay well I'm glad somebody finally got it. We're going to be venturing into the world of simplifying radicals today. Now a radical is an expression that –

SAMANTHA and TODD, two goons, enter.

Todd looks like he's on a military mission.

SAMANTHA

Stop right there! No one is learning anything about radicals!

TODD

I need everybody to stay right where you are. This is dangerous.

MS. WILLIAMS

What's going on?

SAMANTHA

The School Board has determined that algebra textbooks are a danger to the students. We're going to remove them from the classroom.

TODD

Everybody stay still! These books are dangerous! We don't want you to get hurt!

MS. WILLIAMS

The books aren't going to hurt anyone –

TODD

Incorrect! Everyone put on these helmets while we extricate the dangerous books!

Todd hands out helmets to the students.

SAMANTHA

You'll have to excuse Todd there – he's coming straight from a war zone.

TODD

NO ONE MOVE. I see one.

Into a walkie-talkie

I've got eyes on Alpha target. Repeat. I've got eyes on Alpha target. Proceeding cautiously.

He moves up slowly to the desk, takes out a sack, and scoops the book into it swiftly.

One bunny in the hutch. We've got one bunny in the hutch.

SAMANTHA

If you could just point us to the algebra textbooks we can be on our way.

MS. WILLIAMS

This is ridiculous.

TODD

Ma'am, these books are a danger to you and your students. Any false move could cause one of them to explode.

SAMANTHA

They're not actually exploding books.

TODD

Oh. I was told they were exploding books.

SAMANTHA

No, Todd, I told you that we're removing them because they're full of dangerous ideas and harm students.

TODD

So the explosives are *inside* the books? LOOK ALIVE everyone! Do not open those covers! They are booby-trapped!

SAMANTHA

No, the *ideas* are dangerous.

TODD

Carefully place the books in our book-disposal system here –

MS. WILLIAMS

The School Board told you to do this?!

SAMANTHA

Specifically, Dahlia's Dad – he's the new president of the school board. This girl right here – it's her father that's doing the things.

DAHLIA

I think my Dad might've gone off the deep end.

Todd approaches Jace.

TODD

Carefully place the book into the disposal system, son.

Jace holds his algebra book against his chest.

JACE

Never.

TODD

That book contains harmful information and we must remove it for your own safety.

JACE

You'll pry my algebra book from my cold, dead hands.

TODD

THAT CAN BE ARRANGED!

SAMANTHA

Todd. Remember the mission. Think of the children.

TODD

We are saving the children.

SAMANTHA

That's right.

TODD

Sometimes to save the children you have to destroy the children.

SAMANTHA

Not true. There's a way to do this without violence.

TODD

Son, you're gonna need to hand over that algebra book now. I'm through playing.

JACE

This is the key to my future college aspirations! You'll never get it out of me!

TODD

Look over there a distraction!

JACE

Where?

Todd grabs the math book.

TODD

Ha! You thought you were so smart, didn't you? Well not any more, smart boy!

He puts the book in the sack. Talks into his walkie-talkie.

All the bunnies in the hutch. Repeat: All the bunnies in the hutch.

SAMANTHA

Not all of them. Ma'am?

MS. WILLIAMS

What?

SAMANTHA

Your teacher's edition? The one that has all the answers in the back?

TREY

Wait a minute! She had the answers all along?!

JACE

Of course she had the answers!

TREY

Why was she asking us the questions, then?! If you know what x equals, then why are you asking us to figure it out?!

DAHLIA

Trey – chill.

TREY

I knew this whole thing was rigged from the beginning! She was only asking us the questions she already knew the answers to! Sheesh.

MS. WILLIAMS
You don't need my teacher's edition.

SAMANTHA
We're required to take all the algebra books, Ma'am.

TODD
We can do this the easy way… or the not-so-easy way.

MS. WILLIAMS
Fine. You know what? Fine. I can teach algebra without the book.
She hands it over.

TODD *(into his walkie-talkie)*
Big Fat Bunny has entered the hutch. Repeat. Big Fat Bunny has entered the hutch.

SAMANTHA
You can still teach it without the book?

MS. WILLIAMS
Of course. I know it in my head. Are you going to ban that too?
Short pause.

SAMANTHA
We'll see.
They FREEZE.
Dahlia steps out to speak to the audience.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*
I felt awful. I wanted to tell my Dad to stop, but once he gets going…

DAHLIA'S FATHER
Some parents go to 2. I go to 179.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*
He didn't stop with the books.
The scene shifts to the School Board.
Dahlia's Father is now in the prime position. Toto and Barry flank him.
I had a plan. I was going to say something. Maybe I just needed to stand up to him, to tell him that –
Dahlia's Father bangs his gavel.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

It has come to my attention that removing the algebra books from school does not prevent the teachers from teaching algebra.

TOTO

I love it!

DAHLIA'S FATHER

No Toto we don't love it.

TOTO

We don't love it?

DAHLIA'S FATHER

No.

BARRY

Suggestion: What if we revoke the jeans pass for teachers teaching algebra?

DAHLIA'S FATHER

I don't think that's going to cut it, Barry.

BARRY

Think about it: They'll try to teach algebra, but they can't, because they're wearing difficult trousers. The starchiness of the fabric will prevent them from being comfortable – then after ten or twenty years of that, they'll begin to associate higher order math with discomfort. Then – bam, we've got them. In twenty years.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Honestly, I think the Jeans Pass as a method of controlling teachers is overrated.

TOTO

What?! I disagree.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Since we know that algebra is harmful to our students, it's not enough to ban the books. We need to ban teaching algebra altogether.

DAHLIA

But Dad I –

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Shh, sweetie, I'm *protecting* you.

Ms. Williams enters.

MS. WILLIAMS

Excuse me –

Dahlia's Father bangs his gavel.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

We have not entered the time for public comments. If you have something to say, you can wait until we leave the room.

MS. WILLIAMS

What?

TOTO

I love listening to public comments.

DAHLIA'S FATHER

Fine. What is it you want to say?

MS. WILLIAMS

My name is Jocelyn Williams and I'm here today to defend algebra.

Hubbub from the School Board and assembled people.

TOTO *(under their breath)*

Don't love it.

MS. WILLIAMS

I know that algebra has a bad reputation – people think it's difficult. People have a hard time understanding it. You probably have some kind of residual resentment out there from being forced to learn it. Earlier this year, a student asked me, "when are we going to use this in real life?" and I didn't have a great answer for them. But I went home and thought about it, and to be honest, some of you are not going to use algebra in your adult life. You will happily go through existence not caring or knowing what a variable is, or bothering to wonder if you can graph an equation properly. That's fine.

But you know what algebra is? It's a system of knowledge. And it's a system of knowledge that leads to more knowledge. It's the foundation of every bit of math that comes afterwards. And you might not need that higher math, but if you're an engineer, or a doctor, or a scientist, you will need that math. The people who built the roads you drive on – the people who built your smartphone – the people who put the satellites into orbit that you use for your GPS system – they're using that math.

And what I do, as a teacher, is say, you *might* be one of those people one day. My whole job is to make sure that you have the opportunity to do anything you want. I am here to open doors for you - doors that you don't even realize are in front of you. Algebra is a door. Some of you may go through it. Some of you won't. But it is not my job to shut that door in your face. And even if you don't see the path in front of you, I will fight as hard as I can to make sure that path is available if you want it.

A lot of people hate math. A lot of people are scared of math. And maybe you had bad math teachers in the past that made you feel dumb, but I want everyone on this school board to

remember that education is about opening doors, not closing them. And I know people are out there saying that this knowledge is harmful, or makes you feel upset, or damages you in some way, but sometimes things are difficult, sometimes learning is painful, sometimes it makes our brains hurt to expand our horizons. Whether or not you want to believe in this, it's the truth. And sometimes… the truth hurts.

Dahlia steps out.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

If this were a movie, that speech would've changed somebody's mind. But maybe when you get really passionate about something, it's hard to hear people.

Ms. Williams steps back into the classroom.

Dahlia snaps her fingers.

MS. WILLIAMS

Okay then. Um… some of you may have heard that the School Board banned the teaching of algebra last night. Apparently it's "dangerous" to expose you guys to it. So um… I know we're all disappointed. But this is what the School Board decided, and if I want to keep my job I need to teach you the things they want me to teach you.

Todd and Samantha enter.

SAMANTHA

Knock-knock!

TODD

Hey it's your favorite interventionists!

MS. WILLIAMS

Can I just teach my class please? I'm not teaching algebra.

TODD

Of course! Algebra is a dangerous threat!

SAMANTHA

We're not monsters. We're not here to watch your every move. That's what your teacher-observer is for.

TRISH enters.

TRISH

Hi I'm Trish!

MS. WILLIAMS

What is this?

TRISH

I'm your teacher-observer! My job is to wait in the back of the classroom and interrupt you if you try to teach any forbidden concepts!

SAMANTHA

We wanted to install video cameras in every classroom, but that cost a lot of money, so we diverted those funds to pay Trish.

MS. WILLIAMS

Trish is getting paid?

TRISH

Oh yes! I'm a great negotiator! You would die if you knew how much more than you I'm getting paid! Don't worry, though – I'm not doing this for the money. I'm doing this for the joy of interrupting you and squashing out evil thoughts.

MS. WILLIAMS

This is ridiculous –

TRISH

Just think of me like a helpful ghost in the classroom! Like Casper. I'm your Casper.

SAMANTHA

All right! Carry on, Miss Williams. We have more teachers to visit today.

TODD

Stay safe kids! Say no to higher math!

HUNTER

You're a hero, sir.

TODD

I know.

Samantha and Todd exit. Trish sets up in the back of the class.

JACE

Ms. Williams, how am I supposed to learn Calculus if I can't even learn algebra?

MS. WILLIAMS

I don't know, Jace.

DAHLIA

I want to learn. I've changed my mind about algebra.

TREY

Yeah as soon as my parents started hating algebra I found it more important to like it.

MS. WILLIAMS

Guys I can't -

TRISH

I'm Trish!

DAHLIA

Yeah we heard.

TRISH

Just think of me like an all-seeing eye that never blinks and will never release you from its baleful gaze. Hee hee! But seriously let's just have fun and not learn anything that we aren't supposed to learn.

HUNTER

Sweet.

MS. WILLIAMS

So um… today we're going to adjust our lessons to talk about graphing points on a line.

TRISH

Hmm.

MS. WILLIAMS

All right so first thing we do is draw a graph. We have an X-axis –

TRISH

Oop.

MS. WILLIAMS

We have an X-axis and a Y-axis.

TRISH

Oop! Beep! Beeep!

MS. WILLIAMS

And where they intersect is called the origin.

TRISH

Booop booop boop!

MS. WILLIAMS

What.

TRISH

This sounds like algebra!

MS. WILLIAMS

It's not!

TRISH

You're talking about X's and Y's again! Those are letters!

MS. WILLIAMS

This is geometry! I'm teaching geometry now! This is graphing points on a line!

TRISH

I don't know if that's algebra or not!

MS. WILLIAMS

If you don't know what algebra is, how are you banning it?!

TRISH

Because it *seems* like algebra! You're using letters! You mentioned the letter X! X and Y meeting together! What is that?! That sounds inappropriate! X and Y getting together at the origin is giving the kids ideas!

HUNTER

Ooh.

TRISH

See?!

MS. WILLIAMS

You just gave him that idea! He had no ideas in his head until you mentioned that!

TRISH

X and Y cavorting together, at the origin, meeting in secret – it's shameful! X and Y should never be involved in a math classroom!

MS. WILLIAMS

X and Y are very valuable tools that have been used for centuries! This is ancient stuff! It was invented by Euclid!

TRISH

He doesn't sound American!

MS. WILLIAMS

He's not! He's Greek!

TRISH

Where is the American math?!

MS. WILLIAMS

There is no American math!

TRISH

That's prejudiced!

MS. WILLIAMS

It's facts! It's the facts!

TRISH

Your facts!

MS. WILLIAMS

Facts are facts! Math is math! Arrrrrrghghghghgh!

Trish moves in front of the classroom.

TRISH

Kids, I'm sorry you had to see this. It appears your teacher needs time off for mental recuperation and reflection. It's so hard to be a teacher these days.

To Ms. Williams

That's why we're giving you all the support you need, like me, your teacher-observer.

MS. WILLIAMS

Arrrrhrhghghg!

TRISH

See what algebra does to you?

She FREEZES.

Dahlia steps out. Lights change.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

The next day we had a new math teacher.

Miss Williams exits and MR. BRIAN, a terribly nervous teacher, enters.

Dahlia returns and snaps her fingers.

MR. BRIAN *(terrified)*

Hi there class. I'm the new math teacher. I don't actually have any… experience in Math, but um… I really need a job so uh… Let's all just try and get through this. Okay? Ha ha ha. I kind of have a problem with public speaking but no worries I've mentally prepared for this as best I can.

He takes a long swig from a bottle of water. Maybe squirts some on his face.

Stretches out.

Does a breathing exercise.

HUNTER

We're actually already in class –

MR. BRIAN

I know! You just threw me off my train of thought. Gotta start again. Okay.

He shakes out his arms.

All right!

He reads from a notecard.

`Welcome students! I'm here to teach things the way your grandparents learned, with the three R's - Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic.'

DAHLIA

That's literally one R.

JACE

Did our Grandparents not know how to spell?

MR. BRIAN

Ha ha ha. Okay.

Looks at another notecard.

And I brought a little friend to help me.

Mr. Brian produces an adorable puppet.

This is Bonzo. Hello Bonzo. `Hello Mr. Brian.' Can you count to ten, Bonzo? `Ten, what's ten?' It's a number! `Oh boy I'm excited to learn about numbers!' Ha ha ha.

He stops, hyperventilating.

Can I tell you something? This is like a nightmare I had once. You're all staring at me. I've got a hand puppet. I'm talking about things I don't understand. Someone's watching me all the time. All. The. Time.

TRISH

Just teach the math, Mr. Brian.

MR. BRIAN

Oh no the voices have started again.

TRISH

I'm a real person.

MR. BRIAN

`Calm down Mr. Brian. Bonzo is here for you.' Thank you, Bonzo. `Can we count to ten, now?' Of course.

Dahlia steps out. The scene changes behind her.

DAHLIA *(to the audience)*

It was Jace's idea at first.

Jace explains to the other students.

JACE

We're not going to learn anything in this new Math class. It's worse than New Math. I'm not going to get into AP Calculus, and then my college applications are going to look like hot garbage and I'll never get out of this place. We need to do something. Anything.

DAHLIA

So we started the study group.

JACE

We meet in secret. No one breathes a word of this.

DAHLIA

We met in an old music room that wasn't used anymore because they canceled the funding for music. It was radical.

Dahlia snaps her fingers and approaches a door.
She makes a secret knock.
Trey peeks out.

TREY

What's the password?

DAHLIA

Trey, you know me.

TREY

We're taking no chances. What's the password?

DAHLIA

The quadratic formula is my jam.

TREY

She's legit.

Dahlia passes in.
It's a secret hideout.
Jace is there, wearing a tie.
He gives her a secret handshake.

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.concordtheatricals.com