



The Tell Tale Teacher

By Mary J. Long

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Synopsis:

After a class reads “The Tell Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe, their teacher is called away by the principal and disappears. Strange noises are heard, and the lights go out causing the students to wonder if the school is haunted and if their teacher is ever going to come back. The class must work together to solve the mystery and find their teacher before it is too late.

About this play:

This is a 30 minute comedy. It has a cast of 10 actors. Many of the roles can be adapted for boys or girls. It was written for the 2016 Virginia Beach Public School’s One Act Play Festival held on November 4-5, and was performed by a cast of students from Virginia Beach Middle School, and earned Superior ratings from all of the judges. I am submitting this play to several play publishing companies in hopes of making it available for my more schools to perform.

About the author:

I have been an English teacher at Virginia Beach Middle School for 27 years. I live in Virginia Beach, Virginia with my loving and supportive husband, my two artistic and dramatic daughters, two cats, a bearded dragon, and a tortoise. I enjoy reading, teaching, and acting crazily in front of my students during the school year.

About the artist:

The cover art for this play was drawn by my daughter, Megan C. Long, a graphic design graduate from Radford University. She acted in the One Act Play at Virginia Beach Middle School when she was 12 and 13 years old.

THE TELL TALE TEACHER

Cast Members

Students:

Troy -- Jock
Stacy -- Cheerleader
Emerson -- Smart kid
Alex-- Nerd kid
Miles -- Quiet kid
Jasper -- Scared kid
Wednesday -- Goth kid

Faculty and Staff:

Principal Snodgrass -- Principal
Ms. Finkle -- Teacher
Mr. Hyde-- Janitor

The stage is set up like a classroom. There is a teacher's desk and student desks and chairs as well as other items which might be found in a classroom like a blackboard, books, papers, pencils, hall passes, a poster of Edgar Allan Poe, etc. When the curtain opens, the teacher is standing behind her desk making notes and organizing papers for the class. The janitor, Mr. Hyde, is sweeping the room before the students come in. He drops his keys.

Ms. Finkle: I think you dropped something.

Mr. Hyde: *(groans and picks up keys)* I'm all butter fingers today.

Students begin entering the classroom and Mr. Hyde makes his way to the door, sweeping. Miles bumps into Mr. Hyde as he enters, and Mr. Hyde drops his keys again. Miles picks them up and hands them to Mr. Hyde who takes them groaning exasperatedly and exits. The bell rings and all the kids who are mingling in the classroom sit down. After a few seconds, Troy and Stacy come in late.

Ms. Finkle: *(sternly)* That's your second tardy.

The kids in the class all laugh and scold them, and Troy takes a threatening step toward them, but Ms. Finkle shoos him toward his seat.

Ms. Finkle: All right children, we left off last bell at the end of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell Tale Heart." Open your books to page 73 and I'll read the climax to this classic tale of terror,

The students open textbooks, and the teacher dramatically reads aloud the last few lines of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell Tale Heart."

Ms. Finkle: *(reading overly dramatic)* "The sound increased --and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound --much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. *(walking through the desks and around the room)* I gasped for breath --and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men --but the noise steadily increased."

Troy: *(stands up and beating on his chest)* Thump-Thump, Thump-Thump, Thump-Thump.

Stacy: *(giggling, saccharine sweet)* Oh, Troy! You're SO funny.

Ms. Finkle: *(clearing throat)* Yes, yes, children, very funny. *(Troy sits down)* Let's finish, shall we? *(continuing to read overdramatically, she moves toward center stage and the front of the classroom)* "And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? No,

no! [the officers] heard! --they suspected! --they knew! --they were making a mockery of my horror! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now --again! --hark! louder! louder! Louder! "Villains!" I shrieked, "I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! here, here! --It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

(Alex Miles and Emerson cheer. Wednesday applauds unenthusiastically)

Ms. Finkle: All right, now class! *(the class gets quiet, Stacy gets out her phone)* Did you notice how Poe explored the idea of how one small, seemingly unimportant detail like a pale, blue eye can drive the conflict? Stacy, what do you think about the story?

Stacy: *(Stacy stands; and says in a California Valley Girl)* Well, *(pause)* the narrator hated the old man's cloudy eye, so he, like, killed him, right? And he was going to get away with it, but he, like, confessed to the crime because he could hear, like, the heart beating. But was he really hearing the old man's heart beating?

Ms. Finkle: Well, I guess that's up to interpretation. *(Stacy sits)* Jasper? *(Jasper jumps and gasps -- startled)* what do you think?

Jasper: I hate scary stories! Classic tales of terror make me *(shivers uncontrollably)* YUCK! *(Ms. Finkle moves toward Jasper)*

Ms. Finkle: *(pulling the pencil out of her hair)* I'm sorry, do you want me to write you a pass to the guidance office to talk about it?

Jasper: *(cowering)* No, I'll suffer in silence.

Ms. Finkle: *(putting the pencil back behind her ear, sarcastically)* If only, Jasper, if only. Does anyone else *(want to comment on Poe's horror classic? (pause) Anyone? (pause) Anyone? (pause)* How about you Wednesday?

Wednesday: *(leans back in chair and puts feet on desk)* The narrator was insane. I really liked that about him. His choice of weapon ... a mattress...that was cool, and hiding the body under the floor? So obvious, and yet, no one would look there. *(too enthusiastically)* Absolute genius!

Ms. Finkle: *(uneasily)* Yes, well, thank you for that insight, Wednesday. *(moves to the teacher's desk, addressing the whole class)* Now children, What I want you all to do is get into groups of three, and I'm going to come around and give you the directions for the assignment. *(grabs papers off desk)*

The class begins getting into groups. Moving in sequence but not at the same time -- (downstage right) Troy and Stacy get into a group, flirting with one another. (downstage left) Emerson, Alex, and Miles get into a group. Jasper goes up to Wednesday in an attempt to make a group, but Wednesday scares her away and moves her desk to face the audience directly and puts her feet up. Jasper timidly approaches Troy and Stacy, but they wave her away. Jaspers returns to her seat. The teacher walks around handing out papers.

Emerson: *(talking to Miles and Alex)* So, I was doing some research last night about our alma mater—

Alex: Alma what now?

Emerson: Alma Mater, you know, our school. Did you know there was a homicide in this very edifice exactly 20 years ago today? It is still unsolved.

Alex: *(Speaking quickly and eagerly, jumps up)* Whoa, cool. I bet it was just like this episode of the *Ghost Whisperer*. There was a scary, teenaged ghost who had died a long time ago but needed to talk to his mom one last time. *(Emerson and Miles stand too and join him)* The *Ghost Whisperer* helped him talk to his mom, and then he went into the light. Jennifer Love Hewett cries a lot, but she's a pretty good detective.

Miles: *(taps Alex on the shoulder)* Um, what do call an alligator in a vest?

Emerson: What? How does this pertain to our discussion?

Miles: An investigator. *(Laughs hysterically at his own joke)*

Alex and Emerson: *(Alex turns and groans with Emerson)* Miles!

(Ms. Finkle hands Emerson the assignment)

Emerson: *(looking sadly at the paper)* I'll wager the poor student wasn't murdered but crushed to death by a mountain of pointless paperwork. This assignment is going to eradicate me! *(She walks toward her desk huffily.)*

Ms. Finkle: Emerson, don't get whiney. You can handle a little challenge now and then. *(She walks away toward Wednesday.)*

Miles: *(to Alex)* Um, why were the teacher's eyes crossed?

Alex: Miles, don't do it –

Miles: She couldn't control her pupils! *(Miles laughs and high fives Alex who laughs reluctantly)*

(Suddenly, the lights flicker. Strange clangs and rattling sounds are heard. The lights go out. Stacy screams, and the lights come back on. Principal Snodgrass is in the room behind Ms. Finkle.)

Principal: Ms. Finkle! *(the principal's sudden appearance startles Ms. Finkle, making her gasp.)*

All Students: *(Kids go back to their seats and say together)* Hello, Principal Snodgrass!

Principal: Oh, hello children. *(walks toward Emerson)* Working hard, I assume, Emerson, keep it up. *(Principal pats Emerson on the head then turns toward Wednesday)* Wednesday, it's nice to see you..um..keeping up with tradition and wearing black -- for the 3rd year in a row. *(moves to the front)* Troy, Stacy -- looking forward to the football game tomorrow night. Alex...How's that show you like...Weirder Things, is it? *(Alex rolls his eyes and shakes his head)* Miles and Jasper,...well... yes...um... good to see you. Now, Ms. Finkle –

Ms. Finkle: *(recovered)* Yes? How may I help you?

Principal: I need to speak with you in the hallway about those lesson plans. It will only take a minute.

Ms. Finkle: All right. Class, keep working on your assignment, I'll be right outside.

(As soon as the adults are outside the kids jump up. Troy throws paper or a paper airplane at Jasper. Stacy checks her make-up and/or her phone. Emerson gets out paper and starts the assignment. Alex and Miles whisper jokes to one another, laughing hysterically. Jasper hides under the desk, and Wednesday throws her work off her desk and pulls out a vampire book.)

Alex: *(jumps up and moves to front of room, addressing the students from teacher's desk)* Hey guys, did you hear about the unsolved murder that took place 20 years ago on this very day in our school, possibly in this very room?

Wednesday: *(Looking up from book, snide and sarcastic)* WOW! I can't believe you'd think we'd believe this terrible, nauseating joke! Just stop!

Emerson: *(stands and pulls out iPad or phone)* No, this is a hundred percent factual. Twenty years ago today a juvenile male was murdered inside the school during the Homecoming dance. The perpetrator of the crime was never found, and it remains an open case to this very day.
(sits)

Jasper: *(leans out from under the desk)* That means his spirit may be trapped in the school. He might be right here in this room with us.
(shivers and looks around fearfully, slinks back under the desk)

Wednesday: *(moves to empty seat downstage away from Jasper)* He must have done something REALLY bad if he was sentenced to haunt *this* place for all eternity.

Troy: *(yawning)* You people need to get a life! There are no such things as ghosts. Now, if you wienies don't mind, I've got to stay focused, so I can play my best at the game. I'm outta here!

(He grabs the bathroom pass off of the teacher's desk and leaves.)

Stacy: *(Looks around and sees Emerson working on the assignment. Moves to the seat nearest Emerson.)* Uh, Emerson, you're, like, working with me.

(Suddenly, the lights flicker. Strange clangs and rattling sounds are heard. The lights go out. Jasper screams, and the lights come back on. Principal Snodgrass rushes into the room again.)

Principal: Stacy, stop screaming. It's just a power surge.

Stacy: That wasn't me. It was, like, Jasper.

Principal: Yes, yes, well...Where is Ms. Finkle?

Wednesday: She was just with you, and you've lost her? *(turns to audience)* And they put HER in charge?

Principal: I don't appreciate the tone, Wednesday. Watch it or you will be spending yet another afternoon in detention.

Wednesday: *(Says to the audience)* When has detention ever made a difference in my tone?

Principal: *(from the front of class)* You've got a point there, Wednesday, but back to the topic at hand, I sent Ms. Finkle back to class. She didn't come back in?

Jasper: (*panicking stands*) WHAT IF THE GHOST COMES HERE TOO?!
(*walks toward the center of the class*) WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE! I DON'T
WANT TO SPEND MY LAST MOMENTS AFRAID AND CRYING! (*falls to the
floor, clinging to the principal's knees*)

Principal: Ghost? What are you talking about? (*pushing Jasper away
and walks with Jasper back to his desk*)) There are no such things as
ghosts, spirits, or apparitions. I assure you, Ms. Finkle has not been
captured by a ghost.

Jasper: (*turns around, shrilly*) Emerson was just talking about it. The
ghost of the kid who was murdered here 20 years ago today! He's lonely
and took Ms. Finkle to be his friend. He'll be after us next!

Principal: (*turns and says sternly*) Emerson! Why would you spread such
lies?

Emerson: (*stands and picks up device*) It was in the newspaper, Principal
Snodgrass. I read it last night in the *Tribune's* online archives. A
teenager was killed and the crime was never solved. Would you like me
to send you a link?

Principal: Uh, no. I will look into this. (*addressing the audience*) Perhaps
I also need to speak to Ms. Finkle about not teaching Edgar Allan Poe to
such impressionable, young people. (*turns back to the class, moving
toward the door*) In the meantime, I'm certain Ms. Finkle will be right
back. (*Turns back for one moment, stern*) Get back to work, children.

**(Principal exits. For a few seconds everyone looks down at their
assignment.)**

Stacy: *(crumpling up her paper)* This is so stupid! I have, like, so many more important things to do right now. *(She pulls out her cell phone)*

Alex: Who ya gonna call?

Stacy: *(sarcastically)* *Ghostbusters.*

Alex: *(stands and skips through the class singing, other students follow him)* If there's something strange/ In your neighborhood/ Who you gonna call?

All Students: Ghostbusters!

Alex: *(really getting into it)* If there's something weird/ And it don't look good/ Who you gonna call?

All Students: *(All meet at the front of the class in a semi-circle)*
Ghostbusters! I ain't afraid of no ghost!

(All the Kids laugh, high five, and fist bump one another)

Wednesday: Ugh! Why did I just do that? *(She stalks away; Emerson and Stacy head back toward their seats. Jasper moves toward the teacher's desk)*

Alex: That Ray Parker, Jr. is a genius with lyrics! *(He and Miles high five)*

(strange noises, voices, and clanking. Jasper hides momentarily behind the teacher's desk. She leans out to deliver the first part of her lines, then stands)

Jasper: *(to the rhythm of the ghostbusters song)* BUT... I am afraid of the ghost! *(panicking)* What if the ghost really did get Ms. Finkle? She could be in danger!

Emerson: Stop it, Jasper. You're getting hysterical.

Jasper: *(hysterical)* We ALL could be in danger! I don't want to see dead people! *(She crawls under a nearby desk.)*

Emerson: I'm sure there is a reasonable explanation for all of this. The weird noises and light issues could just be shorts in the mechanical and electrical systems. I'm sure it is only a coincidence that the death happened 20 years ago today.

Alex: Yeah, like in every episode of *Scooby Doo*. It is never really a ghost; it's just an old man in a sheet or a mask.

(Everyone laughs nervously)

Stacy: *(tentatively)* Or it could be like that really old movie I watched with my Grandma, *Poltergoose*, or something, and we are all in, like, terrible danger.

Alex: *(super excited)* Do you mean *Poltergeist*? I LOVE that movie!

(The lights flicker and go out. The spotlight comes up, and there is a ghost in the classroom. The kids react in different ways running, hiding, cowering. Wednesday shrugs. Strange noises are heard.)

Troy: *(from off stage in creepy, little girl Poltergeist voice)* They're here!

Troy: *(Entering)* BOO! Gotcha! *(He laughs)*

Stacy: Troy! *(She stand and stomps up to him, punching him lightly on the arm)* That wasn't funny! You almost gave me a heart attack! *(She storms away)*

Troy: *(still laughing walks near Wednesday)* You should have seen your faces! I wish I had taken pictures! They would have been hilarious on Instagram.

Wednesday: *(Standing up and confronting Troy)* You've made a huge mistake messing with me like that! If I had a tombstone, I'd plant you under it!

Miles: *(quietly)* Um, Troy, it seems you've made a grave mistake.

Wednesday: Ugh! I thought *HE* was lame. But, Miles, that was just bad. *(She storms away, disgusted, to another part of the class)*

Jasper: *(Leans out from under a desk)* Can I open my eyes yet?

(Everyone ignores Jasper)

Alex: You all realize that Ms. Finkle still isn't back. Maybe we need to channel our inner *Scooby Doo* gang, you know, fire up the old Mystery Machine, and solve this case.

Stacy: *(Excited)* Ooooo, I call Daphne!

Troy: And of course, I'm Fred.

Wednesday: *(sarcastically)* Gross! Stereotype much?

Stacy: *(ignoring Wednesday)* Emerson, you are Velma.

Emerson: *(sarcastically, pushing up glasses)* Jinkies!

Stacy: Jasper, you have to be Scooby Doo.

Jasper: *(leans out from under desk)* That's insulting, but it is nice to be included for once.

Stacy: Oh, and Alex, that makes you Shaggy.

Alex: Zoinks! There aren't any parts left over for Miles and Wednesday!

Troy: Red Herring! They can be Red Herring.

Stacy: Who?

Troy: Fred always blames this red headed kid named Red Herring, but he's never the one who really committed the crime. *(pause, thinking)* I never really understood why that kid was in the show any way, so it's perfect for Wednesday and Miles.

Emerson: A red herring is a misleading clue. Mystery authors put red herrings in their novels to keep the audience from guessing who did it before the climax of the story.

Troy: *(confused)* I still don't get - *(realization dawns)* Ohhhhhh. I get it now. *(Pause -- Clearly still confused)* But, if Miles and Wednesday killed that boy 20 years ago, wouldn't they be older?

Emerson: *(Face palm)* No, no, no! Miles and Wednesday are NOT red herrings. Forget I ever said anything. *(Sighs and returns to desk)*

Wednesday: Well, I for one am happy you've run out of parts. Miles and I can just sit here and watch you all make fools of yourselves. How long

do you think it will be before Stacy says, “Oh Troy, you’re Soooooo smart”? Cheerleaders disgust me!

Miles: *(has sneaked up behind Wednesday and taps her on the shoulder)*
Um, why do ghosts like cheerleaders?

Wednesday: Oh, Miles, not now--

Miles: Because they have a lot of spirit. *(Laughs)*

Wednesday: *(throws up hands)* Ugh! You’re all ridiculous! I’m out of here! *(She grabs the hall pass and walks out)*

Stacy: Well, if she can, like, leave, I’m leaving too! *(She starts toward Troy and the door.)*

Troy: *(Stopping her, he puts his arm around Stacy)* I really don’t think it is a good idea to split up.

Alex: So true, on *Ghost Hunters*, Jason and Grant put their investigators into teams because it isn’t safe to investigate haunted houses individually. The buddy system is always best. *(Fist bumps Miles)*

Troy: *(surprised)* For once, the nerd is right. What I think we should do is --

Wednesday: *(rushing back in and interrupting Troy)* I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I think I found a clue.

(She holds out a broken pencil)

Emerson: Let me see...that’s Ms. Finkle’s pencil! She always has it tucked behind her ear.

(Wednesday shoves some papers aside on the teacher's desk and sits on the top)

Jasper: Oh no! The ghost got her!