

Sock Hops, Recorders, and Owl Pellets: Tips on Surviving the 4th Grade

by Christopher Cartwright

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CHARACTERS

TYLER. 4th grader. Cool. Self-aware.

BRAYDEN. 4th grader. TYLER’s dorky best friend.

HANNAH. 4th grader. Smart, and she knows it in the most annoying way. Teacher’s pet.

SARA. 4th grader. HANNAH’s best friend. More like the guys than HANNAH.

TIME

Present day.

PLACE

Elementary school of course!

Sock Hops, Recorders, and Owl Pellets: Tips on Surviving the 4th Grade first premiered at the Rarig Center Arena Stage by Caffeinated Productions as part of the 2016 Minnesota Fringe Festival in Minneapolis, MN. It opened on August 4th, 2016 and was directed by Nick Brandt. The cast was as follows:

TYLER.....Cameron Wintersteen
BRAYDEN.....Matt Nelson
HANNAH.....Natalie Dulka
SARA.....Rachel McCloud

Scene One

(Lights come up on TYLER who is standing center stage with his backpack, looking a little bit tired and uninterested)

TYLER. You know what? Adults are always saying how hard life is with jobs and kids and shopping and cooking and cleaning. But do you know how hard it is to be me? To be a 4th grader? I have tons of responsibilities. I have homework. I have to play the recorder in music class. I have to learn about the body. I have to manage 4 different girlfriends! Wait what day is it today? Tuesday...I have to manage 3 different girlfriends! Oh no...I have a spelling test today. Poop! Anyway, you get the point. Us 4th graders are much busier than adults. So stop putting so much pressure on us! And for goodness sake, stop calling us kids. Excuse me, but I'm 10 years old. I don't need crayons and a kid menu from Olive Garden. 4th graders have so much to worry about. Adults need to understand that. Growing up is hard. You have to make decisions. Where should I host my next birthday party, Grand Slam or the movie theatre? What color Crocs should I buy? What college should I go to? You're never too young to think about that, right? *(beat)* Hm...I should write a book of tips on how to survive the 4th grade. "How to Survive the 4th Grade". No, too easy. "A Dummy's Guide to Surviving the 4th Grade". That's better. Get it? 'Cause adults are dummies! *(looks at watch)* Well, I guess it's time to go to class.

(School bell rings)

Scene Two

(BRAYDEN, HANNAH, and SARAH walk onto the stage and sit in their desks)

TYLER. *(still to audience)* Tip #1 on surviving the 4th grade: Be cool. If you're not cool, people won't talk to you. For example, nobody wears their backpacks like *that (referring to BRAYDEN who's wearing his backpack with both straps on)*. Come on, Brayden, we've been over this. You gotta wear your backpack with one strap. It's cool.

BRAYDEN. Oh sorry, Tyler. I forgot. Thanks.

TYLER. That's what I'm here for, bud.

BRAYDEN. Did you get the math homework done? It was so hard.

TYLER. Math homework?

BRAYDEN. Yeah, the multiplication sheet?

(teacher's voice - a Peanut's style "wah wah" sound effect - is heard as BRAYDEN, HANNAH, and SARAH take out their homework.)

TYLER. Oh no.

(teacher's voice)

TYLER. Why yes, Mrs. Lund, I did do my homework.

(teacher's voice)

TYLER. *(to audience)* Tip #2 - If you're gonna make an excuse, make it big. *(to teacher)* Where is it? Well funny story, really. You see, Mrs. Lund, I was doing my homework last night when all of a sudden, a tornado passed through our house and sucked up my homework and my baby brother.

HANNAH. There was no tornado last night, Mrs. Lund. Tyler's lying!

SARA. Yeah! *(high fives Hannah)*

TYLER. But-

(teacher's voice)

TYLER. *(defeated)* Okay, Mrs. Lund. *(to audience)* Tip #3 - Avoid girls. They're evil. Don't let those little smiles deceive you.

SARA. Hi Tyler.

TYLER. *(still to audience)* I know I just said you should avoid girls at all costs, but there are gonna be some you just can't avoid. Hey Sara. How was your weekend?

SARA. It was great. Hannah and I had a sleepover and talked about...well you know.

TYLER. What? Talked about what?

(Sara and Hannah giggle with each other)

SARA. Just girl things. Right, Hannah?

HANNAH. Yup!

BRAYDEN. Tyler, what are they talking about? What does “girl things” mean?

TYLER. Well, Brayden, let’s see. They’re giggling, smiling, and being pretty secretive.

BRAYDEN. I don’t get it.

TYLER. C’mon. What are you usually thinking about when you smile and giggle?

BRAYDEN. Butts. *(bursts out laughing)*

TYLER. No Brayden! Crushes...girls...crushes ON girls.

BRAYDEN. Oh right, yeah that too.

TYLER. You guys didn’t happen to be talking about, oh I don’t know, BOYS were you?

(SARA and HANNAH burst out in a fit of giggles)

BRAYDEN. I still don’t get it, Tyler.

TYLER. Who exactly in particular would you have maybe been talking about?

SARA. Like we’ll ever tell you!

HANNAH. Yeah! *(high fives SARA)*

BRAYDEN. Tyler, their giggling scares me a little.

TYLER. Brayden, you have to learn to deal with it. There’s no escaping.

BRAYDEN. I think I'll just plug my ears.

(Teacher's voice. Students return to their seats. Teacher's voice again. Students groan)

SARA. Mrs. Lund, do we have to do a spelling bee today?

TYLER. *(fake coughs)* My doctor says spelling is bad for my health.

BRAYDEN. I think I hear my Mom calling for me. What was that, Mom?

HANNAH. I'M prepared for the class spelling bee, Mrs. Lund. I WAS last year's 3rd grade speller of the year.

TYLER. Hannah, you almost lost to Ronaldo!

BRAYDEN. Yeah it was totally unfair that he got the word "photosynthesis" and you got "window".

HANNAH. Well I still beat him, didn't I?

BRAYDEN. You got lucky.. Your first word was "hospital". Mine was "effervescent".

HANNAH. Whatever.

SARA. May the best speller win. Good luck you guys!

(teacher's voice)

TYLER. Mrs. Lund, if I may? Ahem. Please rise for the singing of our National Anthem. *(sings)* "Oh say can you seeeee!"

HANNAH. What are you doing?

TYLER. They sing it all the time before baseball games.

BRAYDEN. Spelling isn't really a sport, Tyler. It's just a dumb game.

HANNAH. It is not “just a dumb game”! They broadcast this on ESPN!

BRAYDEN. They also broadcast poker on ESPN.

(teacher’s voice)

SARA. Public. P-U-B-L-I-C. Public.

BRAYDEN. Climate. C-L-I-M-A-T-E. Climate. Yessss!

TYLER. *(to audience)* Tip #4. Spelling bees are dumb. Get out of it as soon as possible. School. B-O-R-I-N-G. School.

(teacher’s voice)

TYLER. Oh darn. I lost.

HANNAH. Grocery. G-R-O-S-H-R-Y. Grocery.

(teacher’s voice)

HANNAH. Wait! Can I get another word? I spaced out for a second.

TYLER. Spaced out, huh?

HANNAH. Please can I get another chance? Or another word?

(teacher’s voice)

HANNAH. *(mortified)* I can’t believe this.

SARA. Judge. J-U-D-G-E. Judge.

BRAYDEN. *(Very confused)* Seventeen? Wait what? Seventeen? *(beat)* Are you sure? *(hesitant)* Well...okay I guess. One seven. Seventeen.

(teacher’s voice)

BRAYDEN. What?! You're saying that numbers are actual words too?!

(other students laughing)

TYLER. Yes Brayden. You can spell numbers.

BRAYDEN. This is bogus!

SARA. Well I guess this makes me the winner!

HANNAH. That was the shortest spelling bee of my life.

TYLER. Thank goodness for that! Congrats, Sara.

SARA. Thanks, Tyler.

TYLER. Will you remember me when you're famous?

SARA. Of course!

(bell rings. Students pack up to leave)

Scene Three

TYLER. *(to audience)* That bell means it's time for music class. What do you do in music class, you might ask? Well it means we go to Miss Pointer's room and make music. Or at least TRY making music. Miss Pointer is this really old lady who's like 50 and she can't hear very well. She also treats us like we're little kids. *(imitates Miss Pointer)* "Alright boys and girls let's sing Row Row Your Boat! Then we're going to hold hands and sing Kumbaya. Hey Tyler don't touch the drums, you're gonna break them!" She's so annoying. Today we're rehearsing for our upcoming recorder concert. I'd say we're pretty good.

SARA. Hi everybody. I'm Sara, and we're the 4th grade Recorder Ensemble. Please enjoy our next song, "Hot Cross Buns".

(Students stand in a line together with their recorders and play “Hot Cross Buns” terribly, of course)

BRAYDEN. Wow we actually sounded so good that time!

SARA. I know!

TYLER. I can't wait until next year when Miss Pointer teaches us how to play the guitar!

BRAYDEN. Yeah!

(both start rockin' the air guitar. They obviously think it's pretty cool)

HANNAH. You boys are so stupid. They aren't going to teach us how to play the electric guitar. My friend Kayla, who's in the 5th grade, told me all about it. They play normal guitars. You know, like the wooden ones?

TYLER. Sweet! Those will be more fun to smash!

BRAYDEN. Yeah!

(both mime smashing their guitars against the ground and going crazy)

SARA. That sounds fun! *(joins them in their mime “rockstar-ing”)*

HANNAH. Sara what are you doing?!

(teacher's voice)

HANNAH. Well I'M ready, Miss Pointer.

(other students line up next to her with their recorders. HANNAH steps forward)

HANNAH. Hello, I'm Hannah and I'm the section leader for the 4th Grade Recorder Ensemble.

TYLER. *(to BRAYDEN, but loud enough so HANNAH can hear)* There are only four of us to lead.

HANNAH. Ahem! As I was saying, I'm the section leader. Our next piece will be "Ode to Joy" by the late great composer, Ludwig van Beethoven.

(They all play terribly, again, of course. When they are finished, they all look at each other, straight-faced - maybe even a bit hesitant.)

BRAYDEN. That was so AWESOME!

(all students ad-lib - "yeah!" "that was so great!" etc.)

TYLER. You know guys, I think we're ready to perform at Orchestra Hall.

SARA. Or at least the school gymnasium.

HANNAH. I think I'm going to start a solo career. My dream is to make it to Carnegie Hall. I hear that all the greats have performed there.

BRAYDEN. Who are the greats?

HANNAH. You know...like the top musicians of the world.

BRAYDEN. Oh!! Like Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus and the Plain White T's.

HANNAH. You're kidding, right?

BRAYDEN. What, you don't like a little J Beebs in your life?

HANNAH. Have you ever heard of The New York Philharmonic? The Minnesota Orchestra? Yo Yo Ma? Now that's music.

BRAYDEN. I don't care who Yo Mama is, I like REAL music.

HANNAH. It's Yo Yo Ma, not Yo Mama!

TYLER. Yuck. My Mom listens to that stuff. It's so boring, it puts me to sleep.

(teacher's voice. Students stand in a line again)

TYLER. Our final song will feature our vocal talent as well. Thank you for coming out tonight. And don't forget to like our Facebook page!

SARA. We have a Facebook page?

TYLER. Doesn't everyone?

HANNAH. Alright alright, let's get this over with.

SARA. 1, 2, 3, 4...

(recorder ensemble attempts to play the intro to "My Heart Will Go On". Then they go on to sing. NOTE: this whole bit can be played around with by the director. Perhaps students mumble a verse or two, not really knowing the lyrics until the chorus. Perhaps one student is consistently playing the recorder while the students sing. This bit can be played as long or as short as desired)

ALL. "Near, far, wherever you are! I believe that the heart does go on!"

SARA. Key Change!

ALL. "Near, far, wherever you are! I believe that the heart does go on!"

TYLER. *(once the song is over)* Wow.

BRAYDEN. It was so beautiful.

SARA. Screw the gymnasium. We're ready for Carnegie Hall.

HANNAH. When I get home I'm applying to Juilliard.

TYLER. Tip #5. *(almost in tears)* Crying is for babies. Don't cry. Or at least don't let people see you cry. Even when the music moves you to tears. *(to students)* Yeah, we were alright I guess. Pretty average, really.

SARA. We should start a band!

BRAYDEN. Aren't we kind of in one already?

SARA. Brayden. The 4th Grade Recorder Ensemble isn't a "band". It isn't cool like a real band.

HANNAH. I think it's cool.

SARA. I'll be the lead singer, Tyler can play guitar, Brayden can be the drummer, and Hannah...um...you can be the groupie!

HANNAH. Groupie? Excuse me, what did you say? I'm the groupie?!

SARA. Yeah! You know, like, our biggest fan!

HANNAH. But in *School of Rock* they said that a groupie is someone who sleeps-

(bell rings, cutting her off. Students exit)

Scene Four

TYLER. *(to audience)* That bell that you just heard right there? It's the best bell of the entire day. It means music class is over and it's time for lunch and recess. Even though 4th grade is hard, it does have its perks. For example, we can eat our lunch outside during recess. It's awesome. What's better than food and four square?!

(students enter with their lunch and a kickball. Someone can bring TYLER his lunch in a bag. BRAYDEN and TYLER sit down to eat together, and HANNAH and SARA eat together further away from the boys)

TYLER. *(to audience)* Tip #6. Never, I repeat, NEVER eat the school lunch. Always bring your own. If you eat the school's lunch, you run the risk of getting some wacky disease. Last year, a 2nd grader got food poisoning from the mystery meat, and had to go to the hospital. I guess the mystery must have been salmonella. When you bring your own lunch, you can pack normal things that you enjoy. Like Lunchables!

BRAYDEN. Hey Tyler, I'll trade you my peanut butter sandwich for your Lunchables.

TYLER. What kind of trade is that? I'll trade you my Lunchables for your sandwich, Capri-Sun, and M&Ms.

BRAYDEN. Not the M&Ms!

TYLER. No M&Ms, no trade.

BRAYDEN. Aghhh fine!

HANNAH. Why do boys always trade their food?

SARA. Yeah, that's so dumb.

HANNAH. Girls are better. We don't fight or give up our food. We're proper.

SARA. We have manners.

HANNAH. Exactly. *(beat.)* That looks like a really nice apple.

SARA. It's a honeycrisp. *(beat)* That clementine looks delicious.

HANNAH. It's a Cutie.

(long-ish beat)

SARA. Do you wanna trade?

HANNAH. Yes please.

TYLER. So Brayden. What do you think about Hannah?

BRAYDEN. What do you mean?

TYLER. Just...what do you think about her?

BRAYDEN. I don't think about her.

TYLER. I caught you staring at her just a second ago.

BRAYDEN. Was not! She had a bee in her hair.

TYLER. Come on, man. You totally like her.

BRAYDEN. Do not!

TYLER. Do too!

BRAYDEN. Do not!!

TYLER. Do too!!

BRAYDEN. Do not not not not NOT.

TYLER. Then how come I saw THIS under your desk this morning?

(TYLER pulls out a piece of paper)

BRAYDEN. Tyler, no!

TYLER. *(reading)* "I heart Hannah banana. I heart Hannah banana."

BRAYDEN. Give me that!

(TYLER and BRAYDEN wrestle for the note)

BRAYDEN. Give me that or else!

TYLER. Or what?

BRAYDEN. I'll tell Sara about that one time in 1st grade.

TYLER. There were a lot of "times" in 1st grade, Brayden. Which one?

(BRAYDEN whispers in his ear. TYLER looks horrified)

TYLER. *(to audience)* Tip #7. If your best friend knows about the time you cried while watching *The Notebook* with your mom in 1st grade and threatens to tell the girl you like, you gotta give in. *(to BRAYDEN)* Okay okay okay, have your stupid note back!

BRAYDEN. Good boy.

SARA. Boys can be so dumb sometimes.

HANNAH. *(staring lovingly in BRAYDEN's general direction)* Yeah.

SARA. So Hannah, what do you think about Brayden?

HANNAH. What do you mean?

SARA. Just...what do you think about him?

HANNAH. I do NOT think about him.

SARA. Oh come on. You were JUST staring at him a second ago!

HANNAH. Was not! He had a bee in his hair.

SARA. Hannah, it's okay if you like him.

HANNAH. I don't like him!

SARA. It's okay if you do. I mean, I kinda like Tyler.

HANNAH. Gross!!

SARA. Hey, why is it gross that I like Tyler! I think it's cute that you like Brayden! *(this last part was just a little too loud)*

HANNAH. Sara shhh!!

BRAYDEN. Did someone say my name?

HANNAH. Nope no, not at all, you must be hearing things, Brayden. Go get your ears checked, stupid!

(BRAYDEN resumes eating. HANNAH stares lovingly at him)

SARA. So you DO like him!

HANNAH. Fine! You caught me! Now let's just drop the whole thing, okay? This is a secret between us. Pinky promise you won't tell anyone?

SARA. Fine.

BRAYDEN. I didn't mean to make her angry, Tyler. Should I go apologize to her?

TYLER. She likes you.

BRAYDEN. What?

TYLER. She likes you.

BRAYDEN. You mean she LIKE likes me?

TYLER. Yeah, she LIKE likes you.

BRAYDEN. Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, she likes me, a girl likes me! *(excitedly takes an enormous bite of food)* Why?

TYLER. I really don't know.

SARA. You should ask him to the 4th grade sock hop dance.

HANNAH. You think so? But that's today!

SARA. Go ahead. It'll be fine.

TYLER. I think you should ask her to the sock hop dance.

BRAYDEN. Really? But that's today!

TYLER. Yes!

BRAYDEN. Nope, not gonna do it.

TYLER. I dare you.

BRAYDEN. No.

TYLER. I double dog dare you.

BRAYDEN. No!

TYLER. Fine. You're a chicken.

BRAYDEN. I'm not a chicken, Tyler! You're embarrassing me!

TYLER. What do you have to lose?

BRAYDEN. My self-confidence, my dignity, this morning's breakfast...

TYLER. It'll be okay, Brayden. I'm right here!

BRAYDEN. Okay fine. I'll do it.

(BRAYDEN and HANNAH both walk up to each other meeting in the middle of the stage. They stare at each other for a brief moment before quickly talking at the same time.)

BRAYDEN. *(overlapping)* Hey, I think you're really nice, and cool, and pretty, and I was wondering if you maybe wanted to go the sock hop with me. It's okay if you can't, I mean I completely understand.

HANNAH. *(overlapping)* You're a really fun and funny guy, and It would be really fun I think to go with you to the sock hop with me, but I would totally understand if you couldn't go, that's fine.

BRAYDEN. Wait, did you just ask me to the sock hop dance?

HANNAH. Yes. I mean no! I mean - there's a bee in your hair!! *(runs away, leaving BRAYDEN confused and a little sad)*

TYLER. So, how did it go? Why are you frowning?!

BRAYDEN. She ripped my heart out and stomped on it like Godzilla crushing a city. I'm gonna go swing now and think about sadness. *(he exits)*

TYLER. *(frustrated)* Brayden! *(to audience)* Tip #8 - if you see some lonely kid on the swing set at recess, they're probably going through some serious heartbreak. *(beat)* Or maybe they just ate the school's lunch.

SARA. So how did it go?

HANNAH. I froze up. I said no. I told him he had a bee in his hair. He didn't have a bee in his hair. His hair was perfect like always. It smelled like watermelon.

SARA. Hannah you have to go explain yourself to him and re-ask him to the dance!

HANNAH. I know I know! I just need some time to think first. I'll be at the swing set if you need me. *(exits)*

(TYLER and SARA both continue sitting apart eating their lunches, occasionally eyeing each other)

SARA. Hey Tyler.

TYLER. What? Oh hey, Sara. What are you up to?

SARA. Just eating my lunch.

TYLER. Yeah, me too.

SARA. Yeah.

TYLER. Uh huh. *(beat)* So...nice day right?

SARA. Yeah it's so nice out!

TYLER. Sure is.

SARA. Yup.

TYLER. Yeah. *(beat)* Hey Sara, can I ask you something?

SARA. Sure!

TYLER. Um, would you maybe like to uhh, well it would be fun if we - what if you and I -

SARA. What?

TYLER. Well I was wondering if you wanted to go...

SARA. Wanted to go where?

TYLER. Um-

(BRAYDEN and HANNAH enter together holding hands)

BRAYDEN/HANNAH. We're going to the sock hop dance together! Jinx! *(both laugh)*

SARA. Whoa congratulations you guys! So you two are like boyfriend-girlfriend now?

(BRAYDEN and HANNAH look at each other for a second)

BRAYDEN. It's complicated.

HANNAH. Yeah, we don't like labels.

TYLER. You guys sure hit it off pretty fast.

BRAYDEN. Well we have a lot in common.

HANNAH. We like to discuss important things. Politics, education, -

BRAYDEN. Food!

SARA. Wow, I'm so happy for you two!!

TYLER. Yup.

BRAYDEN. Hey do you guys wanna go play 4 square?

HANNAH. Yeah!

SARA. Alright!

(They begin to leave. TYLER remains onstage)

SARA. Aren't you coming, Tyler?

TYLER. Yeah, I'll be there in a sec.

SARA. Okay. *(exits)*

TYLER. I am so confused right now. Brayden has a date to the sock hop. Brayden! Brayden who likes to eat pizza all day and pick his nose. Brayden who still lets his mom get him dressed in the morning. He got a date before I did! I need a plan. I need to ask Sara to the sock hop dance in a really cool way. Hmm *(ponders this for a bit)* I've got it! Tip #9 - girls LOVE a guy that can sing. *(exits happily)*

(bell rings)

Scene Five

(BRAYDEN and TYLER are onstage with their desks right next to each other watching a video. No need for a tv or a media cart or anything. Just BRAYDEN and TYLER both looking in the same direction as if they were watching a video)

TYLER. *(to audience)* Today is a big day. It's the day we've been dreading since we found out about it in 3rd grade. Today is what they call "human growth and development" day. It's where they take the boys into one room and the girls in another to show us this video about our bodies. It's also gonna teach us where babies come from. I'm not sure they should be showing us this right after lunch.

BRAYDEN. *(covering his eyes)* Let me know when it's over!

TYLER. It's only the opening credits still.

BRAYDEN. Oh.

(the two watch the video intently)

BRAYDEN. You know, this actually isn't as bad as I thought.

TYLER. Yeah, I'm doing just fine.

BRAYDEN. Me too.

(they continue watching)

BRAYDEN. Wow, I can't believe we were so worried about this.

TYLER. I know, that was so dumb of us. So anyway, you and Hannah?

BRAYDEN. What about me and Hannah?

TYLER. I can't believe it. Hannah is Hannah and you're...Brayden.

BRAYDEN. What do you mean "I'm Brayden"?

TYLER. Well you know...she's really smart and likes to be perfect and neat. You...well you just don't.

BRAYDEN. Hey, I can be smart! I can be neat...at times.

TYLER. I don't know. I guess it just baffles me.

BRAYDEN. Opposites attract, Tyler.

TYLER. I guess you're right. *(they resume watching the video)* OH MY GOSH!

BRAYDEN. What the?!

TYLER. What is that?!

BRAYDEN. I can't do this anymore, I want to go home!

TYLER. I can't look at this!

(more ad-libs as BRAYDEN and TYLER are trying not to look at the video)

BRAYDEN. Is it over?

TYLER. *(slowly removing his hands from his face)* Yes. We're safe.

BRAYDEN. Phew. So uh...were you thinking about Sara at all during that video?

TYLER. Oh gross come on man, that's disgusting! *(exits)*

BRAYDEN. My parents were wrong. We didn't come from baby factories. *(perplexed, he exits)*

(HANNAH and SARA enter with their chairs in a similar fashion to that of BRAYDEN and TYLER. NOTE: director can stage this however he/she wants. They can come onstage after TYLER exits, they can be on a different part of the stage in dim lights during BRAYDEN and TYLER's scene, etc.)

SARA. Ew, that was so gross.