

UNDER A CLOUD A pantomime by Brian Dyson (Music available on request)

CHARACTERS:

- Schoolteacher** **Ms. WHITE.** Good hearted. Socially aware but not politically involved. However, she is working for a change of values in the classroom.
- School Kid** **LUCERO.** Female. Our real heroine. She is street smart and understands intuitively the nature of power.
- 5 School Kids:**
- Richard;** The class lazy-bones, has difficulty keeping awake in class.
 - Mary;** The class chatterbox. Always whispering in class.
 - Doug;** The class clown. Always up to mischief.
 - Sarah;** The class bully. Pulls hair, steals felt pens, etc.
 - Lisa;** Teacher's pet. Always looking for praise from Ms. White.
- Headmaster** **Mr. GRAY M.F.A.** Typical bureaucratic mentality. Pays lip service to the system. He is unable to see his own self-interest or his programmed attitudes.
- Robber Baron** **Mr. BLACK.** A true pantomime caricature of greed, inflated self opinion and crass stupidity.
- Heroine** **SALLY-ANNE.** Corresponds to "Dick Whittington" and other male roles traditionally played by women, but this time she is definitely female. Has a high level of social awareness, self-knowledge (and doubt) and political involvement.
- A Cat** **SYLVESTER.** The heroine's faithful companion.
- Cook** **COOK.** Traditional Old Dame role ("Widow Twanky"). A male in drag playing a Julia Child character. Comic relief element.
- Cafe/Bar Patron** **BILLY.** To express traditional healthy cynicism of the working class. He is somewhat aware of social reality but his lack of analysis leads to a superficial expression, primarily to win friends.
- 4 Bar patrons and bartender**
- Steve:** The bartender. Happy & cheerful to his customers.
 - Rita;** A middle-aged or elderly woman who sits at the bar talking to Steve.
 - Barry:** Plays darts by himself.
 - Sheila;** Has a crush on Barry. Sits at table near dartboard, trying to catch his eye.
 - Jack;** A retired chap. Reads a newspaper in a corner, but doesn't miss a thing.
- Fairy God-Mother/Pope** Vain, condescending, holy and so humble. Corresponds to the Church. An androgynous Pope.
- Clean-up Crew** A representation of the capitalist's support system. Ominous. Star Wars types. Masked.
- Librarian** **Ms. INFORMATION.** To act as a foil for cook.
- TV Newscaster** Typical
- TV News Reporter** Typical

SCENE 1 Curtain opens on classroom. A fairly large free-standing two-sided blackboard that can be flipped over. 2 - 3 tables with chairs for school kids. A teachers desk (table?) and chair, eraser, pointer etc. A cupboard/shelf which contains colored markers, paper etc. Class work on walls.

(Cook is cleaning up, helped by Ms. Information [collecting and stacking books].
Played for laughs to get audience in the mood.)

Cook: (Picking up assorted apple cores, stale sandwiches, smelly socks, dead cats, etc.)
Goodness gracious, Ms. Information, it looks like a tornado has been through here!

Ms. Info: Oh that's highly unlikely, Cook, I read in the Encyclopedia Britannica that the chances of a tornado hitting the same spot twice are about a billion to one and this seems to happen every day. There must be another reason for it, don't you think?

Cook: Of course there's some other reason for it, Ms. Information. Children are the filthiest creatures in the universe! I wasn't suggesting that a tornado had actually done this, I was using a simile wasn't I? A simile is something you use to show that something is simile to something else. The way the children leave this classroom every day is simile to the way a tornado would leave it. Do you understand?

Ms. Info: Oh! I See!

Cook: Said the blind man. (Cook continues to indiscriminately sweep tabletops of objects into the garbage, including some books.)

Ms. Info: (Hurridly rescuing books from the garbage.) Oh Cook, do be careful! If we throw these books away the children won't learn anything! We may as well close down the school, and then where would we be?

Cook: In the real world, Ms. Information, where we all might learn something! Instead of just knowing something, we might learn how to do something. Better for everyone concerned as far as I can see!

(2 or 3 children enter and sit down at desks, idly watching Cook and Ms. Information. Cook picks up a pile of books, puts them on the floor and uses them to stand on as she dusts around. Ms. Information looks horrified at such sacrilege and rushes over, pushing Cook off the pile and protectively picking up books. Kids react with amusement.)

Ms. Info: Cook, I must object! Show some respect for knowledge please!

Cook: (Grabs a book, opens it at random and begins to read aloud)
"The square on the hippopotamus is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides". You see Ms. Information, this is utter rubbish! Everybody knows that a hippopotamus has only two sides! - an inside and an outside, ha! ha! ha!
(Cook slams the book shut. A cloud of dust spills out of the pages. Remainder of school kids and Ms. Giving enter. Cook and Ms. Information leave.)

Ms. White: (Entering classroom) Good morning boys and girls!

Class: Good morning Ms. White!

Ms. White: Now, children, why don't we push all the desks to one side and work on the floor!
(Ms. White hands out paper to the kids. The kids get colored markers from the shelf)
Today we are going to work on words.

Class: Words?

Ms. White: Words! On the piece of paper I have given you I want you to copy down all the words on the blackboard.

Class: All the words?

SONG: (Ms. White)
The first few words are the most difficult to learn
Pick words that are easy to duplicate
Speak slowly and with perfect diction
By these means you will develop a large vocabulary

Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice
Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice
Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice
Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice

There are lots of flowers growing by the roadside
Can you remember their names?
They won't be there for very much longer
They're being killed by the rain

There are lots of animals hiding in the forest
Can you remember their names?
Try to find the animals hiding in the forest
'Cos they're never coming out again

Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice
Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice
Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice
Repeat words over and over
in the same tone of voice

Which of these things do you know about?
How many things can you find in the wrong place?
Can you name some things that help us see more clearly?
Some pictures look the same but they are not
Draw in all the faces
By this means we are able to recognize our friends.

(As the song approaches the last verse, kids in ones and twos pin their work on the wall. Mr. Gray M.F.A. enters, Baron Black peeks around the door, sniffing.)

Mr. Gray: Ms. White, It's not a good idea to disturb the children with such thinking. You should teach the children about the beauty and innocence of Nature, not confuse them with such stories. Now boys and girls I want you to put your tables and chairs back neatly in rows and sit down. I have a special guest I want you to meet. Kids quickly rearrange tables and chairs) Ms. White, boys and girls, today I am very happy to

introduce to you one of the pillars of our community and a person whose generosity has been a great help to this school, indeed a figure that you all should admire and emulate, Baron Black of Black's Consolidated International.

Baron Black: Headmaster, over here!

Mr. Gray: Oh, Ms. White, boys and girls, Baron Black is extremely allergic to, uh, cats. There wouldn't be any cats in here now, would there?

Ms. White: Why no, Mr. Gray.

Mr. Gray: No, there are no cats Baron Black.

Baron Black: So I heard, Mr. Gray.

Ms. White: Children, Mr. Gray, M.F.A., our headmaster, is giving Baron Black a tour of the school. I am sure Baron Black would be happy to answer any questions you might have about Black's Consolidated International . . . Yes, Lucero?

Lucero: Baron Black, don't you think it's time you started cleaning up your act around here? Don't you realize that all the filth and poison your factories are spewing out is killing all our wildlife?

Baron Black: Well, young lady, you know what they say; where there's muck there's money, and I'm in business to make money after all. Look on the bright side! Without pollution there would be no jobs for your parents and no profits for me, and I'm in business to make money after all. Without money your parents couldn't buy Black's products. If they can't buy Black's products, Black's products don't sell. If Black's products don't sell, your parents are out of a job and I don't make any money, and I'm in business to make money after all. When I tour my factories and see the pollution spewing out of the chimney stacks and sewer pipes I know all is well with the world. It means your parents have jobs making Black's products, earning money to spend on Black's products, and that's going to make money for me, and I'm in business to make money after all. If I didn't make oodles of money I couldn't buy your hockey uniforms could I? Money is valuable. there's only so much to go around. The secret is to get as much of it for yourself as possible. That's what education's all about - the smarter you are the more money you make, and I'm in business to make money after all.

SONG:
(Lucero)
He's the ringmaster
He's the court jester
Raking in the loot
He doesn't give a hoot

Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da
Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da

He's the headmaster
God's gift to the nation
Should have talked faster
No more indoctrination

Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da
Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da

What does he do
On a Saturday afternoon
He picks up the spoons
And he tries to play a tune

(Lucero drops spoons to imitate headmaster's lack of dexterity)

He's the main man
Doesn't give a damn
He's read the book
Can't believe his luck

Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da
Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da

He's the big cheese
Does what he pleases
Wears a pinstripe suit
Smokes a sharoot

Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da
Da-Da-Da, Da-Da-Da

Ms. White: Children, please settle down or Mr. Gray, M.F.A. will come back and we don't want that do we? Oh, what are we going to do?

Lucero: It'll be alright, Ms. White, we'll work something out.

(CURTAIN)

SCENE 2 (Introduction of Sally-Anne and her brother Billy. They are at Billy's cabin on a lake. Sally-Anne is accompanied by a pantomime cat "Sylvester". She is holding a letter which she keeps glancing at as she speaks. Sylvester listens attentively, reacting to what she says.)

Sally-Anne: What a beautiful night Billy. You're so lucky to be working out here! And I'm so lucky to be to visit you like this. The stars shine so brightly when you're out of the city. I could stay here forever. Too bad we have to go back to Blackston.

Billy: I know how you feel sister. Stay a couple more days. Things can't be that pressing in Blackston. Tomorrow we can climb Cotter's Hill and watch the eagles soaring. I can't do any more work until Baron Black gets the sawmill fixed. What do you say?

Sally-Anne: Oh, I'd love to Billy, but Ms. White is concerned about the children. Baron Black is doing nothing to clean up his factories, or the countryside. I know you like your work and it's a nice life here, but very soon there'll be no trees left. Baron Black hasn't planted one tree to replace what he's taken out. All he thinks about is making money. I know Sylvester! - we'll go into Blackston and rally the people! We'll march on Baron Black's factories and insist he makes the environment safe again, and we'll all refuse to work for him until he does!

Billy: That won't work, Sally-Anne. If people can't work they can't eat or pay the rent. And you won't be able to buy catfood for Sylvester. I think I agree with what you're saying, but how can we stand up to someone as powerful as Baron Black?

Sally-Anne: Oh, Billy, if only we could get organized we could change things. It's not right that one man has so much power over people's lives. We have to make these people understand before it's too late. Oh, Sylvester, what can we do? Billy, I'm sorry but you have to take me back to Blackston tonight.

SONG:

(Sally-Anne)

Sat on the beach eating moon rocks
Watching the tide rolling in
Propping my head on my elbows
Taking the weight on my chin
Passing the time with my shadow
Hoping the sun wouldn't stay
'Cos the water was up to my ankles
And washing my shadow away.

It gets so very hard sometimes
just trying to be yourself
When everyone is telling you
You're really someone else
They all see you through different eyes
No two are quite the same
So go ahead and please yourself
You've just yourself to blame
Should things go wrong.

Steppin' out, steppin' out
Steppin' out of your skin like a snake do
It's hard to wear your love on the outside
When you're stuck in the old red and blue.

Wonder where the wonder went
Wouldn't like to say
Too many unfinished situations
Too many times we run away
Too many clouds hanging over our heads
Darken our path to the sun
Yes we'll all shed a tear in the river of fear
Before we join hands with the One
And the pale moon will bleed
to awaken the seed
as the river gives blood to the earth
Then the great bull will cradle the sun in its horns
and the earth will make love to the sky.

Sat in a sea full of moondrops
Washing away all my sins
Propping the sink on my kneecaps
Taking the wet on my chin
Passing the time with my echo
Hoping the 'phone wouldn't ring
'Cos the moon had just gone down the plughole
And I never did learn how to swim.

Fools rush in where wise men fear to tread
But wise men always die long in the tooth
And I'd rather die young instead.

Steppin' out, steppin' out
Steppin' out of your skin like a snake do
It's hard to wear your love on the outside
When you're stuck in the old red and blue.

(CURTAIN)

SCENE 3 (Schoolroom again. Ms. White is supervising school kids [at tables this time]. Sally-Anne enters with Sylvester. Mr. Gray and Baron Black, who have been following them, approach a window and spy on the events in the classroom. The audience is aware of their presence but the players are not.)

Sally-Anne: Hi, Ms. White! Hi, boys and girls!

Kids: Hi, Sally-Anne!

Ms. White: Hello Sally-Anne. I'm so glad you're here. Did you get my letter?

Sally-Anne: Yes I did, and there's no time to lose. If we don't get this mess cleaned up soon we'll be in deep trouble. We can't let Baron Black get away with this any longer. It's not just what's happening to our wildlife, this situation could be dangerous for Blackston as well. If we could only get people involved! Oh, why don't they understand?

Lucero: They're living in a fairy tale.

Sally-Anne: They feel so removed from everything! Nothing is more significant to them than a soap opera or a TV commercial. We'll just have to take over the TV station and tell them what's really going on!

Douglas: But then they'll think you're a soap opera or TV commercial, won't they?

Sally-Anne: I don't understand people. Don't they realize they have neighbours? Don't they ever talk to each other? They must talk to their friends? Children, don't you ever talk about these things?

Richard: Sure we do. But what can we do about it? Nobody ever listens to us! You know what grown-ups say - "silence is golden," "children should be seen and not heard." So we silently watch stupid television and turn out just like them.

Sally-Anne: You know, sometimes I really hate cities. There are so many people here yet it seems like everybody is living in their own little world.

(Stage dims. Players are holding umbrellas which are lit from within. A rain effect will be created by using audio static and some lighting effect.)

SONG: There are only shadows in the city
(Sally-Anne) Maybe because there's nobody there
Maybe they've gone away somewhere . . . somewhere

The moving shadows in the city
Flicker fast like a fading film
Not knowing where they're going to . . . nowhere

The haunting shadows in the city
Make you remember things gone past
All alone . . . the birds have flown away . . . out there.

(CURTAIN)