SERIOUS FUN
TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Donna Latham

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SYNOPSIS: Jewel suffers from a cold, as the family prepares to prep Bill for the Grammar-Rama Challenge Bowl in which he’ll soon compete. Jewel, afflicted with “one terrific headache,” has lost her appetite. Lead by that “hopeless optimist” Gram, Jewel’s concerned family members attempt to tempt her with food items of seemingly contradictory descriptions: jumbo shrimp salad with sweet pickles, turkey bacon, and fried ice cream. A discussion of the figure of speech oxymoron ensues. Afterwards, with Gramps as the quiz-meister, the family participates in a review of grammar/language skills and concepts. (Adverbs, Adjectives, Comparatives and Superlatives, Double Negatives, Idioms, Interjections, Onomatopoeia, Oxymoron, Possessives, Pronouns, Sentences) Which lively contestant will be proclaimed Grand Grammarian?

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 MEN, 3 WOMEN, FLEXIBLE)

JEWEL (F) .........................a vibrant, inquisitive, and studious teenager
GRAM (F) .........................her kind, gentle, and nurturing grandmother
GRAMPS (M) .....................her courtly, proper grandfather, a retired British brigadier general
BILL (M) .........................her up-for-anything younger brother
ADDIE (M/F) .....................their lovable lug of a talking dog
ROSCOE (M/F) ....................their reticent and bashful parrot

The Stratford Family
A tightly knit intergenerational family, the Stratfords are an energetic, verbally adept bunch. The family dynamic is chatty, nurturing, and supportive; together, they tackle problems that arise in their ongoing adventures with the English language. As Gramps says, "English is quite a sticky wicket of a language to master!"

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Gramps is a retired British brigadier general, devoted to his bride, Gram, a kind, nurturing soul. Gramps is a lover of history and literature, while Gram enjoys tending to her garden and whipping up new recipes in the kitchen. A still-vigorous pair, Gramps and Gram remain young at heart with the presence of their grandchildren. Jewel, an industrious teenager, is a multi-talented multi-tasker! She aspires to be the next J.K. Rowling and is currently writing a whodunit. Bill, her spontaneous younger brother, is up for anything! Thoroughly living in the moment, he is not actively planning for the future, as Jewel is. In fact, he is consumed these days with teaching Roscoe, the world's most bashful parrot, to talk. Add a lovable, loyal talking dog, Addie, to the mix and the family is complete!

**SETTING**

The play uses a fixed set, with a cozy kitchen and an adjoining living room area. At left, is the kitchen, with a table and four chairs. The kitchen includes a stove, sink, and several cabinets. At right, is a living room area, with a sofa with several pillows, coffee table, and wing chair. Windows appear at opposite sides of the stage; curtains hang from rods. In *Serious Fun*, four places for contestants to sit or stand during the game show are needed, as well as a scoreboard (A chalkboard can be used.) Roscoe is onstage in his birdcage, although he may be offstage in other plays. In addition, though Addie's dog bed is not used in this play, it may appear in others.

**Staging Suggestions:**

In this play, a prop bird should play Roscoe, while an offstage actor voices his lines. Review with performers the manic attitude typically employed by game-show participants and the overly enthusiastic, broadly grinning manner of the hosts and announcers. Encourage big performances as actors parody game-show protocol. You might opt to have Gramps read the game-show questions from note cards. For the curtain call, have Addie ape a game-show announcer as she uses her bone as a mic to introduce each performer.
PROPS LIST

Birdcage with bell and prop bird
Stuffed bear
Dog bone
Four places for game show contestants
Score board with writing implement
Jammies and oversized furry animal slippers (for Jewel)
Writing journal
Box of tissues
Thermometer
Fruit bowl
Green orange
Salad dish
Ice cream carton
Chime
Buzzer
AT RISE:
BILL speaks to ROSCOE, in cage. ADDIE plays with stuffed bear and bone. On set are four places and scoreboard for game show.

BILL: C’mon, Roscoe! You can do it. Say, “Hello!” (Caws and speaks like bird.) Awwk! Hello, hello!

ROSCOE: (Flutters in cage and rings bell; offstage voice.) Cheep, cheep!

BILL: (Like bird.) Awwk, hello!

ROSCOE: (Offstage voice.) Awk, awk!

JEWEL enters wearing jammies and furry animal slippers. Carries writing journal and tissue box.

BILL: (To JEWEL in bird voice.) Awwk! Hello, hello!

JEWEL: Hello! (Sneezes.)

GRAM: Gesundheit!

JEWEL: Thanks, Gram.

ADDIE stalks stuffed bear and pounces.

ADDIE: Gotcha! A dawg’s gotta do what a dawg’s gotta do. The ol’ rough and tumble predator instinct calls.

BILL: Jewel, how are you feeling? You look like the living dead.

ADDIE: (Spies JEWEL’s slippers.) Eeek! (Jumps behind sofa.)

GRAM: Addie, those are Jewel’s animal slippers! No need to be afraid.

BILL: (Chuckles.) What a cowardly lion you are, Addie.

JEWEL: (Blows nose.) I feel like the living dead. This cold has me in a strangle hold.

GRAMPS: What are your persistently prevailing symptoms, my dear?

JEWEL: A stuffy nose, a sore throat, and one terrific headache. Uh!

GRAMPS: By jumbo, you’re ordinarily the very epitome of vim and vigor, Jewel.

GRAM: What bad luck for you to have tumbled into a spell of ill health.
JEWEL: And right before Bill’s big day at the Grammar-Rama Challenge Bowl. I’ll be absolutely broken-hearted if I don’t get to cheer him on.

BILL: Another fine mess! It’s strangely familiar — reminds me of the time you got hiccups before the open mic at the bookshop.

JEWEL: I’m bound and determined to help prep you for the competition.

ADDIE: Billy Boy, you’ll be a grammar whiz kid by the time we get through with you.

GRAM: Before we quiz Bill, let me take your temperature, Jewel. (Takes temp; studies thermometer.) 98.6° — normal.

ADDIE: Wicked good!

GRAMPS: I’m terribly pleased that your fever has broken.

JEWEL: Me, too. Those cold sweats were no fun! Now, I wish I’d get my appetite back . . . .

ADDIE: You have to eat, Jewel, or you’ll end up like one of those random pin-thin girls in the tabloids.

JEWEL: Thanks for your concern, Addie, but that will never happen. I’m an anxious patient right now, but I believe in eating healthfully and taking good care of myself.

ADDIE: You go, girl!

GRAMPS: Might I coax you into enjoying an orange from our fruit bowl? It’s chock-full of much-needed vitamin C.

JEWEL: Thanks, Gramps, but everything tastes like cardboard right now. My taste buds are lying dormant.

ADDIE: (Holds up green orange from bowl.) If you want my unbiased opinion, this green orange is pretty ugly.

GRAM: I’m a hopeless optimist. I’m certain we’ll find something delectable to tempt those sleepy tasty buds of yours. (Crosses to kitchen. Holds up food items.) Might I interest you in jumbo shrimp salad with sweet pickles?

ADDIE: (Rummaging in kitchen with BILL.) How’s about turkey bacon? Ham steak?

BILL: (Holds up carton.) There’s white chocolate non-fat ice cream — naw, scratch that idea. It’s mottled with freezer burn.

GRAMPS: Fried ice cream is just the thing for a sore throat.

ADDIE: Perfect! It’s chilly and toasty, frosty and roasty.
BILL: Addie, that’s clear as mud.
ADDIE: Say what?
BILL: I’m clearly confused. How can something be chilly and toasty at the same time?
GRAMP: Bill, fried ice cream is an oxymoron.
ADDIE: (Gasps.) Gramps! You know we have a strict no-name-calling ordinance around here!
GRAMP: (Chuckles.) Oxymoron isn’t a bad name, Addie. It’s a type of figurative language that combines opposites or contradictory terms for forceful or humorous effect.
BILL: How so, Gramps?
GRAMP: Take the oxymoron jumbo shrimp, for example. Shrimp are quite tiny. Jumbo, of course, means “oversized.” Yet, by combining these opposites, we conjure up a memorable image.
GRAM: Oxymora - - which is the plural form of oxymoron - - are quite effective in our speech.
JEWEL: I love to include them in my writing, too. They create powerful descriptions. (Reads from journal.) “Madame Carlotta broke the deafening silence with a loud whisper.”
ADDIE: I get it, but I’m still visualizing a shrimp as enormous as a blue whale.
GRAM: Take my stationary bike - - something that’s stationary stands still. A bike is a vehicle that’s meant to move. Put the two words together, and you get an oxymoron.
JEWEL: Other oxymora are sad clown, old news, and same difference.
BILL: I’ll have the Grammar-Rama Challenge Bowl all wrapped up if it includes questions about oxymora.
GRAMP: Speaking of the Grammar-Rama, please take your places and let us commence.

GRAMP turns around scoreboard to face audience. GRAM, JEWEL, BILL, and ADDIE takes places at game show.

ADDIE: (Holds bone as mic.) Good evening, ladies and germs, and welcome to the Grammar-Rama Challenge Bowl!
GRAMPS: I’m your quizmeister, Gramps Stratford. Let us greet our distinguished contestants.

GRAM: Hello, I’m Gram Stratford, a grammarian from St. Charles. I’ll be sounding a chime when I’m ready to respond to a question. (Sounds chime.)

GRAMPS: Capital, my dearest!

JEWEL: I’m Jewel Stratford, at the moment afflicted with the dreaded common cold. My sound will be a sneeze. (Sneezes.)

GRAMPS: Gesundheit!

JEWEL: Thanks!

BILL: Hey, all! I’m Bill Stratford. It’s an open secret that I’m nervous. My sound is the buzzer. (Presses buzzer; buzz SFX.)

GRAMPS: Jolly good, my fine chap!

ADDIE: I’m Addie, bowzer extraordinaire. Woof, woof, woof - - that’s my sound.

ROSCOE: Awwk, awwk! Cheep, cheep! (Rings bell.)

GRAMPS: No, no, I won’t leave you out, Roscoe. Thank you all for joining us this evening. Now, remember, you must answer in the form of a question. Ready?

GRAM, JEWEL, BILL, ADDIE: (Ad libbing and clapping.) Oh, yes! Bring it on! Here we go!

GRAMPS: This part of speech is used in place of a noun.

BILL: (Buzz SFX.) What is a pronoun?

GRAMPS: He’s correct! One point for him. (Records point.)

BILL: Woo hoo!

GRAMPS: Identify the pronoun in this sentence: “Ricardo hung up his coat.”

ADDIE: (Woofs.) His.

GRAMPS: Answer in the form of a question, please.

ADDIE: What is his?

GRAMPS: She has retrieved the correct response! That’s one point for her. (Records.)

ADDIE: (Barking.) Yip, yip! All rrright!

GRAMPS: My, oh, my, these spicy words and phrases express emotions. My goodness, they often appear at the beginning of sentences. Good gravy! They can stand alone, as well.
JEWEL: (Sneezes.) Gosh! I just had it. (A beat.) Sheesh, this cold is clouding my mind! Blah!
GRAMPS: So sorry, Jewel. Anyone?
GRAM: (Rings chime.) What are interjections?
GRAMPS: By jumbo, that’s correct, my dearest! (Records.)
JEWEL: Yippee!
ADDIE: Yahoo!
BILL: Cool!
ROSCOE: (Rings bell.) Awwk! Jumpin’ Jehoshaphat!
GRAMPS: Huzzah! Now, let us proceed, shall we? These colorful turns of phrase include the expressions heart of gold, broke the ice, and let the cat out of the bag.
ADDIE: Cat? Lemme at ‘em! Woof, woof, woof!
GRAMPS: Addie, are you offering a response?
ADDIE: (Embarrassed.) Oops, I’ve got egg on my face! Sorry, Gramps, but that ol’ predator instinct is in place 24-7.
GRAMPS: Contestants?
BILL: (Buzz SFX.) What are idioms?
GRAMPS: Give yourself a pat on the back, for you are correct, William. (Records.)
BILL: I don’t mean to toot my own horn, but I feel cool as a cucumber right now.
GRAMPS: An adjective describes a noun or pronoun. Identify the adjectives in this sentence: “Jewel’s symptoms include a sore throat and a stuffy nose.”
JEWEL: (Sneezes.) What are sore and stuffy?
GRAMPS: Grand! Jewel, I award you one point - - one being an adjective that tells how many points.
JEWEL: Great!
GRAMPS: Let us review, shall we? Bill leads with two points.
BILL: How cool is that?
GRAMPS: Gram, Jewel, and Addie are tied with one point each.
GRAM, JEWEL, BILL, ADDIE: (Ad libbing.) Yay! C’mon! Let’s go!
GRAMPS: This describes the use of words or groups of words that imitate sounds.
ROSCOE: Cheep, cheep!
ADDIE: Bow-wow!
BILL: (Makes buzzer sound with mouth.) Buzzzz! What is onomatopoeia?
GRAMPS: (Dances conga.) Onomatopoe - - YUH! Sizzling words, you see - - YUH!
ROSCEO: (Sing as GRAMPS dances.) Onomatopoe - - Awwwk! Onomatopoe - - Awwwk!
BILL: Kerplunk! Add another point to my pile.
GRAMPS: (Records.) To recap, Bill maintains a firm lead with three points, whilst the lovely ladies remain tied with one point each.
JEWEL: Onward!
GRAMPS: Indubitably! An adverb is a part of speech that modifies - - or describes - - a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. What do adverbs tell?
JEWEL: (Sneezes repeatedly.) Achoo, achoo, achoo!
GRAMPS: Yes, Jewel? Your response?
JEWEL: No response, Gramps - - just a sneezing spell. Achoo!
ROSCEO: Gesundheit!
JEWEL: Thanks!
GRAM: (Hits chime.) What are how, when, or where?
GRAMPS: You are unquestionably correct! That’s one point for Gram. (Records.) Now, for a two-parter. I remind you to answer in the form of a question, my fine contestants. In the sentence, “Gram responded immediately,” what is the adverb, and what does it tell?
JEWEL: (Sneezes.) What are immediately and it tells when?
GRAMPS: Indubitably! Jewel has rapidly earned another point. (Records.)
BILL: Yikes, the ladies are catching up to me quickly!
JEWEL: But not effortlessly.
GRAMPS: Next, in this figure of speech, contradictory terms team up to form delightful descriptions.
ADDIE: Pick me, pick me!
GRAMPS: Addie, I must remind you to use your sound signal.
ADDIE: I know, I know. (Woofs.)
GRAMPS: Yes?
ADDIE: Um . . . uh . . . I can’t remember what I was going to say.
GRAMPS: Do you have a response?
ADDIE: Let me give you a definite maybe with even odds that I’ll remember.

GRAMPS: Three seconds, Addie . . .

ROSCOE: *(Fluttering and rustling in cage.)* Awwk! Think!

ADDIE: I’m having a minor crisis! I’m going nowhere fast! I can’t recall what I was going to say . . . Oh, I know - - Oxymoron!

GRAMPS: Nicely recovered! Addie, you have two points. *(Records.)*

ROSCOE: Awwk! Two points! *(Rings bell twice.)*

GRAMPS: Now, please listen carefully to my words. Possessives express ownership. Many possessives receive a special form of punctuation. Name it.

GRAM: *(Rings chime.)* The apostrophe - - it won’t get the best of me.

GRAMPS: Spot on, my dear! I shall add another point for Gram. *(Records.)* Bill, you and Gram are currently neck and neck, as we move along to our next question.

BILL: *(Gulps.)* I’m getting nervous again . . .

GRAMPS: Here is a three-parter: Name three possessives that do NOT require an apostrophe.

JEWEL: *(Sneezes.)* What are hers, his, and its?

GRAMPS: Grand! *(Records.)* Jewel, you are now tied with Bill and Gram. Let us advance with another two-parter. The word *great* expresses the positive state. Which two words express the comparative and superlative states?

ADDIE: *(Woofs.)* What are greater and greatest?

BILL: Superlative, Addie!

ADDIE: *(Bows.)* Thanks, my dearest, kindest, Billy Boy. You’re the best!

GRAMPS: *(Records.)* By jiminy, Addie, you have created a four-way tie. Please listen closely. Think carefully. What kind of sentence makes a request or gives a command?

JEWEL: *(Sneezes.)* Imperative.

GRAMPS: Express your response in the form of a question, please.

JEWEL: What is imperative?

GRAMPS: Well done! *(Records.)* Jewel breaks away from the pack to seize the lead.

JEWEL: Yay!
GRAMPS: Listen to this two-parter: What is required for a complete sentence?
BILL: (Buzz SFX.) What are subject and predicate?
GRAMPS: Jolly good! Bill and Jewel are now neck and neck. For our tiebreaker, you must identify what is wrong with the sentence and then correct it. This time, it is not necessary to answer in the form of a question. Understood?
JEWEL: Got it!
BILL: Yep!
GRAMPS: Very well, what is wrong with this sentence: “She didn’t say nothing”?
BILL: (Buzz SFX.) It’s a double negative. It should be - She didn’t say anything.
GRAMPS: Bravo! (Tallies points.) I am pleased to proclaim that Bill is our Grand Grammarian!

ALL cheer.

ADDIE: Hey, don’t use double negatives, Bill.
BILL: I didn’t!
ADDIE: You shouldn’t!
JEWEL: He won’t!
GRAM, GRAMPS: (Dancing.) No, no! Never, never! Nuh, uh, uh!
BILL: This game has been serious fun.
ROSCOE: (Rings bell.) Oxymoron!
BILL: I think I’m majorly prepped for the Grammar-Rama. Thanks, everyone.
JEWEL: I’ve worked up a huge appetite. Fried ice cream, anyone?
ROSCOE: Awwk! Grammar-Rama!

Curtain.

THE END
MINI-LESSON: OXYMORON

In my unbiased opinion, it’s serious fun to create a memorable description with an oxymoron.

Definition:
An oxymoron (plural: oxymora) is a figure of speech in which two contradictory terms are combined for a vivid, memorable, or humorous description. For example, the oxymoron green orange supplies a vivid description. Genuine fake combines opposites for humorous effect, as does precious junk. William Shakespeare, the master of wordplay, infamously used oxymora.

Examples:
- Parting is such sweet sorrow. (From Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare.)
- I must be cruel only to be kind. (From Hamlet by William Shakespeare.)
- My favorite of Shakespeare’s wise fools is Touchstone.
- They are the little giants of the playground!
- Mr. and Mrs. Danzer were alone together in the restaurant.
- LaShondra is an amateur expert on the subject.

Selected Oxymora Used in Serious Fun:
- Anxious patient
- Bad luck
- Cold sweats
- Cowardly lion
- Fine mess
- Green orange
- Ill health
- Living dead
- Strangely familiar
- Terrific headache
- Unbiased opinion
- Wicked good
A. Directions:
Read each sentence from the play *Serious Fun*. Underline the example(s) of oxymoron in each.

1. I’m a hopeless optimist.
2. Madame Carlotta broke the deafening silence with a loud whisper.
3. How’s about turkey bacon or ham steak?
4. I’m going nowhere fast!
5. Let me give you a definite maybe and even odds that I’ll remember.

B. Directions:
Respond in complete sentences.

6. Explain why the title *Serious Fun* is an oxymoron.

Answers:

1. I’m a **hopeless optimist**.
2. Madame Carlotta broke the deafening silence **with a loud whisper**.
3. How’s about **turkey bacon** or **ham steak**?
4. I’m going nowhere fast!
5. Let me give you a **definite maybe** and **even odds** that I’ll remember.
6. Answers will vary. Possible response: *Serious* and *fun* are contradictions. *Serious* implies something grave or solemn, while *fun* refers to something entertaining and amusing.

Activity:

- **It’s in the Cards**: Select an example of oxymoron from *Serious Fun* or one of your own choosing. Then create an illustrated greeting card that includes the oxymoron. Give your completed card to a friend or family member.
Read All About It:
*William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*, retold by Bruce Coville, illustrated by Dennis Nolan. Dial, 1999. This first-rate prose adaptation, retold with lyrical language and many of the play’s well-known lines, is a captivating launch pad for later exposure to Shakespeare’s original.