

# THE WORST SPELLER

A COMEDIC DRAMA IN ONE ACT

By Caroline Janover

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**THE WORST SPELLER**

**By Caroline Janover**

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(7 MEN, 2 WOMEN)*

- Katie Kelso ..... Feisty, dyslexic 7<sup>th</sup> grader.  
*(81 lines)*
- Mrs. Kelso ..... Mother and professional musician. *(20 lines)*
- Mr. Kelso ..... Father and TV news reporter.  
*(7 lines)*
- Sam Kelso ..... Annoying younger brother.  
*(13 lines)*
- Mozart ..... Deaf family dog (stuffed).
- Mr. Cherry ..... Intimidating English teacher.  
*(18 lines)*
- Scuba ..... “Cool” 7<sup>th</sup> grade showoff.  
*(15 lines)*
- Brian ..... Gifted, introverted classmate.  
*(29 lines)*
- Ping Dong Wee ..... Foreign student just learning English. *(7 lines)*
- Corky ..... Intelligent, “dorky” best friend.  
*(23 lines)*
- Extras ..... Classmates, as many as possible for school scenes.

## COSTUME AND PROP SUGGESTION

### SCENE 1

Table and four chairs, Vase of dried or silk flowers, Bassoon or other musical instrument, Stack of school books, Notebook paper, Baseball glove, Car keys.

**KATIE:** Jeans and a T-shirt, sandals.

**SAM:** Jeans and a baseball T-shirt, baseball cap turned backward, sneakers.

**MOTHER:** Skirt and blouse, pocketbook, stockings and flat or high-healed shoes.

**MOZART THE DOG:** Stuffed dog.

### SCENE 2

Rows of chairs, Table stacked with notebooks, Piles of class essays and textbooks, Globe, Blackboard, Textbooks and bookbag for each student, Notebook paper and pencils, Bell to end class.

**MR. CHERRY:** Sports jacket, dark slacks, green bow tie, dark socks and shoes.

**KATIE:** Jeans and a different T-shirt or blouse (Worn over the T-shirt in SCENE 1), sandals.

**SCUBA:** Shorts or baggy pants, a “cool” T-shirt or colorful Hawaiian shirt, sneakers without socks, hair neatly combed.

**BRIAN:** Black pants, black shirt, sandals, sunglasses, hair uncombed, earring in one ear.

**PING:** Jeans and an ironed cotton shirt, sneakers with socks. (Neatly dressed.)

**CLASSMATES:** School outfits of their choosing.

### SCENE 3

Table surrounded by chairs, Three lunch trays with food (bags of potato chips, apples, milk cartons, sandwiches etc.) Book bags, School directory, Crumpled paper with poem.

## THE WORST SPELLER

**CORKY:** Jeans and a bulky shirt, sneakers, wears large, unattractive glasses.

All outfits are the same as in SCENE 2.

### SCENE 4

Table surrounded by chairs, Three lunch trays with food, Pencil “cigarette,” Container of chocolate pudding, Paper napkins, Blackboard or overhead to show Katie’s letter, Notebook and paper, Sweatshirt with football logo.

**KATIE:** Jeans, same T-shirt or blouse as in Scene 1, sandals.

**CORKY:** Jeans and a different shirt than one worn in Scene 2.

**BRIAN:** Black pants, PHISH T-shirt, sunglasses, sandals, hair uncombed.

**SCUBA:** Shorts, different shirt than one worn in SCENE 2, sneakers without socks.

**CLASSMATES:** Outfits slightly different from SCENE 2.

### SCENE 5

Same setting as SCENE 1, Get-well cards on the kitchen table, Cell phone, Letter from Mrs. Brunner, Empty glass jar with holds poked in the lid, Mozart- the stuffed dog.

**KATIE:** Jeans and shirt or blouse, colorful silk scarf, sandals.

**MOTHER:** Nightgown, bathrobe and slippers, looks tired and pale.

**FATHER:** Suit jacket or shirt with CBS NEWS logo, loosened necktie.

**SAM:** Jeans and baseball T-shirt, baseball cap on backward, sneakers.

SCENE 1

**SETTING:**

*The scene takes place in the kitchen of the Kelso household. A vase of dried flowers and a pile of school books are on the kitchen table.*

**AT RISE:**

*It is Wednesday afternoon, the second week of school.*

**KATIE:** *(Annoyed, hands on hips.)* Mom, you can't do this to me! You can't ask me to baby sit AGAIN?

**MOTHER:** *(Holding bassoon or other musical instrument.)* I need your help, Katie. I've got an unscheduled 6:00 rehearsal at Symphony Hall! You can give your brothers hotdogs and juice pops for supper.

**KATIE:** What time is Dad coming home?

**MOTHER:** He's covering a news story about a house fire. He'll be home late.

**KATIE:** *(Waving sheets of paper in the air.)* So who is going to drill me on all these stupid vocabulary words? You know I've got dyslexia. You know I need help and you just abandon me when I need you most. You just leave me with my two brat brothers and all the dishes and hours and hours of homework! I've got to read this story about a tall tale heart for English and I don't understand it one bit.

**MOTHER:** Ask Mrs. Dodd for help. Don't you go to the Resource Room before English class?

**KATIE:** Face it, Mom! I'm going to fail English just like I failed first grade.

**MOTHER:** Katie, it's only the second week of school. With extra help in the Resource Room and going to your tutor, you'll do just fine in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

**KATIE:** That's what you think. Mr. Cherry is the hardest, creepiest English teacher in the school. He talks to us like we're in college! He does crossword puzzles in ink and he wears the same silly green bow tie every single day. When he looks at me with those beady, little gerbil eyes, I just know he thinks I'm some sort of learning disabled dummy.

THE WORST SPELLER

**MOTHER:** Don't talk that way, Katie. You are intelligent and creative and, I might add, an extremely hard worker.

**KATIE:** How can you say I'm intelligent when I can't even figure out how to do my homework? Since first grade I've never gotten one single A on my report card except in PE and art and citizenship. Corky gets all A's and she hardly ever studies. Face it, Mom. I'm a loser. I'm almost 13 and I've never even been out on a date with a boy. All I do is hang out with other geeks and losers.

**SAM:** (*Enters kitchen with baseball cap on backward, carrying a baseball glove and chanting.*) Katie is a loser! Katie is a loser!

**MOTHER:** (*Sternly.*) That's enough, Sam. Katie is babysitting tonight.

**SAM:** Aw, not **again!**

**MOTHER:** I thought you were watching your little brother. Where's Willie?

**SAM:** He's in the vegetable garden. He's digging up worms. He says he wants a pet.

**KATIE:** That's why Mom had you.

**MOTHER:** (*Picks up car keys and puts strap of purse over shoulder.*) Katie, I'll have to ask you to babysit again on Friday afternoon.

**KATIE:** No way, Mom! I'm hanging out with PK's on Friday.

**MOTHER:** PK's?

**KATIE:** Yeah, the popular kids. I need hip-hugger pants, Mom. That's what PK's wear. Now that I'm in middle school I've decided to hang out with the cool kids instead of the geeks, except for Corky because she's been my best friend since first grade.

**MOTHER:** You'll have to hang out with the PK's a different day. I've got an important doctor's appointment on Friday.

**KATIE:** If you're so sick, how come you're going out to some dumb rehearsal? You don't look sick to me.

**MOTHER:** (*In a soft voice.*) Katie, I found a lump in my breast. It's probably nothing, just a cyst, but I need to get it checked out.

**KATIE:** (*Looks up, concerned.*) Gee Mom, I hope you're okay. Don't worry about Friday afternoon. I'll babysit again but can I have a sleep over on Friday night?

*MOTHER waves good-bye as she leaves the room.*

**KATIE:** I'll be up **all** night trying to stuff vocabulary words into my leaking dyslexic brain!

**SAM:** Katie has a leaking brain. Katie has a leaking brain.

**KATIE:** Shut up you creep! If you ever tell anyone in my new school that I have dyslexia, I'll...

**SAM:** (*Interrupts.*) Everyone already knows you're the dumb one and I'm the smart one in the family. I get 100% on **my** spelling tests. How come Mom never puts **your** spelling tests on the refrigerator?

**KATIE:** (*Hands on hips.*) For your information, the art teacher hung my painting on the front bulletin board for all the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders to see.

**SAM:** Big deal. I'm going outside to get Willie.

**KATIE:** (*Sits down in kitchen chair and puts dog on her lap.*) Mozart, I've got something to tell you. I know that Mom's bassoon playing has driven you deaf but if you could hear, you'd be the first to know that I'm turning over a new leaf. As of today, I vow to become a PK. I vow to start dating a cool guy by Thanksgiving or Christmas vacation at the latest. I plan to do whatever it takes to become the most popular girl in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

SCENE 2

**SETTING:**

*The scene takes place in Mr. Cherry's classroom. The kitchen table becomes the teacher's desk stacked with books, papers and a globe. There is a portable blackboard and rows of chairs for students.*

**AT RISE:**

*A Friday morning class, the second week of school.*

**MR. CHERRY:** *(In a friendly tone.)* Judging from the first set of essays, we actually have some talented writers in this class. Kaleidoscope is an award winning literary magazine here at the George Washington Middle School. I've been asked to encourage my 7<sup>th</sup> graders to try out for a position on the editorial board.

**PING:** *(Raising his hand.)* When try out?

**MR. CHERRY:** Mrs. Brunner will meet with all interested students 9<sup>th</sup> period on Monday, September 25<sup>th</sup> for the on-demand-writing sample. I highly recommend this extra curricular activity. My colleague, Mrs. Brunner, is quite remarkable at honing the creative writing talents of the students here at GW.

**KATIE:** *(Dashes breathlessly into the classroom and sits next to Scuba.)* Sorry I'm late Mr. Cherry.

**MR. CHERRY:** I will have to mark you tardy once again, Miss Kelso. And why are you late **this** time?

**KATIE:** Well um, I couldn't remember the combination to my locker and then I went up the right stairwell instead of the left stairwell and I got lost.

**MR. CHERRY:** Punctuality is imperative in my class! I trust, Miss Kelso, this will not happen again.

**KATIE:** No sir. It won't happen again.

**SCUBA:** *(Taps Katie on the knee, points to himself and mouths.)* Follow me! Follow me next time!

**MR. CHERRY:** I'd like to discuss the short story you read last night for homework. *(Turns his back and writes The Telltale Heart on the blackboard.)*

**SCUBA:** *(Scribbles on a piece of paper, "Start to hum in one minute!" He hands the note to Katie and whispers.)* Pass it on.

**PING:** *(Writes on a paper, "What hum mean?" and shows it to Katie.)*

**MR. CHERRY:** *(Turns around to face the class, chalk in hand.)* Who would like to begin the discussion by describing the foreshadowing the author uses to create emotional tension?

**BRIAN:** *(Raises his hand after a long pause.)* Edgar Allen Poe uses powerful descriptive symbolism by... *(Interrupted by high humming sound; Brian speaks louder.)* By creating suspense...

**MR. CHERRY:** Stop right there, Brian. We will not continue this discussion until there is complete silence in this classroom. *(Humming stops.)*

**BRIAN:** As I was saying, Poe used... *(As he speaks the humming begins again.)*

**MR. CHERRY:** *(Slams textbook on the desk.)* This class has a choice. We can continue this discussion at 3:00 o'clock or we can continue it now. Which will it be?

**SCUBA:** *(Tips back in his chair and raises his hand.)* I vote we continue it now, Mr. Cherry. *(Other students nod in agreement.)* We **love** to discuss good literature! This guy Poe seems like a real cool dude. I really like the way he gets us in the mood.

**MR. CHERRY:** Scuba, I'm glad you appreciate Poe's writing talent. How exactly does he get you in the mood?

**SCUBA:** Well, um, he, um um, he...

**MR. CHERRY:** Perhaps you'd like to refresh your memory. Take a few minutes class to reread the story while I pass back your vocabulary quiz and first set of essays. *(Mr. Cherry returns papers as students reread story...Scuba cringes when he gets his quiz back. Mr. Cherry returns Ping's test.)* What a coincidence! The two people with perfect papers sit right next to each other.

**PING:** *(Looks excited by his grade, says the following with an accent.)* Thank you, Mr. Cherry.

**MR. CHERRY:** Ping Dong Wee, did you copy the definitions from Brian's paper?

**PING:** *(Smiling and nodding yes.)* I copy definition many times.

**KATIE:** He's right, Mr. Cherry. Ping studied really hard and learned every one of those vocabulary words. I know because I quizzed him in homeroom.

**MR. CHERRY:** *(Ignoring Katie.)* What does caricature mean?

**PING:** Caricature mean ludicrous exaggeration.

**MR. CHERRY:** What is the definition of symbolism?

**PING:** Symbolism mean intangible truth.

**MR. CHERRY:** *(Passes out more papers.)* Good boy, Ping. Your vocabulary is superior to that of most of your English-speaking classmates.

**SCUBA:** Wee Wee is **real** smart!

**MR. CHERRY:** *(Giving Scuba a stern look.)* I'll see you after class, Scuba. *(Continues to pass out papers...he stops by Katie's desk and hands her the essay.)* You write with a fresh narrative voice, Katie. I like the way you've used rich descriptive details in your story and showed me rather than telling me about the characters. Unfortunately, there are numerous spelling and punctuation errors. I'd be happy to work with you before or after class on proofreading strategies. I sense you like to write, Miss Kelso.

**KATIE:** I like to write but only in my diary. In my diary I don't pay any attention to spelling. I just sound words out so I can read them. Also my diary looks so I get to keep all my ideas private.

**MR. CHERRY:** With your creative flair, you'd be a great asset on Kaleidoscope's editorial board. Have you considered trying out for the literary magazine? You have a wonderful way with words, young lady.

**KATIE:** *(Looks up surprised.)* I do?

**MR. CHERRY:** *(Adjusting his tie.)* After 30 years of teaching, I know a promising writer when I see one.

**SCUBA:** *(Jumps up when the bell rings and sits on Katie's desk.)* Forget the Lit. magazine. You should be a cheerleader, sweetie pie! If you come with me to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade dance, I'll give you something **REAL** private to write about in that diary of yours!

**KATIE:** *(Picks up her bookbag and papers.)* When's the 7<sup>th</sup> grade dance?

**SCUBA:** (*Puts his arm around Katie as she stands up.*) It's a week from today. I'll meet you at the main entrance so you won't get lost trying to find the cafeteria.

**KATIE:** Very funny! I'll think about it.

**SCUBA:** (*Gives Katie a wink and a wave as he backs out of the classroom.*) You do that, Sweetie Pie.

### SCENE 3

**SETTING:**

*The scene takes place in the school cafeteria. The teacher's desk becomes the lunch table surrounded by chairs.*

**AT RISE:**

*Lunch time, the same day.*

**KATIE:** (*Excitedly puts her lunch tray on the table next to Corky.*) Ohmygod! Ohmygod! You won't believe it. This guy Scuba asked me to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade dance!

**CORKY:** (*Opens two bags of potato chips and spills them onto a plate.*) He's to die for! Scuba's awesome.

**KATIE:** I'd become a PK overnight if I start dating Scuba. He's **king** of the popular kids! He's into football and tennis and swimming and...

**CORKY:** He's into pretty girls, that's what he's into. Judging by his looks, he spends half his life in the weight room.

**KATIE:** (*Picks up the apple from her lunch tray.*) I'm going to try out for cheerleading.

**CORKY:** I'm sighing up for Chess Club and the Math Club.

**KATIE:** Mr. Pits wants me to try out for the literary magazine.

My neighbor Jillian is a real PK and she was on the editorial board last year. She said it was fun (*Pauses and takes a deep sigh.*) but there's one BIIIIIIIG problem. When people read my stuff and see my spelling, they'll think I'm a dope and they won't accept me. Not in a million years!

**CORKY:** Give me your entry and I'd proof read it for you. I aced every spelling test last year, even the bonus words.

THE WORST SPELLER

**KATIE:** (*Shaking her head.*) They give you a topic and you have to sit down and instantly write about it. I wish I could just cut and paste something from the Internet or copy over a story from some back issue of Teen Magazine.

**CORKY:** (*Stops chewing and stares at Katie.*) Isn't that what you call cheating?

**KATIE:** I'd change the names of people and places. Corky, don't you get it? I've just got to get my foot in the door. Once people know me, they'll recognize my talent. I'm a **very** good artist and Cherry-Berry says I've got the fresh voice of a talented writer.

**CORKY:** Speaking of talent. You know that new kid from England who wears dark glasses and looks like a slob? Well, I found out in my advanced algebra class that he's brilliant!

**KATIE:** (*Pulling the school directory from her book bag.*) No kidding! He's smart in English too. I wonder where he lives. I'll look him up in the school directory. (*Points to a name.*) Here it is. It says Brain Straus lives at 21 Bella Vista Drive. Can you imagine naming your kid Brain?

**CORKY:** (*Grabbing the directory.*) His name isn't Brain. It's Brian!

**KATIE:** My dyslexic brain jumbles up letters like that all the time. Let's call him Brain anyway. It can be our secret code name for him. He must be **really** rich. All the houses on Bella Vista are mansions.

**CORKY:** He's loaded, all right. He comes to school in a limo. His chauffeur drops him off in front of Nina's house and he walks the rest of the way.

**KATIE:** (*Looking amazed.*) How do you know that?

**CORKY:** I saw it with my own eyes. That's how I know.

**KATIE:** Ohmygod! Brain alert! He's coming right toward us!

**BRIAN:** (*Carrying a lunch tray.*) Mind if I join you?

**CORKY:** Sure thing. Sit down. (*She stands up and grabs her tray.*) I've got to get to French class early. I'll see you later, Katie.

**BRIAN:** (*Sits down next to Katie.*) I like the way you defended Ping in Mr. Cherry's English class.

**KATIE:** Cherry-Berry is such a creep. It wasn't fair to accuse Ping of cheating. He knew more of those vocabulary words than I did and I've lived in North Kent all my life.

**BRIAN:** You're lucky. I've lived in five different countries and gone to eight different schools.

**KATIE:** Yikes! What does your dad do? He must get transferred a lot for business.

**BRIAN:** No, my dad's a writer. He lives in Hawaii. To tell the truth, he's actually a beach bum. I live with my mother. She's a fashion designer. Have you ever heard of Huggie-Tuggie T-Shirts? That's one of her designs.

**KATIE:** (*Looking impressed.*) Ohmygod, your mom is famous! I saw her on the Oprah Show! You must be really proud of her.

**BRIAN:** (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) She's famous all right but she's never home. She travels extensively. She's been away since August 13<sup>th</sup>.

**KATIE:** Who takes care of you?

**BRIAN:** The housekeeper and the cook but my real best friend is Oscar, the chauffeur. We're both amateur lepidopterists.

**KATIE:** (*Making a face.*) What's a lepidopterist?

**BRIAN:** We collect butterflies.

**KATIE:** That's nice. So what do you think of Pit's English class?

**BRIAN:** Is that what kids call him?

**KATIE:** Either that or Cherry-Berry. Most kids don't like him but I think Cherry-Berry **loves you**.

**BRIAN:** Teachers always like me, especially English teachers. It's not as easy being accepted by my classmates. Every time I make a good friend, I get transferred to a different school. We've lived in Paris, London, New York, Thailand, all over the world really. Mother promised to stay here until I finish middle school, only now she's never home.

**KATIE:** I've never moved. Corky has been my best friend since the first grade.

**BRIAN:** My best friend lives in England. He was my roommate in boarding school. I just moved back to the states in August.

**KATIE:** People in North Kent are pretty friendly. I bet you'll meet kids to hang out with real soon.

THE WORST SPELLER

**BRIAN:** I wrote about you in my journal. On the first day of school, I knew you were someone I wanted to meet. I overheard you tell Mr. Cherry that you write in a diary.

**KATIE:** Yeah, I write every night.

**BRIAN:** *(Hands Katie a crumpled piece of paper.)* I wrote this poem about you today in algebra class. It's just a first draft. It still needs revision.

**KATIE:** *(Takes the paper and reads it slowly out loud.)* Ode to Katie...an intelligent girl, so tall and slender, for Ping in class a valiant defender. Katie's brown eyes like a Monarch dart, she sees through my soul and into my heart. *(Looking up.)* Brian, I don't know what to say. This poem is **BEAUTIFUL!**

**BRIAN:** When I told Mr. Cherry that one of my poems was published in the London times, he suggested I write for the literary magazine.

**KATIE:** My too! He says I've got a fresh voice. He says I'm real talented.

**BRIAN:** We could work together on the editorial board. *(Pauses and shuffles his feet.)* Katie, would you come with me to that 7<sup>th</sup> grade dance next Friday night? I don't want to go alone. Oscar says I've got to be more assertive in establishing new friendships. Frankly, I find most 7<sup>th</sup> graders around here to be incredibly immature. You seem different. You strike me as more intelligent and sophisticated than the cookie-cutter, dress alike girls I've met so far.

**KATIE:** *(Standing up.)* Well I...

**SCUBA:** *(Walks up and pulls off Brian's sunglasses.)* What you trying to hide, Geek Boy? You afraid all those brains of yours will start oozing out your eyes if you don't keep them covered? *(Takes Katie's hand.)* Come with me, Sweetie Pie. I'll show you the way to math class.

**BRIAN:** *(Shakes his head, puts his glasses back on, picks up his tray and walks away from the table.)*

BY CAROLINE JANOVER

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