

MIZZY’S DRAMATIC LEAD

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Robert Wing

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By Robert Wing

SYNOPSIS: Left by their frazzled drama teacher to rehearse a scene they should have perfected weeks earlier, the cast members of Miss Hawthorne's latest flop run their mouths instead of their lines. Sometimes comic, sometimes cruel, these young men and women tackle love, racism, class, and the toughest question of all: *Is there justice in the universe?*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN, 6 WOMEN)

MIZZY (f).....A tough, not-too-bright, free-lunch kid repeating her junior year of high school who finally gets her chance to shine.
(81 lines)

BEN RICCIO (m)Cast as the “sexy love interest,” this geeky senior with a wry sense of humor doesn’t have a chance with the ladies – any of them...almost. (65 lines)

MISS HAWTHORNE (f).....A frazzled thirty-year veteran English teacher with questionable taste in plays.
(17 lines)

LILY (f)A Longfellow-quoting sophomore who believes that, in the end, the good guy always wins. (24 lines)

RHIANNON (f).....A freshman, new to the high school stage, who’s not quite sure where she fits in. (15 lines)

KENDRA (f).....An intelligent, insightful and compassionate senior of different ethnicity than everyone else on stage; she detests violence and urges Mizzy to “rise above it.” (58 lines)

JOLEN SAINT PIERRE (f).....A rich, beautiful senior who has it all – except the lead role. She has been “horribly miscast” – and lets everyone know it. (70 lines)

MAX (m)Jolen’s arm candy; he’s a rich and handsome senior – and Ben’s understudy. (19 lines)

SET, PROPS AND COSTUMES

Staging this play is simple and affordable. A bed, linens, pillows, and a bedside table make the set. The props are inexpensive and easy-to-find: pill bottles filled with small candies, M&Ms, Cheetos, gum, a copy of **Lord of the Rings**, and a few other small personal items that a character might carry, such as a nail file for Kendra, a football for Max, a photo of her boyfriend for Mizzy. Costuming the play is simple also; these are kids playing kids – they dress like kids. (Putting Ben in a **Lord of the Rings** t-shirt is a nice touch, especially one with a picture of Gollum on it, as Max actually calls him Gollum in the play. However, it’s not essential.) The actress who plays Miss Hawthorne will have to look older, as she is a teacher, but that is easily accomplished.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

What happens when a director wishes to stage a play with a powerful message, yet the actors who show up for the audition have little stage experience? *Mizzy's Dramatic Lead* was created for just this reason. The characters in *Mizzy* struggle with the question “*Is there justice in the universe?*” in a uniquely high school way. Painful and funny, it doesn't hold back. It also should be noted that although it poses a profound question, the play does not attempt to answer it. The play's ending is morally ambiguous for a reason: to provoke its high school audience.

There are roles for experienced actors, such as Jolen and Mizzy, and roles for less-experienced actors, such as Rhiannon, Lily, and Max, while roles such as Ben, Kendra, and Miss Hawthorne exist somewhere in between.

Kendra must be of an ethnicity that's different from every one else on stage. Perhaps she's African-American or Asian or Indian. Ben must convey geekiness; Max and Jolen must convey wealth and power. Mizzy is poor. Lily has a “hippie vibe” and Rhiannon is pretty much anything the director wants her to be. Miss Hawthorne, like all high school play directors at some point in his or her career, is frazzled, exhausted, and prone to hysteria.

The characters in *Mizzy* toss around some pretty powerful questions, and they aren't always kind to each other, but they are never vulgar. *They do not use inappropriate language and there is no sexual content.* This play is powerful, yet high school audience safe.

Mizzy's Dramatic Lead was originally titled *Nina's Dramatic Lead*, and was first staged in 2005. It was "dusted off" by its author in 2010, re-written, re-titled and re-staged on March 11, 2010 at North Country Union High School in Newport, Vermont. *Mizzy's Dramatic Lead* was directed by Cheri Skurdall and set and costumes were designed by Robert Wing. The cast and crew were as follows:

MIZZY	Michelle "Mizzy" Corriveau
BEN RICCIO	Ben Stevens
MISS HAWTHORNE.....	Amy Cubit
LILY.....	Lily Diaz
RHIANNON	Rhiannon Rosamilia
KENDRA	Kendra Perkins
JOLEN ST. PIERRE	Jolen Seguin
MAX	Max Maikshilo
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Colleen Fabian
STAGE DIRECTOR.....	Becca Fabian
HAIR AND MAKEUP.....	Brittany McAllister
LIGHTS.....	Timur Kurzej
SOUND.....	Robert McMaster

God bless Mama, Daddy, Jessica, Lisa, Robbie, Jenny Lynn, and all my little friends. Amen.

AT RISE:

A closed curtain. Music plays. Curtain opens. A bed and a pill-bottle strewn bedside table appear center stage. The bed has a headboard but no footboard. MIZZY is lying on the bed. MIZZY and BEN are wearing everyday school clothes. MIZZY is wearing some kind of pullover or hooded sweatshirt with large pockets. She is chewing gum. BEN is kneeling by her bedside. He is holding her hand. BEN and MIZZY are dreadful actors. The atrociousness of BEN's melodramatic acting style is matched only by MIZZY's robotic delivery of lines. It's obvious from the 'get-go' that both students have been horribly, horribly miscast.

BEN: My darling Diana! Don't leave me yet. I've traveled so far to be with you!

MIZZY: *(Coughing intermittently.)* Trevor, my love, I thank God that you are here by my bedside for this, my final journey.

BEN: No! Don't say it!

MIZZY: But I must, for time is running out! *(MIZZY's coughing increases.)*

BEN: *(Raising his fist to heaven and shouting.)* Why? Why God? Why must you mock me so? *(Suddenly determined.)* I know what I must do! *(Grabs pills.)* I'm going with you, Diana! *(Opens bottle. Pours pills down throat. Staggeres around the bed melodramatically.)*

MIZZY: *(Punctuating nearly every line with a cough.)* Trevor! Don't! You have so much life left to live – and you're so close to finding a cure for the very disease that is killing me – S.L.D. *Spastic Lung Disorder!*

MISS HAWTHORNE: (*Shouting. Frustrated.*) No! No! No! Lights up! (*HAWTHORNE stands up from her seat in the audience. She has been 'planted' there. She works her way from her seat to the front of the house and up on the stage. While HAWTHORNE works her way up on stage, BEN pulls out a well-worn copy of Lord of the Rings that he's got stashed under one of the bed pillows. He plops himself down at the foot of the bed and reads.*) Mizzy, are you chewing gum? You're actually on this stage, my stage, with gum in your mouth? (*MIZZY sheepishly removes gum from her mouth.*) Mizzy! (*Brandishing script.*) This is the emotional climax of the play! Your character is on her deathbed, and you're chewing gum! Mizzy, you asked for the dramatic lead role in my spring production. No, you begged for the dramatic lead in my spring production. (*MIZZY produces a bag of Cheetos from her pocket and attempts to put one in her mouth.*) Mizzy! Are you listening to me?

MIZZY: You said I couldn't have gum. You didn't say anything about Cheetos.

MISS HAWTHORNE: Mizzy! Work with me here. No gum! No Cheetos! Where are Lily and Rhiannon? Where's Kendra? (*They enter.*)

LILY, RHIANNON AND KENDRA: Yes, Miss Hawthorne?

MISS HAWTHORNE: The curtain was late...again. The curtain opens when the music swells. When the music swells. Got it, you two?

LILY and RHIANNON: Got it. (*Exit LILY and RHIANNON.*)

MISS HAWTHORNE: And you, Kendra. Ben nearly choked to death on his pills. What are they?

KENDRA: Skittles.

MISS HAWTHORNE: Replace 'em with Tic Tacs before the next rehearsal.

KENDRA: Got it. (*She exits.*)

MISS HAWTHORN: Mizzy, that coughing was ridiculous. You do not sound like a vision of loveliness about to ascend to heaven; you sound like a sea lion in a wood chipper. I could hardly hear Ben.

BEN: Yeah! How am I supposed to convey passion as the sexy love interest with her hacking up a lung? It throws me off. (*MIZZY laughs.*) Hey! Casting me as Dr. Trevor Mustang wasn't a mistake. I know I can play a romantic lead. (*Pauses.*) All the ladies say that I give off a real passionate 'vibe.' (*More laughter from MIZZY.*) Well, that's what my mom and grandma say.

MISS HAWTHORNE: (*Looking into the audience.*) Where's Jolen and Max?

MIZZY: (*Pointing to the audience.*) They're out there somewhere... Making out! (*MIZZY starts eating M&Ms.*)

JOLEN: (*JOLEN's voice booms from the back of the auditorium. She and MAX have been strategically placed there. She delivers her lines as they rush up the center aisle.*) That's a lie! We were not making out! I was helping Max with his French homework.

BEN: 'French.' How appropriate.

JOLEN: For your information, Max has a big test next week. (*JOLEN and MAX climb up on stage. MAX's mouth is smeared with lipstick.*)

MAX: Yeah. And if I don't pass, I won't be eligible for football.

MIZZY: (*Indicating MAX's lipstick-smeared mouth.*) Nice lipstick you got on there, Max.

MISS HAWTHORNE: Listen, all of you. We're not going to worry about the musical cue and the curtain this time. Just take it from the top. Max and Jolen, you're supposed to be learning your lines. Remember, you're Mizzy and Ben's understudies, so stop sneaking off. Mizzy, put away the M&Ms!

MIZZY: But I'm hungry, and my doctor thinks that I might have low blood sugar. I could slide into a coma at any moment.

BEN: God willing.

MIZZY: Shut up, Ben!

MISS HAWTHORNE: Ben, please don't aggravate Mizzy.

BEN: I can't help it. I'm bored to death! We've been working on this scene for half an hour already – and we're getting nowhere! Right, guys? Can't we take a break? (*LILY, RHIANNON, and KENDRA enter from the wings, tired and bored.*)

ALL ACTORS: Pleeeease...

MISS HAWTHORNE: This show goes up in a week, and we've yet to get through the third act without one of you flubbing a line or me having a stroke.

JOLEN: *(Pauses dramatically.)* Miss Hawthorne, with all due respect...I think that this play has been horribly, horribly miscast.

MAX: Yeah!

BEN: Not again! *(HAWTHORNE gives up. MIZZY springs up and starts jumping on the bed while JOLEN speaks.)*

MAX: Stop jumping on the bed, spaz!

MIZZY: No! *(MIZZY gives BEN a "Get up here and jump with me" kind-of-a-gesture; he enthusiastically joins her. MAX and JOLEN are buffeted about the bed as MIZZY and BEN frolic – MAX and JOLEN are not happy about it.)*

MAX: Two spazzes – great!

JOLEN: *(Indicating MIZZY and BEN.)* This is what I'm talking about! Not only are the two of them completely untalented, but their childish behavior is ruining my last play experience – and Max's. We're seniors, and we've been in every play you've ever directed, Miss Hawthorne, and we deserve better roles and better treatment! I've said it before, and I'll say it again – lead roles are reserved for seniors!

BEN: You two are just jealous 'cuz Mizzy got the dramatic lead, and Max is mad 'cuz I get to play the sexy love interest. Let me tell you, Robert Pattinson's got nothing on me. *(Girls laugh. BEN jumps down from bed and approaches KENDRA. He speaks to her in a seductive, manly-man fashion. He gets uncomfortably close. His voice drops to a deep baritone. He blasts KENDRA with his breath.)* You know, if you look up my last name Riccio in an Italian dictionary, you'll find the word 'lover.'

KENDRA: *(Recoiling from the stench.)* Oh yeah? What's the Italian word for Listerine? *(All actors laugh, including MISS HAWTHORNE.)*

MIZZY: Miss Hawthorne, can we please take a break? We've been at this all afternoon. Please, just a ten minute break?

ALL ACTORS: Pleeeeease.

MISS HAWTHORNE: All right. All right. Ten minutes. I need to check my messages and make a few phone calls...and pop a handful of Tylenol. You kids are gonna be the death of me. I'll be back in ten minutes. Run through your lines.

ALL ACTORS: We will. (*Exit MISS HAWTHORNE.*)

JOLEN: Max! Go see if she's gone. (*MAX runs backstage. He sneaks a look.*)

MAX: She's gone! (*ALL make themselves comfortable. BEN pulls out his book. MIZZY munches on M&M's. KENDRA pulls out a nail file.*)

MIZZY: It's about time. Miss Hawthorne is so mean. Have you noticed how the closer we get to the curtain going up, the worse she gets?

KENDRA: It's understandable, don't you think? I mean c'mon. How many of you know your lines for the third act? (*No response.*) See? And you wonder why she flips out. And you Mizzy, you begged Hawthorne for the lead role, and you got it, and that deathbed scene of yours? P.U.

JOLEN: This whole play stinks. What does old lady Hawthorne know about plays anyway? She's just an old English teacher...and she isn't very good at that.

RHIANNON: Miss Hawthorne is my English teacher; I think she's terrific.

MAX: Did anyone ask you, freshman?

MIZZY: Hey! She's allowed to speak, too.

MAX: Hey, Dilbert! (*Indicating MIZZY.*) You'd better get that girlfriend of yours to keep her mouth shut.

BEN: Mizzy isn't my girlfriend!

MIZZY: Puhleez. (*Pulls a photo from her pocket and kisses it.*) I've got a real man! (*Kisses photo again.*)

BEN: Gee...thanks.

MIZZY: His name's Donnie O'Keefe, and he's a junior, and he works at Hubert's filling station on the Derby Road. He has the bluest eyes I've ever seen, and he's saving to buy his cousin's truck, and we're gonna get married after graduation and...and I just love him soooo much. (*Kisses photo.*)

JOLEN: I could vomit.

KENDRA: Oh, be nice, Jolen. I know it goes against the very nature of your being, but just give it a try. Or if that doesn't work, fake it. You said you're the best actress in this class – prove it.

JOLEN: I would if I could, but as Mizzy is always pointing out, I don't have the lead. Not that I want it, not with this stupid play Hawthorne picked out. She's as good a director as she is an English teacher.

LILY: She was my English teacher last year. She's awesome!

RHIANNON: She's my teacher this year. She's the best teacher ever!

JOLEN: Stop sucking up, you two, she isn't in the room.

KENDRA: Oh, cut 'em some slack, Jolen.

JOLEN: I'm just saying that you don't have to suck-up to Havisham to get a good role, you just have to have talent. Unless you're Mizzy.

MIZZY: What's that supposed to mean?

JOLEN: It means that you got the lead this year despite the fact that you're talentless. Once again, let me just say, "Lead roles—"

MIZZY: "—are reserved for seniors." And let me just say... Tough! I got the lead! Deal with it!

JOLEN: Mizzy, I'm going to say what everybody in this class knows but is afraid to say. You can't act. I know it. Max knows it. We all know it.

KENDRA: You don't speak for me, Jolen.

JOLEN: Miss Hawthorne feels sorry for you because you've been in drama for four years and you've never been given a major role before – nor, after four years of high school, have you graduated. (MAX cracks up.) You and Hawthorne have something in common, Mizzy – you're both no talents. You can't act and Hawthorne doesn't know anything about plays - hence this year's selection - *"Gone With the Wind – The Revenge."* Like I said, Miss Hawthorne has no taste in scripts and thinks that casting plays isn't a question of talent but charity. Something that you'd know a lot about, considering you live in the Rainbow Court Traylor Park. Tell me, Mizzy, what are you? A second year junior?

MIZZY: (Defensive.) So...I had some trouble bucklin' down last year. Donny and I were having some problems, and....

JOLEN: (*Interrupting.*) Yada, yada, yada, blah, blah, blah. Got it. Anyway, the way I see it, according to the laws of natural selection where only the strongest survive, “less capable” folks like Mizzy would be picked out of the herd.

KENDRA: Yeah, well, good thing it doesn't work like that.

JOLEN: Oh, but it does.

MAX: She's just tellin' it like it is.

JOLEN: We are born. The strong survive; the weak die off – and then we all die. Period. End of story.

LILY: “...Dust we are to dust returneth was not spoken of the soul.” Longfellow said that...I like Longfellow.

MIZZY: (*To JOLEN, calmly; MIZZY's anger has been building; she struggles to contain it. To JOLEN.*) You know, Jolen, you ruin everything.

JOLEN: (*Moving in for the kill.*) Aw, Mizzy... When are you gonna realize that you have no acting talent? Just face the facts. People like you never amount to much.

KENDRA: (*Sensing MIZZY's rising anger.*) Rise above it, Mizzy, just rise above it.

JOLEN: (*Undaunted.*) The sooner you realize that, the sooner you can marry – what's his name, Donnie O'Keefe – and the sooner the two of you can move into your own rundown trailer, and the sooner you can pop out half a dozen snot-covered future welfare recipients that people like Max and I will have to support with our hard-earned tax money.

RHIANNON: I don't think I like her.

MIZZY: (*Trying to retaliate; trying to match wits with someone who is far more intelligent than she; MIZZY begins her tirade confidently, but ends by grasping at straws.*) You know what you are, Jolen?

JOLEN: (*Confident and cruel; she knows MIZZY doesn't have a chance.*) What am I, Mizzy?

MIZZY: You're just jealous because—

JOLEN: (*Interrupting.*) Because you got the lead role, blah, blah, blah.

MIZZY: (*Undaunted.*) And just because you think you're—

JOLEN: (*Interrupting.*) Better than everybody else, blah, blah, blah.

MIZZY: (*Beginning to grasp.*) And ...and...and—

JOLEN: *(Interrupting.)* And what?

MIZZY: *(Grasping.)* And the way you throw yourself at Max—

JOLEN: *(Laughs.)* What about it?

MAX: Yeah, what about it?

MIZZY: You look like a...a...

JOLEN: What?

MIZZY: You act like a...a...you-know-what.

JOLEN: *(Clearly enjoying herself.)* No, I do not know what I act like when I throw myself at Max. Why don't you tell me?

MIZZY: Do I have to spell it out for you?

JOLEN: Please, please do.

BEN: Uh, Mizzy, maybe you'd better not. Spelling's not your strong suit...

MIZZY: *(Ignoring BEN's suggestion.)* When you're around Max, you act like an H-O-R-E. *(JOLEN and MAX burst out in laughter. BEN and KENDRA are embarrassed for MIZZY. LILY and RHIANNON look confused.)*

KENDRA: *(Cutting her off.)* Just let it drop, Mizzy. Just let it drop.

MAX: *(Still laughing.)* Yeah, just let it drop. D-R-O-P-P.

MIZZY: *(Rolling up sleeves.)* That's it. I'm kicking butt and takin' names. Yer goin' down, Princess. *(MIZZY rolls up sleeves and lunges. BEN and KENDRA restrain her.)*

BEN: Mizzy, no! It isn't worth it!

MIZZY: Come on! Just one good smack! Just one good smack!

KENDRA: Mizzy, stop it! Violence never solves anything.

MIZZY: Maybe not, but it sure feels good!

KENDRA: No, Mizzy! You're better than that! Rise above it!

JOLEN: You know what? I'm bored. I'm out of here. Let's go, Max.

RHIANNON: I think we're supposed to stay here...

MAX: Shut up, newbie.

MIZZY: Yeah, you better run, Princess! *(Exit JOLEN and MAX. LILY relaxes once they're gone.)*

LILY: Where do you think you're going?

BEN: My guess is the backseat of Jolen's car.

RHIANNON: That's against the rules.

KENDRA: People like Jolen and Max are above the rules.

RHIANNON: No one is above the rules. Otherwise what's the point of having them?

MIZZY: I'll tell you what, you can guarantee that if it was me and Donny sneakin' off to the parking lot, we'd get busted. Somebody would see us and report us 'cuz we're...us, but people like Jolen and Max – forget about it. They get to do whatever they want.

LILY: Come on, it's not so bad as that.

KENDRA: Oh, yes it is.

MIZZY: Told ya! If Kendra says it's true, then it's true.

BEN: Mizzy has a point there. You're a pretty good judge of character, Kendra.

KENDRA: What makes you say that?

BEN: Well, I've been watching you....

KENDRA: This conversation isn't going to take some creepy turn now, is it?

BEN: No, no, nothing like that. It's just I watch you...watching other people...observing them.

KENDRA: Really?

BEN: You see, you can do that. You can watch others because you...stand apart from everybody else...you're...different.

KENDRA: *(Playfully. Shares a glance with the other girls that says 'Let's have some fun.')* Ah! "Different." What do you mean by that?

BEN: You know what I mean – or what I don't mean. I didn't mean that.

KENDRA: *(Playfully.)* And what do you mean by that that. Just what are you trying to say, Mr. Ben Riccio? Just how am I different from every one else on this stage? Hmm?

MIZZY: *(Catching on.)* Yeah, just how is she different?

LILY: *(Catching on.)* Is it her clothes?

KENDRA: Is it my clothes?

RHIANNON: *(Catching on.)* Huh? Just what are you saying, Ben?

BEN: I'm saying that Kendra is different because she's...smart and really, really good at figuring people out.

MIZZY: *(Playfully.)* Are you saying that I'm not smart?

LILY: *(Indicating RHIANNON.)* Are you saying that we're not smart?

BEN: No, I'm not saying that.

MIZZY: And, for your information, I'm great at figuring people out.

BEN: No, no! You guys are twisting what I'm saying!

KENDRA: Are we, Ben? Are we?

BEN: All I said was that I think that you're different because...

KENDRA: Are you sure this isn't some kind of...racial thing?

MIZZY: *(Feigned shock.)* Ben! You're being racist!

BEN: *(Genuine shock.)* No, I'm not! I'm not racist! I'm not, Kendra, I'm really not.

LILY: *(Playfully.)* I'm not so sure.

BEN: What do you mean?

LILY: Think about this, guys. The other day, when we were having lunch in the cafeteria, I ask you – What did Ben do? *(Brief pause.)* He picked all the corn out of his shepherd's pie!

BEN: Big deal! I don't like corn!

KENDRA: So you might say he was segregating his corn from the other ingredients.

MIZZY: Oooh, this doesn't sound good.

RHIANNA: Ben, how could you?

BEN: *(Quickly, desperately, and revealing too much.)* I'm not, Kendra, I'm not. We've been friends since the first grade – and I really think you're smart and funny and awesome and cool and beautiful and there's nobody I like better or respect more and I wanna take you to the pro— *(Slaps hand over his mouth.)* Oops...I've said too much. *(All the girls burst out laughing.)*

MIZZY: Ben and Kendra sittin' in a tree...

LILY: K-I-S-S-I-N-G...

RHIANNON: First comes love...

LILY: Then comes marriage...

MIZZY: Then comes Ben in a baby carriage!

KENDRA: *(Laughing.)* Stop it, you guys. Give him a break. *(Smiling.)* He's a pretty good guy... *(Pauses for effect.)* ...for a racist. *(More laughter from the girls.)*

BEN: *(In the depths of misery.)* Oh, Kendra...

KENDRA: Ben, relax. There isn't a racist bone in your body. You're about the nicest person I know. You're...like a brother to me. *(BEN winces. LILY whispers in RHIANNON's ear. RHIANNON nods her head in agreement to whatever LILY has said in her ear.)*

BEN: "Like a brother"...a guy never wants to hear that. So...no prom?

KENDRA: I'm sorry, Ben...

LILY: (*Seeing her chance.*) Gee, I've never been to the prom before...

BEN: (*Somewhat awkwardly.*) Uh, yeah... (*Quickly changing the subject.*) So, Kendra, like I was saying, I think you're really good at figuring people out. So what do you think Jolen's problem is? What's her malfunction?

MIZZY: Yeah. Is she a whack job or what?

KENDRA: (*Laughing.*) How should I know?

MIZZY: 'Cuz you know everything - and I want to destroy Jolen - I hate her!

LILY: Let it go, Mizzy. Hate will get you nowhere. Whatever you send out to the universe will come back on you. Just wait. The universe is going to serve Jolen up in its own good time. Just you wait.

KENDRA: Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that people get what they deserve?

LILY: Don't you?

KENDRA: I'm not so sure...I suppose I like to think they do. I like to think that all the good things I do in life will somehow go into a big cosmic plus column, but I don't know.

BEN: I only hope that in the end there are more checks in my good column than in my bad.

LILY: (*Giggling.*) Oh, Ben....you couldn't do anything wrong - you're perfect. (*Giggling.*)

BEN: (*Awkwardly changing the subject.*) Anyway...

BY ROBERT WING

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