

Parents Just Don't Understand

A Comedy by Bryan Starchman

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DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to my parents and siblings, who, after reading this, will hopefully still talk to me even though I've given away all of our family secrets.

STORY OF THE PLAY

The hip-hop standard of the 1980s said it best: "There's no need to argue, parents just don't understand!" Here is a collection of hilarious (and often too close to the truth) scenes that all families are going to be able to relate to. This easy-to-stage comedy is a lighthearted look at a "greatest hit list" of classic family moments. Remember when Dad tried to teach you to drive? Or Mom decided that she would help pick out your wardrobe? How about those family vacations when you were stuck in the backseat for hours on end with your annoying sibling, headed for a camping trip in the middle of nowhere ... and then your precious iPod suddenly died.

Using minimal sets and a very flexible cast, "Parents Just Don't Understand" will have your audience in stitches while also challenging your cast to not just play teenagers, but also adults. There's even a role for your drama teacher -- if he or she has the guts to play a biker dude! So stop reading this summary and stage this play!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Minimum cast of 5 with doubling: 2 m and 2 w, 1 flexible.

Maximum cast of 33: 16 m and 16 w, 1 flexible.

SON: Sometimes referred to as Jeffrey.

DAUGHTER: Sometimes referred to as Brittany.

MOTHER: Sometimes referred to as Janet Stathem.

FATHER: Sometimes referred to as James Stathem.

GRANDPA: Could be played by same actor as Father.

GRANDMA: Could be played by same actress as Mother.

BIKER: Flexible bit part, could even be played by your drama teacher.

A NOTE ABOUT CASTING

These are generic stock characters, you can put on the entire show with a small cast where the daughter is played by the same actress in every scene, the son is played by the same actor in every scene, etc. Even Grandpa could be played by Father or Biker with a quick change and Grandma could be played by Mother. Or you can recast every scene with unique players if you have a large cast. In that case, I would recommend changing the names so that Daughter and Son aren't always referred to as Brittany and Jeffrey.

The easiest thing to do is just use the actual actors' first names. Medium-sized casts can switch off where perhaps there are three families that appear every two to three scenes. If you are short on male actors (as I often am), they can stick with the same roles for multiple scenes while the girls share roles.

I don't necessarily see this as the same family all the way through. There isn't one consistent plot line, so it would be fine to have different actors playing the same stock character. The only rule I would stick to is, if you are going to be working with a cast of all teenagers, which I assume most of you will be, make sure to dress the parent characters in boring, muted tones and the teen characters in typical street wear so that the audience can easily distinguish between the "adults" and the "young adults" in the scenes. Break a leg!

SCENES

Recommended order for scenes. Directors may rearrange in order to fit the production and casting requirements.

Scene 1: Putting the "Fun" Back in Funeral (2 m, 2 w, 1 flex)

Scene 2: You're Driving Me Crazy (1 m, 1 w)

Scene 3: Clothes Make the Man (1 m, 1 w)

Scene 4: She Said, She Said (2 w)

Scene 5: What Are You Thankful For? (2 m, 2 w)

Intermission

Scene 6: To Grandmother's House We Go (2 m, 2 w)

Scene 7: Christmas Is a Time for Honesty (2 m, 2 w)

Scene 8: The Talk (2 m)

Scene 9: It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To (2 m, 2 w)

Scene 10: The Long and Winding Road (2 m, 2 w)

(NOTE for Scene 10: The best way to set up a car on stage so that the audience can see the passengers in the back seat is to set up two regular chairs in front of two stools. That way the back seat passengers are elevated.)

Scene 1: Putting the "Fun" Back in Funeral

(AT RISE: A funeral home. By just setting up some chairs facing off stage and playing some low organ music, you will set the mood. If your theatre department has a casket...I guess go ahead and use it. [And question whether or not your drama teacher should be working with children.] If you don't have a casket, just insinuate that the body is offstage. MOTHER, FATHER, DAUGHTER, and SON all enter in their nicest "church" clothes. Mother and Father are leading the way, their kids are dawdling behind.)

MOTHER: Well, this is nice.

DAUGHTER: Mom, we're in a funeral parlor.

FATHER: I think what your mother is trying to say is that your Great Aunt Lula loved flowers and she would be happy to see all of these beautiful floral arrangements.

SON: *(Has been secretly playing with a portable video game device.)* Sweet! Level up!

(MOTHER turns on HIM and rips the device out of his hands.)

MOTHER: What are you doing!?!

SON: *(Deadpan.)* Saving the world from the zombie apocalypse.

FATHER: Have a little respect.

SON: I don't even want to be here.

DAUGHTER: Me neither!

MOTHER: *(Losing her temper but trying to do so quietly.)* Do you think Great Aunt Lula wants to be here? Do you!?! Now hush up.

(The KIDS can tell that she's serious. Silence.)

DAUGHTER: Alright...so like...what do we do now?

MOTHER: *(Turning on her.)* What kind of a question is that!?

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FATHER: Now hang on, dear. I'm with our daughter -- I haven't been to a wake since I was a kid. I mean, what exactly do we...you know...*do*?

MOTHER: Well... (*Unsure herself.*) We should probably find the funeral director.

SON: Is this thing catered?

(*MOTHER and FATHER glare at HIM.*)

SON: (*Cont'd.*) What? I didn't eat breakfast.

DAUGHTER: Would you really want to eat food prepared by a mortician?

SON: Good point. (*Beat.*) Can we hit up Mickey D's on the way home?

MOTHER: We just got here! Give it a rest and focus on why we're here.

FATHER: (*A little awkward, he whispers to his wife.*) Why are we here?

MOTHER: To pay our respects. It's what good family members do.

DAUGHTER: Explain to me again how we're related to Great Aunt Lula.

MOTHER: Well, she *is* my mother's mother's sister.

SON: You mean "was."

(*Icy stare from MOTHER.*)

SON: (*Cont'd. Defensive.*) What? You always correct my grammar. (*Mimicking a conversation with her.*) "Can I be excused from the table." (*Playing her now.*) "I don't know, can you? Are you *capable* of being excused?" (*Playing himself.*) "I mean, *may* I be excused." Or when I ask to—

MOTHER: Will you be quiet!?!

(*SON knows she's serious. He shuts up.*)

DAUGHTER: Anyway, you were saying Great Aunt Lula is your mother's mother's...

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FATHER: *(Has looked confused all this time.)* Actually, I thought she was my father's mother's sister.

MOTHER: Are you sure? I'm pretty sure she's from my side.

FATHER: I never met her, but I'm almost positive she's from my side.

SON: *(Coming to a truly frightening conclusion.)* What if she's from both your sides! That would mean you were...related! *(Beat.)* Ewwwwwwww!

DAUGHTER: *(Clutching her stomach.)* I think I'm going to throw up.

FATHER: *(Snapping.)* She is not from both our sides...we're just...confused. Things get complicated when you come from a large family.

MOTHER: We're just not sure *which* side Great Aunt Lula is from.

SON: So then why are we here?

MOTHER: To pay our respects!

DAUGHTER: To a woman you've never even met. I mean, basically I'm missing valuable Sunday afternoon television viewing time to pay my respects to a stranger.

FATHER: She's not a stranger!

SON: *(Spots the casket offstage.)* Oh cool! Open casket! *(HE runs off stage.)*

MOTHER: *(Before she can stop him.)* Get back here! *(Too late, Son is gone.)*

FATHER: Well, at least he's showing an interest.

(MOTHER gives FATHER an icy glare.)

FATHER: *(Cont'd. Defensive.)* What?

DAUGHTER: Was Great Aunt Lula Methodist like us or what?

MOTHER: She was a Christian.

DAUGHTER: Are you sure?

MOTHER: Yes, I'm sure.

DAUGHTER: But you never met her so you don't *really* know if she was. I mean, like if she was an atheist or something would they have to bury her in a special type of cemetery? And—

End of Freeview

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