

# I Cannot Tell a Lie at George Washington School

*By Jim Adolf*

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## **DEDICATION**

*To Michele, Josie and Maggie*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

There's something in the water at George Washington School. Literally. A truck carrying sodium pentothal – a chemical also known as “truth serum” – has crashed into the local lake and spilled its cargo into the drinking water, and now everyone in school can't help telling the truth. Teachers are fighting, parents are pouting, kids are confessing their crimes, and the school's beloved Principal Van Vleck has gone missing. Paulie, Tibby, Seth and Analise are getting ready to compete in the school's Olympic Mind Games as Team Electricity. The competition is in just a few days, and they're barely speaking to each other. Can they pull together for the performance, or will their honesty tear the team apart? Will Principal Van Vleck come out of hiding? What is his terrible secret? And why, for goodness' sake, does everything smell like rotten onions?

## **PREMIERE PERFORMANCE**

The show premiered at the Young People's Theater at the Theater Project in Brunswick, Maine, on August 14, 15 and 16, 2015. Cast: Jonah Smith, Zoe Brush, Vanessa Caffrey, Jaden Nicita, Gabriel Tower, Anya Bachlor, Madison McKusick, Nina Powers, Joshua Nova-Yingst, Elise Gillis, Dylan Phenix, Rebecca Nova-Yingst, Celia Boyd and Izaak Phenix. Directed by Meghan McGuire and Sam Menair. Creative staff: Maddy Whittemore, Josie Adolf, Wendy Poole, Joanna Patterson and Jen Crosby.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5-9 m, 7-8 w, 9-12 flex, extras and doubling possible)*

**PAULIE:** Smart enough to be a good student but plays video games instead.

**ELLIE:** Paulie's mom; a lawyer with a secret love of science fiction.

**JOHNA:** Paulie's older sister; a moody, goth student who doesn't want other kids to know how smart she is and how much she loves her family.

**ANDREW:** Paulie's dad; an artist, scatterbrained, with a secret love of violent contact sports.

**SETH:** Paulie's best friend; a ball of energy who loves scientific tinkering and rarely thinks before he speaks.

**TIBBY:** Paulie's oldest friend, confident with a soft side.

**ANALISE:** A quiet, nervous student who can only be pushed so far then she'll fight back with a vengeance.

**PRINCIPAL VAN VLECK:** Bearded and owlish, firm but fair.

**EVAN:** A preppy, spoiled bully.

**MARTIN:** A student.

**STUDENT #1- #5**

**LUNCH LADY**

**VIC:** Girl who fights with Vi.

**VI:** Girl who fights with Vic.

**MS. EDNA GLEASON:** School secretary. Schoolmarm-ish, secretly in love with Principal Van Vleck.

**MR. LEWIS:** A school counselor who wears sweater vests and speaks in low, soothing tones.

**PARENT #1 and #2**

**ERNIE:** Evan's dad, also a bully and a lout.

**TEAM MOVIE STAR #1 - #3**

**TEAM DINO DOG #1 and #2**

**SUPERINTENDENT BECKER:** A loud, barrel-chested bear of a man, always gets his way; secretly loves Barbie dolls.

### **PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES**

Scenes should flow quickly, with simple transitions; where possible, furniture should be pre-set, and individual scenes can take place on various parts of the stage.

Whenever actors are under the influence of the truth serum, and they are asked direct questions, they must tell the truth; their eyes go blank, their bodies go stiff, and they speak in a flat, emotionless, robotic monotone.

Parts may be multiple-cast as follows:

Evan/Student #3

Martin/Mr. Lewis/Team Movie Star #1

Vic/Ms. Gleason/Ernie/Team Movie Star #2

Vi/Student #2/Team Dino Dog #2

Student #1/Parent #1/Team Movie Star #3/ Student #5

Lunch Lady/Parent #2/Team Dino Dog #1/ Student #4

### **SET**

A kitchen table with four chairs (also used as a school lunch table) desk and chair, three folding chairs, and a computer.

### **PROPS**

Newspaper, bowl of cereal, sandwich, five bookbags, paper memo, two lunch trays, notebook, pen, granola bar, paintbrushes, cardboard as scenery, four paper scripts, napkin, pizza, milk carton, fake fur for caveperson costumes, standing microphone, large photo album, telephone, mixing bowl and spoon, envelope, DVD.

### **SFX**

Screeching brakes, followed by a crash. Then a pop, like a cork from a bottle, and the chug-a-lug of liquid draining out of a container Truck driver voice that sounds sleepy, not very smart. School bus horn. Phone ring. Adults laughing and then clapping; later coughing, murmuring, and then clapping lamely; and finally oohing and aahing and cheering.

**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT up on PAULIE, alone, center stage.)*

**PAULIE:** *(Speaking to the audience.)* Everything you're about to see is completely, totally, one hundred percent true. Seriously, you can believe it all, every single word. The fact is, we couldn't lie even if we wanted to. You'll see what I mean. Anyway, it all started two weeks ago when the truck went into the lake...

*(LIGHTS down. SFX: Screeching brakes, followed by a crash. Then a pop, like a cork from a bottle, and the chug-a-lug of liquid draining out of a container.)*

**VOICE OF TRUCK DRIVER:** *(Still in darkness.)* Oh, man. All that stuff's draining right into the lake. That can't be good.

*(PAULIE walks back to the kitchen table in darkness. LIGHTS up on Paulie's family's kitchen. Paulie and ELLIE are sitting at the kitchen table. Paulie eats cereal. Ellie reads the newspaper.)*

**ELLIE:** Hey, Paulie, look at this. *(Shows HIM the newspaper.)* Last night a truck went off the road on Route 4 and went plowing right into the lake.

**PAULIE:** *(Not paying attention.)* Uh huh.

**ELLIE:** I sure hope the poor guy has good insurance. Or the trucking company, at least.

**PAULIE:** *(Still not really paying attention.)* Who has insurance?

**ELLIE:** The truck driver. I said I hope he has good insurance. Because of the crash. Geez, Paulie, you're a zombie in the morning. Were you up late playing video games by any chance?

**PAULIE:** I take the fifth.

**ELLIE:** Okay, I'll let it slide this time. I just hope you never have to use that trick in court. I'm a darn good lawyer, but I'm glad to have you as a son, not as a client.

**PAULIE:** I don't think they'd put me in jail for playing video games.

**ELLIE:** No, you're probably right.

**PAULIE:** Do they even put students in jail at all?

**ELLIE:** Not usually. (*Sarcastically.*) Especially perfectly obedient ones like you.

**PAULIE:** Very funny. Do you think they'll put the guy who drove the truck into the lake in jail?

**ELLIE:** It depends.

*(JOHNA enters, wearing all black.)*

**JOHNA:** Are you guys talking about the truck that went into the lake? (*Doesn't wait for them to answer.*) I just heard it on the radio. Do you know that our drinking water comes from that lake?

*(ANDREW enters.)*

**ANDREW:** What are we talking about?

**JOHNA:** We're talking about a truck that crashed right into the lake last night, Dad. And polluted our drinking water. Do you have any idea what kinds of oil and chemicals and other bad stuff comes seeping out of trucks when they crash?

**ANDREW:** Actually, I really don't.

**JOHNA:** (*Annoyed.*) Well...lots of oil and chemicals and other bad stuff seeps out. Right into our drinking water.

**PAULIE:** Don't they filter the bad stuff out of the water?

*(JOHNA sighs and rolls her eyes.)*

**ANDREW:** I think Paulie's right. There's a big water treatment plant somewhere, and they run all the water through it so it's clean before it gets to us. I'm sure it's safe, or they wouldn't let us drink it.

**JOHNA:** You're so trusting, Dad. When are you going to realize that they're ruining the environment, and nobody does a single thing about it?

**ANDREW:** Who's ruining the environment? Truck drivers who drive into lakes?

**JOHNA:** Ha ha, very funny.

*(SFX: A school bus horn offstage.)*

**ELLIE:** There's the bus. You guys better move it. If you miss it, you're walking. I've got an early meeting so I can't take you.

*(PAULIE and JOHNA rush offstage. LIGHTS down.)*

## Scene 2

*(AT RISE: PAULIE, TIBBY, SETH and ANALISE sit at a table in the George Washington School lunchroom.)*

**ANNALISE:** We better work on our script for Olympic Mind Games after school today. The performance is in, like, less than a week.

**PAULIE:** We can go to my house.

**SETH:** Hey, what do we get if we win anyway?

**TIBBY:** We qualify for the OMG state competition.

**PAULIE:** And I think we get a trophy too, or ribbons or something.

**SETH:** Cool. *(Takes a bite of his sandwich, and then talks with mouth full.)* You know what Evan said to me today in gym? He said his team is going to crush ours at OMG.

**TIBBY:** Who cares what Evan says. He's always bragging about something. And, eww, don't talk with your mouth full.

**SETH:** *(With mouth still full.)* Sorry.

**PAULIE:** Besides, Evan's OMG team is called "Team Dino Dogs." There's no way a team with a lame name like that could beat us.

**SETH:** Well, he says they built a huge dinosaur. Made out of wires and plaster. Like six feet high.

### **End of Freeview**

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