

# THE STUDENT AND THE MATHEMATICIAN

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A ten-minute comedy  
inspired by Aesop's Fable *Hercules and the Wagoner* by  
Adam Hahn  
*SkyPilot Theatre Company Playwright-in-Residence*

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A wagoner was driving a heavy load on a muddy path. The wheels began to sink in the mud, and the horses pulled until the wagon was stuck. The wagoner knelt by the path and prayed to Hercules the Strong for help. Hercules appeared to him and said, "Get up, put your shoulder to the wheel, and push!"

*Self help is the best help.*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

DAVID, a male student.

ONE, male, plays Father, Professor Eeeunf, narrates.

TWO, female, plays Mrs. Heffesfeffen, Aunt Jane, narrates.

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(*DAVID sits at a desk. TWO stands, ready to teach as "Mrs. Heffesfeffen." ONE narrates.*)

**TWO:** Good morning class!

**ONE:** Mrs. Heffesfeffen was a math teacher.

**DAVID:** Good morning, Mrs. Heffesfeffen.

**ONE:** David was a student.

**TWO:** I hope that the whispering I hear in the back of the room will come to an end soon, unlike the digits of pi! HA HA HA! That was a math joke!

**ONE:** Mrs. Heffesfeffen was an enthusiastic math teacher.

**DAVID:** Mrs. Heffesfeffen, this is boring.

**ONE:** Not all of Mrs. Heffesfeffen's students appreciated her enthusiasm.

**DAVID:** This is possibly the most boring thing I have ever experienced.

**ONE:** David did not appreciate it at all.

**DAVID:** Given the choice between studying math and watching paint dry, I would rather watch paint dry.

**ONE:** David was vocal about his lack of appreciation.

**DAVID:** Even if it was special paint that dried really slowly, you know, special slow-drying, extra-boring paint?

**ONE:** David was a little too vocal, if you ask me.

**DAVID:** Even if it wasn't actual paint drying, but just a video of paint drying, and even if I'd already seen that video a dozen times –

**ONE:** David was a rude, lazy, ungrateful –

**TWO:** It's all right! Not all students see the beauty in mathematics right away.

**ONE:** Mrs. Heffesfeffen tried to make the best of the situation.

**TWO:** David, why do you think math is boring?

**DAVID:** Because I'm never going to use math in real life!

**TWO:** No?

**DAVID:** No! And if I ever need to, a calculator will do all the work, right?

**TWO:** Well, David, when the Giant Yellow Butterfly People from Ganymede take over the earth, the first thing they'll do is break open all the calculators and eat the batteries, because tiny batteries are like candy to the Giant Yellow Butterfly People. The only way to send them back to the moons of Jupiter will be to overload the communications system on their mothership with a precisely timed satellite broadcast. It's going to take a lot of math to coordinate that broadcast, and you won't have a calculator to help you, and if you fail all of mankind will be slaves to the Giant Yellow Butterfly People forever. Is that really what you want, David?

**ONE:** It's possible that Mrs. Heffesfeffen was barking mad.

**TWO:** No I'm not! I'm kidding! That was a math joke.

**ONE:** No, it really wasn't.

**TWO:** HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!

**DAVID:** Can I just get the homework assignment and leave?

**TWO:** Yes, and you'll be happy to know that your homework this weekend is just one problem.

**DAVID:** I hope it's not another story problem set on a farm.

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**TWO:** On Joe's farm, there are forty acres of cornfields and sixty acres of soybean fields.

**DAVID:** If farmers do math all the time, I am definitely not going to be a farmer.

**TWO:** One acre produces one hundred sixty bushels of corn or forty-five bushels of soybeans. Corn sells for six dollars per bushel, and soybeans sell for ten dollars per bushel. Joe loses one-fourth of his corn and one-fifth of his soybeans in an unfortunate silo-fire. What fraction of his total revenue comes from the sale of soybeans?

**DAVID:** How am I supposed to figure that out?

**TWO:** You can do it. Just multiply, multiply again, multiply by a fraction, three more multiplications for the beans, add, divide, and simplify the fraction you end up with by finding the greatest common factor.

**DAVID:** How am I supposed to stay awake while working on this boring problem?

**TWO:** Remember the Giant Yellow Butterfly People are on their way! HA HA HA HA HA HA!

**ONE:** I don't think she's kidding.

*(One exits, Two takes over narration:)*

**TWO:** So David went home, where he briefly considered sitting down and doing his homework –

**DAVID:** Boring! This would take forever –

**TWO:** Probably under fifteen minutes –

**DAVID:** Maybe I can ask someone for help.

*(Enter One, as "Father.")*

**TWO:** David found his father.

**DAVID:** Dad, can you believe I have to go to math class every day? Can you imagine sitting in a chair and listening to someone talk about something completely boring for FIFTY MINUTES?!

**ONE:** Son, I have a job. Sometimes I listen to people talk about boring things all day.

**TWO:** That's actually a big part of what it means to have a job.

**DAVID:** I didn't open this father-son dialogue to listen to your problems. Are you going to help me with my homework or not?

**ONE:** Help you? You just need to multiply, multiply again, multiply by a fraction, do three more multiplications for the beans –

**DAVID:** Whoa, Dad, I don't want this problem to take all day –

**TWO:** Probably under fifteen minutes.

**ONE:** Well, I don't see another way to do this. You could ask your Aunt Jane –

**DAVID:** That's right, Aunt Jane, the engineer! She does math every day!

*(Exit Two. One narrates:)*

**ONE:** And David went in search of his Aunt Jane, because engineers are people who enjoy using math and science to solve problems.

*(Enter Two as "Aunt Jane":)*

**TWO:** I have a job developing scratch-resistant plastics!

**ONE:** Some of them enjoy it too much.

**DAVID:** Hi, Aunt Jane.



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**TWO:** David, your father told me you might be coming. Would you like a tour of my lab?

**DAVID:** No thanks.

**TWO:** We've been working on a new toilet seat that's impossible to scratch. Would you like to try to scratch it?

**DAVID:** No.

**TWO:** Are you sure?

**DAVID:** Yes.

**TWO:** Are you really sure you don't want to scratch my toilet seat?

**ONE:** This part of the conversation went on longer than it needed to.

**TWO:** You can try with your fingernails—

**DAVID:** No—

**TWO:** Or sandpaper—

**DAVID:** No—

**TWO:** Or a grinding wheel—

**DAVID:** Jane, I really just want help with a math problem.

**TWO:** Your father told me! The one where you need to multiply, multiply again, multiply by a fraction—

**DAVID:** Jane, I came here because I thought you could help me find the answer without all the multiplication—

**TWO:** You want to solve Farmer Joe's corn and soybean revenue problem without all the multiplication?! What fun would that be?

**ONE:** David tried to put this into terms that an engineer would understand.

**DAVID:** As much fun as the multiplication is, I thought it could be more fun if there was a way to get to the answer in fewer steps.

**TWO:** Ooooooooooh. So you're going for efficiency.

**DAVID:** Yes?

**TWO:** Awesome.

**DAVID:** Can you help me?

*(Exit One.)*

**TWO:** David, I know who you need to talk to.

**DAVID:** Who?

**TWO:** Professor Eeeunf.

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