

## *The Bizarre Mystery of Horribly Hard Middle School*

Unlike the other Caught'ya books, each of which contains three totally different stories turned into Caught'ya sentences, this book includes only one story that is broken up into three parts. The story, "The Bizarre Mystery of Horribly Hard Middle School," is long enough to produce more than three years' worth of Caught'ya sentences. A group of kids (whose personalities you will recognize in your own students) progress through three years at Horribly Hard Middle School doing the usual middle-school things and suffering from typical middle-school-kid dilemmas and problems. They write awful poetry, deal with obnoxious miscreants, live in a world where magic is possible, and try to figure out what is wrong with many of their teachers who don't seem quite normal.

I felt it would be better to have a story that would span the three years of middle school because middle-school students need continuity. They like books in a series with the same characters. They enjoy reading about themselves (thinly disguised) and their lives at school, and they love reading about adults with foibles—hence the popularity of *Harry Potter* and other *series* of books about pre-teens and teens.

As you read, you will notice that each year's worth of Caught'yas has a basic introduction repeated almost verbatim at the beginning. Obviously this would not be done in a regular children's novel, but I wanted to re-introduce the story and the main characters to the students each year. After all, summers are long, and adolescent memories are short. While they never forget lyrics to a popular tune, middle-school kids tend to forget anything having to do with school in a break of more than a few days. In addition, students will not have a personal copy of the story to read and reread as they so often do with beloved books before the next in the series appears.

Some sentences in the story may sound stilted and others may seem repetitious or redundant. This is because the primary purpose of this story is to teach English grammar, mechanics, usage, vocabulary, literary devices, spelling, etc. Obviously, while retaining the story's appeal to middle-school students, the main purpose had to take precedence.

You will recognize most of your students and some of their antics as the story unweaves. I based the characters on the beloved (and sometimes challenging) “characters” who have passed through my classroom over the years. Almost all the non-magical and non-robotic incidents that take place in the story have occurred at the middle school where I taught (like the accidental mooning of the dean or butterfly releasing or food fights, etc.). I wanted to keep the story “real” and amusing for students in a typical middle school.

I hope you enjoy a chuckle or two as you and your students read about the antics of Isabelle Ingenuous, William Waggish, and their friends and enemies.

**NOTE:**

The numbers in the margin of this chapter correspond with the Caught'yas in **Chapters 6, 7, and 8.**

# Sixth-Grade Part of Story



## Introduction

As the August morning sun chased the shadows from the roofs of houses and painted the sky gold, there was an **eerie** silence at Horribly Hard Middle School. In the dawning light, you could not see into the classrooms because of the dark curtains at every window. No early teacher rushed out of a car in the parking lot to set up a lab or to get an early start on preparation for the first day of school. Horribly Hard Middle School was like a spooky mansion: closed, dark, and abandoned.

In contrast, across town, as the sun rose a bit higher in the sky, Marvelously Magic Magnet Middle School (known popularly as MMMMS) burst with energy and noise. Coffee perked in the teachers' lounge. Cars roared into the parking lot, parked, and spilled out teachers of different sizes, shapes, and complexions. Boxes, books, bags, and piles of "stuff" filled their arms as they walked into the school early to be ready for the first day of classes for the year.

Finally, two cars drove up to the **dormant** and silent Horribly Hard Middle School; one a new mauve Lexus and the other an old blue Ford pick-up truck. A man stepped out of each. The man who exited the Lexus wore a suit and tie and carried a battered briefcase. His face mirrored anxiety. The owner of the pick-up climbed out of his truck and lifted a large black tool case out of the bed of his truck. He **sported** a denim shirt and overalls, a red handkerchief in his upper pocket, a wrench hanging out of his lower pocket, and an air of excitement and purpose.

The two men nodded solemnly to each other as they **trekked** in different directions, the suited one toward the school office and the man in overalls toward the sixth-grade wing and the custodian's office. No other human soul could be seen in the dim light of early morning.

Slowly, one after the other, classroom lights came on in HHMS. Soon the school was **ablaze** with light, and all classrooms were lit, but apart from Mr. **Adept** Fixit, the custodian, rushing from room to room to open the doors and turn on the lights, no sounds of people could be heard on the campus. If you listened carefully in the main office near the door to the principal's room, you could hear the faint click of computer keys as Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, a man who was always concerned with correct procedure, checked and rechecked the procedures which would be followed that first day as well as the list of students who would enter the **portals** of the HHMS in about an hour.

Half an hour later several more cars pulled up in front of the still silent Horribly Hard Middle School.

## Introduction

A lady, dressed in a long pink skirt and a **blousy** white shirt spattered with paint, hurried towards one of the still-dark classrooms with rolls of paper under her arm and a **myriad** of paint brushes in her mouth and hands. A man **ambled** toward a nearby dark classroom. He was burdened with various-sized instrument cases. His purple tie, decorated with yellow musical notes, was **askew**, and his glasses perched unevenly on his large nose.

Meanwhile, in a house not far from Horribly Hard Middle School, a **gaggle** of sixth-graders had gathered to gossip about the upcoming first day of school. They stood in the **foyer** of Isabelle's house, waiting for Olivia **Otiose** whose lazy nature always made her late to everything. Isabelle **Ingenuous**, always **animated**, twirled in nervousness and an excess of energy. Pauline **Puerile** whined in a babyish manner about Olivia's tardiness. Felicia **Fey**, always acting in a bizarre manner, muttered words of a spell, parts of which she could not remember, under her breath to encourage her friend Olivia **Otiose** to hurry. William **Waggish** made a tasteless but funny joke that **evoked titters** from the gathered friends. The last member of the troop, Sam **Sagacious**, simply stood wisely and silently with his backpack in his hand, waiting for the **clamor** to die down.

Isabelle **Ingenuous** danced out the open door, swiftly followed by her friends, with Pauline **Puerile** taking up the rear as she picked up her teddy bear that had fallen from her backpack and tucked it into the front pouch. Another girl joined them as they walked down the steps of Isabelle's house onto the sidewalk. Olivia **Otiose** had arrived, hair half combed and wrinkled blouse hanging out of her jeans. The group was ready but **reluctant** to face their first day of their new middle school: Horribly Hard Middle School.

A **myriad** of thoughts echoed and **rebounded** in each student's mind as the six sixth-graders **trudged** to their new school, a mile away, as if walking the plank of a pirate ship to their doom.

What would the new school be like? Would the new teachers be mean and hard? Were they going to have too much homework? Were the big eighth-graders going to **harass** them? Would they be able to remember the combinations of those shiny new locks in their backpacks? Were they dressed appropriately? Were the teachers nice? Would middle school be much different from elementary school? How would they find all their classes? Would their friends be in their classes? Would they get lost? Was the dean mean?

These questions and many more circled around in the six friends' heads as they silently **ambled**

towards the place where they would find out all the answers. All too soon, the brick walls of Horribly Hard Middle School **loomed** in front of them.

Brown-faced with dark, expressive eyes, William **Waggish** recited a silly limerick to break the tension. (He always was composing poetry to try to **emulate** his hero, Langston Hughes.) The friends' steps matched the **cadence** of the hopeful poem.

There is a bizarre middle school  
Where teachers are easy to fool.  
They fall for our jokes  
And don't call our folks  
Even when we break every rule.

Horribly Hard Middle School did not look much different from their elementary school which was nearby in their town of **Tedious**, Florida. A big, one-story brick building sat **nestled** among large trees and a **verdant** lawn, and a small city of white portables dotted the field behind the school like white lily pads in a green pond.

"Look!" **shrilled** Isabelle **Ingenuous** in her high voice as she nervously twirled the purple, plastic butterfly that was perched in her wild, curly, **auburn** hair. Always upbeat, Isabelle was dressed in her new outfit of matching purple shorts and bright-green top. "All the lights are on, and there is a teacher gazing out the window of each classroom!" Isabelle Ingenuous continued.

"I wish we were going to Marvelously Magic Magnet Middle School instead of this old, ordinary, **insipid** one," groaned William **Waggish**, who was not his usual teasing, cheerful self.

"Yeah," sighed Sam **Sagacious**, who was usually reserved behind his horn-rimmed glasses, "I hear the teachers there are great!"

"Yes, I hear they don't give much homework, either," added Olivia **Otiose**, who hated homework with a passion.

"Well, we don't have enough magic in us, so we can't go to MMMMS," **retorted** Felicia **Fey** whose **meager** magic always went **awry**. "If I were better at magic, I would be going there with all the neat teachers and cool classes, but I failed the entry test when I accidentally gave Ms. Vice Principal a big, juicy zit right between her eyes."

"At least you *have* some magic, even if it always screws up," Isabelle Ingenuous reminded her friend as she twirled the purple butterfly that perched in her **mane** of auburn hair. "The rest of us can't even open a classroom **portal**," she concluded.

Suddenly, right in front of this **sextet**, stood a tall man who was dressed all in black with a shiny, new, black hat perched on his

slick black hair. He peered down at the group and boomed in a loud, **monotone** voice, “Welcome to Horribly Hard Middle School.”

The frightening man then announced that he was the dean of the school and that his name was Dean **Dread**.

Pauline **Puerile** commenced to **snivel** (she was such a baby), and Felicia Fey muttered a “cheer-up spell” but only succeeded in frizzing her friend’s hair.

Dean Dread, a disturbing figure in his **somber** suit and tie, directed the group to go to the “cafetorium,” a combination of cafeteria and auditorium. There, the friends found other sixth-graders whom they already knew from elementary school.

“What a bizarre dean,” whispered Sam Sagacious *sotto voce* to William Waggish. “You and I wouldn’t want to cross him nor meet him in a dark alley.”

“From what **mausoleum** did he crawl out, Sam?” murmured William Waggish **surreptitiously** so no one else could hear.

“Hey, William, look at the other weird teachers standing against the wall,” whispered always observant Sam Sagacious as he **surveyed** the room.

As Sam **uttered** this last statement, Dean Dread suddenly appeared and loomed menacingly over the two boys.

“**Loquacious** ones, eh? You two, come here,” the dean ordered. His voice had the flatness of a cockroach crunching under a shoe.

Dean Dread put one huge, ham-sized hand on the back of each boy and **ushered** them to the front of the “cafetorium.” All the other new sixth-graders, of course, **tittered** at the sight of William and Sam being caught talking.

“Quiet, students,” said Dean Dread in a deadly tone of voice as he placed William Waggish and the **mortified** Sam Sagacious in the second row next to Jesse **Jocose**, another talker.

When Dean Dread said this, he nodded his head, and teachers lined up in the aisles to **quell** the noise with **proximity** control. The new sixth-graders squirmed in fear and became **distraught** as they got a closer look at their new teachers. Only a few of them had genuine, welcoming smiles on their faces, and most were **garbed** in grey or black, too.

Among the teachers, only a few didn’t look too mean or **formidable**. They just didn’t look like the friendly teachers the kids had had in elementary school, and most of them dressed in **somber** clothes that looked as if they were stiff and uncomfortable.

Olivia Otiose, who was more **perceptive** than most sixth-graders but lazy when it came to work, saw that one teacher’s

smile was genuine. This teacher wore a **blousy** white shirt and a long pink skirt, and she had stuck a pink flower in her thick blonde **tresses**.

“Felicia, that must be the art teacher,” Isabelle Ingenuous dared to whisper to her friend Felicia Fey.

Dean Dread and two teachers glared at the two girls who **quailed** under their gaze.

All the teachers still stood in the aisles like **sentries**, most of them **glowering** at the kids as if daring them to speak. The principal stood up on the stage, and Dean Dread joined him there.

“Children, I am the school’s principal, the captain of your ship,” said the principal. My name is Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, and this is Dean Dread who will **mete** out any discipline for misbehaving students,” he continued as he put a hand on the dean’s broad, right shoulder.

William Waggish, always playfully humorous, chose that moment to **subvocalize** a limerick under his breath, his favorite way to deal with tension. He entitled it “The Mean Dean.” Several people heard its **utterance**, and Jesse Jocose, who sat nearby, snorted in laughter.

There was an old dean from Salt Lick                    (Kentucky)  
Who made all the kids very sick.  
One look at his face  
And students would race,  
Well-aided by steps that were quick.

As William Waggish **uttered** the last word of his limerick, the teacher nearest him twitched and nodded his head. His eyelids fluttered; his tongue protruded between his closed lips; and **wisps** of smoke curled from his ears.

Jesse Jocose pointed to that teacher with his one hand and held the other over his mouth to **muffle** his giggles. The other teachers turned and **glowered** at him as students **swiveled** their heads in the direction Jesse pointed.

Only the teacher with the pink flower in her hair and the paint on her shirt smiled at the strange **phenomenon** of her eye-fluttering, ear-smoking, tongue-sticking-out **colleague**. She, somehow, was different, like a cool, glacier breeze in a hot classroom.

After that **incident**, everyone quieted down, turned his or her face towards the stage, and **paid heed** to Mr. Punctilious Principal as he instructed students on where to go and what to do next.

“I hope my friends and I are in the same homeroom, too,” whispered Isabelle Ingenuous to her two friends, Olivia Otiose and Pauline Puerile.

Finally, the assembly was over. Teachers filed out, directed the **striplings** to the homeroom lists on the walls of the sixth-grade hall, and then pointed out the various classrooms.

The **intrepid** group who had begun the first day of school together found themselves in the same homeroom. Their teacher was a very **stern**-looking man, Mr. Math **Martinet**, who promptly announced that he was also their math teacher.

He told the students, too, that he would tolerate no **shenanigans**, and then he **confiscated** a headset from Quincy **Querulous**, a student in the back of the room who made faces as his headset was taken, opened his mouth as if to argue, and then thought better of it.

“Hey, Pauline, that’s the teacher who stuck out his tongue,” **articulated** Felicia Fey to her **puerile** friend who was crying silently.

William Waggish, worried about Pauline, whispered another of his **inimitable** limericks, this one about a **malevolent** math teacher entitled “**Wrathful Math.**” Faint curls of smoke wisped from Mr. Math Martinet’s ears, and his eyelids fluttered, too.

The nasty man, teacher of math,  
Was utterly filled with such **wrath**.  
He yelled at the boys  
And **stifled** their joys.  
He took a malevolent path.

At this, you could have heard a pin drop as the students’ mouths gaped open at their **peer**’s boldness and their teacher’s antics. The class waited for William’s painful **demise** at the hands of the stern, **uncompromising** teacher.

Nothing happened! Absolutely nothing! After fewer than three seconds, Mr. Math Martinet **resumed** his announcements as if he neither had been interrupted nor had wisps of smoke **emitting** from his ears. After he went over the school rules, Mr. Math Martinet handed out a schedule and a map of the school to everyone.

As soon as the students’ schedules were in their hands, **pandemonium** broke out as everyone tried to see who was in his or her classes. The **intrepid** six compared notes and found that they shared some of the same classes: math, English, and science. Pauline, Isabelle, Jesse, William, and Felicia had art with Ms. **Amicable** Artist, and the other two had music with Mr. **Melodious** Music.

The bell **pealed**, signaling the end of homeroom. Although the group was going to the same place, Pauline Puerile got lost. Things were not going well for her. First, she became separated from her friends. Then, she turned her map upside down. Next, the size of



the eighth-graders **daunted** her, and finally, she got lost. As Pauline Puerile stood in the crowded hallway blubbering while others laughed and pointed fingers at her, a kind, **titanic** eighth-grader took pity on her and pointed her in the right direction.

Meanwhile, Isabelle Ingenuous and Felicia Fey found the girls' bathroom, but there were too many eighth-graders for comfort in there, so they left hurriedly. Felicia and Isabelle found their first class (which, thankfully, was only ten steps farther). Before entering the classroom, Felicia Fey, who should have known better, tried to fix her flyaway hair with a **petite** spell. As usual, it backfired; this time it turned her hair purple.

At the same time, William Waggish found a new friend, Jesse **Jocose**, the boy who had experienced the **wrath** of Dean Dread, too. The two of them discovered their love for **jocularity** and limericks. Since, like William's other friends, they were headed for English class, they composed an **appropriate** poem and entitled it "Awful Teacher," even though they had not yet **encountered** the teacher.

An English teacher from Slade (Kentucky)  
 Confused the verbs "lay" and "laid."  
 She didn't know squat  
 And was put on the spot,  
 So she quit and didn't get paid.

Standing at her door, their new English teacher, Ms. Grammar Grouch, heard the limerick. Her eyes fluttered, and she stuck out her tongue while curls of smoke wisped from her **proboscis** and rose to the ceiling.

"Hey, Jesse, look at that," giggled William Waggish, pleased with their poetic efforts and their effect on the teachers. "These teachers are **eerie!** Maybe my friends and I are wrong, and this year will be fun after all."

Sam Sagacious just made a further notation in his pocket notebook.

Jesse Jocose **queried** with a grin as they stepped into the room of the slightly smoking teacher, "I wonder what makes them do that?"

Just then they spied Felicia Fey in her newly purpled hair.

"Uh oh, William, I bet the teachers are not going to find *that* amusing," said Jesse Jocose.

Ms. Grammar Grouch *could* **differentiate** between the verbs "lay" and "laid," and, much to the **consternation** of Olivia Otiose, she loaded the class with a list of vocabulary words to learn. In addition, Ms. Grammar Grouch did not permit any student to end a sentence with a preposition nor to split a verb. She was a true Grammar Grouch.

She also was not very **amiable** and was going to send Felicia Fey to the dean with a **terse** note to call Felicia's parents about her coming to school with purple hair.

"Wait, Ms. Grouch, I can fix it. It's fixable," **blurled** Felicia as she muttered another spell which turned her hair back to its normal color but put a purple streak in Ms. Grouch's **coiffure**.

Jesse Jocose composed a limerick on the spot that he entitled "My New Friend, Felicia" and sent it in a note to William Waggish who whispered it to Felicia who **tittered**.

There was a young lady from Day (Florida)  
Whose nature was quirkily fey.  
She purpled her hair,  
But she didn't care  
And merrily did things her way.

At this **juncture**, Ms. Grammar Grouch stuck out her tongue, fluttered her eyes, and **emitted** smoke from her ears. She stopped teaching, froze for fewer than three seconds, mumbled, "That is unanswerable," and then resumed her grammar lecture as if nothing had occurred.

"Weirder and weirder," **penned** William to Jesse in another **furtive** note.

"I don't think I like that teacher very much," said Isabelle to her friends as they exited the room at the peal of the bell, and Felicia and she dashed into the ladies' room, **micturated** quickly, washed their hands in the filthy sink, and ran out to join their friends.

"I wonder if the science teacher will be any better. We already know what the math teacher is like," said Sam Sagacious who liked the vocabulary lesson of Ms. Grammar Grouch but **loathed** the way the **latter** had wanted to send his friend to Dean Dread.

"Well, she couldn't be worse," said Felicia Fey whose narrow escape had scared them all further. "I hope she doesn't **perceive** that purple streak in her hair until she gets home."

"She's the one who deserved it," **countered** Felicia's friends William Waggish and Pauline Puerile in **unison**. They shared a "high five" as William proceeded to recite another one of his **infamous** limericks, this one entitled "Frigid English."

Our grammar teacher is rigid.  
On English rules, she is frigid.  
She never splits verbs  
And teaches hard words,  
And errors make her quite **livid**.

Nearby, two teachers in unison fluttered their eyelids, stuck out their tongues between closed lips, froze in place for fewer than three seconds, and emitted wisps of smoke from their **nostrils**. Sam Sagacious noted the **anomalies** in their reactions.

“**Bizarre**,” Sam Sagacious muttered to himself as he took notes.

The rest of the day went pretty much the same. The teachers, for the most part, were **clad** in somber colors, and they had no sense of humor. Unfortunately, in science class, the friends found their old **nemesis**, Orson **Odius**. As they entered the room, Orson was “holding court” in the back among many of the popular kids.

“Ah, guys, look at the weird ones who just entered science class,” Orson said **maliciously**. “There’s the witch who can’t do a spell right, the four-eyed wise guy who knows it all, the free spirit who even wears stupid, plastic butterflies in her hair, the crybaby, the lazy one who never has her homework, and the two who think they’re funny. What losers,” he stated, and he chuckled to his audience and encouraged them to laugh.

“I’m sorry my parents made my buds and me late this morning, and my buds and I missed two of the “geeks” getting caught by the Dean,” **expounded** Orson Odius as he concluded his **verbal** attack.

The intrepid six and Jesse Jocose, heads down, slunk into seats in the front of the room just as the science teacher entered and closed the door behind him. When the class saw the teacher, silence **reigned**, even from the back of the room where Orson’s gang sat.

“I am Ms. **Stern Science**,” the teacher said in a **monotone** voice. “I believe in a lot of hard tests, **a plethora of** homework, and **a dearth of** student talking in my class, but I also expect students to do well.”

At this, Olivia Otiose **slumped** in her desk in **woe**. “Oh, no,” she whined as she sank farther into her seat. “This year is starting out badly.”

Ms. Stern Science stared at Olivia Otiose with her bird-like, beady eyes, and she said in a low, **ominous** tone, “There always will be silence in this classroom when I **pontificate**.”

Olivia Otiose thought she heard a snicker from Orson Odius in the back, but the teacher did not catch it.

As the seven friends left the room, they tried to **elude** Orson Odius who knew all the tricks of making other students’ lives **wretched** without getting caught by the teachers himself. William Waggish and his new friend Jesse Jocose **commenced** composing another limerick, this one about the stern science teacher, and they entitled it “Crude, Rude Science.”

Our old science teacher is rude.  
 She also is horribly crude.  
 She picks at her nose;  
 She sports ugly toes;  
 And always is in a bad mood.

Isabelle Ingenuous and her friends laughed, imagining their teacher's **unsightly** toes. They forgot about the toad Orson Odious and all that he liked to do to make their lives miserable.

By her desk near the **portal** of the room, Ms. Stern Science stuck out her tongue, smoked slightly from her **proboscis**, fluttered her eyes like a blinking lizard, and froze mid-step for fewer than three seconds.

"Stranger and weirder," murmured Sam Sagacious who noticed these things.

Lunch was the usual **boisterous pandemonium** typical of a middle-school lunchroom. A fight broke out between two girls over something a **rumor-monger** had reported that the other had **purportedly** said, and both were suspended on the spot. Dean Dread called their parents from the lunchroom, right in front of the girls' **peers**.

After that incident, Dean Dread stood on the stage with his ham-sized hands on his hips, glaring **forebodingly** at the students as if he dared them to try anything else except talking and eating.

"It's amazing he lets us talk at all, Sam" said William Waggish to his **compatriot** at the table. He also composed another limerick for the occasion, entitled it "Mean Green Dean," and caused everyone at his table to hoot with laughter like a bunch of hyenas. After a brief flutter of his eyelids and one wisp of smoke curling from his left ear, Dean Dread turned to stare at their table with a **malevolent** expression on his **visage**, **marred** only by his tongue that still stuck out between his **pursed** lips.

The dean of students is mean.  
 His face in anger turns bright green.  
 He maintains his right  
 To stop any fight  
 And suspend those who are obscene.

Art and music were the only relief for the rest of the week. In art, the teacher, Ms. **Amicable** Artist, smiled a lot and promised the class that they would release butterflies on Earth Day and celebrate the event further with an art project of their own choosing as well. Pauline, Isabelle, Jesse, William, and Felicia, who had **opted** to take Art, were delighted.

"This teacher seems almost human, girlfriend," whispered Isabelle to Felicia who nodded in agreement.

With only a small frown at Isabelle, Ms. Amicable Artist quietly moved by the two girls and **commenced** a lecture about the **Impressionist** artists.

William Waggish took out a pencil and a piece of paper, and he composed another limerick entitled “Art.”

We have a bizarre art teacher  
Who **touts** painters like a preacher.  
Cassat and Van Go  
And Monet, now we know,  
Are the ones who really reach her.

Ms. Amicable Artist, still lecturing and **periodically** showing pictures from a stack in her hand, **ambled** over to William, confiscated the paper, swiftly **perused** its contents, smiled, and said, “You spelled Van Gogh’s name incorrectly, William. It is spelled ‘G-o-g-h,’ not ‘G-o.’”

Nothing else happened except that the pink-**hued** flower in her **coiffure** fell onto William’s desk as she nodded her head at him, handed back William’s paper, and continued her **spiel** on the Impressionists.

William Waggish corrected the spelling of the Dutch painter’s name and paid **rapt** attention for the rest of the period.

“Hey,” **mused** William Waggish to himself, “maybe the limerick has to be said out loud for it to affect the teachers. I must tell Sam as he would want to make a note.”

Meanwhile in music, Mr. **Melodious** Music told his class all about band, and he let the untried, **neophyte** sixth-graders choose their instruments. Sam Sagacious played the guitar at home but wanted to take up a new challenge. He chose the oboe, an **arduous** instrument to learn to play. Olivia Otiose, who had not signed up for any exploratory class and who had been randomly assigned to band by the school’s computer, wanted the instrument that was the easiest to play. She wanted to play the triangle but was given a clarinet.

“Bummer,” she said. “If I have to learn to play this instrument, I will be forced to carry this home every day, and my mother will **compel** me to practice.”

That day, the six friends (Jesse Jocose took a bus to school) **plodded** home, piled with science and math homework. Olivia Otiose was not pleased, so she did none of it and lied to her mother when her mother asked if she ever had been assigned any. Olivia’s lying about homework was nothing new.

Months passed in a similar, **invariable** manner. The six walked to school, met up with their friends who bussed to school, suffered

through classes with their bizarre teachers, and tried to avoid Orson Odious and his popular pals, the **comely** Petra **Pulchritudinous**, lovely Alessandra **Amorous**, and handsome Danny **Dapper**. Except in art and music, the nasty, annoying teachers gave tons of homework.

While middle school is always a weird place, they knew that something strange was **afoot** at Horribly Hard Middle School. Sam kept notes on the effects that William's and Jesse's **atrocious** but **hilarious** limericks had on their teachers. One of their best, a wicked limerick about the social studies teacher, Ms. Grumpy Geography, **evoked** more than smoke from her ears and fluttering eyes.

There is a teacher from Noodle (Texas)  
 Whose hair looks like a French poodle.  
 She paints her nails green;  
 She taps on the screen;  
 Her face looks like pale apple strudel.

In addition to the usual teachers' reactions to hearing one of their **infamous** verses, Ms. Grumpy Geography repeated over and over in a **monotone** voice for more than two seconds but fewer than three, "You must read the book Great Geography. You must read the book Great Geography."

As usual, Sam Sagacious took notes *apropos* of the incident, but neither he nor anyone else could draw any conclusions. There was just something different about their school, but no one could put a finger on what its difference was.

Art continued to be "awesome." Band was challenging, and even lazy, **indolent** Olivia Otiose was getting into playing her clarinet well.

Then, there was this **innovative** teacher who visited their English class from time to time to teach creative writing. Her humor and enthusiasm inspired students to write well. Usually **apathetic** Olivia Otiose wrote a personal narrative that won a prize. In addition, William Waggish even abandoned his favorite form of writing—the limerick—and composed a **superlative** argumentative essay defending his position that school uniforms were a **noxious** idea.

One day in science, Orson Odious was particularly **insufferable**. His **taunts** provoked the usually cheerful Jesse Jocose to become **pugnacious** and to swing at him in fury. Orson **countered** with a blow to Jesse's **visage**. William jumped into the **fray** to support his friend, and then Ms. Stern Science stepped into the act.

"You three **rapsCALLIONS**," she said in a loud voice, "go to the dean's office immediately. Isabelle, take this note, go see that they arrive in the appropriate place, and get a return note from the

dean,” she concluded, punching the call button to inform the office that Dean Dread had some “customers.”

As the group walked to the dean’s office, Orson **goaded** and teased Jesse, William, and Isabelle.

“You’re nothing but unpopular little geeks,” he **jeered**.

The three remained **quiescent** at this insult, for they dared not **exacerbate** the situation.

“Everyone **loathes** your stupid poems,” he continued. “They are written badly.”

“Now you’ve gone too far,” growled the usually **pacifistic** William Waggish as he rushed in on his tormentor.

As if they had **orchestrated** it beforehand, the three friends jumped on Orson, all at the same time. Orson fell to the ground, and Jesse, William, and Isabelle sat on him and called him an **obstreperous** jerk. Orson Odious was shocked into silence.

At that moment, Dean Dread appeared suddenly, like a huge, swooping bat, and **ushered** all four **miscreants** into his office. Orson Odious tried to blame the three for the entire incident, but luckily Ms. Stern Science had seen him take a swing at Jesse Jocose. Dean Dread called everyone’s parents to come get their **miscreants**, and then he suspended all four of them for two days. William Waggish didn’t even have time to compose a limerick appropriate for the occasion.

When the suspension had ended, and all were back in school, things got better for a while. Orson Odious remained unusually **docile**. He did, however, start targeting a girl named Beth **Bibliophilic** who had read Harry Potter more than four times and who always **secreted** a book on her knees under her desk.

Orson also picked on a boy named Mark **Meticulous**, a perfectionist who always rewrote his papers many times. These two, of course, were not **elated** with this turn of events. Beth Bibliophilic and Mark Meticulous, to be sure, preferred it when Orson Odious had ignored them as if they weren’t there.

“Weirdos who sit on people don’t **warrant** my attention,” Orson **scoffed**.

“Bullies who taunt my friends deserve to be expelled,” **retorted** Isabelle Ingenuous, the free spirit whom even Dean Dread did not **daunt**.

Then, in art and in music, Ms. Amicable Artist and Mr. Melodious Music joined their classes to present a **mutual** art/music project—**nurturing** and releasing butterflies.

“We have ordered your kits, and you will raise Painted Lady butterflies,” said Ms. Amicable Artist. “Painted Lady butterflies are probably the most **widespread** butterfly **species** and are found

all over the world,” she said. “They particularly like living in mountains and flowery meadows, and they love the following flowers: aster, cosmos, thistle, and buttonbush. After we release the butterflies on Earth Day, art students will paint an appropriate **habitat** with their butterfly in it,” she lectured, “and music students will compose a short tune.

“Each student will raise his or her own butterfly from a caterpillar (which is the **larvae**) to the **chrysalis** (in which the caterpillar **metamorphosis** will occur) and, finally, into a Painted Lady butterfly,” Mr. Melodious Music concluded.

“This will be **stupendous**,” Felicia Fey informed her pals. Then, in her **exhilaration**, she accidentally waved her hands the wrong way, enacting a spell, and a white maggot **oozed** out of Sam’s left ear.

“EEWW, that’s gross, Felicia,” **shrilled** Isabelle and Pauline in unison.

Sam Sagacious and the other boys collected the disgusting maggot Felicia’s spell had produced and admired its properties. They plotted to leave it on some unsuspecting teacher’s desk. Which teacher deserved their “present”? They couldn’t **concur**.

“It came out of my ear, so I get to decide,” insisted an **adamant** Sam.

The three girls almost **retched** in disgust, but they quickly turned their thoughts to butterflies. “Oh, you guys, I can’t wait until the caterpillars arrive,” said Isabelle, her face **animated** by the thought of raising a butterfly.

Then, on a day that had been particularly **problematical**, the group arrived in art and music and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Boy, Pauline, this has been a **horrendous** day,” said Isabelle Ingenuous.

Pauline Puerile just nodded in agreement as she didn’t trust herself not to cry.

“Yeah, Orson Odious forgot his truce, and he insulted Sam about his **spectacles**,” groaned Jesse Jocose. “We must make up a limerick about him, William,” he grinned **puckishly**.

A nasty young **stripling** from Toast           (North Carolina)  
Was meaner and crueller than most.  
His **barbs** were so cruel  
That we hated school  
Where he made his nastiest boasts.

Ms. Grammar Grouch and Mr. Math Martinet, who were passing by the group just as Jesse Jocose recited his **doggerel**, stopped dead in their tracks, one foot raised as if to take another step.



Their eyelids fluttered wildly. Their lips clamped shut but their tongues still **protruded** like pink taffy. Wisps of smoke curled from their ears as they stood there, unmoving. There they froze, **manifesting** their bizarre behavior for fewer than three seconds. It wasn't a pretty sight; they looked like ugly, stone **gargoyles!**

"Stranger and stranger," murmured Sam as he made a note in his **omnipresent** notebook.

During the peculiar **interlude**, William gently dared to touch Mr. Math Martinet on the tip of his large, Pinocchio-like **proboscis**. The **latter** did not even notice. William Waggish quickly withdrew before both teachers resumed walking as if nothing **untoward** had occurred.

As William and Jesse continued to **regale** the rest with their account of their horrendous day, the crew saw a big box being delivered to the art room!

"Caterpillars!" **bellowed** Felicia Fey in her loudest voice.

"Future butterflies!" **articulated** Isabelle Ingenuous with **awe** in her tone. As usual, she wore a plastic **replica** of one in her auburn **tresses**, and it bobbed as she spoke.

The rest of the day passed, and the group remained **oblivious** to Orson's verbal **barbs** and **jabs**, the teachers' love affair with homework, and the usual battle to walk in the crowded halls with the bigger students.

Finally, it was time for art and music! Ms. Amicable Artist and Mr. Melodious Music stood in the front of the art room as their students **crammed** themselves into a room made for many fewer bodies. A **massive**, opened box sat on the front table.

"These are the caterpillars," said Ms. Amicable Artist in a quiet voice. "The caterpillar-to-butterfly life cycle is **approximately** twenty-one days, so three weeks from now, on Earth Day, we will release butterflies." She added, "First, you will choose a partner."

Murmurs erupted from the students as they searched for partners. "Silence, students, you may choose partners after you receive all the instructions," Ms. Amicable Artist gently **reproached** the kids. "Next, each pair of you will receive one of these cups," she continued as Mr. Melodious Music held up several small, covered cups in his hand.

Mr. Melodious Music continued Ms. Amicable Artist's **discourse**. "Each one of these," he said, indicating the covered cups, "contains four to five caterpillars. Because not all of the caterpillars will live, each pair of students will have between three to five butterflies to release. The caterpillar cup has all the food the caterpillars need to **metamorphose**. Finally, keep the lid on the cup until the caterpillars form their **chrysalises**," he warned the students. "Completing the chrysalis will take only about ten days," he concluded.

“Awesome,” **marveled** Isabelle Ingenuous who adored butterflies.

Ms. Amicable Artist resumed the lecture with a **caveat**. “Handle your cups as little and as gently as possible so that you do not disturb the caterpillars. Occasionally, you may open the lid to peer inside, but **refrain** from touching the caterpillars; it will stop them from changing.”

Even though there were sixty sixth-graders in the overcrowded room, silence **reigned**. Suddenly, one student coughed, and the **mesmerized** crowd resumed its usual **clamor**.

“I can’t wait three weeks!” **puled** Pauline Puerile in a **petulant** tone.

A boy named Quincy **Querulous** echoed Pauline’s whine. “Why can’t we speed up the things?” he asked **peevisly**.

“Nature takes her own time,” **mollified** Sam Sagacious.

Nature did take its own time. In three weeks, each pair of students opened a box, revealing several **chrysalises** on the sides and little green balls on the bottom.

“EWWWW! What are those little green balls?” asked Pauline Puerile who was totally grossed out.

“They are caterpillar poop, you dummy,” piped up Quincy **Querulous** who actually had done his homework. (He liked to insult his **peers** almost as much as Orson Odious but wasn’t as **adept** at it.)

After the teachers sent Quincy Querulous out of the room for his **insensitive** remark, the rest of the class **warily** removed the small pieces of paper to which the chrysalis had **adhered**. They then taped them to the inside wall of one of the butterfly **abodes** that the art class had constructed. They also placed twigs inside the abodes. Pauline Puerile, of course, dropped a chrysalis and cried with **consternation**.

In science, Orson Odious, who took P.E. instead of art or music, yanked the plastic butterfly from Isabelle’s hair, put it in his **unruly**, uncombed mop, flapped his arms, and pretended to fly around the room like a butterfly to make fun of the students who were excited about the project. In reality, the **obnoxious** pest was jealous.

In art, each student drew a picture of his or her chrysalis, and in music, they played a **pastoral** piece with a **lilting** melody that gave the airy feeling of a butterfly in flight. Even Olivia Otiose practiced her part **assiduously** and played it beautifully. Everyone was anxious for the final metamorphosis to happen.

A little more than a week later, William Waggish arrived in art. To his amazement, he spied lovely Painted Lady butterflies in the butterfly **abode**. They clung to the side. Their wings looked as if they had been painted with black, brown, and orange paint with spots of

**Read-aloud  
passage**

white, red, and blue thrown in. They were lovely! They perched on the twigs and pumped their **frangible** wings to unfurl them.

**Read-aloud  
passage**

“Oh, look, guys,” William Waggish gleefully **whooped** to his classmates, “the butterflies are emerging!”

As the class supplied the newly formed insects with food (sugar water), they impatiently waited for Earth Day which was two days **hence**, at the end of April.

Finally Earth Day arrived. The entire sixth-grade class, Orson Odious included, gathered around the butterfly houses that were on tables in the middle of the P.E. field. The weather was **balmy**, and there was a slight breeze. Orson Odious pushed and pinched his way to the front of the crowd, and Ms. Amicable Artist, who did not feel amicable towards **aggressive** bullies, **banished** him farther back because Dean Dread was there.

Ms. Amicable Artist then asked Isabelle and William to come forward. Pauline whined in disappointment, and Felicia Fey danced in a circle of **vicarious** joy for her friends. Two brown moths flew out of Ms. Grammar Grouch’s hair.

Mr. Melodious Music called upon Sam Sagacious and, much to her surprise, a **flabbergasted** Olivia Otiose. “You, Sam, are a talented and **diligent** student,” he said.

Orson Odious made **noxious** faces from the last row of students.

You, Olivia Otiose, have improved so much, that I **deem** that you, too, deserve this honor,” Mr. Melodious Music stated as he beckoned with his finger for the two students to come up close to the butterfly **abodes**.

Then, at a nod from the two teachers, Isabelle, William, Sam, and Olivia **simultaneously** lifted the lid to a butterfly abode. As the crowd gasped, “Ahhh,” in **unison**, a fluttering cloud of brown, black, and orange **hues** rose from the boxes and **dispersed** in **diverse** directions.

Orson Odious tried to catch one to crush it; thankfully, he failed. As the cloud of butterflies rose into the air and **dispersed** with the breeze, the sixth-graders craned their necks to watch their departure. This had been a truly **prodigious** experience for the **majority** of the sixth-graders. Even Orson Odious was impressed although he did not admit it.

The last six weeks of school sped by with **alacrity**. The band concert went well, and although she earned her usual “Ds” and “Fs” in the majority of her classes, Olivia Otiose and her clarinet wowed the audience. Sam Sagacious aced all the exams with ease, and Isabelle Ingenious earned all “As” and “Bs” except for a “C” in math,

**Read-aloud  
passage**

the **bane** of her existence (besides Orson Odious). Her drawing of her butterfly astounded all at the **annual** art show. William Waggish and his new friend, Jesse Jocose, continued to compose **outlandish** limericks. Felicia Fey only let fly a few **inappropriate** spells that had minor, **insignificant** results, usually involving Ms. Grammar Grouch. Pauline Puerile still cried when frustrated, but even she **ameliorated** her grades. Thus, their sixth-grade year drew to a close.

One gorgeous morning at the end of May, the sextet **strolled** to school. They were unusually early. (Olivia Otiose, who had spent the night at Isabelle's house, actually was on time!) They reached the parking lot at the school just as the custodian, Mr. **Adept** Fixit, got out of his blue pick-up truck. Mr. Adept Fixit waved at the group of friends, grabbed a strange-looking tool from his truck, and **scurried** into the building. He had an **apprehensive** look on his face.

The friends watched in amazement as Mr. Adept Fixit **bustled** from room to room with only one tool. As he exited each room, the lights went on quickly, and the blinds rose. From their **vantage** point on the sidewalk, the friends could see well the outlines of their teachers in the rooms.

"Where did they come from?" **astutely** asked Sam. I see fewer than three cars in the parking lot, and the teachers aren't moving, too.

"This is a mystery to be solved next year when we are in the seventh grade," said William in a rare serious tone.

"Yes, William, I **concur**," said Sam Sagacious. "There are neither enough time nor enough clues, and I only want to think about my summer and the book The Mystery of the Terrible Teachers," he agreed.

"Yeah," said Isabelle as she nodded her head in **assent**, and her plastic butterfly bobbed **in accord**.

"I don't like this," whined Pauline.

Everyone else heaved his or her shoulders in **exasperation**. Was Pauline going to grow up, and was she ever going to stop her sniveling?

"I think I will wear all black next year in the seventh grade," announced Felicia who had not produced a single successful spell the entire sixth-grade year.

The friends, except Sam, of course, promptly forgot about their strange teachers and concentrated on the end-of-year activities and their summer plans.

On the last day of school (after all the students had left), all was silent except for muffled sounds from the art and music rooms and the "clack" of computer keys in the main office.

## Seventh-Grade Part of the Story



### Introduction

As the August morning sun chased the shadows from the roofs of houses and painted the sky gold, once again there was an **eerie** silence at Horribly Hard Middle School. In the dawning light, you could not see into the classrooms because of the light-blocking curtains at every window. No early teacher rushed out of a car in the parking lot to set up a lab or to get an early start on preparation for the first day of school. Horribly Hard Middle School was like a spooky mansion: closed, dark, and abandoned.

In contrast, across town, as the sun rose a bit higher in the sky, Marvelously Magic Magnet Middle School (known popularly as MMMMS) burst with energy and noise. Coffee perked in the teachers' lounge. Cars roared into the parking lot, parked, and spilled out teachers of different sizes, shapes, and complexions. Boxes, books, bags, and piles of "stuff" filled their arms as they walked into the school early to be ready for the first day of classes for the year. Finally, three cars drove up to the **dormant** and silent Horribly Hard Middle School—a new mauve Lexus sedan, an old blue Ford pick-up truck, and an old, battered, tan Subaru station wagon that had seen better days. A middle-aged man, Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, stepped out of the Lexus. Another middle-aged man, the custodian, Mr. **Adept** Fixit, exited the blue pick-up.

The man who exited the Lexus wore a suit and tie, and carried a battered briefcase. The owner of the Ford climbed out of his pick-up, walked to the back, and lifted a tool chest from the bed of his truck. He **sported** a denim shirt and overalls, a red handkerchief in his upper pocket, a wrench that hung out of his lower pocket, and a purposeful air.

The door of the Subaru creaked open and out fell construction paper and magazines, followed by a **harried**-looking woman. She was dressed in a long, loose pink dress with a pink flower in her thick blonde hair and a **myriad** of new paint brushes in her mouth. The two men nodded solemnly to each other and smiled at the woman as she gathered the stuff that had fallen from her car.

The men **trekked** in different directions, the suited one toward the school office and the man in overalls toward the custodian's office. The woman gathered her materials from the pavement and **ambled** slowly to a building set slightly off from the main part of the school. No other human soul could be seen in the dim light of early morning.

Slowly, one after the other, classroom lights came on in HHMS. Soon the school was **ablaze**, and all classrooms were lit, but apart from Mr. **Adept** Fixit, the custodian, rushing from room to room to open the

### Introduction

doors and turn on the lights, no sounds of people could be heard on the campus. This was the first day of school?

If you listened carefully in the main office near the door to the principal's room, you could hear the faint click of computer keys as Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, a man who was always concerned with correct procedure, checked and rechecked the procedures which would be followed that first day of school as well as the list of students who would enter the **portals** of the HHMS in about an hour. If you **strolled** over to the art room, and listened very carefully, you could hear faint singing of an old Beatles tune and the rustling of paper.

Ten minutes later another car pulled up in front of the still silent Horribly Hard Middle School. A man in a **dapper** suit who was humming a Mozart sonata **ambled** toward a nearby dark classroom. He was burdened with various-sized instrument cases. He wore his favorite purple tie that was decorated with yellow musical notes. His tie was **askew**, and his glasses perched unevenly on his nose, ruining the effect of his handsome suit.

Before the man with the instrument cases could close the trunk of his car, a final **vehicle**, an ancient white Volvo sedan, **careened** into the lot and parked next to the **decrepit** tan Subaru. A pleasingly-plump middle-aged woman with curly grey hair jumped **animatedly** out of the Volvo and dashed up to the man who hummed the Mozart sonata.

She spoke briefly to him, gesturing with both hands. The man pointed to a building, nodded **genially** in farewell (since his arms were filled), turned around, shifted his burden of instrument cases, and walked in the opposite direction from where he had pointed.

The **stout** woman returned to her car, opened the trunk, and removed an obviously heavy box that was **brimful** with books. She heaved the box for better **leverage** and trudged slowly with her heavy burden in the direction the Mozart-humming man had indicated. The staff parking lot of Horribly Hard Middle School once again fell silent. Only five cars awaited their drivers.

On another side of the school, school busses arrived, one by one. Each **disgorged** a bunch of chattering students. Other students who had walked to school **ambled** slowly onto the school grounds to join the mobs being let off by the busses. Horribly Hard Middle School came alive with voices. A new school year was about to begin.

Meanwhile, in a house not far from Horribly Hard Middle School, a group of five **diverse** seventh-graders had gathered to gossip about the upcoming first day of school.

They stood in the **foyer** of Isabelle **Ingenuous's** house, waiting for Olivia **Otiose** whose **languid** (yet delightful) nature usually made her late to everything, even the first day of seventh grade.

Isabelle **Ingenuous**, always **animated**, twirled in nervousness and an **excess** of energy. Pauline **Puerile** whined in a babyish manner about the **tardiness** of Olivia **Otiose**, about having to return to Horribly Hard Middle School for another year, and about the homework the teachers loved to pile on her.

Another girl was **garbed** all in black. Even her hair was dyed black. It was Felicia **Fey**, who acted in a bizarre manner and who was known for her spells that always went **awry**. Felicia began to mutter words of a spell to encourage her friend Olivia **Otiose** to hurry. Isabelle **Ingenuous** put her hand over Felicia's mouth to stop her from **uttering** her spell, and she warned her friend.

"You know it will backfire on you, Felicia," warned Isabelle Ingenuous. "You don't want to ruin your new black hairdo or start the seventh grade with **putrid** purple streaks in your hair as you did in the sixth grade last year, do you?"

William **Waggish** made a tasteless but funny joke about girls and their weird habits, but no one listened. They were used to his **lame** limericks, **vapid** jokes, and strange sense of humor. The last member of the troop, Sam **Sagacious**, simply stood wisely and silently, waiting for the **clamor** to die down. An **erudite** young man, Sam held a book in his hand, The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas, and he read as he waited.

Since his joke had fallen flat, and no one had laughed, William **Waggish** **regaled** his friends with a new limerick about girls who wear black. Brown-faced with expressive dark pupils, William composed mischievous poems to hide his real **aspiration**: to be as **eloquent** and **articulate** a poet as his secret hero, Langston Hughes.

There once was a strange girl from Mack                    (Colorado)  
Whose hair and clothes were all black.  
She looked like a crow,  
And she should have said "No"  
To trying a magical act.

Sam **Sagacious** put his book in his backpack and laughed. Felicia **Fey** threatened to zap William with a spell, but that didn't **deter** him. Isabelle Ingenuous smiled at William's poem and the image of Felicia as a crow, but she dared not laugh because she didn't want to **affront** her friend Felicia.

Felicia **glowered**, stuck out her tongue at William, and then muttered something rude under her breath.

“William, can’t you write anything except those **insipid** limericks?” she snapped. “How about giving us a break and trying another form of poetry for a change?”

Isabelle Ingenuous **deftly** changed the subject before an argument **ensued**. “I dread going back to Horribly Hard Middle School for another year,” she groaned. “I dislike all the teachers except Ms. **Amicable** Artist, and I don’t want to be laughed at by Orson **Odious** and his stuck-up friends,” she concluded.

“Yes, I’m with you, Isabelle,” **concurred** Sam Sagacious with **fervor**, “but we also need to curb William and his limericks. Doesn’t he know any other form of poetry? Would other types of poetry have the same effect on the teachers?” he **queried** further, always curious.

Finally Olivia **Otiose** arrived, late as usual, shrugging on her new **chartreuse** backpack as she hurried up to the door of Isabelle’s **abode**. “Hola, amigos,” she said in Spanish she had learned over the summer, “Am I late?” she queried as she approached her friends.

“Aren’t you always, Olivia?” **sniped** Felicia, who still smarted from William’s limerick about her magical **ineptitude**. “Are we ready to go face school for another year?” she finished as she waltzed out the door and onto the sidewalk.

As they slung their backpacks over their shoulders, the **intrepid** friends followed Felicia out of Isabelle’s **abode**. There was a **paucity** of talk as the group **trekked** the short walk to Horribly Hard Middle School.

At the edge of the campus, each wondered **mutely** what the new school year in the seventh grade would be like. All too soon, they had reached their school. At the school by the bus port, they were joined by another friend, Jesse **Jocose**, who rode the school bus. Each of them found his or her name on lists posted on the doors to the seventh-grade wing of the school.

“Oh, no, guys, it’s bad. It looks as if many of our sixth-grade teachers followed us to the seventh grade, too,” moaned Pauline **Puerile** in **dejection**.

“I see a lot of homework in our future, and I see William getting into trouble with his **incessant**, stupid limericks,” **predicted** Felicia Fey in an **eerie**, spooky voice.

“Hey, wait up, people,” chirped a soft, cheery tone.

“It’s Vivian **Virtuous**,” whispered Isabelle to her friends.

“I remember her from last year as she was in a few of my classes.



She always did her work, and she got straight ‘As.’ She was the one on whom Orson **Odius** picked whenever he could,” she finished.

“Remember me?” murmured the girl with a quiet voice and carefully **coiffed**, intricately braided, **ebony** hair. She clutched a huge hard-back book in her hand entitled War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy. “I was in your science class last year, and I sat in the last row as far away from Orson **Odius** and his **crony** Danny **Dapper** as I could get. They used to lie in wait for me between classes.

“Orson always whispered **malevolent** things under his breath in my direction, too,” she sighed, “and he called me a ‘suck-up.’ Unfortunately, the teacher never caught him doing it.

Danny, on the other hand, threatened and **coerced** me into doing his homework so that he could go to parties. No adult ever caught on to his **shenanigans** either.”

Vivian Virtuous joined the group of seven seventh-graders as each member searched for the correct homeroom. When everyone had found his or her **appropriate** classroom, the friends found that they had different homerooms.

When she arrived in her homeroom, Pauline Puerile whined at the unfairness of it all.

“It’s not fair,” Pauline **whimpered** to herself. “It’s just not fair. Not only do I have to go back to school, but my worst **nemesis** is in homeroom to **torment** me first thing every morning.”

Orson **Odius**, who, indeed, was in Pauline’s homeroom, grinned **maliciously** at her and **lobbed** a slimy spit wad in her direction. Pauline ducked, and she incurred the **wrath** of the homeroom teacher, Mr. Math **Martinet**.

“Stop **fidgiting**, young lady, and sit still,” he ordered Pauline in a menacing tone of voice.

Sam **Sagacious** **ambled** to his new homeroom a few doors down from Pauline’s. As he entered the room’s **portal**, he froze mid-stride.

“Oh, my,” Sam Sagacious muttered in awe as he spied a **comely** girl who sat **demurely** in the third row of desks. Sam hastily grabbed a seat in the fourth row, right behind the **pulchritudinous** girl.

The young, **comely** lady wore a tight, ribbed, aqua top that barely met the top of her equally-tight jeans. Her medium-length black hair curled gently around her ears and flipped up in the back like birds’ tail-feathers, only softer. Sam Sagacious, for once in his life, was struck “dumb.” (**pun—meaning for “dumb” = “silent, speechless”**)

Sam, by the way, knew that he had seen this **pulchritudinous** girl before among other students, but he couldn’t place her. He sat

there in the fourth row, right behind the “vision,” and breathed in the fresh, shampoo scent from her cute **ebony tresses**.

“This is a **novel** (meaning “new”) twist. She’s extremely ‘hott’ with two ‘Ts,’” Sam thought to himself as, busily writing, he copied the daily schedule.

As the day progressed, the eight friends met periodically in the hall to compare gossip and the latest news flashes.

“My friend and I think that Orson Odious is worse than ever this year,” proclaimed Isabelle and Vivian almost in **unison**.

“Danny **Dapper** is worse than ever as well. Most of the girls think he is so handsome and good, but I think he is **abhorrent** and **vindictive**,” added Isabelle with a **grimace**.

“Too right,” said William, who already had experienced a **skirmish** with his arch **nemesis**, the **obstreperous** Orson, and his pal Danny.

“They’re *both* in my homeroom,” **carped** Pauline Puerile. “It’s unfair.”

“Have you seen the new English teacher yet?” **queried** Sam. “She’s one for whom even Olivia Otiose will work! She does well.”

“She’s ‘boss,’” William concluded in the current **vernacular**.

“Oh, yeah, William, she’s ‘tubular,’” **concurred** Jesse **Jocose**, who was not to be outdone in his knowledge of **slang**.

“Yeah, she’s not like Ms. Grammar Grouch at all,” **reiterated** Felicia Fey. “She’s, like, almost human, and I think she has a touch of magic in her. She has such a way with words; she almost paints pictures with them.”

At that moment, Orson Odious passed by. “There’s the girl who can’t do anything right,” he **taunted**. “You’re weird, Felicia. Your **somber** outfit is ugly, and your hair looks like a muddy broom. You don’t have any class.”

Felicia Fey **glowered** at Orson and prepared to zap him with a spell, but her friend’s warnings stopped her before she could mouth the first word.

“Careful, Felicia,” counseled Isabelle, “your spells don’t always work the way you want. It’s too **perilous** to try one.”

Felicia held back and just stared in the direction of the rapidly retreating Orson. “You’re going to get your **comeuppance** some day,” she muttered to his back.

After that, the first few months of school passed in the usual fashion except that Sam was **enamored** of the girl in his homeroom and kept trying to get her to notice him—to no **avail**. She seemed **oblivious** of his presence and very **aloof**. Something was troubling her.

She didn't seem to be too **blithe**, and she always looked as if something was wrong.

Teachers assigned a **plethora of** homework but less than at the end of the previous year. Vivian Virtuous raised her hand no fewer than three times each period, even in science class. Orson continued to call her a “suck-up” at every opportunity. As usual, Beth **Bibliophilic** won the “Million Minutes of Reading” Contest. Orson, the **cad**, picked on her as much as he could, and he reduced her to tears on more than one but fewer than ten occasions.

Petra **Pulchritudinous**, as beautiful as ever, spent as much time as possible in the girls' bathroom. Gossip **abounded** in the halls and students' bathrooms (which still smelled **atrocious**). Orson Odious and his main **sycophant**, Danny Dapper, attempted to make everyone's life as miserable as possible; they were **incorrigible**. They made nasty comments to everyone.

The teachers, with the exception of Ms. **Amicable** Artist, Mr. **Melodious** Music, and the new, amazing English teacher, Ms. **Witty** Writing Wizard, were their usual, stern selves. They also still did their usual routine when William or Sam recited one of their **appalling** limericks: stick out their tongues, smoke slightly from their ears and noses, and flicker their eyes.

Happily for the crew of friends who were getting tired of William Waggish's **deplorable** limericks, the new English teacher, Ms. **Witty** Writing Wizard, taught them a new form of poetry—**cinquain**. William, thankfully, abandoned limericks and began to write cinquains. (**NOTE TO TEACHER: See Chapter 5 for definition of “cinquain” and how to write one.**)

William Waggish, as soon as he was comfortable with the new poetic form, **penned** several cinquains. William's first effort was about Mr. Math **Martinet**, his least favorite teacher, and he had the **audacity** to **utter** it as he entered class that same day. He titled his poem “Mindless Math.”

Math class,  
It's deadly dull.  
The old teacher **drones** on...  
Numbers, equations, formulas.  
Boring.

Out of the corner of his eye, William spied Mr. Math Martinet who was standing at the front of the classroom. As William **uttered** the last few words of the poem, Mr. Martinet's eyes fluttered fewer than eight times, his tongue protruded, and his ears **exuded** curls of smoke.

**Midterm**

“Aha,” muttered William to no one in particular, “cinquains work as well as limericks on these **bizarre** teachers.”

Sam Sagacious pursued his new interest, the girl in homeroom whose name was Alessandra **Amorous**. She was a former **sycophant** of Orson Odious. Alessandra had become **disenchanted** with the **latter** when Orson (who secretly loved Alessandra) had popped her bra in the back, right in front of everyone in the lunchroom. She hadn’t spoken to Orson since then.

Orson Odious, of course, was not pleased with this turn of events, and he went out of his way to embarrass Alessandra every chance he got. Alessandra also avoided Danny Dapper and Petra Pulchritudinous who still hung with their leader, Orson.

“Still stuck-up, aren’t you, Alessandra?” Orson said to Alessandra one day in front of Sam and at least nine other students as he passed by.

“Yes, are you **spurning** me, too?” queried Petra **spitefully**. Petra secretly missed the company of her former friend, Alessandra, when she **primped** in the girls’ bathroom between every class, but she would never let Orson, Danny, or Alessandra know.

Alessandra muttered something **uncomplimentary** in Spanish under her breath, but no one else heard the **affront**. Orson certainly wouldn’t have understood it anyway.

There, in the middle of the lunchroom, Sam wanted to punch Orson in his big, ugly **proboscis**, but he **refrained** from doing so. Alessandra **cringed**.

Sam gently put his hand on her shoulder and said, “He is a ‘bogus’ **cad**. No one listens to him. My friends and I pay him no **heed**.”

Alessandra smiled at Sam, and as he grinned back, Sam’s heart sang with hope.

Meanwhile, Orson Odious and his **sycophant**, Danny Dapper (whom the girls thought handsome despite his mean nature), had big plans for a particularly **noisome** event.

Ms. Stern Science displayed a particularly **awe-inspiring** demonstration of teacher weirdness after William recited *sotto voce* one of his new cinquains to see how it would affect the teacher. Sam concluded that cinquains had an even greater effect on the bizarre teachers than limericks. Ms. Stern Science not only had done the usual eye fluttering, smoke curling, and tongue **protrusion**, but she also had raised and lowered both arms no fewer than five times during the recitation of the poem, once with the **utterance** of each line.

This poem was entitled, “Ms. **Monotonous** Science” because Ms. Stern Science **droned** on and on about the day’s science topic

(which sounded like all the other days' topics) while covering the board with her notes. She required each student to copy the **latter laboriously** into his or her notebook.

Science,  
Dreary subject...  
**Monotonous drivel...**  
Every day the same thing from one  
Dull prof.

“Wowzer, man!” whispered Jesse to his friend Sam, who also had witnessed the effect of William’s poem on the teacher. “This ‘rocks.’ I can’t wait to **regale** the rest of our friends with this latest effect of William’s poems.”

Yes, this was another piece to add to the puzzle of the bizarre teachers. Inspired by William’s success and by Ms. Witty Writing Wizard’s **fervent** teaching, Jesse wrote a cinquain of his own. He dedicated his to his favorite teacher, Ms. **Amicable** Artist, on whom he had a small crush. He entitled his composition “Art in Pink” because Ms. **Amicable** Artist loved to wear that **hue**.

Frothy  
Teacher in pink.  
Daily we create and mold.  
She guides our hands...Creative things  
Spring forth.

When Jesse repeated his poem **audibly** in art class, within hearing of his favorite teacher, he watched her actions. Nothing happened! He said the poem again.

“That’s a nice cinquain, Jesse,” said Ms. Amicable Artist, but her eyes never fluttered; her tongue never protruded; and her ears and nose never **emitted** smoke.

“Yes, this gets weirder and weirder,” Jesse muttered.

The group **unremittingly** continued to test its teachers with the new poetry form. Everybody wrote his or her own cinquain and then tried it out. It was “sweet” to watch the **majority** of the teachers’ reactions to the poems. Ms. Amicable Artist, Mr. Melodious Music, and Ms. Witty Writing Wizard, however, still did not react in any way except to **critique** the poems. The crew was getting even more **perplexed**. The cinquain had the most **blatant** effect on Ms. Stern Science and Dean Dread. Sam **pondered** this new development in the mystery.

A few weeks later, though, there was an **odoriferous** incident that distracted the group from their experiments with the bizarre teachers. One day, as the students **milled** about in the halls between

classes, a loud “boom” erupted from the boys’ bathroom in the seventh-grade hallway. The “boom” immediately was followed by a bad, **noxious** odor that **reeked** badly of rotten eggs.

The door to the boys’ bathroom suddenly burst open, and a **plethora of noisome** grey smoke **billowed** out. Two boys emerged from the smoke, coughing, hacking, giggling, and holding their noses. Isabelle and Felicia, who were standing nearby, thought they recognized Orson and Danny as they ran out of the bathroom. Then, all **perdition** broke loose as students scattered in all directions to flee the noxious smoke and the **dearth** of fresh air.

A booming, **stentorian** voice echoed from down the hall. “Who set off a stink bomb in the boys’ bathroom?” **bellowed** a tall, black-**garbed, foreboding**-looking man. It was the feared, seemingly **ubiquitous** Dean Dread who was ever present in the halls and lunchroom. He **loomed** over and rushed among the scurrying seventh-graders as he proceeded towards the still-smoking bathroom.

Felicia, for whom spells never worked, panicked. The **putrescent stench** of the stink bomb filled her nostrils, and it gagged her. Without thinking, she muttered an **incantation** to **dispel** the smoke and odor. Of course, it backfired badly. Felicia’s fingernails turned **mauve**. The smoke changed from grey to mauve, but it still **reeked** badly of rotten eggs. Oddly enough, there were mauve streaks in the hair of the two fleeing **culprits**, Orson Odious and Danny Dapper.

William Waggish, also on the scene, muttered his newest cinquain entitled “Orson, the **Obstreperous**.”

There is  
One bad person.  
A mean boy...A troublemaker..  
He loves to torment the helpless.  
Bad kid.

Immediately, Dean Dread waved his arms up and down in **cadence** with the poem as smoke curled from his ears and nostrils. His tongue protruded from his mouth, and his eyes fluttered uncontrollably. In addition, his legs seemed to buckle completely, and he wobbled like the scarecrow from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. It was a **stellar** performance of teacher weirdness. When Dean Dread recovered from his momentary **lapse**, he took charge of the situation.

“Get the custodian, Mr. Fixit,” he bellowed to a nearby teacher.

Then as he frowned, the dean’s eyes bulged when he spied the mauve smoke that had been grey fewer than four seconds before. He also saw two **striplings** with matching mauve streaks in their hair sprint

out the door of the seventh-grade wing. He made a connection between the two in less than a second.

“You, boys, STOP!” Dean Dread roared to the **receding** backs of Orson and Danny.

All boys in the hallway stopped except the two in question who were headed for the sixth-grade wing at a **brisk pace**. This **exacerbated** the possibility of their guilt.

If they had run five steps farther, the **miscreants** might have escaped Dean Dread’s eye. Dean Dread, however, moved quickly. Quicker than the blink of an eye, he had the **malefactors** by the back of their shirts.

“You two **reprobates**, come with me to my office. We need to investigate this incident,” he said in a low, menacing tone.

Orson and Danny cringed. The crowd of seventh-graders who witnessed this clapped their hands in delight and **jubilantly jeered** at the two **scalawags**! The class tormenters finally had been **apprehended** for something. Further, they even might be **castigated** and then suspended for their **transgression**. Setting off a stink bomb, after all, was a major offense.

When the **putrescent** smoke had been cleared, everyone **congregated** around Felicia Fey.

“You did well, girlfriend,” praised Isabelle Ingenuous.

“You really nailed them, Felicia,” **extolled** Sam Sagacious.

“Astounding, Felicia,” said Vivian Virtuous **diffidently**.

“Way to go, girl,” **lauded** Jesse Jocose as he **cuffed** Felicia gently on her back.

“I take back all those poems about your magic, Felicia,” William Waggish apologized **contritely**.

“That’s all right, William,” returned Felicia **magnanimously**, for she really **loathed** William’s teasing poems. “What am I going to do with these mauve nails? They clash with my black **attire**.”

The **dénouement** of the entire stink-bomb **incident** was that Orson and Danny (over whom all the girls still drooled and for whom some still did an extra copy of their homework) were suspended for ten days. The **nefarious duo** was sentenced to cafeteria clean-up for a month after their return, too.

After that incident, Dean Dread and the rest of the teachers kept a watchful eye on the **reprehensible** pair for the remainder of the school year. Orson still gave evil looks; Danny still **preyed** on the girls; but the two ceased to be a major pain in the **posterior** of the **intrepid** friends.

Now, Felicia **abruptly** became “Miss Popular.” One of the teachers even recommended her for the special school for magically gifted kids, Marvelously Magic Magnet Middle School.

On the day she was tested for admission to that school, however, Felicia's entry spell, as usual, went **awry**. Instead of raising a pencil more than one foot but fewer than two feet off the desk as required, Felicia turned the pencil and her hair green.

"I didn't want to go there anyway," she **rationalized** later to Isabelle, her best friend, "and I didn't want to leave all of you stuck here without me. At whom would William direct his **putrid** poems?" she concluded.

Now that Orson and Danny were **relegated** to nasty stares only, new problem students **cropped up**. Carolyn **Clamorous** became even more **obstreperous** with her persistent, but pointed, questions in math. John **Jabbering** and his **incessant, inane** chatter grew to be more **audible** and more annoying. Quincy **Querulous**, who always argued with everyone, tried to pick more **quarrels**. Quincy went so far as to complain **vociferously** to Ms. Stern Science about copying the notes from the board. She punished him by requiring him to make an extra copy of the notes for someone who was absent. Even Jesse's usually **droll** jokes fell flatter than usual.

Skateboarding Steven **Slovenly** provided a welcome break in the **monotony** of school when he accidentally dropped his sagging jeans to his ankles as he jumped to touch the top of a doorway. It seemed that Dean Dread was right behind him. Steven **Slovenly** thus **inadvertently** "mooned" Dean Dread with his bright, orange and blue, striped boxer shorts. Steven maintained afterwards that the **retribution** of three days of in-school detention was worth mooning the dean. Everyone talked about the incident for weeks, and Steven became the new hero for that time.

William, Jesse, and Sam intensified their **quest** to **unravel** the mystery of the bizarre teachers and their strange behavior.

Sam, Jesse, and Olivia **Otiose** had taken music for the second year. Sam, as he had the previous year, played the oboe. Olivia, **loathe** to learn a new instrument, stuck to her clarinet, and Jesse, always the **buffoon**, played the trombone which allowed him some "tubular slides." For the most part, the trio liked the subject and the teacher, but classical music did not **pique** their interest.

Jesse, whose attitude towards classical music was less than **fervent**, directed a **pithy** *cinquain* at the music teacher, Mr. Melodious Music. Jesse entitled his **oeuvre** "Music Misery."

We play  
 Poorly, off-key.  
 Bach, Beethoven, Mozart,  
 Three ancient composers, long dead,  
 Haunt us.



In spite of the mention of his favorite composers, Mr. Melodious Music, a **devotee** of classical music, did not appreciate the **sentiment**. He sentenced Jesse to playing Bach on the trombone to **engross** the crowd at lunch for a day, but Mr. Melodious Music did not react in any other way to the poem.

“Strange,” murmured Sam.

“‘Bogus,’ you’re toast, my friend,” whispered Olivia for whom writing a poem for the fun of it would be **anomalous** even though she was good at it.

“‘Bummer, dudes,’” said Jesse Jocose to his friends as he **mulled over** the misery of having to play Bach on his trombone before his **peers**. “If only he had let me play jazz...”

In English, Ms. Witty Writing Wizard also did not react to the poems in any way except to analyze them for form. William Waggish recited **sotto voce** one of his best efforts. He had entitled it “Writing Wacko” because the new English teacher was, indeed, a little crazy. Ms. Writing Wizard required her students to sing “dead” verbs and the **subordinating conjunctions** and to chant prepositions and the coordinating conjunctions.

Writing.

Weird stuff.

Poems, essays, stories.

Singing “dead” verbs; chanting the preps.

Strange class.

“William,” **critiqued** Ms. Writing Wizard, “your last line needs work.”

In social studies, however, the new teacher, Ms. **Stringent** Social Studies, reacted in the **customary** fashion to the poems. Isabelle Ingenuous, who usually didn’t like to **mock** anyone, wrote a cinquain for her least favorite class.

History (Say it in two syllables.)

We study dates, facts,

And people who are dead...

A good class to catch a good nap.

**Dreary.**

Towards the end of the period, Isabelle recited her poem under her breath when Ms. **Stringent** Social Studies was walking the aisle to make sure no one was being **unethical** on the test.

There was an immediate and **spontaneous** reaction by Ms. Stringent Social Studies. Not only did her eyelids flutter, her

tongue protrude, and smoke curl from her ears, but her **lank** grey hair stood on end for more than two but fewer than three seconds.

“Oh, wow, that ‘rocks,’” said Jesse who witnessed the event.

“What is all this?” whined Pauline for whom anything out of the ordinary **overtaxed** her ability to cope. “I had gotten used to the smoke, the flutter, and the tongue, but hair standing on end? What’s next?” she moaned. “Sparks?”

Jesse, William, and Sam then wrote and recited a **barrage** of **egregious** cinquains. Alessandra also wrote one which she gave to Sam to **articulate**. Sam, for whom Alessandra was the **epitome** of female beauty, was thrilled right down to his toes. Of course, he tried her cinquain on every teacher with whom he came into contact. Alessandra’s cinquain was entitled “Horribly Hard Middle School ‘Bites;”” it went like this:

School “bites.”  
Teachers assign  
Piles of homework and projects.  
Bathrooms **reek**; lunchroom is noisy.  
Why us?

Ms. Witty Writing Wizard **upbraided** Sam for his use of the **pejorative** word “bites.”

“As you know, young man, your use use of the verb ‘to bite’ is improper,” she scolded. “You have to bite something; it is a transitive verb. You’re using it as an intransitive verb,” she finished with a **flourish** as she lay down the chalk.

“What is she **blathering** about?” whispered Olivia to Isabelle since Olivia rarely listened in class when a teacher spoke.

Ms. Witty Writing Wizard overheard Olivia’s question, and she **exuberantly** launched into an extensive, **extemporaneous** lesson on verbs that take an object and verbs that do not.

“Oh, brother,” murmured Olivia as she rolled her eyes upwards in **aversion**, “she is a grammar book in the **guise** of a person.”

Isabelle and Sam just grinned; Olivia Otiose was being her usual **otiose** self. She was very intelligent, but somehow **abhorred** to do anything that might make her do homework or study.

Other teachers reacted differently to Alessandra’s poem. Mr. Math Martinet, Ms. Stern Science, and Ms. **Stringent** Social Studies did the usual: fluttering eyes, smoking ears, protruding tongue.

In addition, their hair either stood on end for fewer than three seconds, or they raised their arms in the air in **cadence** with each syllable of the poem.

When Sam recited Alessandra’s poem in the vicinity



**Read-aloud  
passage**

of Dean Dread in the cafeteria, he rewarded the seventh-graders with a startling show of silver sparks that **emanated** from the tips of his fingers. The show stopped as **abruptly** as it had begun.

**Read-aloud  
passage**

“Wow, Pauline,” said Jesse Jocose in admiration, “you called it! Sparks!”

Principal **Punctilious**, who had lunchroom duty that day and who did not show any **overt** reaction to the poem, promptly used his radio and called Mr. **Adept** Fixit. The **latter** arrived in fewer than five seconds and then exited with Dean Dread following behind him. Jesse Jocose recited the poem again as the two passed by his table, but while Dean Dread reacted in the usual manner, Mr. Adept Fixit did not even **grimace**.

The art and music teachers, like the new creative writing teacher, showed no overt reaction except utter disgust at the use of the **epithet** “bites.”

One day at lunch, Sam, William, Jesse, Isabelle, Pauline, Vivian, Alessandra (who now hung around with her hero, Sam), Felicia, and Pauline analyzed the new information that they were **amassing** on their bizarre teachers.

“This is getting stranger and stranger,” said Sam. “Why did our **intractable** English teacher last year react to the poems while the creative writing teacher this year does not?”

“Hey, guys, why are they all reacting more obviously this year?” asked Vivian Virtuouus.

Jesse Jocose, who always looked for an excuse to be funny, suddenly stood up on the bench and recited a **spontaneous** cinquain in a **strident** voice.

There are  
Five things I hate  
About lunch: awful food,  
Piercing noise, hard seats, no freedom,  
Stale rolls.

When he had finished his poem, Jesse sat down on the **inflexible** seat mentioned in Jesse’s poem. Felicia (who secretly liked Jesse) **surreptitiously** threw a stale roll in Jesse’s direction. Jesse, laughing, pitched an apple core into Felicia’s lap.

William, not to be outdone and remembering that Dean Dread had left the room, flicked his tray and **launched** his uneaten, **sodden** vegetables into the air and yelled, “Food fight!”

**Read-aloud  
passage**

Immediately, the air became **rife** with flying bits of food and trash. Bits of spaghetti dangled from the ceiling fans. Greasy sauce plastered everyone's hair and smeared most **visages**. Bits of "mystery meat" lay in brown blobs on the now-filthy floor. The **cacophony** of shouting and laughing student voices drowned out Mr. Punctilious Principal who stood on stage and shrieked **futilely** into his microphone.

All at once, the doors to the cafeteria flung open. A tall, menacing figure stood there, his **visage** a picture of righteous **wrath**.

"Students, stop this immediately," he boomed over the **din**. Even without **amplification**, his **raucous** voice could be heard by all.

Amazingly, the cafeteria was suddenly silent except for the drip of the spaghetti as it fell from the fans. Students froze in place. They stood, leaned, or sat, mid-hurl, at the sound of Dean Dread's **stentorian** and **fearsome** voice, and they stared in his direction.

"I absolutely will not tolerate such **appalling** behavior," Dean Dread continued in a deadly, low tone that **boded** disaster and punishment. "Sit down, children," he ordered. "There will be **dire** consequences for this," he **intoned**.

Everyone sat, stunned into silence. Even John **Jabbering** was **mute**.

Then Quincy **Querulous**, who always had to argue with everybody, broke the silence and said, "But..."

"I said 'silence,'" repeated Dean Dread as he **bristled** like an angry warthog.

Quincy **Querulous** was **querulous**, but he was not stupid. He did not attempt to speak again. Dean Dread stalked **ominously** to the front of the cafeteria where he stood, hands on hips, and glared at the **miscreants**.

"First," he said, "classes will be **postponed**, and you will stay here until every strand of spaghetti, every drop of milk, every piece of paper, and every **gobbet** of sauce is cleaned, and this cafeteria shines. Second," he **persisted**, "all end-of-the-year field trips are cancelled for all seventh-grade students; instead, you're required to write a series of essays on how to **comport** yourselves in public. Third," he pronounced, "there will now be assigned seats in the cafeteria for the rest of the year."

After Dean Dread made this pronouncement, he crossed his arms in front of his enormous chest and just stared. The seventh-graders cleaned the cafeteria under his watchful eye, and no one opened his or her **maw**. No one, not even Orson, misbehaved in any way. Even John **Jabbering** was **mute**, and Beth Bibliophilic didn't turn pages in her book, Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott until Dean Dread stopped talking.

After they cleaned up the mess, the seventh-graders filed **mutely** out of the cafeteria. No one spoke until the cafeteria was no longer in sight.

“It’s not fair to cancel our field trips!” exclaimed William.

“Why do we have to write essays, too?” complained Olivia who hated to write.

“Why is he so mean?” whined Pauline to her friends.

“Hey, you guys,” said Isabelle who always calmed her friends when they were agitated, “we *were* guilty, you know. We *did* throw food, and, in fact, we began the food fight because we threw the first **salvo**.”

“I know,” **retorted** Sam, “but did he have to take away all our end-of-year field trips? It’s too much,” he concluded.

Orson and his **sycophant** Danny, a too handsome young man, chose that moment to pass by angrily. “Nice going, losers,” **jeered** Orson to whom everyone who was not in his crowd was a “loser.”

Danny, **aghast** at the thought of having to write a bunch of essays in front of the teachers which meant he would actually have to write them by himself, really was **livid** at the thought. He **lashed** out.

“You’re nothing but unsightly, stupid trash,” he hissed. “You’re a pimple on Dean Dread’s **posterior**, too.”

Everyone in the group of friends glared at Orson with his or her best **withering** gaze. They still **loathed** Orson and Danny because the two were so mean.

Luckily, the end of the school year quickly arrived. Despite the lack of the much-desired field trip to the amusement park and the extra essays they had to write, the school year ended on an upbeat note. Ms. Amicable Artist, Mr. Melodious Music, and Ms. Witty Writing Wizard got together and staged an afternoon in a nearby park. The HHMS Jazz Band’s members provided music, and they played well. Students made impressions of leaves and flowers onto special paper. Vivian recited some of her favorite poetry, including “I Dream a World” by Langston Hughes. All three subjects were covered so that it could be **dubbed** “educational.”

Soon the last day of school arrived. Exams had ended. The friends, except Sam Sagacious, of course, promptly forgot about their strange teachers and concentrated on their summer plans.

The girls had **diverse** ideas about how to spend their summer. Isabelle Ingenuous had imaginative projects to do. Olivia Otiose had to go to summer school for math because she had been lazy and had not done her homework; nor had she studied for tests. She hoped to spend time with her new friend, Alessandra, though, because she also thought that learning more

Spanish might be fun. Felicia Fey planned to **hone** her magical skills (but she really didn't want to leave her friends to go to the school for **magic**). Pauline Puerile didn't know what she was going to do that summer since no one yet had suggested anything that appealed to her. Alessandra Amorous and her family planned a trip to Puerto Rico to visit relatives. Vivian Virtuous had signed up for a writing course. Beth Bibliophilic would, of course, read as much as she could, but she hoped to travel with her family as well.

The boys had plans as well. William Waggish hoped to laze around in the morning, write poetry, and play sports at the local Boys Club in the afternoons. Sam Sagacious decided to go to the library daily for research but also was on a baseball team with William and Jesse. Jesse Jocose was going to summer school by choice to learn about computers. He hoped to spend his afternoons playing basketball and baseball.

It looked as if it would be a good summer for all the friends. They didn't have to deal with Orson Odious or Danny Dapper (whose parents were going to send them to their grandmothers for two months), and homework (except for Olivia Otiose) already was a **vague** memory.

On the last day of school (after all the students had left), all was silent at Horribly Hard Middle School except for muffled sounds from the art, music, and seventh-grade language arts rooms, the "clack" of computer keys in the main office, and the muttered **epithets** of Mr. Adept Fixit in the dean's office.

## Eighth-Grade Part of the Story



### Introduction

As the August morning sun chased the shadows from the roofs of houses and painted the sky gold, once again there was an **eerie** silence at Horribly Hard Middle School. In the dawning light, you could not see into the classrooms because of the light-blocking curtains at every window. No early teacher rushed out of a car in the parking lot to set up a lab or to get an early start on preparation for the first day of school. Horribly Hard Middle School was like a spooky mansion: closed, dark, and abandoned.

In contrast, across town, as the sun rose a bit higher in the sky, Marvelously Magic Magnet Middle School (popularly known as MMMMS) burst with energy and noise. Coffee perked in the teachers' lounge. Cars roared into the parking lot, parked, and spilled out teachers of different sizes, shapes, and complexions. Boxes, books, bags, and piles of "stuff" filled their arms as they walked into the school early to be ready for the first day of classes for the year.

Finally, four cars drove up to the **dormant** and silent Horribly Hard Middle School: a new mauve Lexus sedan, an old blue Ford pick-up truck, a new red Chevy sedan, and an old, battered, tan Subaru station wagon that had seen better days. A middle-aged man, Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, stepped out of the Lexus. Another middle-aged man, the custodian, Mr. **Adept** Fixit, exited the blue pick-up.

The man who exited the Lexus wore a suit and tie, and carried a battered briefcase. The owner of the Ford climbed out of his pick-up, walked to the back, and lifted a tool chest from the bed of his truck. He **sported** a denim shirt and overalls, a red handkerchief in his upper pocket, a wrench that hung out of his lower pocket, a purposeful air, and a worried look on his face.

The door of the Subaru creaked open and out fell construction paper and magazines, followed by a **harried**-looking woman. She was dressed in a long, loose purple dress with a purple flower in her thick blonde hair and a **myriad** of colored pencils in her mouth. The two men nodded solemnly to each other and smiled at the woman as she gathered the stuff that had fallen from her car.

The red Chevy parked next to the Subaru. The door swung open in **tandem** with the trunk. A man, dressed in a tri-corner hat and military uniform of 300 years ago, awkwardly stepped out of the car. He nodded to the lady in the purple dress, smiled, and walked to the open trunk. After lifting out the biggest of the boxes in the trunk and placing it on the ground, he closed the trunk, picked up the box, and headed towards the eighth-grade wing of the school.

### Introduction

The men **trekked** in different directions: the suited one toward the school office, the man in overalls toward the custodian's office, and the one with the box towards the farthest wing of the school. The woman gathered her materials from the pavement and **ambled** slowly to a building set slightly off from the main part of the school. No other human soul could be seen in the dim light of early morning.

Slowly, one after the other, classroom lights came on in HHMS. Soon the school was **ablaze**, and all classrooms were lit, but apart from Mr. **Adept** Fixit, who rushed from room to room to open doors and turn on lights, no sounds of people could be heard on the campus. This was the first day of school?

If you listened carefully in the main office near the door to the principal's room, you could hear the faint click of computer keys as Mr. **Punctilious** Principal, a man who was always concerned with correct procedure, checked and rechecked the procedures which would be followed that first day of school as well as the list of students who would enter the **portals** of the HHMS in less than an hour.

If you **strolled** over to the art room, you could hear faint singing of an old Beatles tune and the rustling of paper.

Five minutes later another car pulled up in front of the still silent Horribly Hard Middle School. A man in a **dapper** blue suit who was humming a Mozart sonata **ambled** toward a nearby dark classroom. He was burdened with various-sized instrument cases. He wore his favorite purple tie that was decorated with yellow musical notes. His tie was **askew**, and his glasses perched unevenly on his nose, ruining the effect of his handsome blue suit.

Before the man with the instrument cases could close the trunk of his car, a final **vehicle**, an ancient white Volvo sedan, **careened** into the lot and parked next to the **decrepit** tan Subaru. A pleasingly-plump middle-aged woman with curly grey hair jumped **animatedly** out of the Volvo, nodded **genially** to the man who hummed the Mozart sonata, and turned back to her car.

The **stout** woman then opened the hatch and removed an obviously heavy box that was **brimful** with books. She heaved the box for better **leverage** and trudged slowly with her heavy burden in the direction of the seventh-grade wing of the school.

The staff parking lot of Horribly Hard Middle School once again fell silent. Only six cars awaited their drivers.

On another side of the school, forty-five minutes later, a long, curved line of school busses arrived, one by one. Each **disgorged** a bunch of chattering



students, each with his or her backpack. Other students who had walked to school **ambled** slowly onto the school grounds to join the **hordes** being let off by the busses. Horribly Hard Middle School came alive with voices, and a new school year began.

A young man, whose vast, faded, too-big trousers sat **precariously** low on his hips, rode a much-decorated skateboard on one of the sidewalks. Mysteriously, a **foreboding** figure appeared. It was the **dreaded** Dean **Dread**. As usual, he was **garbed** in black. His long, narrow face showed neither humor nor compassion.

Dean **Dread** raised his **menacing** voice so that the **miscreant** could hear, and he said in a deadly tone, “Steven **Slovenly**, give me that skateboard. Skateboards are **banned** on campus. Sagging pants without belts also are not allowed. Come to my office right now to get a piece of **twine** to use as a belt for those **outsized** pants you insist on wearing. Didn’t you learn anything last year when your pants dropped to your ankles right in front of me?”

Steven Slovenly knew he was **culpable**. He hung his head, mumbled something about “forgetting,” got off his board, put it under his right arm, gripped the waistband of his trousers, and followed Dean Dread to the **latter’s** office. Every few steps, Steven hitched up his pants with his left hand. A few students pointed at Steven and **jeered**.

Steven Slovenly kept repeating, “I forgot. I forgot,” as he **trudged dejectedly** after Dean Dread.

Meanwhile on the other side of the school, seven students, who had just walked to school together, stood on a corner of the sidewalk waiting for the bus of one of their friends to arrive.

Isabelle **Ingenuous**, an **animated**, perky young lady, twirled with an excess of energy. One of Isabelle’s friends, Olivia **Otiose**, slouched next to her. Another friend, Pauline **Puerile**, whined in a babyish manner about the summer being over, but she perked up when Alessandra **Amorous**, another member of the group, diverted her attention by recounting a story of her summer in Puerto Rico with her relatives. The fourth girl in the **assemblage** was dressed and **coiffed** in an odd manner. Her long hair was light sea green. Her shorts and t-shirt also were green, but their color was more like that of a lime. This was Felicia **Fey**, who was known for casting spells that always went **awry** (except once in the seventh grade when one of her spells **nabbed** the **perpetrators** of a stink bomb in the boys’ bathroom).

Felicia began to mutter words of a spell to encourage her friend Pauline **Puerile** to cheer up. Isabelle **Ingenuous** put her hand over Felicia’s mouth to stop her from **uttering** her spell.

“You know it will backfire on you, Felicia,” cautioned Isabelle Ingenuous. “You don’t want to **obliterate** your new hairdo, do you?”

“My other magic friends and I practiced all summer,” **retorted** a slightly **indignant** Felicia. “I’m getting a little better at it. I’m doing well.”

“Hey, Felicia, how come you’re not **garbed** in black as you were all last year?” asked a boy whose **puckish** expression mirrored his **waggish** personality.

Felicia **Fey** rolled her eyes and **retorted**, “Hey, William **Waggish**, I may dress weirdly, and my spells backfire, but you write the most **egregious** poetry.”

To hide his admiration of Felicia, William Waggish made a tasteless but funny joke about girls. No one listened, and everyone turned his or her head in Alessandra’s direction to hear her story. They, too, were used to William’s **lame** poems, **vapid** jokes, and friendly **barbs**.

The last member of the troop, Sam **Sagacious**, simply stood wisely and **mutely** as he waited for the **clamor** to die down. He held a huge, heavy book (*Norton’s Anthology of Poetry*) in his hand and pretended to read it, but he really was watching Alessandra Amorous whom he liked.

Since his joke had fallen flat, and no one had laughed, William Waggish **regaled** his friends with a new limerick about girls who wear green. Brown-faced with expressive dark **pupils**, William composed mischievous poems to hide his real aspiration: to be as **eloquent** a poet as his secret hero, Langston Hughes. He entitled it “The Heroine.”

There was a young lady in green  
Whose spells often cause a big scene.  
She’s “fey” as they come  
But smarter than some,  
Like Orson who really is mean.

A faint wisp of smoke **emanated** from both ears of a teacher who was standing just barely within earshot. First, her tongue **protruded** slightly, and next, she froze in place for fewer than three seconds. This was nothing new.

Sam **Sagacious** glanced at the teacher, put his book in his backpack, and laughed. “It’s working. You haven’t lost your touch, William. Yes, you still can affect and **discombobulate** some of the teachers, and last year, in fact, you recited cinquains which had an even greater effect on the teachers than the limericks. Are you going to go back to limericks this year?”

“Nah,” said his friend William Waggish, “I still like composing limericks just to be **exasperating**, like a constant drip. I do well at annoying you all, and, besides, it’s fun.”

Six pairs of eyeballs rolled at this comment. Felicia Fey threatened to zap William, but that didn’t **deter** him. She then furrowed her brow, stuck out her tongue at him, and good-naturedly muttered something rude under her breath as the rest of the girls **tittered**.

“For the benefit of your friends, William, can’t you and your friend Jesse write anything except those **insipid** limericks and cinquains?” Felicia teased. “Hey, how about giving us a break and trying another form of poetry this year?”

Isabelle Ingenuous, of course, smiled at William’s poem and Felicia’s friendly **jibe**, but her smile immediately turned to a frown at the sight of a recognizable, hulking figure that **loped** towards them with a **malevolent** grin on its face. It was Orson **Odious** followed by his two pals, Danny **Dapper** and Petra **Pulchritudinous**.

“Well, if it isn’t the super-strange cast of ‘Weirdo, Incorporated’ and its famous witch,” **derided** Orson **Odious**, the **nemesis** of the group.

“Seen Dean Dread today, Orson?” asked Sam Sagacious, wrinkling his nose against the **reek** of stale cigarette smoke that **wafted** from Orson’s clothes and breath.

“Set off any **putrescent** stink bombs lately?” inquired William with a trace of sarcasm in his voice as he referred to the incident in the seventh grade when Orson had been caught for his **misdeed** by Dean Dread. His **culpability** was revealed when a misfired spell of Felicia’s put mauve streaks in his hair that matched the smoke.

Suddenly, Orson’s **sycophants**, Danny **Dapper** and Petra **Pulchritudinous**, came up behind him, ready to back up their friend, just as Orson spied a teacher approaching. When Orson and his **cohorts** strutted by Isabelle and friends, they muttered a few nasty, choice **epithets** and threats under their breath as they passed by.

As he raised a fisted hand into the air, Orson threatened **ominously**, “My friends and I will make ‘toast’ of you later.”

“My friends and I are trembling,” William said with false **bravado**.

Isabelle hushed him before he could **infuriate** Orson any further.

“I see that Petra **Pulchritudinous** already has changed her clothes in the girls’ bathroom,” commented Isabelle **Ingenuous**. “I know her family, and her mother never would let her wear a skirt that short to school,” she finished.

Another **putrid** yellow school bus pulled up to the curb. Jesse **Jocose** leapt off the bus with **alacrity**; he walked quickly up to his friends.

“Hey, Dudes and Lades, how’s it going? I can’t wait to **regale** you with all I learned at the ‘tubular’ computer camp I attended this **sultry, simmering** summer. Now I can really ‘hack.’ Hey, William,” he said as he thumped his buddy on the back, “got any new poems?”

Everyone else rolled his or her eyes and groaned. Another girl exited her bus and **ambled** over to the group, too. She had intricately braided **ebony** hair and a hardback book, as usual, in her hand. This one was entitled Pride and Prejudice. As she was greeted, the usually shy Vivian **Virtuous** turned to the boys with excitement.

“William, Jesse, I learned a new form of poetry in my summer writing course,” she bubbled. “You’ll love it. It’s in your **bailiwick**. Haiku!”

“At least it’s different from limericks and cinquains,” **rejoined** Isabelle who really liked William’s poems but pretended otherwise.

On that note, the nine friends gathered their stuff, walked to the double **portals** where eighth-grade homerooms were posted, checked out the lists, found their names, and then **lingered** together until the warning bell rang.

“Oh, no, guys, it looks as if some of the most **insufferable** teachers followed us to the eighth grade,” moaned Pauline Puerile in **dejection** as she frowned.

“Hey, Vivian, tell me about haiku poetry. Maybe we really can flip out the **intolerable** ones this year as we did last year, and then we can discover why they react to our poems,” said William.

“Yeah,” **reiterated** Jesse who always was ready to try any prank that would **discombobulate** their teachers. “I’ve heard of haiku; it’s ‘sweet.’ It’s only three lines, too. That’s two fewer lines than in a cinquain.”

“I made up one this summer,” said Vivian Virtuous **diffidently**.

“Let’s hear your poem,” said Isabelle Ingenuous **earnestly**.

Vivian heard her haiku. It was about her new friend, Felicia, and it was entitled “My Friend.”

My friend casts her spells  
Upon the wind, and she hopes  
That one will go right.

Isabelle pointed out, “Your spell on that **noisome** stink bomb sure worked well last year, Felicia! Maybe fewer of your spells will go wrong this year!”

“There are a few I’ve been practicing,” **alleged** Felicia hopefully.

Pauline, Olivia, and Alessandra smiled. William and Jesse, who stood among the girls, **sniggered**, but they really were impressed with Vivian’s poem. Sam, who always was observant, noticed that

two teachers standing in nearby classroom doorways twitched, **emitted** curls of smoke from their ears and noses, **garbled** almost **incoherently** some phrase over and over, and stuck out their tongues with each word like lizards. Sam couldn't **perceive** exactly what they muttered, but he was determined to find out.

Indeed, the group of friends did have some of the same teachers from previous years. Mr. Math Martinet had followed them to the eighth grade, much to Olivia's dismay. Ms. **Amicable** Artist and Mr. **Melodious** Music, however, taught eighth-graders, too. And, there was a new teacher for social studies, Mr. **Scintillating** Social Studies.

"I wonder what he's like," **pondered** Isabelle as she played with one of the **omnipresent**, plastic butterflies in her hair.

"It's probably just another horrible, **despicable**, boring **automaton**," moaned Pauline who always saw only the negative.

"Oh, no, that nice English teacher we had last year, Ms. **Witty** Writing Wizard, stayed in seventh grade," complained Olivia. "We have Ms. Grammar Grouch again, and there's Ms. Stern Science on the eighth-grade list, too," Olivia **griped** further. "It's going to be an **arduous** year."

"Well, between Ms. Grammar Grouch and Mr. Math Martinet, I see lots of homework. I also see William and Jesse getting into trouble with their **incessant**, stupid poems," **predicted** Felicia Fey in an **eerie**, spooky voice.

William and Jesse wasted no time, and after they received a few lessons from Vivian Virtuous, they **promptly** composed a **plethora** of haiku with which to **assess** their teachers' reactions. Sam kept notes on the various instructors' reactions in his **omnipresent** notebook.

One day, when one particularly **astute** poem of Jesse's made Mr. Math Martinet freeze in his tracks and raise his arms in the air for no fewer than two entire minutes (besides **manifesting** the usual ear-smoke, eye-flutter, and tongue **protrusion**), Sam knew that they were on the right track. Jesse Jocese entitled the poem "No **Mirth**." Sam Sagacious **speculated** that it was the **superlative** vocabulary that produced the added effect.

Numbers and homework  
Fill his mind that seems **devoid**  
Of **mirth** and **vision**.

Sam also noted further that Ms. Amicable Artist had no reaction except a sweet, **exasperated** smile for William's poem that was entitled "Brush Magic."

Her brush strokes paper,  
And colorful images  
Appear like magic.

“Mr. Melodious Music didn’t react to the haiku either except to comment on their content. I wonder,” **mused** Sam.

Surprisingly, the new history teacher, Mr. **Scintillating** Social Studies, didn’t react to the poems either. Usually, he simply **disregarded** them as he went on with his lesson as if no poem had been **uttered**.

“This is becoming more and more curious,” noted Sam to William.

Since the students had even more homework, eighth grade proved more **arduous** than seventh grade. Orson Odious was again up to his usual, **malicious** tricks, and this year he picked mainly on three victims: Isabelle Ingenuous, shy Beth **Bibliophilic**, and, of course, Felicia Fey who had “ratted” on him the previous year.

Once again, otiose Danny **Dapper** took advantage of his **comeliness** and preyed on super-shy girls like Beth **Bibliophilic** to do his homework for him. Petra Pulchritudinous showed **derision** toward any girl who didn’t dress as she did. To make matters worse, the **malevolent** trio was joined by a new student, Dalbert **Devious**. Dalbert, too, liked to pick on anyone whom he perceived as weaker, more **insecure**, or smaller than he.

One morning, however, just before school, Orson, Danny, and Dalbert were caught smoking behind the eighth-grade wing. This effected some **drastic** changes for the better, and it got rid of a problem. It seems that just as Orson was taking a last drag behind the eighth-grade **edifice**, Dean Dread came around the corner, and he spied the **miscreants**.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he said in his deadly, **monotone** voice.

“My friends and I didn’t do anything,” coughed Orson as he swallowed the cigarette’s smoke.

“Oh, it’s nothing, sir,” mumbled Dalbert and Danny in unison as Danny stuck his hand with the still-lit cigarette, which he held between two fingers, into his **voluminous** trousers. “Ouch!” he yelped as the lit cigarette **scorched** his leg, and he **inadvertently** revealed his guilt.

Dalbert **Devious**, living up to his sneaky personality, quickly had crushed the evidence of his guilt under his shoe, and Dean Dread saw nothing. Orson and Danny, on the other hand, could not plead innocence.

“Follow me, you **varlets**,” (commonly known Shakespearean **insult meaning a knavish person, a rascal**) snarled Dean Dread as he marched them toward his office.

“Your parents will be notified immediately, and you’re suspended for no fewer than ten days. We do not **tolerate** illegal use of substances of any kind on this campus, and you’re guilty.”

The result of this incident was that Orson, who had a long list of **egregious transgressions** in his records, was sent to the alternative school. Danny came back after ten days of suspension a **subdued** young man who no longer made fun of others. Dalbert escaped with a few days of in-school detention because there was a **lack** of evidence in his case, but he remained as **conniving** as ever.

Now the group of friends only had to contend with one tormentor and, of course, the ever-**haughty** Petra Pulchritudinous, too. William and Jesse continued to recite their haiku poems in an attempt to discover the mystery of their teachers’ reactions.

One day, Ms. Grammar Grouch, ever the **stickler** for correct punctuation and grammar, **manifested** her usual symptoms, froze for ten seconds, and **liped** over and over for more than thirty seconds but for fewer than sixty seconds the following phrase: “There are four uses of semicolons; there are four uses of semicolons.”

William had recited an **adroit**, clever poem he entitled “No Fire.”

She likes correct **prose**.  
Where’s her imagination,  
Her creative fire?

Dalbert Devious, who sat in his usual place in the back row of Ms. Grouch’s class, stopped **surreptitiously** poking Beth **Bibliophilic** (who sat in front of him) with his feet, and he stared, **dumbfounded**, at the **antics** of the teacher.

“Whoa,” he **pondered**, “this is really ‘bogus.’ Maybe these ‘weirdo nerds’ aren’t so weird after all.”

After they left the class, Dalbert asked William what he had said that had **discombobulated** their instructor and made her freeze.

“Please tell me what you did to make the teachers do all that,” he **entreated** William. “It’s too ‘sweet’ for words.”

“Words, that’s all it is. It’s just poetry,” **rejoined** William Waggish.

When William **regaled** him about the limerick’s effects on the teachers in the sixth grade, the cinquain’s effects on the teachers in the seventh grade, and the even more **apparent** effects of the haiku this year, Dalbert resolved to join whole-heartedly in the effort to unravel the mystery of HHMS’s **bizarre** teachers. He even politely **beseached** Vivian Virtuous to teach him quickly how to write a haiku poem.

“Please, Vivian, as I live and breathe, I **implore** you to teach me how to write a haiku,” pleaded Dalbert who suddenly was **affable**.

Dalbert’s first effort was not **shoddy**. Its effect on Ms. **Stern Science** was amazing. Not only did she do the usual smoking, tongue-wagging, and freezing, but she wobbled as well as if she were going to **topple** over. This pleased Dalbert to no end as he loved to be **wily**. Dalbert entitled his poetic effort “The **Automaton**.”

Science is her life.  
Facts, figures, **incessant** notes.  
She is not human.

The effect of Dalbert’s poem on Dalbert himself was to focus his **deviousness** on composing haiku instead of **cogitating** how to torment his **peers**. Writing haiku became the “in” thing among the eighth-graders that year. Even Skateboarding Steven **Slovenly** wrote on his skateboard in huge, block letters the phrase “Haiku Rules.”

The year progressed, and William, Jesse, and the other friends were joined in their efforts at haiku writing from an **unanticipated** source—Danny Dapper.

A **subdued** Danny, former **sycophant** of the **scurrilous** Orson Odious, even composed a haiku himself. “It’s easy,” he marveled. “They’re short!”

“Use **superlative** vocabulary in it so that it has an even greater effect on the teachers,” instructed Sam Sagacious.

“I will,” said Danny **fervently**.

Danny **heeded** Sam’s advice, and he asked Beth Bibliophilic (in a nice tone for a change) for some suggestions. He used the following words: “**foreboding**” and “**garbed**.” He entitled his poem “My Favorite Dean.” It was the first piece of work Danny had completed by himself all year.

A **foreboding** man  
**Garbed** in a black expression  
Looms over students.

“That’s not bad!” **marveled** William, whose dislike of Danny was **palpable**. “My friends and I are impressed with your **metaphor**, and you’re actually a good poet,” he **marveled**.

In reaction to Danny’s poetic effort, Dean Dread did the usual eye-fluttering, ear-smoking, and tongue-protruding, but he also raised his **mammoth**, trunk-like arms into the air and **wind-milled** them as if he were a plane revving up to take off. In addition, he also **lipped**



the clause, “I am the **authority**; I am the authority.” He repeated this for more than four but fewer than five seconds. Dean Dread **buckled** at the knees, too, almost falling over.

“There is something weird going on here,” said Sam. “Their reactions are becoming more and more **blatant**. I never thought I’d say this, but ‘way to go,’ Danny.”

“It was nothing,” murmured Danny as he blushed at the unaccustomed praise and **loped** off.

Alessandra Amorous, who had hung around with Danny in the sixth grade, **gawked** at Danny, her mouth **ajar** in shock at his **uncharacteristic** behavior.

“Es increíble! It’s unbelievable!” she said in Spanish and then **reiterated** in English to anyone who listened. “Danny truly wrote something himself!”

Danny may have written something on his own, but Petra **Pulchritudinous** hadn’t changed her *modus vivendi*. That same evening at the second school dance of the year, there was an **episode** with Petra Pulchritudinous that, temporarily at least, pushed thoughts of the bizarre teachers out of the friends’ minds.

The cafeteria was beautiful with **subdued** light. All the tables lined the walls with red and blue paper draped over them. Mounds of artfully arranged chips, cookies, cakes, veggies, and fruit **adorned** tablecloths in the school’s colors. A fountain of pink punch **cascaded** into a huge bowl, and **garlands** of paper flowers hung from the ceiling. A live band, The **Strident Strummers**, warmed up on a low platform. Their **strident** music boomed from large speakers, and the walls **reverberated** with the bass.

“Ah,” breathed Petra as she entered the room, glanced around, and heard the music. “My friends and I are going to have a blast tonight,” she said as she ducked into the girls’ bathroom to change to her too-short, too-tight black skirt and spaghetti-string **azure** blouse, **garments** that her mother would not let her wear because of their “**inappropriateness** for her age.”

Since Petra had plastered so much make-up on her now not-so-**comely** face, she looked as if she had been painted. Petra, who thought she looked **pulchritudinous**, exited the girls’ bathroom and found her friends. Orson no longer attended HHMS, but Dalbert Devious, dressed in an **ebony** tank top and tight, black, leather pants, found Petra without delay.

He swept Petra up in his arms to dance. As the dance moved to a slow tune, Dalbert **surreptitiously** moved his hands further down

Petra's back until they rested **perilously** close to her **posterior**. Their improper behavior and **garb** were spotted immediately.

"Stop that at once!" **shrilled** Ms. Grammar Grouch to the two students who further **compounded** their guilt by ignoring her and continuing to **gyrate** slowly to the music. "Dean Dread, you must come see this! This is your **bailiwick**. These two students must leave this dance at once; we must call their parents."

As Dean Dread approached, Petra, who already was in trouble with her mother, panicked and ran. In her haste to further the distance between herself and Dean Dread, she tripped over a tablecloth and toppled over a food-**laden** table. She fell face down **amid** the food with her painted **visage** in a chocolate cake. As Petra lay there among the cakes, fruit, and cookies, she **wailed** her distress and **wrath**.

"Why me? I'm so beautiful. My friends and I are so popular. Things like this don't happen to *me*," she **sniveled** as Dean Dread and Ms. Grammar Grouch plucked her off the cake and then walked her to the office to phone her parents.

Dean Dread firmly gripped Dalbert's arm with his other hand.

"I wish I had written a poem to use right about now," Dalbert muttered.

"You're in big trouble, young man, and you must not speak unless spoken to," said Dean Dread in an **ominous** tone.

Dalbert Devious, for once in his **wily** life, couldn't think of a way to squirm out of trouble. He didn't even think he had done anything that **egregious**.

The next week all anyone could talk about was Petra Pulchritudinous.

"It's amazing," said Vivian Virtuous, "Petra actually is wearing long pants and tops without any **décolletage**. She looks like the rest of us; she's really **comely** without all that makeup. She should have done this sooner."

"Wow, I can't believe it," said Alessandra Amorous. "Petra's mother actually came to school every morning for a week, sat in homeroom with her, and **escorted** her to first period. I bet Petra was **mortified**; I certainly would be 'mucho' humiliated."

"Maybe she'll be nice when we bump into her in the girls' **lavatory**," said Felicia **optimistically**.

"Don't get your hopes up," said Pauline Puerile. "She scoffed at my blouse today, so I think this only is going to make her more **intolerant**."

"She's not a **blithe** camper this week," added Isabelle who always looked for the best in everyone.

Soon, as it usually happens with gossip, talk about the **episode** at the dance and its aftermath died down. The new topic of conversation centered around Mr. **Scintillating** Social Studies and his “Living History Day” incident.

Mr. Scintillating Social Studies turned out to be an exciting, creative teacher, and he certainly was different from his **predecessor**, Ms. **Humdrum** History. His teaching methods were somewhat **bizarre** since he liked to spark lively discussions and to hold panels instead of **unadulterated, lackluster** study out of the text.

“He’s ‘tubular,’” murmured Jesse who always used **vernacular**.

His “Living History Days” had become legendary, even though he only held one or two every unit, or fewer than four every six weeks. On “Living History Days,” Mr. Scintillating Social Studies dressed up in a soldier’s costume from his **extensive** wardrobe. If they were studying the Revolutionary War, then he **garbed** himself in the uniform of a foot soldier one day, and then he came as a sergeant or a high-ranking officer the next day. The third day he arrived as a cavalry officer. He even brought the mess kit and an authentic (unloaded, of course) rifle from the period. The class then held lively discussions, or students **probed** the history of the **era** in an **innovative** manner.

One morning, Mr. Scintillating Social Studies stepped out of his red Chevy, **clad**, like a true soldier, in the full uniform of a sergeant in the Civil War. A duffel bag and mess kit hung from one shoulder, and an authentic rifle **dangled** from the other.

As he sauntered to the eighth-grade wing of the school, he passed by the bus port where **a plethora of** school busses were disgorging students.

“Oh, boy, it’s ‘Living History Day!’” enthused Jesse as he descended from his public **conveyance** and spied his history teacher in full soldier **regalia**. “Hi, Mr. S.”

Suddenly, a police car, sirens blaring, **careened** around the **crenshaw-shaped** driveway. Two officers got out, and they quickly surrounded Mr. Scintillating Social Studies, guns drawn.

“You’re under arrest,” one of them said in an **ominous** tone. “Firearms are not permitted on school grounds.”

“You’re violating the law,” said the other **constable**.

“But, it’s a **replica** of an antique gun,” spluttered Mr. S. “It’s only a **facsimile**, and it has no bullets.”

“Well, it looks like a rifle to my partner and me,” said one of the officers angrily.

As the two officers prepared to drag Mr. S. to their car, a **horde** of students, Jesse in front, surrounded the trio.

“You can’t arrest Mr. S, Officers; it’s ‘Living History Day!’”  
**implored** a bunch of students in **unison**. “Those are fun days, and we learn a lot!”

“No, no, you can’t **incarcerate** Mr. S.,” shouted Jesse over the **cacophony** of protesting students and police sirens. “He’s one of the few good teachers whom we have, and we learn a lot from him,” he added. “Please don’t take our teacher,” he **beseched**.

At that moment, Mr. Punctilious Principal, roused from his office by the **din**, appeared on the scene. He surveyed the situation, made a quick **assessment** of the crisis, made a decision, and then he quietly spoke to one of the police officers.

The **dénouement** of the incident was that the officers examined the gun replica carefully, handed it to the principal, saluted Mr. Scintillating Social Studies (who saluted back), and **chortled** in amusement while getting into their car. The students, however, talked about the near-arrest for days.

“This calls for a haiku, and I know just the person to help me write one,” said Jesse Jocose to himself as he **sauntered** to his homeroom, eager to **impart** the news to his friends.

It was William Waggish, though, who wrote the haiku to **commemorate** the excitement even though he only had heard about it second-hand from his friend Jesse. He entitled his poem “Mr. Punctilious Principal to the Rescue.”

A fake gun of **yore**  
**Effects** near-arrest, but lo,  
 Principal saves day.

William and Jesse stood up among all their **peers** and recited the poem in **unison** at lunch at the top of their voices. There were seven teachers in the room at the time. Four of them and Dean Dread immediately rose on their toes, emitted **ebony** smoke and silver sparks from their ears and **proboscises**, raised their arms in the air, and wind-milled them. Then, two teachers **plummeted** to their knees, and they kneeled there for fewer than thirty seconds, blinking their eyes and muttering. Each one muttered something **inaudible** under his or her breath.

The students gasped in shock as Mr. Punctilious Principal **scurried** into the cafeteria, and then he sent everyone to his or her next class.

“I’m not finished with my lunch,” **remonstrated** Isabelle Ingenuous.

“It’s not fair,” whined Pauline Puerile who had eaten only a bite of her sandwich.

“*Life* is not fair,” **reiterated** Ms. Amicable Artist who had overheard Pauline’s comment.

“What do you want to bet they call in Mr. Adept Fixit,” **conjectured** Sam Sagacious.

As the crowd hastily exited the cafeteria, they, indeed, saw Mr. Adept Fixit **scurry** into the cafeteria, toolbox in hand and a worried look on his **weathered visage**.

“This is getting more and more peculiar,” said Sam to his pals Jesse and William. “We must get to the bottom of this mystery. Some of our teachers are truly **atypical**,” he concluded.

“What middle-school teacher is a normal adult?” asked Jesse Jocose. “Who ever would want to teach a bunch of **rampant**, living hormones for a career? They’re all **eccentric**, if you ask me,” Jesse finished.

“Some of them more than others,” **persevered** Sam for whom solving this mystery was a serious **endeavor**.

As the end of the year approached, Mr. Scintillating Social Studies, Ms. Amicable Artist, Mr. Melodious Music, and Mr. Punctilious Principal (of all people) arranged a field trip to an amusement park as an end-of-the-year **diversion** for the eighth-graders. They proposed the treat as a reward for not having a single food fight the entire year and for exhibiting exemplary behavior in general after Orson had left HHMS. Danny and Dalbert had turned their **maliciousness** into trying to compose haiku with **superlative** vocabulary in order to affect their teachers.

Everyone was **elated** about the field trip. After all, all their trips had been cancelled in the seventh grade due to a **colossal** food fight started by none other than William Waggish who should have known better.

“Your field trip needs to be **correlated** to an **academic** subject,” said Ms. Grammar Grouch to the principal. “Otherwise, it is forbidden by the school board.”

“It is,” piped up Ms. Witty Writing Wizard, the seventh-grade English teacher who had overheard the conversation. “Going to an amusement park provides a **plethora of** ideas for writing. We should have taken them earlier.”

The day of the field trip dawned brightly. Five large, shiny, yellow school busses lined the side of the school. Eighth-graders **animatedly clambered** on them as they talked non-stop about the rides they planned to take. The **intrepid** friends all had signed up for the same bus. They wanted to plot and plan how to **flummox** their teachers into revealing their true nature, whatever it was. The group spent the entire ride writing and **compiling** haiku and planning to try to get, in the same area, all the teachers whom the poems affected.

“Let’s call this ‘Operation **Stealth**,’” volunteered Vivian.

“Does everyone have his or her **fabricated** excuse ready?”

“Please include me,” said a familiar voice. It was John **Jabbering**, a nice enough fellow whose problem was that he was too **loquacious**. His tall, lanky body with straw-like, limp hair was a familiar sight to the friends.

“Me, too, please,” spoke a boy who sat nearby. “You’re going to need a ‘detail man’ to coordinate your excuses, and that’s my **forte**,” insisted Mark **Meticulous**, his round glasses bobbing on his round face in **glee** at being included in the group.

The group accomplished its **objective** on the **tedious** bus ride to the amusement park. Once there, they forgot all about their **clandestine** plans as they swooped and swirled on the rides, **devoured** mounds of junk food, gossiped, laughed, and enjoyed a day of freedom with **peers**. As the allotted time at the park approached, the students, **laden** with purchases, slowly **meandered** towards the parking lot where the busses had parked.

There, in the spaces where five yellow school **conveyances** marked with their county’s name were supposed to be waiting, was nothing! Mr. Punctilious Principal, who had driven separately in his van in case a student had become ill or wasn’t **punctual** for the return trip, took out his cell phone and made a frantic call.

“They’re where?” he shouted in a **wrathful** tone with a **soupçon** (**French word used in English meaning a suspicion or hint of panic**). “Why didn’t the rest remain? I see. One hour, you say? It’s pushing their limits, you know. You’d better call Mr. Adept Fixit.” With that **baffling** remark, he hung up.

Sam Sagacious was intrigued by hearing the Principal’s end of the conversation.

“I wonder what he meant by that,” Sam said, *sotto voce* to his friends among whom he stood.

“Let’s wait and watch the teachers,” suggested Isabelle. “Hey, Alessandra, tell us another story about your “abuela” and your waggish younger “primos” in Puerto Rico. Maybe that will take our minds off of standing here **sweltering** like hairy dogs in the **sultry** sun with no breeze to **mitigate** the heat.”

“Yes, I just love hearing about Puerto Rico,” sighed Olivia whose usual **otiose**, **indolent** nature did not apply to learning Spanish.

“I might be able to help,” offered Felicia Fey.

“No, Felicia,” said the rest of the group with **alacrity**.

**Read-aloud  
passage**

Felicia didn't listen to her friends. She muttered something under her breath, waved her hands (despite the fact that Isabelle and Vivian tried to hold them down) and "poof." A small, cool breeze **wafted** by and rustled their **tresses**. A few birds flew by upside down. A white cloud turned slightly **chartreuse**.

"At least its effects weren't too **egregious**," said Vivian Virtuous, her ebony curls bobbing as she **gawked** upwards. "Birds flying upside down for a few moments never hurt anything, and no one saw the cloud but us."

"Way to go, Felicia," said Mark **Meticulous**. "The **zephyr** feels good."

"Don't encourage her, Mark," **asserted** Pauline Puerile. "She'll get into trouble when one of her spells doesn't go so well and affects a teacher."

Slightly less than an hour later, at 6 p.m., the busses pulled into the parking lot. As the students and teachers boarded them, Sam noticed that Ms. Stern Science, Mr. Math Martinet, and Ms. Grammar Grouch were moving more and more **lethargically**. Their faces were **inert** as if frozen. Unfortunately, each of the teachers boarded a different bus, so Jesse and William couldn't try a haiku on them. Ms. Grammar Grouch got on the bus with the intrepid friends, told the students in a slow, **monotone** voice to sit down, perched herself **gracelessly** in a front seat, and motioned slowly to Mr. Scintillating Social Studies (who also was on the same bus) to take over with the students. The busses took off for Horribly Hard Middle School.

Vivian Vivacious and Beth Bibliophilic took books out of their book bags that they had **secreted** under the seats and **commenced** to read. Vivian read Their Eyes Were Watching God by the **eminent** Florida author Zora Neale Hurston, and Beth read David Copperfield by the **illustrious** British author Charles Dickens. Most of the students dozed or quietly chatted.

"Let's do it," whispered Jesse Jocose to William and Sam.

"It's now or never," agreed William. "Wake up, girls. Put down those books. Get out the haiku we wrote and get ready to recite at my signal."

Ms. Grammar Grouch sat unsuspecting in her seat. Mr. Scintillating Social Studies continued to chat **affably** with a nearby student, unaware that a large group of students were about to **wreak havoc**.

"Now," said William.

At his signal, a dozen students rose to their feet and shouted the following poem at the top of their voices:

**Read-aloud  
passage**

Sparks, smoke **emanate**  
From their **orifices** as  
If they are on fire.

The bus driver ignored them.

Mr. Scintillating Social Studies commented, “**Incomparable** use of vocabulary, students,” and laughed good-naturedly.

Ms. Grammar Grouch, on the other hand, reacted violently. Smoke and sparks did, as usual, **emanate** from all her **orifices**. She twitched, fluttered her eyes three times, threw her arms in the air, and then froze, **rigid** as a marble statue, eyes open, arms raised in the air. There she sat in that position, immobile.

“She’s just having one of her spells,” **placated** Mr. Scintillating Social Studies as he yanked out his cell phone and dialed frantically.

The bus pulled over next to the principal’s van, and the two men carried the **inflexible** Ms. Grammar Grouch (whose arms still stuck straight up) from the bus to the van and laid her **transversely** across the back seat. They slammed the door shut, and Mr. Punctilious Principal **vaulted** into the driver’s seat and sped off.

“That was interesting,” said Sam Sagacious.

“That’s a gross **understatement**,” **rejoined** Isabelle Ingenuous.

“OK, guys,” said Sam. “Now we go to the next step of ‘Operation **Stealth**.’ Can everyone sneak out Thursday night? Do you have your excuses ready for maximum **credibility**? Does everyone know what **comestibles** to bring so we don’t starve or get caught carrying too much food in our lunch bags?”

“I will check everyone’s excuse and coordinate who is supposed to be staying overnight with whom, so there should be no **glitches**,” said Mark **Meticulous** with pride.

The friends spent the remainder of the long, **tedious** ride back to school **solidifying** their plans. Mark and Sam took **copious** notes.

The following Thursday afternoon when school let out, Isabelle, Felicia, Olivia, Pauline, Vivian, Alessandra, William, Jesse, Sam, Dalbert, and the newest members of the group, John **Jabbering** and Mark **Meticulous**, hid, one-by-one, in a small, stuffy, seldom-used book room in the eighth-grade wing of the school. Beth Bibliophilic, a **timorous** girl, **opted** out of the adventure. The group had decided to ask Dalbert Devious to join them because he knew how to pick

**Read-aloud  
passage**



locks. Dalbert was **ecstatic** to be included. Dalbert, being devious, had no problem giving his parents a **bogus pretext** for where he was spending the night.

**Read-aloud  
passage**

Isabelle had convinced their beloved, seventh-grade English teacher, Ms. **Witty Writing Wizard** (for whom she now worked as an aide), that she needed to get into a book room but wasn't sure which one.

"She didn't know which book room either, so she gave me her master key that opens all the doors. I went to the book room, took out a book as my excuse, and left a thin book to block the door slightly **ajar**," she told her **cohorts** in stealth, "but it proved **redundant**. When I went back to her room, Ms. Witty Writing Wizard forgot about the key, so I still have it.

"I've never done anything like this before. I know it's for a good motive, but I'm nervous," she whispered to her assembled friends with **trepidation**. "It was the scariest thing I ever did," she added with a **quiver** that made the **omnipresent** plastic butterflies in her hair nod in agreement.

The group of twelve remained silent as they listened to someone open most of the classroom doors in the hallway. They **lingered mutely** until that person's footsteps echoed down the hall, and a door closed. Soon, there were no more sounds outside the book room, and even Mr. Adept Fixit had left the school.

They **warily** exited the book room, checking to make sure the coast was clear. One by one, they checked all the classrooms in the hallway. To their **utter incredulity**, they found, in most rooms, an **immobile** teacher, standing like a statue in the middle of the room. Ms. Stern Science didn't blink an eye when they touched her or said a haiku. Mr. Math Martinet remained rigid and unresponsive to every attempt to rouse him. Ms. Grammar Grouch stood like a silent **sentinel** in the middle of her room, totally **oblivious** to the twelve students who surrounded her, recited haiku, and waved their hands in her **static visage**.

"This is really strange," said Sam Sagacious as he wrote in his notebook. I **surmise** that these teachers are not human. I think that they are robots."

"Let's check for the controls," said William.

"Where do we begin?" asked Isabelle. "I don't want to undress a teacher, even if she is a robot, to find out."

"We'll look for a panel on the upper chest first. Have you noticed that all the teachers on whom the poems worked are always dressed in high-necked blouses or shirts and ties?" pointed out Sam.

**Read-aloud  
passage**

The boys, since the chosen victim was a male teacher, loosened the teacher's **cravat** and unbuttoned his shirt halfway. Sure enough, there was a panel.

"Wow! These teachers truly are robots," **affirmed** Jesse and Alessandra in **unison**.

"Let's open the panel and see what's inside," suggested Sam.

Dalbert took out one of his **diverse**, little tools and pried open the panel on the teacher's chest. Everyone twisted his or her head to peer inside. Wires branched out from switches and vanished into the **crevices** of his body. Little green lights blinked slowly along the wires. There was no question. The teacher was a robot.

"Tubular," said Jesse. "Our teachers are robots!"

"Not all of them, I think," argued Sam. "I think some of them are human. Neither Ms. Witty Writing Wizard, nor Mr. Scintillating Social Studies, nor Ms. Amicable Artist, nor Mr. Melodious Music ever were affected by the poems."

"Oh, my gosh," **interjected** Alessandra, "they are all the creative teachers—writing, new methods of studying history, art, music."

"You're right!" agreed William.

"They probably couldn't make robots creative and **innovative**," added Vivian.

"Wait a minute. What about Principal Punctilious?" **queried** William. "He didn't react to the poems either."

"It's a certainty that he's human as well," agreed Sam. They would need a human in charge to make all the decisions and to **assess** any situation that arose, like our field trip. Mr. Adept Fixit has to be human as well."

"Yes, I've never seen him react to any of our poems," said Jesse.

"I **deduce** that it's Mr. Adept Fixit who turns the robots on and off," offered Sam.

"Well, we'll find out in the morning, won't we?" said Isabelle.

"Now, let's try to get a little sleep."

"I set the alarm clock to wake us up on time," said Mark Meticulous who was the detail guy.

Alessandra suggested, "Let's lie down on the carpet in the teachers' lounge with books for pillows and get some shut-eye. At least it's larger than that tiny book room, and the carpet, even though it is **sullied**, is better than the hard, **grubby** floor."

"Good idea, girlfriend," said Felicia Fey. "Does anyone want me to try to soften those books or clean the carpet a bit?"

“No, Felicia,” eleven voices shouted together.

The group of friends lay on the carpet, heads **bolstered** on books, and slept **fitfully** until 5 a.m. when Mark’s alarm rang with a **cacophonous** sound.

The twelve students leapt up, went to do their morning **ablutions** in the boys’ and girls’ bathrooms respectively, scattered, each **secreting** himself or herself in a different classroom, and lay in wait to see what would happen.

An hour later footsteps **resonated** down the hall. Mr. Adept Fixit entered each classroom in turn. The students observed from their hiding spots as he opened the panel(s) on each robot teacher, flipped a switch, closed the panel, and **lingered** fewer than ten seconds for the teacher to come to life.

As he or she awoke, each robot said graciously, “Thank you, Mr. Fixit. Good morning. Have a nice day,” in a **monotone** voice and proceeded to go to the blackboard to write the day’s date and lesson.

As the school became alive with a **myriad** of students, the **intrepid** twelve **mingled** with the crowd and went to their homeroom as if they, too, had just arrived at school by foot, car, or bus. Like a bunch of **conspirators** in a spy novel, they had big, **covert** plans for the upcoming eighth-grade awards ceremony.

News of the truth about the robot teachers spread like mosquitoes in **stagnant** water among the students. Not one eighth grader “ratted” the **appalling** truth of the bizarre teachers to anyone not in his or her class. For once, everyone kept a secret.

The last few weeks of school dragged by like a slow-moving train. Everyone waited anxiously for the end-of-year awards ceremony. Every few days, someone would try out a haiku on the robot teachers. Superlative vocabulary in the poems **enhanced** the effects on the robots. The eighth-graders’ **implausible, exemplary** behavior worried the principal. He knew they were up to something but had no clue what the kids were planning.

William Waggish had the honor of composing the **coup de grace**. Every eighth-grader memorized the haiku, and they were more than ready.

Finally, the evening of the awards ceremony arrived. The administration and teachers sat on the stage, and parents and students filled the cafeteria to **capacity** with the **latter** spilling out into the hallway. All the eighth-graders were poised for the signal, and even Beth Bibliophilic laid down her **tome**, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, as she watched William with **rapt** attention.

William gave a **clandestine** sign to Isabelle, Felicia, Olivia, Pauline, Vivian, Alessandra, Jesse, Sam, Dalbert, John, and Mark. Then, just as Mr. Punctilious Principal had finished his welcoming speech, the twelve stood up. This was the signal. Every eighth-grader in the room recited the following haiku entitled “*Coup de Grace*” in his or her loudest voice.

Why does the school board  
Use **egregious** robots when  
Good teachers **abound**?

The robot teachers on stage spluttered. Sparks and smoke billowed from every **orifice**. They threw their arms into the air, opened their mouths, and stared out at the audience without blinking or **uttering** a sound.

The eighth-graders, led by the intrepid twelve, quickly followed this poem by a second haiku. They entitled it “We Want Human Teachers,” and then they shouted it at the top of their voices in perfect unison.

“We **merit** real profs.  
Creativity will die  
Without humanness.”

No fewer than twelve robot teachers sparked and smoked once more, emitted a huge dying sigh, and fell flat on their faces. The cafeteria was totally silent for a moment, and then all **perdition** broke loose. Parents protested loudly and **vociferously**.

“We want those abominable fake teachers replaced with real people as soon as you can do it,” they insisted.

Students smiled and gave each other “high fives” and said, “We did it!”

As the human teachers clapped enthusiastically, too, they joined in the “high fives” with their students, and they patted each other on the back.

Ms. Amicable Artist murmured to Mr. Melodious Music, “Thank heavens, I couldn’t take much more of those unfeeling **automatons**.”

After a quick phone call, during which he was heard to say, “The jig is up,” Mr. Punctilious Principal banged the podium for the **pandemonium** and **ruckus** to die down.

Finally, as the **din** turned to silence, and all eyes glared at the principal with dislike, the truth emerged. Beth even laid down her book, Little Women, and paid attention.

“First,” he said, “I know that this is no excuse, but the human teachers and I fought the school board’s

**Final Exam**

decision to save money by replacing real teachers with robots. They used Horribly Hard Middle School as an experiment. Frankly, I am surprised that the robots lasted this long before our clever students' brains figured out the secret. I think the school board's little experiment is over. I, for one, am relieved and delighted. Thank you, students, for uncovering the truth. Students, keep ever **vigilant** because you never know what money-saving strategy they will try next."

When Mr. Punctilious Principal finished and sat down, a cheer arose from the assembled eighth-graders. The long nightmare of HHMS was over, and the mystery of the bizarre teachers was solved.

There were only two questions remaining. Why did the robot teachers react to the poems, and why did their reactions get even more intensified when the students incorporated great vocabulary in their poems?

"I've got it!" Sam exclaimed when they exited the cafeteria among the other students. "You see, the teachers who were creative and individualistic were human. They had to be. Robots cannot be programmed to be individualistic or creative. They just react to the program in them.

"Ms. Amicable Artist, who taught art; Mr. Melodious Music, who taught music; Ms. Witty Writing Wizard, who taught creative writing; and Mr. Scintillating Social Studies, who came up with all kinds of weird ways to present history, all taught creative subjects or taught in a creative manner. All the robot teachers taught us in a rote manner by using the book exactly as written, by making us copy notes, or by giving us ditto sheets. They couldn't be creative at all," Sam concluded.

"Then why did the **superlative** vocabulary enhance their reactions to the poems?" asked Isabelle.

"Well," suggested Jesse, "I think that using super vocabulary is like being creative. It takes thought."

"I think you're right," said Sam. "The robots were obviously programmed only with the basic vocabulary of middle-school students. When we added those big, juicy vocabulary words to our poems, they only confused the robots more since those words 'did not compute.'"

"I think we've solved the entire mystery," concluded William Waggish with an air of relief and excitement. "I wonder what next year in high school will be like..."