

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Mister Jones

by Jamie Forbes

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

MISTER JONES: a Maths teacher.

ZAP: a Year Ten student (as are the rest of the class). Zap is slightly off the planet.

GREG: a student. A little vague. Best friend of

BALI: a student. Dry.

CRANE: a student. Radical at times, but mostly pretty straight. May have a slight crush on

JENNY: a student. Swat. Hangs out with Crane. May have a slight crush on Mister Jones.

GROF: student. Tough. Self-styled troublemaker.

JANE: student. Grof's boyfriend and support staff/cheerleader.

BEAN: student. Part of Grof's gang.

MRS. DWIGHT: the school's assistant principal.

BEATRICE: a policewoman.

The play is set in a classroom; last period on a very hot Tuesday afternoon.

MISTER JONES

Lights up on a high school classroom. The students' desks and chairs face a blackboard, before which is the teacher's desk and chair. Beside the desk is a small metal bin. On the blackboard some kid has written the following:

ROSES ARE RED
VIOLETS ARE BLUE
SUGAR IS SWEET
AND MISTER JONES IS A DICKHEAD

MISTER JONES enters. He wears short sleeves and a tie, sensible trousers and shoes, and carries a briefcase. He stops for a moment, closes his eyes and raises his head as though in some kind of preparatory meditation. He draws in a deep breath through his nose then frowns and exhales with disgust. Something smelt bad. He moves behind the teacher's desk and places his briefcase upon it. He twiddles the dials on the briefcase until he finds the combination. He opens the briefcase and takes out some papers, note books, pens and text books, placing them on the desk just so. Next, he produces an astonishingly clean chalk duster and a brand new box of chalk. He takes a nice new stick from the box, then puts the box back into the briefcase. He closes the case, carefully jumbling up the combination. He takes the duster in one hand, picks up the bin with the other and turns to the blackboard. He hasn't seen (or doesn't yet acknowledge) what's written there. His attention is on the chalk holder running along the base of the blackboard. He shakes his head and "tsk tsks" at the chalk ends and dust he sees there. He holds the bin under one end of the chalk holder and with one deft movement of his eraser he sweeps the contents of the holder into the bin. He puts the bin down and reads what's written on the blackboard.

MISTER JONES: Hideous irritants. Doesn't even rhyme.

He carefully erases the board clean. It's not just the message he's erasing; he's getting into every corner of the board as though he were meticulously cleaning a window. Once satisfied, MISTER JONES turns back to the desk. He pulls out the chair (an adjustable office-type thing), then "tsk tsks" its condition.

MISTER JONES: Seems we're so desperate for teachers now we're not even factoring in personal hygiene as a pre-requisite for potential employment.

He takes out a handkerchief and begins judiciously scrubbing the seat of the chair. He stops after a moment and looks at his watch.

MISTER JONES: Dear Lord. T minus thirty.

He goes back to scrubbing, furiously now because he's short on time. After one last maniacal burst he steps back to examine the chair.

MISTER JONES: Best I can do without disinfectant, kerosene and a box of matches.

He looks at his watch.

MISTER JONES: Christ. T minus ten.

He drapes his hanky over the seat of the chair and begins— very tentatively—to lower himself on to it. But—just a centimetre off—he can't quite bring himself all the way down. He closes his eyes.

MISTER JONES: Remember Jones, you're a professional. Your rear end is that of an educator, no matter what unpleasant circumstance in which it may find itself.

He lets himself drop all the way into the chair...and finds that it's too low. With a sigh he gets up to adjust the height and then sits back down...he's satisfied for just a second...until the chair sinks slowly back down. He faces the ceiling with that same meditative look we saw when he first came in, then suddenly leaps up and starts smashing the chair repeatedly into the floor with astonishing ferocity.

MISTER JONES: *[in time to his smashing of the chair]*

How! Can! They! Ex! Pect! Us! To! Hire! More! God! Damn!
Teach! Ers! When! We! Can't! Even! Aff! Ord! A! Decent!
Freakin! Chair!

He stops, breathing heavily but working to calm himself. After a moment he puts the chair neatly back under the desk. He adjusts his tie, smooths his hair and then points sternly at the chair, daring it to malfunction again. He pulls the chair out and sits in it. He waits. This time it behaves. He smiles and looks at his watch.

MISTER JONES: Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Let the games commence.

Pause.

MISTER JONES: I said, let the games—

The school bell rings.

MISTER JONES: Utterly hopeless.

Enter ZAP. He shambles over to his desk, dragging his bag on the floor behind him. He doesn't look at MISTER JONES until he plonks himself behind his desk at the back of the room. ZAP screams.

MISTER JONES: Zap, I kindly request that you save your screams for when you read what I intend to write on your end of term report.

ZAP: You're not Miss Dean!

MISTER JONES: I don't care what they say about the system, every now and then it seems to work. Your gender recognition skills are coming along a treat.

ZAP: I thought this was Drama.

MISTER JONES: Give it a chance. You never know what might develop. Your brain, for example. You're a waste of space as a student. You'd make a great teacher.

ZAP: Your barbed witticisms are lost on me, Mister Jones. I feel no pain.

MISTER JONES: So I've been told. Tell me, is that a real lobotomy scar on your forehead or did you just Texta it on to get out of sport.

ZAP: Why don't you go get fu—

MISTER JONES: What did you say?
ZAP: Nothing.
MISTER JONES: Good. Because I will not have that kind of language in a room over which I have been forced to preside.
ZAP: Fine.
MISTER JONES: Fine.

Pause.

ZAP: Fuckin' hot, isn't it?
MISTER JONES: [*leaping up from his chair*] How dare –

He's interrupted by GREG and BALI entering the classroom. ZAP settles back to listen to his iPod.

GREG: I hope we're interrupting something important.
BALI: Yeah. Zap if you wanna have it out with Miss Dean just wait until I get my camcorder and then go for it till your little heart and the rest of your little bits are content.

They sit at their desks and MISTER JONES sits back down.

GREG: Miss Dean, you've had some work done.
MISTER JONES: It's Mister Jones, Greg.
BALI: That's the spirit!
GREG: Yeah, just because Mother Nature mistakenly put you in the hot bod of a nubile young Drama teacher doesn't mean you can't have yourself surgically corrected to release the hoary old Maths teacher within.
MISTER JONES: I *am* Mister Jones, you intellectual invalid.
GREG: Prove it.
MISTER JONES: Fine, how's this: if you didn't spend your lunch hour (as instructed) completing the maths assignment I expected from you this morning

after one entire month of “my-mother-ate-my-father-when-she-found-out-he-ate-the-dog-who-ate-my-homework” type excuses, I shall this very instant sally forth to poke out your left eye with the corner of a hardcover edition of Professor Stephen Hawkings’ *A Brief History Of Time* and your right eye with the same great man’s most recent work, *The Universe In A Nutshell* , thus, quite literally, blinding you with science.

BALI: [to GREG] Careful, dude. Mister Jones is famous for thinly veiled threats like that.

GREG: Right. [to MISTER JONES] Sorry, sir. I mistook you for a human.

MISTER JONES: An honest mistake.

GREG: You’ll be happy to know that I *did* finish that assignment, sir.

MISTER JONES: I’m thrilled to bits that you bothered to learn to write. It’s awfully big of you.

GREG: [*fishes his assignment from his bag and approaching MISTER JONES with it*]
Good to see this heat hasn’t stopped you from being your bitter bastard self, sir.

He hands his assignment out to MISTER JONES who recoils in horror.

MISTER JONES: What’s this???

GREG: My maths assignment.

MISTER JONES: Don’t give it to me here! This is *Drama* , for God’s sake! Where’s your sense of etiquette?

GREG: In my bag, under my sandwiches.

MISTER JONES: Take it out and leave it on my desk. I may want a word with it after school.

GREG: Er...yes, sir.

GREG *shrugs and goes back to take his seat next to BALI.* **MISTER JONES** *turns to the blackboard and writes these words:*

DRAMA
STRUCTURE
THEME
SUBTEXT

GREG: [to **BALI**] Dude, it's a *shtinka* ! What do you reckon it is now? Thirty-five?

BALI: No way, man. At least forty.

GREG: I heard if it gets over forty-five they gotta let you go home.

BALI: Well, that's a handy piece of information. It's last period, you dork!

GREG: Back off! I'm just telling you what I heard.

MISTER JONES: What you've heard is absolute pig poop, Greg. You don't get to go home until you've done the correct time.

Enter CRANE and JENNY. They move toward their desks, right at the front of the others.

MISTER JONES: And what afternoon would be complete without our resident floor lickers, Crane and Jenny. How are our little knees today?

CRANE: Sorry I'm late, sir. I was at the front office delivering my list of personal grievances against the school for today. Stubbed my toe on the school bursar. That's how she told me to remember it, anyway.

JENNY: Sorry, sir. Science. My burner would not cease to bunsen.

MISTER JONES: How reassuring it is to know that most of you will never be permitted to enter the workforce.

JENNY: Quite warm isn't it, sir?

MISTER JONES: Listen! If any one of you polyps mentions the heat again I shall feed you my desk! Now, is that clear?

Enter GROF (noisily bouncing a basketball), JANE and BEAN.

GROF: Goddamn it's hot!

The three of them make their way to their desks, behind GREG and BALI. Even when she's seated GROF continues to bounce her ball.

MISTER JONES: Grof, do not bounce that thing in here!

GROF: You don't think I don't want to? That if I could cease my constant dribbling I would? Thanks for pointing it out to the class, Mister Jones! Thanks a lot!

The class—expect for ZAP, JENNY and CRANE—snigger.

GROF: You teachers never think about how we feel.

MISTER JONES: [*aside*] Oh, go to hell.

JANE: I'm all sticky.

GROF: Oh, dear, he's had another accident. Don't worry, honey, it's all part of growing up. Someone get him a tissue.

BEAN: Hey, Mister Jones! Your fly's undone!

MISTER JONES: Right, scum! As you may have noticed, I am filling in for Miss Dean today.

BEAN: I hope you asked her nicely.

MISTER JONES: You are the stinking, fetid depth.

THE CLASS *turn to the audience in chorus.*

CLASS: [*to audience*] It was a day like any other!

MISTER JONES: [*calling off from the roll, ticking names as he goes*] Crane.

CRANE: Yo!

MISTER JONES: Bali.

BALI: Yo yo!