

## Variations On a Theme...

Scene 1: A classroom. Six students are in desks facing the Teacher's desk. Teacher bursts in through a door, stage right, smiling and rubbing her hands together with glee:

Teacher: All right, my learning lizards. Today, we're going to talk about riddles. Here's one: "The person who uses it never sees it, the person who makes it doesn't use it, the person who pays for it wishes it wasn't needed. What is it?" (pause) Can anyone answer it? Think about it while we talk.

Lisa: Seriously? Everyone knows that one.

Victor: Keep your generalizations to yourself, loser.

Lisa: Me? I'm not a loser, I know the answer. You're a loser.

Teacher: All right, all right, let's do this another way. The first person to answer the riddle I just gave can pose another to the class. Raise your hand if you think you know.

(Five of the six students raise their hands.)

Teacher (looks at Lisa, but pointedly chooses someone else): Rebecca?

Rebecca (tentatively): I think it's a coffin.

Teacher: Do you think, or do you know?

Rebecca: I know. It's a coffin.

Teacher: Correct! Think of a riddle to pose to the class, and I'll come back to you in a moment. (She waits for Rebecca's confirming nod) Many people think of riddles as jokes, but really, they're close cousins of stories. In fact, a lot of stories include riddles.

Charlie: Name one.

Teacher: Okay... MacBeth.

Charlie: MacBeth has a riddle.

Teacher: I think you'll find that Shakespeare's work is full of riddles. In MacBeth, however, the key riddle has to do with the title character's ultimate demise: In act four, scene one, the witches warn MacBeth, "Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn The power of man, for none of woman born Shall harm Macbeth."

Lisa: *That's* a riddle. How so?

Teacher: Who can answer?

Victor: It's a riddle because by that point in the play, we've learned that MacDuff wasn't born naturally, but by c-section. It's a technicality that proves the prophecy.

Teacher: Excellent. You can think of a riddle for the class as well. Rebecca, are you ready yet?

Rebecca: I am. Here's my riddle: "A man lies dead in the middle of the desert. All he has with him is an unopened package. The unopened package explains his death. What is it?"

Teacher (delighted) Oh, that's a good one. Now where were we? Oh, right, so riddles are close cousins to stories, and they're not new. In fact, the oldest recorded riddles are about four thousand years old and were written down in Cuneiform, which was the writing system of the ancient Sumerians.

Teacher (continuing): One of the oldest riddles from that time is this: "A house you enter blind but come out with sight. What kind of house is it?" I'll give you a hint. You're in such a place right now.

(Students raise their hands again)

Teacher: Yolanda?

Yolanda: Am I answering yours or 'Becca's'?

Teacher: Either one.

Yolanda: Then I'll answer hers. (She directs her next line to Rebecca) It's a parachute, right? Because the reason he's dead is that the chute didn't open.

Rebecca: Yes, that's right.

Teacher: These riddles are pretty grim. Victor, have you thought of yours yet?

Victor: Yes. "I have many feathers to help me fly. I have a body and head, but I'm not alive. It is your strength which determines how far I go. You can hold me in your hand, but I'm never thrown. What am I?"

Teacher (muttering) Grimmer and grimmer. (normal voice) Oooh, that's a tough one. Good job, Victor. Now, riddles can be used to educate – they are exercises in logic and wordplay – but they're also excellent as a method of distracting people. My kids and I have riddle challenges during dinner at least once a week, and they're a great way to survive a long road trip, as well.

(Another student raises his hand)

Teacher (addressing that student): Yes, Jared?

Jared: I know the answer to Victor's riddle, it's an arrow.

Teacher: Victor is that correct.

Victor: Yeah. Good job, Jair.

Teacher: Jared, would you like to think of a riddle?

Jared: I'll pass.

Teacher: You're just saying that because you know it's five minutes to the bell. Are you sure you don't want to try?

Jared: I'm sure.

Teacher: Riddles teach us to pay attention to our surroundings, and to listen carefully to what others say. Has anyone figured out the house riddle yet? Lisa, you knew the first one.

Lisa: It's a school. Because schools are houses of learning.

Teacher: Excellent. Care to end the class with our final riddle of the day?

Lisa: "I am greater than God, more evil than the devil, and if you eat me, you'll die. What am I?"

Teacher: (to herself) Again with the grim theme... (aloud) Ohh, good one!"

The bell rings, and all the students except Lisa rush to get out, talking over each other as they collect their books and exit. Lisa remains.

Teacher: Lisa, class is over.

Lisa: But no one answered mine. Don't you know the answer?

Teacher: Sorry, Lisa. I've got nothing.

(Lisa stares at the Teacher, who has actually just answered her riddle, despite acting as if she didn't.)

Lisa (frustrated): Ooh... you. (She runs off stage)

Blackout.

Scene 2 – Later that Day

The teachers' lounge. Teacher and Guidance Counselor are on opposite ends of a comfy sofa, each with a mug of coffee.

Guidance Counselor: So, I heard you did the riddle lesson, today. All the kids have been asking riddles all afternoon.

Teacher (laughing): I guess they got hooked on them.

Guidance Counselor: I guess so.

Teacher (sober): I'm a little concerned, though.

Guidance Counselor: Oh?

Teacher: All their riddles were variations on a single theme.

Guidance Counselor: Sex?

Teacher. "Some fear him

Some fight him

Some accept him.

Some invite him.

He can't be seen.

He can't be heard.

No matter the case

He'll have the last word."

Guidance Counselor gasps as the lights Blackout.