

8 Seconds Excerpt

By

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ACT I

A high school classroom. The walls of the classroom are not physicalized, but are rather represented by a whiteboard SR, a door frame US, long low shelves SL above which a clock is suspended, and an outlet propped up 8 inches above the ground so that it appears to be floating positioned DL and facing US. These form right angles with each other, reveal a small classroom, smaller than the stage. A grid of desks and chairs face SR. Everything is angled exactly.

Students sit at the desks. Some have notebooks out, a few have laptops. Everyone has a bag or backpack.

Image 1: *3 is listening to music with earbuds on her phone. Others may have phones out, or books. Perhaps some are doodling or surfing the web. Perhaps even someone is dozing. (If so, this person should leave when 0 does). 0 stares at the clock. They have been waiting. Finally:*

0

That is it, it has been fifteen minutes, we can go.

1

You realize that's a fallacy, no? Something students say? Something to allay the endless tick tick ticking of our regimented lives, a collective fantasy or phantasm of imminent freedom, as if the clock stopping tocking would release us from responsibility--to whom? Yes, that's it, to whom?

Beat.

0

Nah, I'm pretty sure it's in the student handbook.

Pause.

Yah, I'm leaving. Anyone joining me?

Image 2: *Several students pack their things in their own time, follow 0 out. The remainder watch until the last person has exited, then settle back in. Everyone left is female, fem, or in relationship to femininity.*

Image 3: They wait. 1 reads a thick book. 2 just sits. 3 continues to listen to her music. 4 watches 1 from a seat the desk behind her. 5 jiggles her leg and looks at the clock, the door. 6 draws in her notebook. 7 goes to the blank whiteboard, examines it.

Image 4: 3 begins to subconsciously sing out loud the music she's listening to. Everyone stares at her. She realizes, stops. They return. Time.

4

So, uh, to whom?

It takes a moment.

1

What, me?

4

Yes. To whom?

1

Oh. Uh.

The conversation has the quality of being between individuals in a public sphere; others are and aren't listening, it may or may not grow.

Well, right. It depends on your approach. Ultimately we can only be responsible for ourselves, but through individual action we create collectives--communities, societies--that are both made up of individuals entirely and also somehow transcend multitudinous individuality.

4

Because they're reciprocal.

1

Yes.

4

Because the individual forms the collective and the collective forms the individual. It's a creative process.

1

Yes.

4

So is our longing to escape the formative process of society, or to *shape* it?

Image 5: Beat. 1 looks at the clock. Looks at the door. Looks at 4. Smiles. Beat.

5

I really have to pee. I've had to pee since halfway through last class but I didn't want to be late to this class again and I don't want to leave unless the teacher comes back and sees I'm gone and thinks I left not for the bathroom, not because I had to but because I left because I didn't care and I do care. I do care.

Who is she speaking to? Silence.

4

You should probably go to the bathroom.

5

No. I won't.

Beat. Silence.

6

We'll explain. If the teacher comes. You can go.

5

Oh. Ok. Thanks.

Image 6: She stands carefully with her backpack. Looks at 6. Steps to door. Looks at 6. Looks around. Turns to leave. Realizes she has her backpack with her. Rushes back to place it at her desk. Looks at 6. Goes to door. Looks at clock. Leaves.

7 begins to write musical notation on the blackboard.

4

What are you reading?

Image 7: 1 turns to 4. Looks at the book. Looks at 4. Begins to speak, stops. Looks at the book. Extends it toward 4, who extends her hand toward to book. When both hold the book, everything freezes for 8 seconds. The action resumes and 4 draws the book back to her. She examines it. Flips to a page and starts reading. 1 watches 4. Time.

3 begins humming again. No one pays attention except for 6, who recognizes the song. She smiles to herself and mouths the words.

Image 8: 2 stands and faces the audience. The action freezes. The inhale and...2 sits and the action continues.

1
Are you going to give me my book back?

4
No.

1
Oh. Ever?

4
Quiet I'm reading.

1
I. Well. No. I'm.

4
Shh I want to concentrate. This could go any minute. Isn't it thrilling? Gotta finish the paragraph, gotta finish the page. Shh I'm racing. Shh I'm--oh! Oh! Oh, read that, oh!

4 flicks her eyes up at 1. 1 hesitates, stands and goes to read over 4's shoulder.

1
Where?

Image 9: 4 takes 1's fingers and touches them to the page. 1 reads the sentence, mouthing the words as she reads. 4 looks at 1's lips. 1 finishes the sentence. Looks at 4. They hold for a moment.

1 breaks the contact, steps back. Nods awkwardly at 4, goes back to her seat, facing forward. They are in the same positions as before their contact, but now 4 reads the back of 1's head instead of the open book.