

Heads Up, Off, Whatever: An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette

By Gregory T. Burns

NOTES

Learning interesting new trivia facts is always an adventure; however, for a group of Catholic school girls, who are encouraged to research all of their information from the Internet, it is sometimes difficult to separate the facts from fiction. *Heads Up, Off, Whatever: An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette* should be performed by a female and be entered in Humorous Interpretation. The performer must decide the age of the students, ranging from any grade in elementary school through junior high school. Also, it would be advantageous to play Sister Stein as a sweet, matronly stereotype; however, with so many younger female characters, it is imperative for the performer to distinguish each student both physically and vocally. The possibilities for character choices include, but are not limited to the following: The nerd; the know-it-all smarty pants; the Valley girl; the dark, brooding, Goth girl; and the nasal girl; the cheerleader; the bully; the Southern girl; the whiny girl; and the soft-spoken, shy girl. The choices for character development are endless. Please note, the *italicized* words found within the dialogue are merely suggestions to aid the performer in deciding which words to emphasize. This play is a throwback to old school forensics, with a universal message for today's youth: Just because something is printed on the Internet, doesn't make it true.

Location: A Classroom at St. Mary's Sacred Heart Lady of the Madonna and Lourdes Academy

Characters:

Tabitha, a young girl

Sister Stein, a substitute teacher

Lori, a young girl

Paula, a young girl

Bethany, a young girl

Jennifer, a young girl

Clara, a young girl

Tabitha: (*Finishing her book report*) ...And The Jonas Brothers' lives were never the same. And that's why they don't like the films, *Orca*, *Free Willy*, *Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home*, *Free Willy 3: The Rescue*, or the book, *Moby Dick*. The End.

Sister Stein: (*Applauding*) You did a wonderful job, Tabitha. Thank you for that *very* informative oral book report.

Tabitha: You're welcome, Sister Stein.

Sister Stein: I had no idea The Jonas Brothers had all *three* been swallowed by a *whale*. (*Pauses to let Tabitha's book report sink in*) Girls, I can't thank you enough for these wonderful oral book reports. (*Beat*) As your permanent substitute teacher for the rest of this semester, I'm sure all of you remember—though I frequently don't—that I've never fully recovered from my chronic case of...oh, yes, *amnesia*. (*Beat*) These oral book reports are filling my brain with all *sorts* of useful information that—after the amnesia, well—I simply *forgot*. In a way, you girls have become *my* teacher, and I must say—we've certainly heard about some interesting people today, haven't we? Lori presented an oral book report titled, Miley Cyrus: Disney Princess Gone Wild.

Lori: Oh, and I forgot to add that Miley's behavior has had a crushing effect on her dad, Billy Ray. (*Beat*) It's given him an *Achy Breaky Heart*.

Sister Stein: (*Sincerely*) And that breaks mine. (*Beat*) You girls have no idea how much your parents worry about all of you...(*Looking down at her list*) And Paula gave us a report she called, Harry Potter, the Silky Smooth Boy Who Likes to Smoke. (*Beat*) Are you sure all of your information is correct, Paula? I mean, come on. We're talking about Harry Potter here.

Paula: I'm positive, Sister Stein. The Internet said that Harry Potter was hooked on his (*Using a short 'o' on the syllable, pot*) pot-ions.

Sister Stein: Paula, do you think the article might have read *potions*?

Paula: No, Sister, the word '*pot*' was at the end of a line, and then there was a *hyphen*. Then after that, it said '*ions*' at the beginning of the next line. And I also read on the Internet that you can get *hooked* on pot. So I put the two and two together. Now, I'm sure of it. Harry Potter's name has a double meaning.

Sister Stein: Well, I can't tell you girls how blessed I am that your principal chose to hire me after Mr. Clump's sudden departure, but the school needs a handicapped teacher to make its quota—and here I am—a substitute teacher who is now part of an exemplary school like St. Mary's Sacred Heart Lady of the Madonna and Lourdes Academy, where we pride ourselves on guiding young impressionable girls—and at the same time—letting them flourish and grow with the all of the wonders of new technology. (*Checking the clock*) Oh, and our clock's not working, but I think we have time for one more presentation before lunch. Let's see. Who hasn't gone yet? (*Looking at her roll*) Bethany? Would you like to go next?

Bethany: Sure, Sister Stein, but my oral book report's a little different. Is that okay?

Sister Stein: Why certainly it's all right, but how is yours different? Didn't you pick a famous person or persons?

Bethany: Yes, Sister Stein, but everyone else picked people in the movies or on TV or on the radio. (*Pause*) I picked Marie Antoinette.

Sister Stein: My goodness, you chose Marie Antoinette? That's certainly

Heads Up, Off, Whatever: An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette

By Gregory T. Burns

an interesting choice. What made you choose her?

Bethany: Well, you know how our other teacher showed us that beheading video from the Internet—the one that happened overseas? Well, the other girls and I haven't been able to stop talking about it. (*Long pause*) About the nightmares, that is. (*Long pause*) We all *have* them now. (*Beat*) Nightly. (*Beat*) So I thought if maybe I did a *report* about Marie Antoinette...then, you know—the bad dreams would stop.

Sister Stein: Is that true—about the nightmares? (*Truly concerned*) Girls, I want you to raise your hands, if you've ever had nightmares after watching that horrible, horrible video that horrible, horrible man showed you. (*Making the sign of the cross*) You poor, poor souls... (*Looking around and counting nearly every hand, until she notices one girl whose hand is not raised*) Jennifer, why isn't your hand up along with the other girls?

Jennifer: (*Pause, smiles creepily*) I thought the video was coooool.

Sister Stein: (*Disturbed by Jennifer's response*) Ohhhh-kayyyy. Well—

Bethany: (*Interrupting*) Sister Stein, I don't want to give anything away about my book report—(*Pause*)—but I think learning about what *happened* to Marie Antoinette might make the nightmares stop for everyone. (*Smiling*) They did for me.

Sister Stein: That's very sweet of you to be so concerned about your classmates, Bethany, but before you begin—I think I need to clear up what might be an untrue rumor circulating about Mr. Clump. (*Gathering her thoughts*) And what is our rule about spreading rumors here at St. Mary's Sacred Heart Lady of the Madonna and Lourdes Academy? Anyone?

Clara: (*Raising her hand*) You can't spread a rumor about someone—unless it's true.

Sister Stein: That's right, Clara. So, girls, I think it's only right for me to tell all of you that Mr. Clump wasn't fired—or arrested—for showing all of you that inappropriate, gruesome piece of video.

Paula: (*Raising her hand and nodding her head*) Not to correct you, but I think he was, Sister Stein. My mother called the principal and everything.

Jennifer: (*Raising her hand*) My two dads called the principal, too.

Sister Stein: (*Again disturbed by Jennifer's response*) I can assure all of you. Mr. Clump was not *arrested* for that. (*Pause*) He was simply put on administrative leave barring an internal *investigation*. (*Beat*) So, now that we've cleared up that little misunderstanding, Bethany, what is the title of your oral book report?

Bethany: Heads Up, Off, Whatever: An Oral Book Report on Marie Antoinette. (*Beat*) By Bethany Larson.

Sister Stein: (*Writing on her evaluation sheet*) Excellent. That's a very clever title, and thank you for not giving anything away too soon. (*Looking up*) You may begin any time you're ready.

Bethany: (*Reading from her book report*) Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna of Habsburg-Lorraine, daughter of the Australian Empress, Maria