[BLACKGAARD'S PLACE. THE FIRST CLASS. THE SCENE BEGINS WITH
THE PERPLEXING SOUND OF THE CLASS DOING MOUTH EXERCISES:
"BRRRR"S AND "AH-AH-AH-AH" AND "HMMMM"S. IN ATTENDANCE ARE:
JACK, CONNIE, EUGENE AND CHARLES -- ALONG WITH SHANNON.
BLACKGAARD IS GOING ABOUT THIS CLASS WITH FEIGNED PLEASANTRY
THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH.]

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Very good, class. Those mouth exercises will help you to speak
clearly and project your voice. Your acting will be of no use if
your words are not as sweet whispers in the back row of the
balcony.

CHARLES:

Why will we be whispering in the back row of the balcony, Mr.
Blackgaard? Shouldn't we be on stage?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

A figure of speech, Charles. Speak so you'll be heard.

CHARLES:

(MUMBLES) Yes, sir.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

What?

CHARLES:

(LOUDER) Yes, sir.

SHANNON:

I always speak clearly, Mr. Blackgaard. Being a cheerleader
has taught me the importance of that.
R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Very good, Shannon. Now --

SHANNON:

And when I played the part of Katie Crabapple in my second grade production of --

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes, Shannon. We're all confident in your ability to talk loudly. Now, class, our next exercise will be to help you develop another important tool of acting: the act of becoming.

CONNIE:

Becoming what?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Precisely the question that must be asked. Becoming what? Your character, of course. Since this is our first class together, we shall begin with the basics. For the next few minutes, I'd like you to think of -- then become -- an inanimate object.

JACK:

A what?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Become something that doesn't move or talk -- a rock or a tree.

CHARLES:

Is that why we'll have to whisper to the back row?
R. EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

No, Charles.

EUGENE:

Pardon me, Mr. Blackgaard, but technically speaking, a tree isn't inanimate. It moves as it grows and spreads its appendages.

R. EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

I stand corrected. I want you to become things -- that's all. Things. Since you're so interested in trees, Eugene. Why don't you become one?

EUGENE:

A tree? Er, precisely what kind of tree were you thinking: deciduous, coniferous, perhaps a - - ?

R. EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Be a tree, Eugene. A tree blowing gently in the wind.

EUGENE:

Of course. But what is my motivation? Is the tree blowing gently because it is old and beaten by decades of weather or is it --

R. EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Forget the wind. You're standing perfectly still --

EUGENE:

But why would -- ?
R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

With your bark tightly covering your mouth.

EUGENE:

(THROUGH TIGHT LIPS) Yes, sir.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Now, unless there are other questions ... become something!

[THERE IS A RUSTLE AS THE CLASS TRIES TO DECIDE, THEN TAKE THEIR POSITIONS. A BRIEF NOTE OF "TIME PASSAGE" MUSIC IS HEARD, THEN:]

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(CLAPS HIS HANDS) Very good, class. I think that's all for today. Jack -- your imitation of a house with a two-car garage having a pizza delivered was most ... imaginative. Connie, I appreciated your attempt at being a broken milkshake dispenser. Charles, your large dirt clod was unforgettable. Shannon --

SHANNON:

Yes, sir?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Your appearance as a rose pedal was without compare.

SHANNON:

Thank you. You know, I played an entire rose bush in my first grade prod --

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:
Yes, thank you.

EUGENE:

(CLEARS THROAT) And what about me, sir?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Eugene. Yes. Your tree. The words escape me.

EUGENE:

Thank you.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Well, then, I suppose this is as good a time as any to announce that the ultimate goal of this class -- apart from making you better actors -- is to put together a production of some sort to be performed for the public.

[AUDIBLE AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSES FROM THE CLASS.]

CHARLES:

You mean, like, get up in front of people and perform?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Of course. A recital, if you will.

CONNIE:

What will we be performing?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

I haven't decided yet. I'll know by our next class. All right? I see by the gaggle of parents
gathering at the door that we're over our time. Dismissed!

[SHUFFLING SOUNDS, CASUAL CONVERSATION, ETC., AS THE CLASS GATHERS THEIR THINGS TO GO. THE WAITING PARENTS ENTER. CHARLES' MOTHER GO TO HIM, AS DOES SHANNON'S FATHER -- RICHARD EVERETT.]

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Charles! How as it, son?

CHARLES:

Okay, I guess. Where's Dad?

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Working late at the factory. Mr. Blackgaard?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes?

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

I'm Maureen Thompson, Charles' Mom. Thank you very much for allowing him in your class.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

It was my ... pleasure. And I have no doubt that when Charles gets up on stage, people will say to themselves ... "Now that's Charles!"

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Do you think so? Oh, isn't that exciting, Charles?

CHARLES:

I guess.

MAUREEN THOMPSON:
Well, it's nice to meet you.

RICHARD EVERETT:

(APPROACHING) Blackgaard!

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes?

RICHARD EVERETT:

Richard Everett here. Shannon's my daughter. How did my little pumpkin do?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Pumpkin? I thought she was trying to be a rose.

RICHARD EVERETT:

What?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Nothing.

RICHARD EVERETT:

Talented little gal, isn't she? She'll be a star in no time at all, I'm sure.

SHANNON:

Daddy! It'll take a little time.

RICHARD EVERETT:

Not with my baby. Tell you what, Sugarplum, you do a good job in this class -- make your ol' Dad proud -- and there might be a small present at the end of it for you.
SHANNON:
Daddy!

RICHARD EVERETT:
Perhaps that pool you wanted in the back yard?

SHANNON:
Olympic size?

RICHARD EVERETT:
Don't push it.

SHANNON:
Oh, thank you, Daddy!

[EVERETT'S PAGER GOES OFF.]

RICHARD EVERETT:
Oh, you'll have to excuse us. I'm being paged. (TO SHANNON) Come on, Shannon, I can make the call from the car. (THEY GO)

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(AS THEY GO) Tah-tah.

JACK:
Mr. Blackgaard?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:
Yes, Jack?

JACK:
I have to go deliver some pizzas, but I wanted to thank you for teaching this class.
R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

I'm sure it'll be an experience for all of us.

JACK:

I hope so! See ya later!

[CONNIE AND EUGENE APPROACH]

EUGENE:

Mr. Blackgaard, before I go I'd like to express my surprise that this class was as enjoyable as it was.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Er, thanks.

CONNIE:

Yeah -- me, too. I know when you first came to town that I said you crawled out from under a rock and should be tarred, feathered and driven from town on a rail, but I think my opinion is changing.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

So glad to hear it.

CONNIE:

See ya next time.

EUGENE:

Farewell.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(CHUCKLES PLEASANTLY) Goodbye ... goodbye ...
[HE CLOSES THE DOOR AFTER THEM]

R. EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(CHUCKLE TURNS INTO A GROWL INTO A ROAR) Shakespeare!