

TEACH BIG · A MUSICAL PLAY FOR FIFTH GRADE

Stop the Presses: The Newsroom

*A rushed story, a deadline, and how revising and editing make writing its
best*

A full length musical, about ninety minutes

For the fifth grade to perform for the whole school

Ten roles, a narrator, and a singing newsroom

Featuring songs from the Teach BIG music catalogue

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The Cast

NARRATOR, our friendly guide, who speaks to the audience.

SAM, a fifth grade reporter who thinks a first draft means the job is done.

MS. QUINN, the newspaper club advisor, warm and wise.

CHIEF, the student editor in chief, who holds the standards and the deadline.

RUBY REDMOND, the revising editor, who makes a story stronger.

EDDIE PRESS, the copy editor, who sweeps a story clean.

DEV, a fellow student reporter and Sam's good friend.

FIONA, the fact checker, who makes sure every claim can be proven.

PIXEL, the photographer, cheerful and always a little late.

MR. PARKER, who runs the print shop and will not print a messy page.

THE NEWSROOM, an ensemble of student reporters who are the singing voices of the paper.

A note on staging. The set is the school newspaper office, desks, a big wall clock, a board that reads FRONT PAGE, and a printing station to one side. Everything is real, no magic and no dreams, just a true story about a young writer and a deadline. Stage directions appear in brackets, and the whole newsroom, and the audience, are invited to sing the choruses.

Act One

Scene One • Deadline

[Lights up on a busy school newspaper office. The wall clock reads four o'clock. THE NEWSROOM hurries about with papers and cameras. MS. QUINN claps for attention. The NARRATOR steps into a spotlight.]

NARRATOR. Welcome to the newsroom of the Lincoln Elementary Ledger, the finest student newspaper in town, and tonight, the busiest. The big spring edition prints tomorrow morning. And the front page belongs to one reporter. This is Sam. Sam is fast. Sam is fearless. And Sam is about to learn that finishing a story is only half the job.

CHIEF. Listen up, team! The paper goes to print at eight tomorrow morning. Every story must be strong, and every story must be clean. No exceptions. Sam, the front page is yours. The new school garden. How is it coming?

SAM. [holding up a page proudly] Done! Finished it in twenty minutes. Boom.

DEV. Twenty minutes? Sam, the front page?

SAM. When you're good, you're good.

[MS. QUINN gathers the newsroom.]

MS. QUINN. Before anyone celebrates, let us remember what a strong story needs. Not just words on a page. A clear point, real evidence, and every piece doing its job.

SONG: EVERY GREAT ESSAY

Say it! Show it! Make it clear!

Give your reader something to hear!

Think it! Link it! Make it strong!

Every little piece belongs!

Thesis! Evidence! Explain away!

Great stories have something to say!

[THE NEWSROOM sings as they work. SAM waves the song off, sure the story is already perfect.]

Scene Two · The Page That Would Not Print

[SAM carries the story to the print station, where MR. PARKER inspects it through his glasses. He frowns, and sets it down.]

MR. PARKER. I run the presses, young reporter, and I have one rule. I do not print a page that is not ready. And this page, I am sorry to say, is not ready.

SAM. Not ready? But it's finished!

MR. PARKER. Finished and ready are two different words. Your best reason is buried at the bottom. Half your sentences say the word good. And there is a headline here with no capital letter and a missing period. Once this is printed, five hundred families read it exactly as it is. Are you sure this is your best?

SAM. [deflating] I... I thought done meant done.

CHIEF. Done is where the real work starts, Sam. Every story worth printing is revised, then edited. Lucky for you, this newsroom has the two best in the business. Ruby! Eddie!

[RUBY REDMOND and EDDIE PRESS step forward, sleeves rolled up, ready to help. The lights brighten. Act One ends.]

Act Two

Scene One · Ruby and the Art of Revising

RUBY REDMOND. Ruby Redmond, revising editor. Revising is not fixing, Sam. Fixing is for later. Revising is making your story its best. And I do it four ways. Rearrange, exchange, add, and delete. Just remember the word R E A D.

SAM. Where do I even start?

RUBY REDMOND. Rearrange. Your strongest fact, that the garden already fed thirty families, is stuck in the last line. Move it up top where readers will see it first.

SAM. [sliding a strip of paper up] Oh. That is a way better opening.

RUBY REDMOND. Exchange. You called the garden good four times. Good is a tired word. Trade it for a strong one.

SAM. The garden is... thriving. And helpful. And needed.

RUBY REDMOND. Now add a detail where the story is thin, and delete the sentence about your favorite snack, which has nothing to do with the garden. Watch it get stronger.

🎵 SONG: MAKE IT STRONGER

REARRANGE it! Move it around!

EXCHANGE it! A stronger word found!

ADD it! More detail, more proof!

DELETE it! Cut what I do not use!

Read it, revise it, make it strong!

[SAM and RUBY act out each move as THE NEWSROOM sings, sliding the lead up, swapping words, cutting a line. SAM starts to grin.]

Scene Two · Fiona Checks the Facts

[FIONA steps in with a clipboard, serious and sharp eyed.]

FIONA. Hold it. Fact checker coming through. Sam, you wrote that the garden is the biggest in the city. Can you prove it?

SAM. Well... I think it is.

FIONA. Think is not proof. A newspaper prints what it can show. What can you show?

SAM. [checking notes] I can show it is the biggest at our school. Ms. Alvarez measured it. Two hundred square feet.

FIONA. Now that is a fact we can stand behind. Strong writing tells the truth and proves it. Every claim needs evidence that connects, supports, and lets the reader infer more.

🎵 **SONG: CSI, EVIDENCE IS ON THE WAY**

Hey! Hey! Hey! Evidence is on the way!

Find the proof and make it fit,

CSI will help with it!

Connect, Support, Infer,

show your thinking loud and clear!

[FIONA and SAM check each claim against the notes as THE NEWSROOM sings, holding up the facts that connect and setting aside the ones that cannot be proven.]

DEV. [impressed] Sam, this is turning into a real front page story.

Scene Three • Eddie Sweeps It Clean

[EDDIE PRESS arrives with a small broom, brisk and precise. PIXEL rushes in late with a camera, snapping a photo of the garden for the page.]

EDDIE PRESS. Pencils down? Not yet. Eddie Press, copy editor. Ruby made your story strong. Now I make it clean. Editing is the last sweep before the story goes out to the world. Just remember E D I T.

SAM. What do I sweep for?

EDDIE PRESS. First, capital letters, standing tall at the start of every sentence and every name. Second, end marks, catching the end of it all. Third, subject and verb, do they agree? You wrote the students plants a garden. Many students, so, the students plant a garden.

SAM. [fixing each one] Capital G on Garden Club. A period at the end. Students plant. Got it.

🎵 SONG: SWEEP IT CLEAN

Sweep it, sweep it, make it clean!

Best little edit you have ever seen!

Capital letters standing tall,

end marks catching the end of it all!

E D I T, edit! You are not done till you have said it!

[THE NEWSROOM sweeps in rhythm as EDDIE and SAM fix each mark on the big front page.]

[The lights hold on SAM, who reads the page over, amazed at how far it has come. Act Two ends.]

Act Three

Scene One • Ready for the Press

[SAM carries the revised, edited, fact checked page back to MR. PARKER. The clock now reads seven in the evening. MR. PARKER reads it carefully, and a slow smile spreads across his face.]

MR. PARKER. Now this. This is ready. Strong from the first line, clean to the last mark, and every word true. This is a front page I am proud to print.

SAM. I almost sent the first draft. I really thought done meant done.

MR. PARKER. Every good writer thinks that once. The great ones learn the secret. Write it, strengthen it, sweep it clean.

[MR. PARKER runs the press. A large, crisp front page rises up for all to see. THE NEWSROOM cheers.]

Scene Two • Off the Press, and Finale

CHIEF. Hot off the press! The spring edition, and Sam's front page leads it.

MS. QUINN. Sam, what did you learn today?

SAM. That finishing a draft is just the beginning. Revising makes it strong. Editing makes it clean. And a real writer never prints their first try.

DEV. Front page material, that.

NARRATOR. And so the Lincoln Ledger went out the next morning, strong, clean, and true, and one young reporter never called a first draft finished again. Because now Sam knew the newsroom secret, the one every great writer learns. You write it, you strengthen it, and you sweep it clean.

[The whole company gathers. RUBY and EDDIE lift the front page high. The audience is invited to sing.]

🎵 **FINALE SONG: EVERY GREAT ESSAY (REPRISE)**

Say it! Show it! Make it clear!

Give your reader something to hear!

Think it! Link it! Make it strong!

Every little piece belongs!

Thesis! Evidence! Explain away!

Great stories have something to say!

[The entire cast sings. On the last line, SAM holds up the printed front page, and the lights blaze bright.]

[Everyone holds the last note. Blackout. The end.]

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Every Great Essay, Make It Stronger, Sweep It Clean