

# The Green Classroom

A short play

By

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To my wonderful Aunts

**Wilga**

**Dot**

**Mickie**

**June**

Thank you for all your wisdom, love and support

And for living such amazing lives

Your nephew

Alex

**Cast**

<b>MARIO (MICKIE)</b>	Eight years old
<b>WILGA</b>	Nine years old )
<b>DOT</b>	Seven years old ) - Her sisters
<b>JUNE</b>	Six years old )
<b>MINNIE</b>	A young aboriginal girl, eight years old
<b>W.J (JIM)</b>	Father of Mickie, June, Dot, Wilga and Jimmy
<b>LIZZIE</b>	Minnie's mother, employed as a "Washer Woman" in the Broun household
<b>GRAHAM WOOD</b>	Teacher appointed by the Aboriginal Protection Board
<b>BOB RICHARDS</b>	Regional Director of the Aboriginal Protection Board
<b>JIMMY</b>	Five years old, Mickie's little brother

**Scene**

Various locations around Bassendean, a sheep and cattle property in the New England region of New South Wales

**Time**

Summer, 1928

**Notes on Casting**

**The Green Classroom** is designed to be performed by a cast of five women with a mix of indigenous and non-indigenous actors. The following distribution of roles is suggested:

<b>Actor 1</b>	MICKIE
<b>Actor 2</b>	W.J. and JUNE
<b>Actor 3:</b>	WILGA, WOOD and JIMMY
<b>Actor 4</b>	DOT and LIZZIE
<b>Actor 5</b>	MINNIE and BOB

**1. The Verandah of the main house. Sunset.****MICKIE and W.J.**

MICKIE: But I don't understand.

W.J.: It's very complicated.

MICKIE: But you said she could go to school.

W.J.: And she can.

MICKIE: But not with us !

W.J.: When you're older you'll understand.

MICKIE: I'm almost twelve.

W.J.: When you're big.

MICKIE: I'm bigger than Dot and June.

W.J.: When you're as big as me.

MICKIE: Daddy, I'll never be as big t and June.

W.J.: When you're as big as me.

MICKIE: Daddy, I'll never be as big as you.

PAUSE.

W.J.: Come and sit here with me child.

MICKIE SMILES. SHE SITS NEXT TO W.J.

W.J.: Sometimes it's best for people to do things by themselves.

MICKIE: Mother says we should do everything together. That way we can look after each other.

W.J.: But sometimes people need to be kept apart. Remember when we found that lamb last week ?

MICKIE: She was all broken.

W.J.: And how did that happen ?

MICKIE: The foxes.

- W.J.: The foxes got in and hurt the lamb. And what would happen if we didn't keep the foxes and lambs apart ?
- MICKIE: They would all get hurt.
- W.J.: That's why we had to fix the fence. So we could keep the foxes and lambs from getting hurt. We have to keep them apart. It's best for both of them.
- MICKIE: So Minnie can't go to school with us or the foxes will hurt the lambs ?
- W.J.: That's not what I mean.
- MICKIE: Minnie can't go to school with us because she's a lamb ?
- W.J.: No.
- MICKIE: Because she's a fox ?
- W.J.: No child.
- MICKIE: Then who are the foxes and who are the lambs ?
- W.J.: I'm not saying anyone's foxes or lambs.
- MICKIE: Then why did you say it ?
- W.J.: What I'm saying is that you and Minnie are different. And sometimes - not all the time - but sometimes you have to do things by yourself.
- MICKIE: But she plays with us.
- W.J.: But it's better if you go to school separately. She'll still be going to school. I've written to the board to ask them to build a new school room for Minnie and the other children. And they're sending a teacher all the way from Sydney.
- MICKIE: But I want her to go to school with us.
- W.J.: Sometimes in life we can't always get what we want.
- MICKIE: Why not ?
- W.J.: Because sometimes people have to be kept apart.
- MICKIE: When times ?
- W.J.: At night. We sleep in our house and they sleep in their shacks down by the creek.

MICKIE: But Daddy they don't have a house.

W.J.: That's what they call a house child. They're comfortable.

MICKIE: You better tell Uncle Malachi about that then.

W.J.: Why ?

MICKIE: Some night's he sleeps down by the creek too.

W.J.: That's a different kind of fox among the lambs. (CHANGE) Do you remember when June got sick last year.

MICKIE: Mama had to wash her hair with that smelly soap.

W.J.: And you remember how June kept crying ?

MICKIE: She didn't stop for two days.

W.J.: Well June got sick like that because she was with the other children.

MICKIE: Did they have creatures in their hair too ?

W.J.: Yes and they went into June's hair. Do you want to get sick like June ?

MICKIE: But Minnie doesn't have creatures in her hair.

W.J.: Some of the other children do.

MICKIE: But not Minnie. So she can go to school with us.

W.J.: Child - you can't do that.

MICKIE: Why not ?

W.J.: You can't separate Minnie from the other children.

MICKIE: But you just said sometimes you have to keep people separate.

PAUSE.

W.J.: Alright Minnie can go to school with you. But only Minnie.

MICKIE: Thank you Daddy.

W.J.: But only if the new teacher agrees. The board is paying for a special schoolroom and he might want Minnie to be taught there.

MICKIE: When can I ask him?

W.J.: He's coming tomorrow. You can ask him then.

MICKIE: I will.

PAUSE.

W.J.: Mickie, you know you're daddy's only doing what's best for you ?

MICKIE: But Daddy - Minnie's not a fox.

LIGHTS CHANGE. **W.J.** EXITS.

## **2. The yard in front of the main house, the following morning.**

**MICKIE WALKS ACROSS TO JOIN DOT AND MINNIE, WHO HAVE ENTERED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAGE.**

ALL: (SINGING) Jesus loves the little children  
All the children of the world  
Red and yellow, black and white  
All are precious in his sight  
Jesus loves the little children of the world

**DOT IS WRITING A LIST. MINNIE IS HELPING HER.**

DOT: Midge, Tippo, Flossy, Streaker

MINNIE: Why do you call him Streaker ?

DOT: Because he streaks in front of the other dogs to get the Rabbits.  
Judy, Trixie, Pranks

MINNIE: Pranks ?

DOT: Because he can do tricks. Tiny, Too - that's Tiny's puppy - Togo -

**MICKIE ALSO HAS A PAD AND PENCIL.**

MICKIE: Dot Broun ! What are you doing ?

DOT: Making a list.

MINNIE: We're writing down all Dot's dogs. Then Dot's going to draw pictures of them.

MICKIE: But you can't make a list.

MINNIE: Why not ?

MICKIE: Because I want to make a list and Minnie's got to help me.

DOT: Why is your list more important than mine ?

MICKIE: Because I have to write down my horses. And everybody knows horses are more important than dogs.

DOT: Are not !

MICKIE: Are too !

MINNIE: But Mickie - we've already started.

MICKIE: How many more have you got to go ?

MINNIE: I don't know. How many dogs have you got Dot ?

DOT: About fifty.

MICKIE: Fifty ! But that will take forever. Or at least until lunchtime.

MINNIE: I'm sorry Mickie. But Dot was first.

DOT: So there.

**DOT POKES OUT HER TONGUE.**

MICKIE: But I've only got six horses.

DOT: Six ? That won't make a very good list.

MICKIE: It will if you draw nice pictures of them. You do such nice pictures Dot. Why don't we do my list first and then I'll help you and Minnie do your list ?

DOT: Why should I do that ?

MICKIE: Because you're my sister and you love me. (BEAT) And I'll give you some of my Easter eggs.

**DOT THINKS.**

DOT: Okay.

**MICKIE GOES TO SIT WITH THEM. SHE WRITES IN HER PAD.**

MICKIE: First there's Merry Legs.

**DOT AND MINNIE LAUGH.**

MINNIE: Why do you call her Merry Legs ?

MICKIE: Because that's her name. Next there's Alice, then Pet, then Splodger.

**DOT AND MINNIE ROLL AROUND LAUGHING.**

DOT: You can't call a horse Splodger.

MICKIE: Yes I can.

MINNIE: But Mickie - it's such a silly name.

DOT: Splodger !

**THEY LAUGH LOUDER.**

MICKIE: Dot Broun and Minnie Bowden - you stop laughing at my horses.

DOT: But it's so funny.

MINNIE: Splodger.

**THEY LAUGH AGAIN.**

MICKIE: Stop it. I didn't laugh at your names.

DOT: But my name's aren't silly.

MICKIE: Yes they are. (SHE GRABS DOT'S LIST) What about Flossy ?  
How can you call a dog Flossy ?

**DOT AND MINNIE ARE SUDDENLY SERIOUS.**

DOT: What's wrong with Flossy ?

MINNIE: Flossy is a good name.

**JUNE ENTERS, HOLDING A WOMAN 'S WEEKLY. SHE TAKES UP  
A POSE.**

JUNE: Do you think I look like Mary Pickford ?

**PAUSE. DOT, MICKIE AND MINNIE ALL BURST INTO LAUGHTER.**

JUNE: What did I do ?

**WILGA ENTERS.**

WILGA: Miss Bridekirk says you must come in now.

ALL (EXCEPT WILGA): Wilga, Wilga  
 How does your garden grow ?  
 With rotten snails and puppy's dogs tails  
 And chicken heads all in a row

WILGA: That's not true.

ALL EXCEPT WILGA: Yes it is.

WILGA: The cosmos grew and so did the Snap dragon. It's not my fault it won't rain. And Daddy said there wasn't enough water in the tank.

JUNE: Then you should plant flowers that don't need water.

MINNIE: All flowers need water June.

JUNE: No they don't. What about Daisies ?

MICKIE: Why don't Daisies need water ?

JUNE: Because they're daisies silly. They grow everywhere.

WILGA: Miss Bridekirk says you must come. It's time for our Botany lesson.

DOT: We're going to learn what's not growing in Wilga's garden ?

WILGA: Miss Bridekirk says you must come right now. All except you Minnie.

MICKIE: Sorry Minnie.

MINNIE: Don't worry. I'll stay and finish off Dot's list.

DOT: But you don't know all their names.

MICKIE: You should make them up. Better than Dot's names anyway.

DOT: Quiet Miss Splodger.

MICKIE: Don't worry Minnie. I spoke to Daddy and he says you can come to school with us soon.

MINNIE: I can go to school ?

JUNE: You can study geography and Maths and writing.

DOT: And how to look like Mary Pickford ?

MINNIE: I would like that.

WILGA: (TO **DOT**, **JUNE** AND **MICKIE**) You have to come now. Or I'll be in trouble.

DOT: We might stay here then.

WILGA: Dot ! How awful.

MICKIE: Here Minnie - you mind our lists.

**DOT AND MICKIE GIVE HER THE LISTS.**

DOT: We'll come back as soon as Miss Bridekirk lets us.

**DOT, MICKIE AND WILGA EXIT.**

JUNE: Bye Miss Minnie.

MINNIE: Bye Miss Pickford.

**JUNE SMILES AND EXITS. MINNIE ALONE. LIGHTS CHANGE.**

**MINNIE EXITS.**

### **3. The Green Classroom, the next day.**

**MICKIE AND MR. WOOD ENTER.**

MICKIE: My name is Mickie Broun.

WOOD: My name is Mr. Wood.

MICKIE: That's not really my name but.

WOOD: Don't end a sentence with a preposition.

MICKIE: Sorry. Mickie isn't really my name.

WOOD: That's better. And what is your name ?

MICKIE: Mario. You want to know why ?

WOOD: Certainly.

MICKIE: It was because when Uncle Mario went missing in the war and mother said that her next child would be called Mario no matter if it was a boy or a girl. So I'm Mario. But everybody calls me Mickie. After the song.

WOOD: Which song ?

MICKIE: Don't you know ? Everybody knows that song.

WOOD: Not I.

MICKIE: (SINGS) "Pretty Mickie, Pretty Mickie  
With your hair of raven hue  
Do you blame anyone for  
Falling in love with you ?"

WOOD: How nice. And how may I help you Pretty Mickie ?

MICKIE: Are you the new teacher ?

WOOD: Yes. I have been sent by the Aboriginal Protection Board to start a school on Bassendean. I will be teaching the children basic mathematics and English.

MICKIE: I'm best at English. Miss Bridekirk says so.

WOOD: You did it again.

MICKIE: I did ?

WOOD: A preposition.

MICKIE: Sorry. Miss Bridekirk said.

WOOD: It sounds like Miss Bridekirk has a lot of work to do. She must be waiting for you even now and I must also prepare for my classes.

MICKIE: But I haven't asked you my question yet.

WOOD: What question ?

MICKIE: The question I came to ask you.

PAUSE.

WOOD: What is your question ?

MICKIE: My question is - can Minnie go to school with us ?

WOOD: Who is Minnie ?

MICKIE: She's Lizzie's daughter.

WOOD: Who is Lizzie ?

MICKIE: She's our washer woman.

WOOD: Is Minnie a black ?

MICKIE: Not really.

WOOD: She's white then ?

MICKIE: No, she's more like a bit brown.

WOOD: So she is a black ?

MICKIE: Well I'm a white.

WOOD: If she is a black then she will study with the other black children.

MICKIE: But why ?

WOOD: That is the decision of the board.

MICKIE: But I don't understand.

WOOD: It's not important that you understand. That's just the way it is.

MICKIE: I'm just asking a question. You're a teacher. It's your job to answer questions. That's what Mother said.

PAUSE.

WOOD: You're a very confident young lady Mickie Broun.

MICKIE: Thank you. So why can't Minnie come to school with us ?

WOOD: It's a matter of levels.

MICKIE: But Minnie's just as tall as me.

WOOD: Academic levels. The child is not at the same level of study as you. Who else studies with you ?

MICKIE: Well there's June and Wilga and Dot and Jimmy and I. Sometimes M.D. comes too.

WOOD: Minnie would not be at the same Academic Level as the other children in your class. If she was to be introduced into the class she would reduce the class' learning capacity.

MICKIE: Learning capacity ?

WOOD: Miss Bridekirk would be forced to go back and teach her lessons which you have already learnt. Slowing down the class.

MICKIE: Minnie would not slow the class down.

WOOD: Mickie - Minnie is not as smart as you.

MICKIE: But that's not true.

WOOD: Are you calling me a liar ?

MICKIE: No but Minnie's just as smart as me.

WOOD: I find that hard to believe.

MICKIE: She can write and do sums and everything.

WOOD: A black child ?

MICKIE: It's true.

WOOD: And how would she have learnt to do that ?

MICKIE: By watching us. She plays with us all the time. We make lists.

WOOD: Lists ?

MICKIE: Of Dot's dogs and my horses. Then Dot draw's nice pictures.

WOOD: Regardless of whatever lists she may or may not have been involved in compiling I still find it difficult to believe that the child could be at the same academic level as you.

MICKIE: Mr. Wood - are you calling me a liar ?

WOOD: A very confident young lady. (PAUSE) Mickie - you are a child. I am an adult.

MICKIE: So ?

WOOD: So I know a little bit more about these matters.

MICKIE: If you don't believe me you can give her a test.

WOOD: A test ?

MICKIE: To see if Minnie's a smart as me.

WOOD: I couldn't do that.

MICKIE: Why not ?

WOOD: It would be highly unusual.

- MICKIE: It's not impossible but.
- WOOD: No, it isn't impossible - but have you considered that perhaps Minnie would be better off studying with me. Perhaps she can learn more from me than Miss Bridekirk.
- MICKIE: I'm not saying that Miss Bridekirk is a better teacher than you Mr. Wood.
- WOOD: Then what are you saying ?
- MICKIE: You'll be so busy with all the other children. And what you said about levels.
- WOOD: What about them ?
- MICKIE: Minnie isn't on the same level than the other black children.
- WOOD: So it would seem.
- MICKIE: What will she do while you're getting the other children to her level ?

PAUSE.

- WOOD: Very clever Mickie. A test you say ?

MICKIE NODS.

- WOOD: I haven't got the authority to authorise that sort of a test.
- MICKIE: Then who does ?
- WOOD: I have been sent here to teach the black children on this property. All the black children. I do not have the authority to include or exclude one particular student.
- MICKIE: Then who does ?
- WOOD: I'm not sure if anybody has that authority.
- MICKIE: But if somebody did ?
- WOOD: I am answerable to the director of the Aboriginal Protection Board for the New England region.
- MICKIE: Can I ask him then ?
- WOOD: I'm not sure if that would be appropriate.
- MICKIE: Can I write him a letter then ?

WOOD: You can do whatever you like.

PAUSE.

MICKIE: Don't be mad at me Mr. Wood.

WOOD: I am just doing my job Pretty Mickie.

**WOOD EXITS. LIGHTS CHANGE. MICKIE TAKES OUT A PAD AND SITS ON THE GROUND.**

**4. The yard in front of the main house, later.**

JUNE AND MINNIE ENTER.

THEY SIT WITH MICKIE WHO IS WRITING HER LETTER.

MICKIE: (READING) Dear Director of the Aboriginal Protection Board for the New England Region, Please can you give permission for Minnie to do a Test so she can come to school with us ? Yours sincerely, Miss Mickie Broun.

JUNE: That's not a very good letter.

MICKIE: What's wrong with it ?

JUNE: It's too short. Letter's should be longer than that.

MICKIE: It's long enough. What do you think Minnie ?

PAUSE.

MINNIE: It should be longer.

MICKIE: Minnie ! I'm writing this letter for you so you can go to school with us.

MINNIE: I appreciate it Mickie but ...

MICKIE: You still think my letter's -

JUNE: Too short. Letter's should be longer.

MICKIE: But what else should I put in it ? That's all I want to ask.

JUNE: You could tell him about your horses.

MICKIE: What do my horses have to do with Minnie going to school with us ?

JUNE: He might like horses.

- MICKIE: The Director lives in Sydney. He doesn't have a horse.
- JUNE: Don't be silly Mickie. Everyone has a horse.
- MICKIE: What do you think Minnie ?
- MINNIE: I agree with June. Everyone likes horses.
- MICKIE: So what am I meant to do ?
- MINNIE: You could list the name of your horses.
- JUNE: That's a very good idea.
- MICKIE: Why would he be interested in the names of my horses ?
- JUNE: You might have more horses than him.
- MICKIE: So ?
- JUNE: That might make him scared. And then he'll let Minnie go to school with us.
- MICKIE: June Broun that's the most stupid idea I've ever heard. Isn't that right Minnie ?
- MINNIE: I don't think it's so stupid Mickie.

PAUSE.

- MICKIE: Alright. I'll write down the names of my horses.

**MICKIE WRITES AGAIN.**

- MICKIE: Finished.
- JUNE: Read it out again.
- MICKIE: (READING) "Dear Director of the Aboriginal Protection Board for the New England Region, Please can you give *bermission* for Minnie to do a Test so she can come to school with us ? Yours sincerely, Miss Mario Rheta Broun – but you can call me Mickie. PS: I have six horses. They are called Merry Legs, Alice, Pet, Splodger, Prince and Tony."
- MINNIE: That sounds like a real letter now.
- JUNE: I still think Splodger is a silly name for a horse though.

**LIZZIE BOWDEN ENTERS**

LIZZIE: What are you children doing ? Don't sit on the ground in your new clothes. What will Mrs. Broun say ? That goes for you to Minnie.

MINNIE: Sorry Mummy.

JUNE: Yes sorry Lizzie - but we were very comfort-a-*bull*.

MICKIE: Yes. We were comfort-a-*bull* Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Sssh you children. Don't say rude words. What if Mrs. Broun hears ?

MICKIE: What's wrong with saying comfort-a-*bull* Lizzie ?

LIZZIE: You know you mustn't say that ? You must call it a male beast.

JUNE: What's a male beast called Lizzie ?

LIZZIE: Stop it now Miss June.

**JUNE, MICKIE AND MINNIE LAUGH. WILGA ENTERS.**

WILGA: Mother says you must come in for dinner now. All except Minnie.

MICKIE: But we can't. We haven't finished my letter.

LIZZIE: What letter are you writing Miss Mickie ?

MICKIE: We're writing a letter to the director of the Aboriginal Protection Board for the New England Region.

LIZZIE: (CONCERNED) Why do you write to that man Miss Mickie ?

MICKIE: I'm writing to the Board to ask if Minnie can go to school with us.

LIZZIE: The Aboriginal Protection Board ?

MICKIE: That's the board that protects you Lizzie.

LIZZIE: (UPSET) You aren't going to get Minnie in trouble ?

JUNE: What's wrong Lizzie ?

LIZZIE: Old Henry wrote to that man asking for some clothes and then they came and took Little Henry and Mary away. You don't want Minnie taken away do you Miss Mickie ?

MICKIE: Don't worry Lizzie. They won't take Minnie away.

WILGA: I don't know why you're worrying about writing some silly letter Mickie.

- MICKIE: Quiet Wilga - this is none of your business.
- WILGA: Alright, then I won't tell you he's coming here next week and that you can ask him in person.
- LIZZIE: That man is coming here ?
- WILGA: The Director of the Aboriginal Protection Board for the New England Region. Daddy said so.
- LIZZIE: Why is that man coming here ?
- WILGA: To open the new school house. Mother and I are going to make some scones.
- JUNE: I'm going to help too.
- WILGA: She said me.
- JUNE: But I also want to help.

**JUNE STARTS TO CRY.**

- LIZZIE: Don't cry Miss June. I'm sure Mrs. Broun will let you help.
- MICKIE: I guess I don't need to write the letter then.
- MINNIE: You should still tell him about your horses though.
- WILGA: Mother says you have to come in. The rabbit pie is getting cold.
- LIZZIE: Go on Miss June and Miss Mickie. Don't keep Mrs. Broun waiting.
- MICKIE: Bye Minnie.
- JUNE: Bye Minnie.
- MICKIE: You can't say goodbye to Minnie. She's my best friend.
- JUNE: She's my best friend too.
- MICKIE: Is not.
- JUNE: Is too.

**JUNE, WILGA AND MICKIE EXIT. PAUSE.**

- LIZZIE: Come Minnie. Our dinner be ready in the kitchen.
- MINNIE: They won't take me away will they Mummy ?

LIZZIE: No Minnie. They'll never take you away from me.

**LIZZIE AND MINNIE EXIT. LIGHTS CHANGE.**

**5. The verandah of the main house. Several days later.**

**BOB, THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE APB, AND MICKIE ENTER.**

MICKIE: My name is Mickie Broun and I have six horses. How many do you have ?

BOB: I live in Sydney. I don't have any horses.

MICKIE: I knew it.

BOB: Did you ?

MICKIE: My sister June said everybody has horses. But I knew you wouldn't.

BOB: I had a horse when I was young.

MICKIE: Did you ? What was her name ?

BOB: Rainbow.

MICKIE: That's a lovely name. Was it all the colours of the rainbow ?

BOB: Not quite.

MICKIE: Do you want to hear my horses' names ?

BOB: Alright.

MICKIE: Merry Legs, Alice, Pet, Splodger, Prince and Tony. June says Splodger is a silly name for a horse. Do you think it's stupid ?

BOB: Splodger sounds just fine.

MICKIE: (OFFERING SCONES) Would you like another scone ?

BOB: I've had more than enough.

ICKIE: Mother made them special.

BOB: And I appreciate it.

MICKIE: How about some strawberry jam ? I've got a spoon.

BOB: I'm fine, thank you. So, what do you think of the new class room ?

MICKIE: It's very green.

BOB: Yes, it is.

MICKIE: I don't like green. My favourite colour is blue.

BOB: We'll keep that in mind next time we're painting class rooms.  
Shouldn't you be out playing with the other children ?

MICKIE: I have to ask you something.

BOB: Do you ?

MICKIE: A very special question.

BOB: Really ?

WOOD ENTERS.

WOOD: We better be off Mr. Richards. You'll miss your train.

BOB: Just a minute Graham. Little Mickie wants to ask me  
a very special question.

WOOD: You're not causing trouble are you Mickie ?

BOB: Steady on Graham. She just wants to ask me something. Well go on  
Mickie.

PAUSE.

MICKIE: I can't now.

WOOD: Ask Mr. Richards Mickie. It's alright.

MICKIE: Well, I was wondering -

BOB: Yes ?

MICKIE: If you might let Minnie go to school with us ?

BOB: Is Minnie one of your horses ?

WOOD: Minnie is a young black child who lives on the property.  
Her mother is the washer woman in the main house.

BOB: She's aboriginal ?

- WOOD: I believe so.
- BOB: Well if she's aboriginal then she'll attend the new school room. That's why we built it. Now we best be off.
- MICKIE: But Mr. Wood said she's not on the same level.
- BOB: What did you say ?
- MICKIE: Minnie's not on the same academic level as the other children. So she shouldn't be in the same class as them.
- BOB: Is that true Graham ?
- WOOD: Apparently the child has had some prior education.
- MICKIE: She's just as smart as us.
- BOB: It's not just about academic levels Mickie. It's about breeding and background.
- MICKIE: But Mr. Wood said if Minnie was on the same level as us then she should go to school with us.
- BOB: Graham ?
- WOOD: I was talking theoretically Mickie. I also pointed out that I did not have the authority to make such a decision.
- MICKIE: That's why I want Minnie to do a Test.
- BOB: A test ?
- MICKIE: If she gets enough answers right she can study with us. Mr. Wood can make up the questions.
- BOB: This is all highly unusual.
- MICKIE: Don't you think all the children in a class should be on the same level Mr. Richards ?
- BOB: In a perfect world - that would be the case. But we don't live in a perfect world.
- MICKIE: Who said we don't ?
- PAUSE.
- WOOD: (TO BOB) Did she sing her song to you ? It's called "Pretty Mickie."

BOB: Persistent little girl aren't you ?

MICKIE: I just think if Minnie is as smart as us she should come to school with us.

PAUSE.

BOB: (TO MICKIE) What do your parents say about this ?

MICKIE: Daddy and Mother both say it's alright and Miss Bridekirk said Minnie could be in our class - but only on the condition that Mr. Wood gave his *bermission*.

BOB: *P*.

MICKIE: But I don't need to pee.

BOB: No, it's a *p*. *Permission*. Not *bermission*.

MICKIE: Sorry. *Permission*.

BOB: (TO WOOD) Would you be able to set such a test ?

WOOD: If you really thought it was wise.

BOB: What would happen if we left the child in with the other black children?

WOOD: Well if what Mickie says is accurate she could get bored and become disruptive.

BOB: So what do you think then ?

WOOD: I try not to do that Bob.

BOB: Graham - I'm asking for your opinion.

PAUSE.

WOOD: Well I think the test is a reasonable idea. (ASIDE TO BOB)  
I doubt she'll pass it anyway.

BOB: Alright Mickie. Minnie can do a test. The questions will be set by Mr. Wood and you must promise that if Minnie does not pass then you will say no more on this matter.

MICKIE: I promise. Thank you Graham. Thank you Bob.

BOB: It's Mr. Richards.

MICKIE: Sorry Mr. Richards.

**MICKIE EXITS.**

WOOD: So what do we do if she actually does pass this test ?

BOB: Then you better let her go to school with the white children. I hope we haven't missed my train.

THEY EXIT. LIGHTS CHANGE.

**6. The yard in front of the main house, the next day.**

**MINNIE AND MICKIE ENTER.**

MICKIE: Now Minnie you must promise me you will study hard for the test.

MINNIE: But Mickie - I don't want to do a test.

MICKIE: But why not ? Mr Richards said you could.

MINNIE: If I do a test they might send me away.

MICKIE: Oh Minnie - don't be so silly. They won't send you away. If you get enough questions right you get to go to school with us. If you don't - you go to school in the green classroom. No one's talking about sending you away.

**JUNE, JIMMY AND DOT ENTER. DOT IS HOLDING JIMMY BY THE HAND.**

DOT: Doesn't it look awful ?

JUNE: I think it looks nice. I like green.

MICKIE: You would June .

MINNIE: But how will I get the questions right. I've never done a test before.

MICKIE: Now Miss Minnie you really are being too silly today. We'll help you.

JUNE: We will ?

MICKIE: We'll divide up the subjects and each one of us will help you study for the test. Dot will do art, I'll do English, Wilga can do Botany -

JUNE: What will I do ?

MICKIE: No, that's not going to work. There's not enough of us. Dot will do Art and History.

DOT: But I'm not very good at History.

JUNE: What will I do ?

MICKIE: Alright, I'll do English and History and Wilga can do Maths and -

DOT: But Wilga's terrible at Maths. Last week Miss Bridekirk asked her what five times five is and she said twenty five.

**DOT LAUGHS.**

MINNIE: Dot - five times five is twenty five.

DOT: Don't be so silly Minnie. Of course it isn't.

JUNE: Mickie - what will I do ?

MICKIE: You'll sit right there June and be very quiet.

**JUNE STARTS TO CRY.**

JUNE: But I want to help.

**JIMMY ALSO STARTS TO CRY.**

MICKIE: Alright, alright. You can help.

JUNE: (SUDDENLY HAPPY) Goodie.

MICKIE: You can help me help Minnie with her English.

DOT: But that still leaves Geography.

MICKIE: Oh - this is never going to work.

MINNIE: Maybe I can just do the test by myself.

MICKIE: Don't be silly Minnie. What has got in to you today ? How will you answer those questions by yourself ?

MINNIE: I've learnt a lot from just being around you. And sometimes I read your books while Mummy is doing the washing.

MICKIE: That's not enough Minnie. Don't you know how hard the questions will be ?

DOT: Yes Minnie. They will be the hardest questions in the history of the world.

MINNIE: Ask me one then. Go on. Test me out right now. Ask me a super hard question.

DOT: The hardest question ever in the history of the world ?

MINNIE: Yes. I want you to.

DOT: Alright. (PAUSE) Does anybody know a super hard question ?

MICKIE: I have a question for you Minnie. What is the capital of Australia ?

JUNE: Oooh but Mickie. That's too hard.

MICKIE: Come on Miss smartie pants. What's the answer ?

MINNIE: Canberra ?

**DOT AND JUNE LAUGH.**

MICKIE: No Minnie. It's Tamworth. Everybody knows that. You see - you'll never be able to answer those questions by yourself.

DOT: It's hopeless.

MICKIE: Maybe not. I have a plan.

JUNE: Is it a secret plan ?

MICKIE: Top secret. This is how we will make Minnie pass the Test.

DOT AND JUNE: Tell us Pretty Mickie.

MICKIE: When Mr. Wood gives Minnie the test June will go in and distract him.

JUNE: What does that mean ?

MICKIE: Get his attention.

JUNE: How do I do that ?

MICKIE: I don't know. Pretend your Mary Pickford.

JUNE: Oh, that's easy.

MICKIE: Then while Mr. Wood's not watching I'll grab the test from Minnie and bring it outside. Then me, Dot and Wilga will fill in the answers. Then once we've written in the answers Dot will distract Mr. Wood again and I'll give Minnie back the test. Then she can hand *our* answers into Mr. Wood.

DOT: Mickie - that is the best plan I've ever heard.

JUNE: And I even get to be Mary Pickford.

MINNIE: But isn't that cheating ?

JIMMY: Cheat - ing.

MICKIE: Minnie - how dare you say that ? It is not cheating.

MINNIE: But you're giving me the answers. How can that not be cheating ?

MICKIE: It is not cheating. We're just helping. Isn't that right Dot ?

DOT: Yes. We're helping.

JIMMY: Cheat - ing.

MICKIE: Jimmy Broun - you be quiet. (CHANGE) Minnie , don't you want to go to school with us ?

MINNIE: Yes.

MICKIE: Then you have to follow the plan.

PAUSE.

MINNIE: If you think it's best.

MICKIE: I do Minnie. I think it's absolutely for the best. Now everyone must swear to keep our secret plan the most secretest secret in the whole world.

JUNE: (EXCITED) Do me first.

MICKIE: June Broun, do you swear to keep this secret plan the most secretest secret in the whole world ?

JUNE: I swear.

MICKIE: Cross your heart and hope to die.

JUNE: Cross my heart (SHE DOES SO) and hope to die.

MICKIE: Dot Broun, do you swear to keep this secret plan the most secretest secret in the whole world ?

DOT: I swear.

MICKIE: Cross your heart and hope to die.

DOT: Cross my heart (SHE DOES SO) and hope to die.

MICKIE: Minnie Bowden, do you swear to keep this secret plan the most secretest secret in the whole world ? Cross your heart and hope to die.

MINNIE: But I still think I can answer the questions.

MICKIE: Minnie, you know you can't !

PAUSE.

MINNIE: I swear.

MICKIE: Cross your heart and hope to die.

MINNIE: Cross my heart (SHE DOES SO) and hope to die.

MICKIE: Now we have all sworn to keep our secret plan the secretest secret in the whole world. Cross your heart and hope to die.

JIMMY: Cheat - ing.

MICKIE: That's enough from you Little Jimmy Broun !

**JIMMY LAUGHS. BLACKOUT.**

### **7. The Classroom, several days later.**

**MR. WOOD STANDS AT THE FRONT OF THE ROOM. MINNIE SITS AT A DESK.**

WOOD: Thank you for coming Minnie. Do you know why you are here ?

MINNIE: To see if I can go to school with Mickie, Mr. Wood.

WOOD: You are here so we can assess your current level of education and determine the most appropriate course for your further studies. Is that understood ?

**MINNIE NODS.**

WOOD: Good. I have been given authority by the Regional Director of the Aboriginal Protection Board in New England to set a test to determine your current level of education. The test will consist of ten questions which will cover the six subjects you are to be taught if you pass the test: Maths, English, Botany, Art, Geography and History. Is that understood ?

**MINNIE NODS.**

WOOD: Good.

MINNIE: How many do I have to get right ?

WOOD: A majority of correct answers will determine your present level of academic ability.

**MINNIE LOOKS AT WOOD.**

MINNIE: How many to go to school with Mickie ?

WOOD: Six out of ten. You have ten minutes to answer the questions. Are you ready to begin ?

MINNIE: I'm ready Mr. Wood.

**WOOD CHECKS HIS WATCH. HE WAITS, THEN:**

WOOD: You may turn over your test paper and begin.

**MINNIE TURNS OVER HER PAPER. AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE MICKIE, DOT AND JUNE APPEAR.**

DOT: But she's already started.

MICKIE: That's okay. Just remember the plan. Are you ready June ?

**JUNE IS HOLDING HER HAIR IN AN ODD POSITION.**

JUNE: Call me Mary.

DOT: Get in there Mary.

**JUNE ENTERS THE CLASSROOM. SHE STANDS BEFORE WOOD.**

JUNE: Mr. Wood, do you think I look like Mary Pickford ?

WOOD: What are you doing in here child ?

JUNE: They're having a competition in The Women's Weekly for the person who most looks like Mary Pickford ? Do you think I should enter ?

**MICKIE GRABS HER CHANCE AND MOTIONS TO DOT. DOT, LIKE A COMMANDO GOING IN TO BATTLE, CRAWLS IN TO THE CLASS ROOM AND TAPS MINNIE ON THE ANKLE.**

**MINNIE LOOKS DOWN AND SHAKES HER HEAD.**

WOOD: I have no opinion on the subject whatsoever. And even if I did you are standing in a test environment which is not the appropriate time or place for a discussion of that nature.

**DOT TAPS AGAIN. MINNIE RELUCTANTLY HANDS HER THE PAPER. DOT STARTS TO CRAWL OUT.**

WOOD: Now come along and leave us in peace.

**WOOD STARTS TO USHER JUNE TOWARDS THE DOOR. JUNE SEES THIS WILL LEAD WOOD STRAIGHT TO DOT.**

**JUNE FREEZES. SHE THINKS QUICKLY AND LETS OUT AN EAR PIERCING WAIL.**

WOOD: What's wrong child ?

JUNE: But I was only asking if I looked like Mary Pickford.

WOOD: There, there. Don't cry.

JUNE: Well - do I ?

**DOT GRABS THE OPENING AND CRAWLS OUT THE DOOR.**

WOOD: Do you what ?

JUNE: Look like Mary Pickford ?

WOOD: Yes - you look exactly like Mary Pickford.

JUNE: Really ?

WOOD: The splitting image. Now off you go.

**JUNE SEES THE COAST IS CLEAR.**

JUNE: Okay.

**AND SHE SKIPS OUT THE DOOR.**

WOOD: Odd child.

**WOOD GOES BACK TO HIS DESK. LIGHTS FADE ON THE CLASS ROOM.**

**JUNE REACHES DOT AND MICKIE.**

JUNE: Mr. Wood said I looked exactly like Mary Pickford.

MICKIE: Quiet June . We have to answer the questions quickly and then get the test back to Minnie before Mr. Wood notices. (STUDYING TEST)  
This first one is easy. (WRITING) 1788. Captain James Cook.

DOT: Even I knew that.

JUNE: But what was the question ?

MICKIE: June Broun. We haven't got time for your nonsense.

JUNE: But how am I meant to help if I don't know the questions ? (BEAT)  
I'll cry and Mr Wood will hear.

MICKIE: Alright. (READING) Question two. If a man has nine oranges  
and he sells four - how many does he have left ?

JUNE: I don't like oranges. Doesn't he have any apples ?

LIGHTS FADE ON **JUNE, MICKIE AND DOT**. THEY COME UP  
AGAIN ON THE CLASSROOM.

WITH OUT THE TEST **MINNIE** SITS AT HER DESK STARING AT  
THE BOARD. **WOOD** IS WRITING AT HIS DESK.

**WOOD** SENSES **MINNIE** IS LOOKING AT HIM AND LOOKS UP.

WOOD: Whatever is the matter child ? Why aren't you doing the test ?

**MINNIE** IS SILENT.

WOOD: Well speak up. A lot of people went to a lot of trouble to give you  
this opportunity.

MINNIE: I lost my piece of paper.

WOOD: Lost it ?

MINNIE: The wind blew it off my desk and now I can't find it.

WOOD: Well it must be around here somewhere. Look child.

**WOOD AND MINNIE** BOTH LOOK FOR THE PAPER. LIGHTS  
FADE ON CLASSROOM. UP AGAIN ON **JUNE, MICKIE AND DOT**.

MICKIE: (READING) What is the book called where you find the meaning of  
words ? Correct spelling please.

JUNE: I know. Dictionary.

MICKIE: Spell it.

JUNE: D- i - c - k - (SHE STOPS. SHOCKED.) Ooh. I made a rude word.

**DOT** LAUGHS.

- MICKIE: Stop laughing Dot . This is serious. Spell Dictionary.
- DOT: Dict. D- i - c - t. Shon - S- h- o - n - Ary - A - r - y.
- MICKIE: You're both wrong. Dictionary. D - i - c - t - i - o - n - a - r - y.
- JUNE: Oh. Minnie would never have got that.

LIGHTS FADE ON **JUNE, MICKIE AND DOT**. UP ON THE CLASS ROOM. **WOOD** IS ON HIS HAND AND KNEES.

- WOOD: (STANDING) How very strange ? You didn't eat it did you ?

**MINNIE LOOKS AT WOOD.**

- WOOD: Well we can't cancel the test. Mr. Richards has given the authority for it to go ahead. But that was my only copy. I'll have to give it to you verbally. That's if I can remember the questions.
- MINNIE: Ver - bally ?
- WOOD: I'll ask the questions out loud and you answer them. That's if you think you're up to it. You can withdraw if you want ?
- MINNIE: I would like to do the test.
- WOOD: Very well. I can remember the first question. History. When was Australia discovered and by who ?
- MINNIE: But no one knows that.
- WOOD: I can assure you many people do.
- MINNIE: But Mummy says our people have been here ever since the Dreamtime. When was that ?
- WOOD: Let me re-phrase the question. When was Australia first discovered by Europeans ?

**MINNIE LOOKS AT WOOD.**

- WOOD: White people.
- MINNIE: I don't know Mr. Wood.
- WOOD: Very well. (**WOOD MARKS A SHEET OF PAPER IN FRONT OF HIM.**) Next question. I think it was maths. If a man has nine oranges and sells five - how many oranges does he have left ?
- MINNIE: Four ?

**WOOD MARKS THE PAPER.**

MINNIE: Is that right ?

WOOD: I will tell you your score at the end of the test.

LIGHTS FADE ON CLASS ROOM. UP AGAIN ON **JUNE, DOT AND MICKIE.**

DOT: That last one's easy. We told Minnie that already.

MICKIE: Let's hope she remembers.

**MICKIE FINISHES WRITING.**

MICKIE: All right, now we just have to get the paper back to her before Mr. Wood finds out. Ready Dot.

**DOT STANDS AND RUBS SOME DIRT ON HER KNEE.**

DOT: Ready.

MICKIE: Then let's go.

LIGHTS COME BACK UP ON CLASS ROOM.

MINNIE: The national flower of Australia is Wattle.

**WOOD MARKS THE PAPER.**

WOOD: Very well – now the final question. Geography.

SUDDENLY **DOT BURSTS INTO THE CLASS ROOM. SHE IS CRYING AND HOLDING HER KNEE.**

WOOD: (GOING TO **DOT**) What is it now ?

DOT: I hurt my knee.

WOOD: Hold still and give me a look.

**WOOD EXAMINES THE KNEE. MICKIE CRAWLS OVER TO MINNIE, SHE HOLDS THE PAPER UP TO HER.**

**MINNIE PUSHES IT AWAY.**

WOOD: It's only dirt. There's no bleeding. You just sit there and be quiet. I'll wash it for you shortly. I have to complete Minnie's test.

**MICKIE** HOLDS THE PAPER UP AGAIN. **MINNIE** PUSHES IT AWAY ONCE MORE.

**WOOD** STANDS. HE LOOKS AT **MINNIE**. **MICKIE** HIDES BEHIND THE DESK. **JUNE** WATCHES ON FROM THE DOOR OF THE CLASS ROOM.

WOOD: Now - final question. Geography.

MICKIE: Final question ?

**MINNIE** GIVES **MICKIE** A LITTLE KICK.

WOOD: What is the capital of Australia ?

**MICKIE** HOLDS UP THE PAPER. **MINNIE** PUSHES IT AWAY AGAIN.

WOOD: Is anything wrong Minnie ?

MINNIE: No Mr. Wood.

WOOD: Well then, I'm waiting for your answer.

MINNIE: The capital of Australia is ...

MICKIE: (WHISPERS) Tamworth.

**DOT** AND **JUNE** BOTH START MOUTHING "TAMWORTH".

**MINNIE** LOOKS AT THEM. **WOOD** TURNS TO SEE WHAT **MINNIE** IS LOOKING AT. **DOT** RUBS HER KNEE.

**WOOD** TURNS BACK TO **MINNIE**.

WOOD: Yes ?

MINNIE: The capital of Australia is ...

MICKIE: (WHISPERING MORE URGENTLY) Tamworth.

**DOT** AND **JUNE** AGAIN MOUTH "TAMWORTH" EXTRAVAGANTLY. **MINNIE** TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

MINNIE: Canberra.

JUNE: Oh Minnie. How could you be so silly ?

**WOOD** TURNS TO LOOK AT **JUNE**. **JUNE** QUICKLY ASSUMES HER "MARY PICKFORD" POSE.

JUNE: Oh, hi Mr. Wood.

**WOOD MAKES A MARK ON HIS PAPER.**

WOOD: The test is now complete. I'll just total up your score.

**MICKIE STANDS.**

MICKIE: But Mr. Wood ! Minnie hasn't handed in her paper yet.

**WOOD LOOKS AT MICKIE.**

WOOD: How long have you been hiding there child ?

MICKIE: I just came in Mr. Wood. I found this in the yard. The wind must've blown it out the door.

**MICKIE HOLDS UP THE TEST PAPER.**

WOOD: Bring it to me.

**MICKIE TAKES THE PAPER TO WOOD.**

MICKIE: I think it's Minnie's test.

WOOD: *The wind* also seems to have magically filled in the answers.

**WOOD PLACES IT ON THE DESK.**

MICKIE: Aren't you going to mark it ?

WOOD: When the "wind" blew Minnie's sheet away I was forced to give her the test verbally ?

MICKIE: But Mr. Wood - you can't do that !

WOOD: I can and I have. And may I remind you Mickie, Dot and June Broun that cheating is a very serious matter indeed.

JUNE: We were just trying to help.

WOOD: It doesn't matter what you were trying to do. It's still cheating and if I ever see any similar behaviour again from any of you I will have to report it immediately to your father.

DOT: Sorry Mr. Wood.

JUNE: Sorry Mr. Wood.

**WOOD LOOKS AT MICKIE.**

MICKIE: Sorry Mr. Wood.

WOOD: And taking a quick glance at the answers “the wind” filled in it’s very fortunate for Minnie that she did take the test verbally.  
(READING) Question two. If a man has nine oranges and gives five away how many does he have left ? Answer: I don’t like oranges.

MICKIE: June . You changed the answer.

JUNE: Well I don’t.

WOOD: If we can have some order I shall now announce Minnie’s test results. If you children are quiet you may stay and hear.

MICKIE: But Mr. Wood - it’s not fair. We want Minnie -

WOOD: Mickie Broun. I shall not tell you again.

**MICKIE IS SILENT.**

WOOD: Minnie Bowden - I have given you the required test of your academic abilities as set down by the Aboriginal Protection Board. You have completed the test fairly in conditions that were, shall we say, not completely conducive to the best results. After totalling up your marks, and in accordance with guidelines set down by the New England Regional Director, I have determined that you have attained the required level of study.

MINNIE: So ?

**WOOD LOOKS AT MINNIE.**

WOOD: You got seven out of ten Minnie.

MINNIE: You mean I passed ?

WOOD: Yes Minnie, you passed. In fact, you did surprisingly well.

MINNIE: So I can go to school with Mickie and Dot.

JUNE: And me.

WOOD: You may study with Miss Bridekirk as you requested.

MINNIE: Thank you Mr. Wood.

WOOD: On one condition.

MINNIE: Yes Mr. Wood.

WOOD: That you will come and visit us here in the Green Classroom from time to time to show the other children how much you have learned.

MINNIE: Yes, Mr. Wood.

DOT: Mr. Wood, how many did we get right ?

MICKIE: Dot.

WOOD: You mean how many did “the wind” get right ?

DOT: Yes.

WOOD: Five and a half.

MICKIE: A half ?

WOOD: The landmark in the centre of Australia is called Ayers Rock. Not Ayers Stone. Although there is a very good drawing of a dog.

DOT: That’s streaker.

JUNE: Wow Minnie. You got more than us.

WOOD: Perhaps now your future classmates will show more faith in you to allow you to complete your own tests next time.

DOT: Better than us doing it.

MINNIE: Can I go now Mr. Wood ?

WOOD: Yes Minnie, you are excused.

**MINNIE STANDS AND RUSHES TO MICKIE, JUNE AND DOT.  
THE FOUR GIRLS JOIN HANDS AND JUMP FOR JOY.**

ALL: Minnie’s going to our school. Minnie’s going to our school.

**THEY BEGIN TO GO AROUND IN A CIRCLE AND SOON BURST  
INTO SONG. WOOD WATCHES ON, SMILING.**

ALL: (SINGING) Jesus loves the little children  
All the children of the world  
Red and yellow, black and white  
All are precious in his sight  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

**BLACKOUT.**

**END PLAY.**