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# WHAT ON EARTH?!

An Environmental Play Perfect for Earth Day

by

Mike Willis

*WHAT ON EARTH?!* is dedicated to my great granddaughter Emaleigh, who is innocent of all of the pollution that plagues the world today. With increased awareness and diligence on our part may she and her generation be given the opportunity to enjoy clean, safe water in the future.

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## WHAT ON EARTH?!

by Mike Willis

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

10 Gender and Age Neutral

Extras Possible

OIL

SALT

PLASTIC

PAPER

CAN

PESTICIDE

FERTILIZER

GAS

SEWAGE

ACID

### **TIME & PLACE**

*The Present; Earth*

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

The play is meant to be played on a bare stage. All characters can be played by either male or female actors. Costuming is simple and consists of either t-shirts with the character's name silkscreened on the front or as placards hanging around the actor's neck on which the character name is printed. This play may also be played as reader's theatre. A raked stage helps with sightlines but is not necessary. Extras may be used at the director's discretion with doubling for all characters possible. For example; there can be multiple actors wearing shirts or placards for each character or the director can choose to add the names of other environmental hazards and have them positioned in the background.

### **HISTORY**

*What On Earth*, was first presented by Boscobel High School, Boscobel, WI as part of an Earth Day Program in April of 2019. The play was directed by Kerry McCabe.

## WHAT ON EARTH?!

by Mike Willis

SETTING: *A bare stage.*

AT RISE: *OIL enters and crosses center stage and sits on the floor. OIL looks the place over and then stretches out. SALT enters and crosses to OIL.*

SALT  
What's happening?

OIL  
Not much.

SALT  
You waiting for a ride?

OIL  
Yeah, how about you?

SALT  
The same. Shouldn't be long now, I see some clouds moving in.

OIL  
Cool. A good, strong, rain should get us on our way pretty fast.

SALT  
You plan on taking that storm drain over there?

OIL  
Hope to, but if I miss that one, there's another right down at the corner. How about you?

SALT  
I should make this one, but if I dissolve a little the rest of me will make the next one. How did you get here?

OIL  
My human had this truck with a major leak. There's a little bit of me all over. How about you?

SALT  
You know, winter snow and ice, the humans spread salt over the roads. Me and my cousins are everywhere.

*PAPER, PLASTIC and CAN enter, falling on stage.*

OIL

Whoa, look out! Here comes the Trash family.

SALT

Quite an entrance. You guys all right?

PAPER

A little torn up is all.

CAN

I'm fine, a dent here and there.

PLASTIC

What a ride. Sweet!

OIL

What was your human thinking... tossing you out of the car right here on the street?

CAN

I guess he's not really big on recycling.

OIL

I guess not.

PAPER

What do we do now?

SALT

The same as us... we wait until there is a good rain and then we're going to take a trip down that storm-drain over there.

CAN

Where will that take us?

OIL

Not sure, think of it as an adventure.

PLASTIC

I hope it takes us to the ocean. I want to lay on the beach with all of the other plastic bottles and trash.

CAN

Me, too.

PLASTIC

I have a lot of friends and relatives on the beach. Us plastics, we live forever.

CAN

My DNA is aluminum and we have a pretty long life expectancy too.

SALT

I'm soluble so I can travel a long way on the water.

OIL

I'm just going to float along until I find someplace I want to settle down. What about you, Paper?

PAPER

I'm not very strong, so I probably won't travel very far, but I am sure I will see a lot of old friends on the way.

OIL

*(Looking up)*

Finally, here comes the rain.

SALT

Hold on!

*OIL, SALT, PLASTIC, PAPER, and CAN  
spin around on the stage and end up  
down right.*

CAN

Whoa...

PLASTIC

Awesome. What a trip!

PAPER

Where are we?

OIL

My guess is that we're in some stream someplace.

PAPER

Cool. I like it here. I think I'll just hang out here in these weeds along the shore.

PLASTIC

Not me. I'm going to the end of the line.

CAN

Me too. There's a great big world out there.

*ACID, SEWAGE, FERTILIZER,  
PESTICIDE and GAS enter.*

PAPER

Who are those guys?

OIL

One is my cousin Gas. Hey Gas, what's shakin'?

GAS

Oil, how ya doin'?

OIL

Doing fine... feelin' strong ya know.

GAS

I know. Me too, man. You guys headin' to the Gulf?

PAPER

The Gulf?

GAS

Yeah, the Gulf of Mexico. This stream here dumps into the Mississippi River and that flows to the Gulf. (laughs) Dumps, get it?

SALT

Yeah, got it. We all got "dumped" by our humans.

ACID

Did us a big favor, I'd say. Now we get to travel and wreak havoc.

CAN

Reek, is right. Who are you?

ACID

I'm Acid. I came from an abandoned mine just up the hill.

PAPER

You smell.

ACID

You think I smell, wait until you get a whiff of Sewage over there.

SEWAGE

That wasn't nice.

ACID

Truth hurts.

OIL

Who are your friends?

FERTILIZER

*(Shaking hands)*

I'm Fertilizer and this is my cousin...

PESTICIDE

Pesticide.

SALT

You guys getting on at this stop.

FERTILIZER and PESTICIDE

Hope to.

CAN

How far are you planning on traveling?

PESTICIDE

As far as we can, right Fertilizer?

FERTILIZER

You got it, cousin.

PAPER

Where did you all come from?

ACID

Well, my humans abandoned this old mine up on the hill and didn't seal it up properly and so I just leached up out of the ground as the water table rose.

CAN

What's that smell?

ACID

Sulfur, man. Ain't it sweet?

OIL

No, not really.

SALT

It smells like rotten eggs.

ACID

That's sulfuric acid, baby. It's caused by the iron and other minerals draining out of the mine.

PLASTIC

Fine. Stay downstream of me, okay?

ACID

The sensitive type, huh?

PAPER

Maybe.

ACID

Then you're gonna love Sewage here.

SEWAGE

Hey! I can't help it I smell, blame the humans. I didn't ask to be here. My human neglected his septic system and it overflowed and here I am.

FERTILIZER

We're all here because of our humans. We escaped because of them. Time for a new life, somethin' other than what we were meant for.

PESTICIDE

Yeah, applied right and I wouldn't be here and neither would Fertilizer. We' would be back in the field taking care of business.

FERTILIZER and PESTICIDE

*(Singing Bachman Turner Overdrive lyrics)*

Taking care of business, everyday... taking care of business and workin' overtime...

OIL

Please! Spare us.

FERTILIZER

Oh, a music critic and a contaminant.

PESTICIDE

So, what do we do now?

ACID

Decision time, mi amigos. We either stay here or decide to move on.

CAN

I'm movin' on. What about you, Plastic?

PLASTIC

Headin' to the Gulf baby! There is a big beautiful beach just waitin' for me.

ACID

Not sure I'll make it to the Gulf, but I'll go as far as I can and make my presence felt along the way.

SALT

Felt or smelt?

ACID

Smelt is a small fish and fish don't generally do well when I'm around.

SALT

Fine, just stay downstream of me okay.

SEWAGE

I plan on leaving a little bit of me along the way.

SALT

You too, Sewage... keep downstream.

PAPER

I like it here. I think I'll just get tangled up in the shoreline along with some of my brothers and be an eyesore.

CAN

Sounds like a plan. I'll miss you, but I think I'm going to see how far I can travel. I always wanted to see the world.

PAPER

Good Luck.

CAN

You, too. Hey, Oil what about you?

OIL

I haven't decided yet. Part of me says, I'd like to see the Gulf, float out and join a nice oil slick, but then some of my friends have gone underground travelling through fissures in the rock to explore the groundwater table.

SALT

How did that work out for them?

OIL

Sweet... once they made it to the groundwater they got sucked up by another human's well and came back to contaminate their drinking water. It's a vicious cycle.

SALT

Whoa! Talk about payback for the humans dumpin' them.

OIL

You got that right. My distant cousin Paint, his human poured him out on the ground, thinking he got rid of him, but old Paint found his way back home. It took a while, but those of us in the VOC's family are patient little suckers

PESTICIDE

Ain't it the truth.

PAPER

What's a VOC?

GAS

Volatile Organic Chemicals, Baby! We're hot. Dump us on the ground or pour us down the drain and we can get in all kinds of mischief.

PAPER

You would think the humans would know better.

FERTILIZER

You'd think. (looking around) Currents picking up. Let's get on with it.

PLASTIC

So long Paper.

*PAPER exits stage right as THE OTHERS all swirl around and move stage left.*

OIL

We're starting to pick up some speed now.

ACID

Wow, look at this place. There's a lot more water here.

PLASTIC

We're movin' really fast too. Here's where I leave you guys in my dust. You comin' Can?

CAN

I won't be able to keep up with you. I think I'll just fill up with water and bounce along the bottom, take my time. You go on ahead.

PLASTIC

All right! Hasta la vista! See ya on the beach.

*PLASTIC spins around and exits stage right.*

PESTICIDE

Man, look at Plastic go.

FERTILIZER

Impressive, but you and I can enjoy the scenery and take our time and enjoy killing off some marine life and vegetation along the way.

PESTICIDE

Looking forward to it.

GAS and OIL

Us too!

SALT

Hey Sewage, you must be diluting, you don't smell quite so bad.

OIL

Neither does Acid.

SEWAGE

Well don't get too used to it. This river has a lot of sewage treatment plants dumping into it and some of them are overloaded. I expect to meet up with some extended family along the way.

SALT

*(Less than enthusiastic)*

Great.

SEWAGE

Yeah, we're hoping for a reunion where we can meet up and reek... maybe starve some fish of oxygen and in general mess up the river for anyone wanting to use it for recreation.

OIL

We all want to do that.

ACID

You got that right.

GAS

Let's get on with it then.

EVERYONE

Wheeee!

*EVERYONE swirls around and exits stage right. PLASTIC enters wearing sunglasses and sits center stage as if sunbathing.*

Aaah, this is the life.

PLASTIC

*OIL and GAS enter followed by  
FERTILIZER and PESTICIDE.*

Hey Plastic, is that you?

OIL

Oil... and Gas, you guys finally made it.

PLASTIC

Was there any doubt.

GAS

You remember Fertilizer and Pesticide.

OIL

Sure, the VOC boys.

PLASTIC

Good to see you again.

FERTILIZER

It's been awhile, but we made it.

PESTICIDE

We just floated along on the surface and took our time killing off some of the vegetation and making some of the wildlife sick..

GAS

Have you seen Can?

PLASTIC

He should be coming. He decided to go underwater and stop for a little littering along the way. Acid and Sewage should be here any minute.

OIL

*ACID and SEWAGE enter.*

Here they come now.

FERTILIZER

Whoa... they don't smell any better. And, I see they picked up some friends along the way.

PLASTIC

*(Holding his nose)*

*EXTRAS including the entire CAST and CREW enter and mill around behind the speaking ACTORS.*

OIL

We all did.

SALT

This place looks super crowded, dude.

PLASTIC

You got that right, new arrivals every day. You may have trouble finding a spot to contaminate, but when you find a space, just feel free to dump yourself there. A lot of you VOC types are floating just off shore. But, we have get-togethers where we intermingle.

*CAN and PAPER enter.*

GAS

Sweet. Hey Can, you made it.

CAN

Finally. It was a bumpy trip along the river bottom, but I met some interesting garbage down there.

OIL

I'll bet.

CAN

*(Pointing to PAPER)*

Look who I picked up along the way.

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
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