

Silence So Proud, Speaks So Loud: A Play in One Act

Characters:

The DOS Observers:

Remy-Remy is 16, and has been a card-carrying, out-and-proud gay GSA member since the first day of 6th grade. Her appearance is kind of stereotypically lesbian: butch with a blood-red highlight in her short-cropped, spiky, dirty blonde hair. She wears Birkenstocks, blue jean cutoffs, and a red "Day of Silence" T-shirt that says, "What are YOU going to do to end the Silence? www.dayofsilence.org" on the back. There's duct tape over her mouth with an X drawn on it in black sharpie. Remy's handwriting on the pieces of loose-leaf she periodically holds up over the course of the play is the messiest chickenscratch possible while still being clearly legible for the audience. When Remy speaks her monologues, her voice is gravelly and sarcastic like the low plunk of pebbles kicked up against each other by Converse sneakers. Her voice does get noticeably higher when she is particularly impassioned, and it conveys that she is fiercely intelligent, tough but easily offended, outgoing, and more vulnerable than she seems.

Charlie-GSA member who is out to some as bisexual—most people know. He's sweet, hard-working, and is usually on the quiet side anyway, but this changes as the play progresses. He was bullied in elementary school when kids perceived him as gay. He wears faded jeans and a red Adidas t-shirt...with a pink rhinestone belt.

Avra-Has two moms, and is very protective and proud of her family—she could never bear the thought of concealing her parents' LGBT identity. She's outspoken and funny. She wears red flip-flops and an unusual lavender sundress with large sunflowers all over it.

Jenny-Jenny is 14; she skipped a grade but she's very mature for her age. She's a bit of a know-it-all—everyone is shocked that she's missing an opportunity to participate in class of her own volition. She's gay but (for the most part) closeted. She blushes the color of rose petals whenever she's embarrassed. Her shoulder-length hair is tied back in a low ponytail; it's frizzy with many flyaway strands that give her the air of one who doesn't invest much time in her appearance. Her black skinny jeans bunch up around her red, blue-laced Converse, which clash with her yellow and green-striped blouse.

The Speakers:

Ms. Whisp-A young teacher in her early 30s, and an earnest supporter of DOS. She happens to be one of the better and more open-minded teachers in the school. She raises eyebrows imposingly whenever she's angry or giving a rebuke, but she's contrastingly and extremely apologetic when she accidentally offends. Her sharp, singsong wit seems to match her outfit; black slacks and a deep green button-down shirt.

David-Charlie's friend, who acts as the voice for all the silent ones who can't directly defend themselves without breaking their silence. He's a straight ally who's passionate about gay rights, and a little geeky. He only just manages not to commit social suicide with his thick, horn-rimmed glasses because hipster is in, but his navy man-cardigan may do him in where the glasses failed to. He wears dark jeans, red vans, and in contradiction to the rest of his getup, the front of his hair is spiked up.

Connor-Connor is 15 and the principle homophobic kid. Swaggering, confident on the outside—really unsure and insecure (like any bully, really.) He's secretly questioning his sexual orientation, which freaks him out. His brown hair is combed down on his head at a jaunty slant with a little bit too much gel, because it naturally wants to be curly. His swelling paranoia as the play runs its course gets conveyed through a hair flick that he at first does to be cocky, but then does increasingly frantically and

frequently. He doesn't repeat this tic often enough to come across as twitchy, but he does repeat it enough to come across as immensely ill at ease. Connor wears a tight gray muscle shirt, a necklace with a shark tooth on it, tan cargo shorts, and a pair of faded Nike sneakers.

Skye-A pretty, popular girl who approaches the class with a homophobic attitude at first. Later on, it becomes clear that she's more curious than she is hostile. She acts as sort of an emotional barometer for the average kid in the school with regards to LGBT issues. She wears a scarf that was most likely purchased at Urban Outfitters; it is made of an expensive, exotic-looking fabric and is draped around her neck with the ends hanging down like pigtails. Underneath, she wears a white V-neck T-shirt that would reveal a bit too much cleavage without the scarf there, gray skinny jeans, and light brown Ugg boots. Her hair sits bouncily in a side ponytail.

Hogan-Hogan's a little homophobic, but this stems mostly from the fact that he's simultaneously trying to be cool and trying to look like he isn't trying. He has a crush on Skye, and wants to impress her. He asks many of the questions that move the play along. He is never without his Redskins baseball cap that he isn't supposed to be wearing inside of school, and underneath it his hair sits mop-like; it's long, platinum-blond, and beach bum-ish. He also has on a black and gray-checked flannel shirt that it's too warm outside for, completely mismatching black basketball shorts and navy keds.

Note about the monologues:

Whenever a character stands up for a monologue, the stage darkens and the action freezes--we are to assume that the monologue is an internal dialogue taking place inside the given character's head. A lone spotlight shines on the character in focus, who stands up on her or his chair to speak. The DOS Observers who speak monologues don red hoods while they are up on their chairs to symbolize the silence that envelopes them, while the Speakers who have monologues do not wear these hoods. When the monologue is over, the character(s) return to their seats and the action picks up again as though it never paused.

(Lights up on a 10th-grade English classroom with one four-person table cheated out at stage left, another at stage right, and a whiteboard against the back wall in the center. There is a red LED light digital clock directly above the whiteboard. Behind each of the two tables is a door--the one on the left is a closet door, as indicated by the sign on it that reads SUPPLY CLOSET, and the door on the right is the entrance to the classroom. The closet door is decorated with a poster of Shakespeare on a blood-red background, and the classroom door is decorated with a too-childish poster of onomatopoeias like "moo" and "ding" and "splosh." MS. WHISP stands in the classroom for a few moments, tapping a red board marker against the palm of her right hand, waiting for class to start. In another moment, REMY, CHARLIE, DAVID, CONNOR, SKYE, HOGAN, AVRA, and JENNY enter. REMY and CHARLIE enter through the supply closet door, symbolizing the fact that they are out of the closet, and everyone else enters through the normal door. The SPEAKERS all enter at a normal pace, settling down quickly with pencils and notebooks, while the DOS OBSERVERS enter slowly and deliberately, their speaking cards held out in front of them. Before they arrive at their seats, they freeze in place. Spotlights shine on each

of them and on David who is sitting cross-legged on the section of table in front of his chair.)

DAVID

There isn't just one sort of silence--there are many, many kinds. There's the silence of an audience in a newly-dim theatre, as it waits with great anticipation for the curtain to go up and the show to begin. Then, there's the completely different silence that comes from rests in a piece of music, punctuated pauses that add potency to any string of notes. There's awkward silences, comfortable silences, and the silence of two friends desperately looking away from one another as they try to stifle their laughter in the middle of a class. There's sleepy silences and contemplative silences, guilty silences and awed silences and solemn silences. And most of the time, it's hard to tell the difference between them all...you have to read body language, interpret contexts. Like today; this silence isn't easy to read. *(Beat)* Maybe it's a little of everything--awkward and funny and serious and full of suspense, like most things that happen in high school. But what does silence sound like, exactly? I mean, look at the "Onomatopoeia" poster over there. There's "crack!," and "splish!," and "boom!," and "ring!" But get right down to it, and silence is just...

(He cuts off, and keep standing, still, for ten slow seconds before sitting down in his chair. Meanwhile, the first four kids sit at the table at stage left, and the latter four sit at the table at stage right. Also, Ms. Whisp writes the date, 4/16/10, on the board, and the words "Civil Disobedience.")

CONNOR

(Hissing at the slow-moving DOS Observers)

Come on and sit down already!

MS. WHISP

(Reading off of list she gets from end of left-hand table. The attendance is very fast-paced.)

Okay guys, let's get attendance out of the way. Avra.

AVRA

(Raises her hand halfway into the air)

MS. WHISP

Charlie.

CHARLIE

(Smiles and waves)

MS. WHISP

Connor...Connor?

CONNOR

Not here.

MS. WHISP

I appreciate that, Connor.

CONNOR

(Muttering as teacher continues with attendance)

Well, what? It's a classroom full of ghosts today, if you hadn't noticed. I feel like I'm in a freakin' horror movie: *(mockingly)* it's quiet...too quiet.

MS. WHISP

David.

DAVID

Present!

MS. WHISP

Hogan?

HOGAN

I'm here.

MS. WHISP

Jenny.

JENNY

(Her hand shoots up. She practices raising her hand at home when she's not doing supplementary coursework.)

MS. WHISP

Remy?

MS. WHISP

(She has been lost in thought because of Connor's news and has missed that whole exchange.)

His parents wouldn't let him come? That's really too bad.

DAVID

He's an Evangelical Christian who just moved here from the Bible Belt. What could we expect?

CONNOR

Excuse me? I think he's pretty well justified and I think you should shut up like your friends.

MS. WHISP

(Interrupting loudly)

And Skye.

SKYE

Here.

MS. WHISP

Well, clearly we've observed that it's the Day of Silence today. The more sharp-eyed among you may have known it was coming long before now, thanks to some beautiful rainbow banners made by the GSA, and various other decorations in the day's theme color, red.

(Avra rises for a monologue--see note.)

AVRA

Redness and silence go together. It's something about them: the pale rouge of quietly flushed embarrassment, or the way the inside of your eyelids look when you close your eyes in a room full of bright lights. Red's that soft color flooding the sky right when the sun's about to disappear from view, and the color of speechless rage, too. Red's that color that spills in gushes out of soldiers who die on the battlegrounds of petty, protracted wars, and the color of watermelon so delicious on a hot summer day that people refuse to speak until they've gulped down every mouthful right to the rind. Redness and silence shine today, sparkling and shimmering and

REMY

(Flashes a double thumbs-up and an open-mouthed grin)

MS. WHISP

Richard...kids, is Richard here today?

HOGAN

Could be cutting.

CONNOR

No, he isn't. His mom kept him home because of...you know. The Day of Silence.

SKYE

(In stage whisper to Hogan)

Don't you think it's like a whole day of interrupting class just so the gay kids can find each other based on who's silent and hook up?

HOGAN

(Also whispering)

That's bullshit. Don't they have gaydar for that already?

SKYE

(Whispered)

How do you even know what that shit is? You're so gay.

HOGAN

(Louder)

This is the gayest English class I've ever been in.

REMY

(Overhears this last comment, rips a piece of lined paper out of her notebook, scrawls out "HELLZ YEAH" in capital letters, and flashes it to Hogan. He glares.)

commingling into pale, hushed splendor.

(Back to normal.)

MS. WHISP

(Continuing where she left off)

Can anyone tell me how the Day of Silence might tie in well with what we're learning about today--civil disobedience, that is?

(Hogan raises his hand.)

MS. WHISP

Hogan.

HOGAN

Actually, I was just sort of wondering what the Day of Silence is--no, I mean, I have an idea from being in school all day with this going on, but I still don't really get it.

SKYE

(whispered to Hogan)

Suck-up.

MS. WHISP

You know what? That's completely valid. Who here knows what the Day of Silence is?

(Most of the class raises hands, but Jenny's hand is, as usual, first in the air.)

Tell us, Jenny.

JENNY

(Wordlessly gets up out of her seat, hands her teacher a neatly-folded speaking card, and sits back down.)

MS. WHISP

Oh wow, okay of course. Sorry Jenny. Well that's why these cards come in handy. Now I don't want to make this mistake again, so just by a show of hands who is participating in the day? And I'll be checking with the faculty advisor of the GSA later, so no lying to get out of participation.

(Jenny, Remy, Charlie, and Avra raise their hands.)

Now I'm going to read you all what the card says...

CONNOR

(While she unfolds the card and clears her throat, Connor whispers carryingly across the room to Skye)

Jenny? Know-it-all Jenny purposefully missing out on an opportunity to participate in class? What, is she gay or something?

(Skye raises her eyebrows and giggles unkindly. Jenny blushes bright red and stares down at her notebook.)

MS. WHISP

"Please understand my reasons for not speaking today. I am participating in the Day of Silence (DOS), a national youth movement bringing attention to the silence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their allies. My deliberate silence echoes that silence, which is caused by anti-LGBT bullying, name-calling and harassment. I believe that ending the silence is the first step towards building awareness and making a commitment to address these injustices. Think about the voices you are not hearing today." You know, I think that puts it very nicely. Hogan, do you think you can try answering the question now?

HOGAN

Nah, let someone else take it. I'm still thinking.

MS. WHISP

Connor, help him out.

CONNOR

I didn't raise my hand.

MS. WHISP

I'm going to be exceptionally honest with you: I don't care.

(The stage darkens but for a spotlight on Remy, who stands atop her chair and dons her fitted red hood. The other characters are frozen in time.)

REMY

I think that pretty often, silence is more honest than words. Or at least more exact. The logic to that conclusion is simple—if you don't open your mouth to speak, you can't possibly lie. And it's not even blatant lying I'm talking about—like, you know, someone asks you if you're gay and you straight up deny it.

(Beat) Every day when I enter my apartment building, I walk past my doorman, Reg, and every day he says, "Hey Remy, how are you?" Without variation, I always respond, "I'm good, thanks. How are you?" And he almost always says the same thing, too. Neither of us stops to actually assess how we're feeling, and speak a truthful answer. "Good" is the truth some of the time—one would hope—but mostly it isn't, or it isn't specific enough.

It's like the George Orwell book we just read, 1984, with the Ministry of Truth's intentional linguistic imprecision. They aim to get rid of "superfluous" words in the English language, to wreck the complexity of human communication and to make it impossible for the Outer Party to rebel or recognize the impossible paradoxes upon which their dystopic society is built: "War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength." It would be easy to equate silence and ignorance, but sometimes silence is wisdom.

(Contemplative pause, and then) Perhaps on some level I think that Reg the doorman doesn't truly care how I'm feeling as I come home from track practice late on a Monday afternoon. Perhaps, to be brutally honest, I don't care too much how Reg is feeling. Perhaps he's bored or lonely or trying to get a good Christmas bonus, but maybe he's just really fucking kindhearted. And I should be too. Because that's what today is really about.

(The class returns to normal and unfreezes.)

CONNOR

Why don't you call on Remy or Charlie or Avra?

MS. WHISP

If you had been paying attention--and I am generously going to assume that you were not paying attention--you would know the answer to that question.

CONNOR

But Ms. Whisp, I can't. I've just decided to participate in the Day of Silence.

MS. WHISP

This is unacceptable.

CONNOR

What do you mean it's unacceptable? You have to let me. It's a free country.

MS. WHISP

I hardly think that I'm restricting your rights to free expression by demanding that you be respectful in my classroom. Right now you're disrupting my class, and you're

cheapening the day for the people who actually care about it. If I hear any more words from you on the subject--or lack thereof--I'm going to have to ask you to leave. David, will you please answer the question and get this class back on track?

DAVID

Yeah, okay. Well, I'm pretty sure that's when people refuse to obey certain laws that the government wants them to comply with. (*Growing steadily more confident as his response continues*) But the big thing is that their resistance is completely nonviolent. Like, during the American Civil Rights Movement, protestors would stage sit-ins in diners to try and get them desegregated, and in India Gandhi staged hunger strikes to campaign for independence from the oppressive British Empire. These instances of social action are a lot like the Day of Silence, because keeping silent is a way for the LGBT community and straight allies to protest bullying in a nonviolent manner.

MS. WHISP

That's excellent, David. You know, it was Henry David Thoreau's 1849 essay, entitled "Civil Disobedience" that inspired many later nonviolent protestors. He himself protested the Mexican-American war, and also I think slavery, by not paying his taxes. Fun fact. But actually I brought that up because Thoreau once said: "In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood." I think that our class will safely be able to avoid tragedy, now that we understand and can be supportive of the silence of our peers.

REMY

(*Flashes her characteristic double-thumbs up at Ms. Whisp.*)

(*Ms. Whisp keeps on mouthing words but is no longer actually talking as the lights fade out, and Charlie rises for a monologue.*)

CHARLIE

Peers, huh. (*Beat*) There comes a point sometime in elementary school that most people never really notice, the point at which your teachers stop referring to all of your classmates as your friends. Before that point, it's always, 'come on and finish up your spelling test, Charlie, so you can join your *friends* on the rug for quiet reading time.' In high school though, it's your *peers* this, or if you have a weirdly formal teacher, your *compatriots* that. But never friends anymore--obviously it's not at all like that now. Come on, I mean Ms. Whisp knows instinctually that me and Connor over there aren't friends...it'd be a stretch to even call us acquaintances. (*Another pause, and then he continues with more intensity*) I didn't come out of the closet until last year, but to be honest it seems like there was no need to, (*bitterly*) it seems like everybody already knew, even before I did. Even the boys in the 3rd grade! They knew, they perceived. They used to call me names on the playground at recess--they didn't know the word "gay" quite yet, they didn't know the word "faggot," but they could still call me "weakling," and "sissy," and generally make my life hell. They got a good laugh out of it, and then one recess they decided that it

would be even funnier if they *really* drove the nasty nicknames home by beating me up. (*Louder*) I didn't know it was coming; they shoved me from behind, and all of a sudden I was flat on the astroturf. I had a bad bloody lip, bleeding all over my chin and my favorite Rolling Stones T-shirt. (*More quietly*) I didn't know it was coming, so I couldn't defend myself, but I look back... and wonder whether that isn't just my excuse for not standing up to them. I just walked quietly off the playground and back into the classroom, and waited to be noticed. Of course my teacher was horrified--called everybody back inside, said 'whoever did this to Charlie, please step forward. Now.' Of course nobody did, and I didn't tattle...(*louder*) I kept silent. (*Pause while lost in memory*) So I remember very clearly when *my* teachers stopped referring to all my classmates as my friends, stopped to realize that their rosy cheeks contradicted their thorny fists. It was that day.

(*Back to normal. Skye raises her hand.*)

MS. WHISP

Yes, Skye?

SKYE

This whole civil disobedience thing--it kind of reminds me of that story we read at the beginning of the year, "Bartleby, the Scrivener." How Bartleby didn't want to do any of the secretarial work the narrator asked of him, so he'd always just say, "I prefer not to."

MS. WHISP

Very good--there's certainly a connection there. Now can anyone think of any other fiction we've read this year that--

HOGAN

(*As she is talking, Hogan whispers loudly to Skye.*)

Who's the suck-up now?

MS. WHISP

(*Hearing the interruption*)

Excuse me Hogan, am I interrupting your conversation?

HOGAN

No, I apologize Ms. Whisp, I--

MS. WHISP

I'm sure whatever you were saying is important enough for the whole class to hear. Go on, say it louder.

(Jenny rises for a monologue.)

JENNY

I guess I've always known that silence can be louder than sound. I went to this Jewish middle school, right, and starting in the 7th grade we used to have to lead Torah services as part of our daily morning prayers every Monday and Thursday. This one Thursday morning, the boy carrying the Torah in the procession got careless, and he nearly dropped it. Well, that would have just about been the end of the world. The Torah is a sacred text that we're meant to treat with all the care of an infant and all the respect of a village elder. The punishment for dropping it would have been...severe. Something to the tune of a 40-day fast, if my Tanach class memories serve me well. Everyone just stood there, paralyzed, immobile, while the rabbi hugged the Torah to his chest, giving the godly object comfort when it needed it the most.

(Louder) I wasn't given comfort when I needed it the most...when I came out to my family. It was awful. It was dropping the Torah scrolls, and watching them clatter, seemingly in slow motion, to the cold hard floor of the Beit Knesset. *(Voice breaks)* Silence. Buzzing, screaming silence that engulfed me to my core, lasting as long as an eternal flame. My father, he *(clears her throat)* he stared at me like he couldn't believe it. Like he didn't recognize me! Like every conversation we'd ever had had been translated into biblical Hebrew, and there was no way he'd ever understand me anymore. And then he told me to get the hell out of his house...

Since then, I haven't been able to come out to anyone else. If I got another reaction like that...I don't know what I'd do. It gets to where some days I'm not even sure who I am anymore, just because I frequently feel like I'd rather have any identity but mine.

(Takes a few shaky breathes and slowly brightens.) But today changes things. This Silence is different. It's holier to me than any Jewish holiday I've ever celebrated. *(Bitter)* It's even holier, apparently, than my father's once-unconditional love for me. *(Brightening again)* Seeing all the people participating with me, in this with me--it's like this giant glowing talisman in my chest. There's all this solidarity--we're united by this redemptive, peaceful purpose--and it makes me happier than I can explain. It makes me clamorously, ringingly, thunderously, clashingly, tumultuously, uproarously, deafeningly, happy.

(Jenny sits back down and the lights go back up, unpauing the rest of the class.)

HOGAN

I was just saying...I was just saying...*(grasping for something to say)* well isn't this whole day kind of stupid?

MS. WHISP

What do you mean?

DAVID

Yes, please do explain how you came to *that* fascinating conclusion.

HOGAN

No, I'm serious, I really do think it's stupid--

DAVID

--Really? Is that what you think? Or do you think it's *gay*, because the way you use the two words interchangeably, they might as well mean the same thing.

(The stage goes dark except for a spotlight on Remy, who dons her red hood and stands on her chair.)

REMY

My cousin and I often call each other up to chat about school, or whatever random stuff we want to talk about. When I'm mad at my sister and bored of my friends, she's always there to talk to. *(Beat, change of pace)* I only officially came out to her a couple of months ago, and she was great with it. I was so relieved, but it's just...I have this persisting insecurity that it's affected our relationship even so. She'll be talking to me *(switches to cousin persona)* "So I wrote all this crap about how the Gettysburg Address makes me appreciate all the freedoms I have in my own life, which I know is so gay--I mean, lame." After she makes her perennial faux pas, she usually makes some excuse to get off the phone. She hangs *up*, and I'm left wondering when I'm ever going to live this *down*. She knows that I found what she said offensive, and she probably just got off the phone because she feels guilty about it. But the days are lengthening between our phone conversations, and I'm always the one who has to dial. *(More intense)* All I can think is that I'll never forgive myself if we lose touch over something this stupid...or as my cousin would say, something this gay. She says "that's so gay" around her friends all the time, because she says it's just the way everyone at her school talks. She says, *(adopts cousin persona again)* "no, no, no...I'm not talking about gay *people*. It's just an expression--it has nothing to do with that!" And I know it might be true. But who can tell the difference? *(Beat)* She does her best to censor herself when she talks to me, but the g-word slips through sometimes. I know she can't help it. But what I also know is this: I may be gay, but I'm not stupid.

(Back to unfrozen normal.)

MS. WHISP

David, let him talk.

HOGAN

Okay! It's just--isn't gay people keeping silent to fight the fact that they can't come out of the closet basically like anorexic people going on a hunger strike?

(David and Connor respond simultaneously.)

DAVID

No.

CONNOR

Yes! He has a point. It's counterintuitive. I'm not saying that this wouldn't be incredibly gross, but wouldn't it make more sense for them to pick a day to act super flamboyant? They could promote visibility instead of perpetuating the silence. Why do they have to play the victim to grovel for their respect?

DAVID

You don't get it! The whole point is to draw attention to the detrimental effects of people remaining silent by necessity! Instead of talking and laughing with their friends today, or participating in class, people are just sitting there. Don't tell me you don't find that just the least bit unsettling.

CONNOR

It's not unsettling. It's gay.

REMY

(Rips out another piece of notebook paper, scrawls upon it the letters "F U," and flashes it at Connor. Unfortunately, Ms. Whisp sees it.)

MS. WHISP

Remy!

REMY

(Quickly modifies her sign to read, "This class is FUN!")

MS. WHISP

Nice save, Remy.

REMY

(Smiles mischievously and nods. Some angry ad-libbing from the speaking members of the class ensues.)

SKYE

Either way, I guess they know what their mothers taught them: if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

HOGAN

Yeah, I guess the cat got all of their tongues, because they sure are as quiet as mice!

(Skye and Hogan high-five. Remy flips them off beneath the table--she knows that there's more ways than one to tell someone to go fuck themselves.)

DAVID

Really, you two? You've resorted to platitudinizing because your repertoire of insults is just that skimpy? Well, I'm not afraid to sink to your level. Silence is golden--ever hear that one? Or maybe, actions speak louder than words--

SKYE

--This is retarded, David. I wouldn't mind all of this if it were a *moment* of silence. Normally when we take time to remember or acknowledge some sad happening, the silence lasts a minute or two. Why do the gays get a whole day? What makes them special?

DAVID

Nothing makes them special. Prejudice is prejudice is prejudice.

(Jenny rises for a monologue.)

JENNY

In the Holocaust, they identified the gay people in the concentration camps by sewing a pink triangle onto their clothing. I would have worn a yellow star and a pink triangle. *(Beat)* I wonder what I would have been hated for more, but then again, it doesn't matter. Prejudice is prejudice is prejudice. *(Beat)* Two years ago in English class, we read Eli Wiesel's memoir, Night, about his experience as a Holocaust survivor. Eli Wiesel wrote, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides." But Eli Wiesel wasn't right that we should never be silent--in this case, today, silence is taking a side, and it's taking the side of the oppressed. Silence was never less passive, never more forcefully piercing in my ears as today.

(Back to normal.)

DAVID

(Continuing where he left off)

All that matters is that students do have the constitutional right to do this. *Tinker v. Des Moines* affirmed that we don't abandon free speech "at the schoolhouse gate," and if you want another example go ask your history teacher about *Morse v. Frederick*. Plus there's the 5th Amendment. Beat that.

CONNOR

(Angrily)

You know perfectly well that the right to remain silent isn't about DOS! It's about keeping your mouth shut when you get arrested. But you know what? Maybe you're right. Some of what you homosexuals do in bed might as well be criminal.

DAVID

First of all, I'm not gay! Second of all, I think you're the criminal. Yeah, it's pretty obvious that the only reason an ignorant bigot like you knows about 5th Amendment rights is getting caught so many times smoking weed with your friends.

MS. WHISP

(Finally intervening)

That's enough! Everyone needs to calm down, now. Everybody breathe, and calm down. Now take a look at how riled up you all just got. This is why we have such a deep admiration for all forms of nonviolent protest. People *want* to hit each other, and they *want* to hurt each other, but they don't. Do you think it was easy for Martin Luther King, Jr. to see his house bombed by the KKK, and then go out and tell an angry mob not to fight back? That "he who lives by the sword will perish by the sword"? He resisted. And that's what's happening here in this classroom. So be proud of yourselves. Yes, Connor?

CONNOR

It was Jesus who said that about living and perishing by the sword. Yeah, you know, the Bible has a lot of good stuff in it. Take the Book of Lev: "you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination."

REMY

(Scribbles furiously, and then holds up another looseleaf sign with the words, "I guess I'll lie with females, then...patriarchal pig.")

DAVID

Hey Connor! How about "love thy neighbor as thyself"? How about "do unto others as you would have others do unto you"? How about the Book of Ecclesiastes: "there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak"? Now and always is the time for tolerance, and now is the time for silence.

CONNOR

Look! I've been in this argument before. I know all the points you want to make-- that I'm picking and choosing my verses, that if we took a literal interpretation of the Bible on everything it teaches, we would stone our disobedient children--

DAVID

--We would stone you.

CONNOR

Let me finish--

MS. WHISP

(Trying to get things back under control)

--Or, if you're like me and you try not to bring religion into the classroom, you could cite our friend William Shakespeare: *(gesturing to poster)* "I like your silence; it the more shows off your wonder." "When words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain." "Speak low, if you speak love."--

CONNOR

--Really, let me finish! The fact is that the Bible doesn't even acknowledge homosexuality on any higher plane than that of a disgusting sex act. *(Beat)* In the Ten Commandments, we are told, "honor thy father and mother." There's no footnote down at the bottom of the tablet, 'oh, and this also applies if you're honoring your father and father, or your mother and mother.' No. The Bible doesn't even consider that arrangement, because it's not natural. Do I need to draw it out for you?

(With that question ringing in the air, Avra rises for a monologue.)

AVRA

I've never been a very good artist. You know those houses that everybody—I mean, even the kids who lived in apartment buildings—would always draw? The perfect little squares with the cookie-cutter doors and two evenly spaced, four-paned windows above and slightly to the sides? And, oh yeah, everything capped off with a bright red roof, a pristine equilateral triangle. I wasn't a very good artist, so I'd draw those generic, those typical, those utterly conventional houses all the way up through the 5th grade. One day—this was in the 5th grade—Ms. Sap assigned us an art project. We were tasked with drawing our houses and our families, and underneath we'd write a little description. I remember being *(pause)* really excited to make mine.

I started a rough sketch of the house, *(walks over to the classroom whiteboard, and takes red marker. Ms. Whisp quietly steps aside)* drawing how I usually did *(on the board, she draws the childish house.)* I was about to sketch in my parents when Ms.

Sap came over and peered down at my paper. 'Good,' she said. 'Now all you need is your family.' She was holding the uni-ball pen she carried around with her everywhere, and before I could stop her—without even asking!—she drew *this* into the invisible front yard of my house. *Mom, (she draws a stereotypical woman and a stereotypical man holding hands below the house on the board. They look like the icons you see on the doors to men's and women's public restrooms.) and dad.*

I was so angry I saw red. I stood up, and tore up that revolting piece of looseleaf paper until the impossibly blinding hue of red occluding my vision had turned orange-yellow-green-blue-purple and finally subsided. Then I turned to face Ms. Sap, and I started to scream. I told her (*gets really loud and intense, gradually*): this is not what my family looks like. This is not what my family looks like! (*slashes her hand across whiteboard, erasing drawing.*) My family is not a husband and a wife decked out in their supremely cis-sexual clothing. My family is not a man and a woman posing on their driveway for a picture that exudes enough heteronormativity to rival the famous painting of "The Farmer and His Wife." Maybe the simplicity, the normalcy of my little house *fooled* you into thinking that you could make assumptions about my life. No, no, and no!

I have two moms. Their names are Kim and Jodi. I love them (*voice breaks*) so much, and I would die for them, and I cannot bear the idea of pretending that our family is something we are not. I have been coming out as the daughter of two moms since I was old enough to speak, and explaining the mechanics of sperm banks and artificial insemination since I was five. I wouldn't have it any other way. If you don't mind, I would like very much to start over and draw my moms in our front garden, holding hands.

(*Avra gives back the marker, slowly returns to her seat, the lights go back up on everybody, and the scene unfreezes.*)

CONNOR

(*Continuing where he left off*)

Ms. Whisp, why do you defend them, anyway? I did of course notice that we call you Ms. Whisp as opposed to, say, Mrs. Whisp. So are you on your way to becoming an old maid, or do you have a...girlfriend? Are you a lesbian?

MS. WHISP

(*Yelling*) Connor, leave. (*He does so, stomping.*) This is getting way out of hand. (*Softer, so the students need to strain their ears to hear her*) Quite aptly, I am making the decision for everybody to work quietly for a while. We've been talking about hunger strikes. Gandhi demonstrated in this way while he was incarcerated in 1942, knowing that if he died, his fame would make his death a real embarrassment for the British, who happened to be trying to condemn European dictators at the time. Open your journals, and I want you to imagine that you were there with Gandhi, fasting for your country's freedom. I'll be collecting these tomorrow, so be thoughtful and be descriptive--really get inside your character's head. And bear in mind what you learned in our creative writing unit--I want you to write with all five of your senses.

(Remy, David, Avra, Charlie, and Jenny all stand up on their chairs. All of them but David wear red hoods. Spotlights focus in on each of them, while the rest of the room is dark and silent but for the scribbings of pencils on notebook paper. At some point during the sequence, Connor reenters the room.)

REMY

Sight.

AVRA

Taste.

CHARLIE

Touch.

JENNY

Smell.

DAVID

Sound.

TOGETHER

Sight.

REMY

They say that if one of your senses is impaired, it heightens the rest of them. Blind people--for example--often have above-average, acutely heightened hearing abilities. There's actually neurological evidence for this phenomenon, as cells once programmed for a disabled function adapt to take on other responsibilities that can better harness their potential *(the other standing kids turn to look at her simultaneously, and she notices)* Hey! I can secretly be a nerd. I'm pretty damn open about everything else. *(Beat)* Anyway, I just didn't realize that the same principle applied to mute people.

Silence...crystallizes everything. It vivifies. Never before today had I noticed so much red in stoplights, or in the shiny wrapper of my morning, 90-calorie chocolate-chip chewy bar. The highlights in kids' hair, the round blood-drive buttons kids have pinned to their backpacks--it all takes on a deeper meaning today, somehow. It makes me wonder how many kids in their crimson graphic tees and American Apparel zip-ups selected those outfits this morning on purpose, for DOS. And walking through the public garden on the way to school, I stopped to notice the red tulips coming out--hahahaha, coming out. Geddit?

TOGETHER

Taste.

AVRA

The pizza from Luigi's down the street seemed like it tasted better today--and I don't know, maybe that's completely irrational. But it's because when you're into a conversation you don't notice *what* you're cramming into your mouth, but silence lets you sit and savor.

TOGETHER

Touch.

CHARLIE

I've learned to stick up for myself since the 3rd grade, and I'm much better off for it. But I cried at lunch today. Frustrated tears, because I was being taunted—as usual—except it being DOS, I couldn't fight back. That would have been more of a victory for them. I just pressed my hands against the cool railing in the stairwell; noticed its smoothness like a pebble softened by eons of lapping seawater. I willed my taunters away. (*Beat*) But it's funny how crying has never been so intense—how hard I tightened my stomach to stifle my wracking sobs; how only the occasional gasp broke through; how the teardrops left wide, stinging ruts down the concaves of my cheeks. It didn't feel good, but I felt it powerfully. And I felt empowered.

TOGETHER

Smell.

JENNY

April might claim to be spring, but it barely ever actually acts like springtime. But April 16th, 2010 positively stinks of spring--no question. The freshly cut lawns, the heady fragrance of the roses and the daffodils--even the musty smell of the paper in my notebook that I've always thought smells a lot like matzah. It's all here, each blade and bloom and sheaf electrifyingly aromatic.

TOGETHER

Sound.

DAVID

I'm trying my best to be the voice for all the people who can't speak today, but it isn't easy. There's not a lot of kids in this school who mean well when they approach the kids observing DOS, and those who do...give me a break! They showed you the speaking card for a reason--don't you know they can't answer your follow-up question about whether you have to be gay to participate? The answer to that is no, by the way. I know how difficult it must be for Remy and Avra and Charlie and Jenny to be stripped of the power to defend the issues they care about on the only day that people are finally taking an interest. Seeing that, it makes a part of me feel like

Hogan and Skye and Connor are right about today. But then I look into the eyes of those who are silent (*he does*) and I see their faces--set, steely, determined, and full of resolve. And I know this is worth it. Because silence may sound like (*he is silent for 10 seconds, demonstrating*) but also it sounds like a chorus of warblers, sparrows, wrens, kinglets, and chickadees, all singing the sweet, ethereal melody of the spaces between noise. An angel with laryngitis croaking out a soundless, secret Serenity Prayer.

JENNY

Silence smells like a candle snuffed softly into darkness by a lover's lips, like white wax drip-drying into shapes on the bases of her candlesticks.

CHARLIE

Silence feels like the patter of rain on blistered sunburnt skin, ever so gentle, relieving the pain. Inflamed but full of coolness, hollow but full of riches.

AVRA

Silence tastes like hot chocolate--not the powdery, saccharine crap, but the real stuff so real you can only buy in specialty stores and botanical gardens. The cocoa is bitter and intoxicating and dark, and some people don't like it. Some people can't handle it. But I can.

REMY

Silence looks like a stream, always flowing forward. There are rocks jutting out all over the place, and fallen branches and patches of bullrushes, and all kinds of natural detritus the stream has to circumvent. Still. It flows forward undeterred, clear but at the same time arched and ruddy like a thousand rainbows refracted and dispersed by gleaming sunlight.

(The DOS Observers sit back down, and the whole class writes quietly for a while. Suddenly, Charlie breaks the point of his pencil by accident, and his pencil and notebook both slip off the desk and onto the floor.)

CHARLIE

(Muttering unthinkingly and very audibly)

Shit.

(He immediately claps his hands over his mouth, remembering the silence he just broke by mistake.)

Shit!

CONNOR

Nice one, Charlie. I knew it was worth betting my lunch money that you wouldn't last the day.

(Charlie stands up for a monologue.)

CHARLIE

I always feel really bad about wasting my lunches—packing more than I can eat and throwing it out afterwards. Because while I'm scraping the food in the garbage—and I know this is really weird—I always think about how it would have *(beat)* preferred to be eaten. And no I'm not going so far as to say that food has a personality or the cognition to elect to die one way or another. (Disregarding, of course, the fact that by the time the food reaches me, it's already hopefully dead.) I wind up feeling like the food died in vain. And that's how I feel right now. My silence was a waste! All that time keeping my mouth zipped diligently shut--so diligently, because it's to promote an issue that's so important to me. And all of a sudden this lapse, this dropping a notebook, yelling "shit," and it's the whole day out the window. Why? How? It's like, first I'm wrong by being gay, and then I can't even be gay right? *(Beat)* David would tell me that I'm being too hard on myself. That I'm just disappointed. And maybe he's right--I should follow the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law. If my silence ended a little prematurely, so what? So? What? It wasn't wasted; I made my difference. And after English, I think I'll go and give those thugs from earlier a very verbal piece of my mind.

(Back to normal.)

CHARLIE

Shut up!

CONNOR

Yeah, because that worked out really well for you, didn't it?

MS. WHISP

It sounds like some people need reminding that it is currently time for working quietly.

SKYE

(Somewhat sassily)

Excuse me, Ms. Whisp, but it's pretty clear that none of us can really focus on the assignment right now.

MS. WHISP

(Sighing)

Somehow, Skye, I got that sense. I understand that today brings a lot of sensitive issues to bear, and that you want to discuss them. You're probably not going to get a better, or at least more civil, opportunity to do that than in this classroom, at least not for a long while: it's unfortunate what I've overheard even some of my colleagues saying, comments that rival the disrespect of some of you. I don't trust them to offer you this opportunity if I don't. And besides, *(gesturing to poster)* our pal Shakespeare says that "there is no darkness but ignorance." So you're right, Skye. Go ahead and kick off the discussion.

SKYE

(Not really knowing what to say)

This whole "coming out" thing. Wouldn't all the bullying stop if people just didn't come out? I mean, why do it? Why flaunt your sexuality? I don't run around shouting out to the world that I'm straight. Why can't the school have a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, like the military? Why is it anyone's business that you're gay?

CHARLIE

Some people can hide their sexuality--they can and they do. Others just can't. And anyway, a DADT policy in public school would be horrifying--what are you proposing, that openly gay students be expelled? Besides, the answer isn't to closet us--rather, it's to increase tolerance of what ought to be out in the open. You say that we flaunt our sexual orientation, but we don't any more than straight people do. Every time you kiss your boyfriend in the hall, or talk about hot guy celebrities and who your friend hooked up with at the party last weekend, that's you *(he makes quote-y marks with his hands)* "flaunting" your sexuality. Meanwhile I can't talk about my boyfriend, let alone hold hands with him or kiss him in the hallway without people freaking out. It's a huge double standard.

(The stage darkens, time freezes, and Remy, Charlie, and Jenny get up on their chairs. Charlie no longer wears his red hood.)

REMY

Coming out

At first I thought I'd never have the guts

What was I—nuts?

To want to tell people this secret, only for them to misinterpret, and for me to regret

I was keeping the closet door shut, thank you very much

CHARLIE

Because struggling with sexuality is hard

And I am permanently scarred/ by that shard/ of truth I had to internalize
Until I realized after how many tries, how many heteronormative lies
That it was time to be wise, to say my goodbyes to my despised disguise
Devise a plan to
Revise my self-acceptance
So that I could arise/ honestly in the eyes /of my friends and family
No more denying, no more nearly crying/ as I asked myself why
No more relying/ on that proverbially closed closet door
Well I'm still shy, not shouting up to the sky, the fact that I happen to be bi

JENNY

Because struggling with sexuality is hard!
It's getting cold feet at the wedding society wants me never to have
It's gripping that ice-cold door handle, sure I'm about to turn the knob, but
chickening out at the last second (it should be called chickening *in!*)
It's pushing the inevitable back one more day, one more week
I'll tell them all tomorrow because right now when I try to open my mouth
Nothing comes out and I can't seem to speak
This situation's going south
This [closet] is like a prickly, sharp [claw set] on ripping out my soul

REMY

Because struggling with sexuality is a process
Late school nights after homework and track practice spent with search engines,
Spent clearing computer histories

Closets are for old art projects and sneakers and high heels

But closets are not for people—not for me

So why the hell is it so hard to be who I want to, and who I need to be?

Because the answer is not to get down and plea on bended knee

“Can I please break free?”

To some degree, you need to break down the door!

CHARLIE

Coming out

I thought about doing the deed in a lot of ways

Option 1: symbolically stepping out of the closet in my parents' bedroom...but I couldn't fit inside and still close the door, and I stubbed my toe on a pair of high heels

Option 2: playing Diana Ross's "I'm Coming Out" until they got the picture

Option 3: segueing from something currently in the media

“Did you see in *People* that Ricky Martin just...”

“How 'bout that Prop 8 trial?”

“You know, the Day of Silence is coming up...You don't know what that is?”

Never mind

“So I found this awesome band, Tegan and Sara...did you know they're both lesbians?”

Option 4: Maybe I could, I don't know, embroider a fucking pillow: I'm not straight

But in the end I just said it

JENNY

Because struggling with sexuality is hard,

Feeling excited sparks ignite at my first unguarded sight of two girls kissing
So this is what was missing from all those other kisses on TV
I'd replay that scene between Callie and Erica
From the *Grey's Anatomy* finale of season four
Over and over, because no onscreen kiss
Had ever made me feel that way inside before
...And then, I discovered *The L Word* on youtube

CHARLIE

Because struggling with sexuality can be treated like a puzzle
That's how I dealt with it, anyway
Educating myself for hours on the history of Stonewall and pride parades
On the Kinsey scale, on sexuality's fluidity, on gathering the strength not to
Masquerade behind a big-ass walk-in closet full of stupidity

JENNY

In or out?
It sounds like a fashion critic judging a trend
But really it's me envisioning a life-altering decision
Not that *it* was a choice, not at all, because I was born this way
But the choice to come out was
The choice not to bend down, and hide, and give in, and die inside was!

REMY

Closets are for hangers and clothes, the gay rights activists all say

I came out to my aunt first, who's gay herself
I stood still, still unsure
Like I was frozen fast onto some frigid ice shelf
Staring at the floor, now, trembling to the core
Then in a high-pitched voice most unlike my own (creaky like an unhinging closet door?)
Tone squeaky with dismay
I said, "I think I might be gay"
She nodded at me, not speaking right away
So I drank in all the acceptance her gaze would convey
"Okay," she said, "it's okay"

REMY

Next to know were my sister and brother
Followed closely by my mom and dad
Sarah and Lucca told me that they kind of already knew
Mom and dad were more surprised, but glad that I would confide in them
And they told me how much they loved me
Which almost made me lose it
After keeping my composure so well the rest of the time,
Because the relief is sublime
That they know that I'm the exact same person as I always was
I'm still the same girl, even if this one new side of me
Will like a rainbow after a great flood, unfurl

(Back to normal.)

SKYE

(Continuing where discussion left off)

That actually makes a lot of sense. I think that a lot of the--what's the word--heteronormativity?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

SKYE

Heteronormativity. I think a lot of the heteronormativity in our society comes from pop culture. Take music: "When a Man Loves a Woman," is a 1960s classic by Percy Sledge. The opening line of "Miracle" by Cascada is "boy meets girl." My favorite lyric from the band Counting Crows is "American girls are weather and noise, playing the changes for all of the boys," and another of my favorite bands is actually called Boys Like Girls! It's rampant.

AVRA

(Makes eye contact with Skye; smiles and nods at what she is saying.)

HOGAN

I have another question.

MS. WHISP

Shoot. These kids have answers.

HOGAN

Are people born gay? Because personally, and don't take this the wrong way, but personally, it would be easier for me to accept someone's homosexuality if I knew they were born gay. Born that way instead of deciding to become that way, I mean. Because then they couldn't help it...it's not like it was up to them, then.

SKYE

Right. Then it's more like the accident of birth. Like race. You're born black, or white, or Asian, or whatever--and you can't just decide to be someone else.

DAVID

I think most gay people believe that they're born gay. Is that right, Charlie?

REMY

(Scribbles on looseleaf: "I was born gay.")

CHARLIE

(Laughs) Not to be the spokesperson for all LGBT people or anything, but yeah, I think that's true. I think I was. Still there's some people who are convinced that they're straight for the longest time, and then they fall in love with members of the same sex. Those people might say that they chose to be gay. But I don't know...not really! Because it's not about labels and none of it's clear-cut. Those people are more likely to say--I'll love whoever I fall in love with, girl, guy, and everyone in between--and power to them.

DAVID

And also it doesn't have to be just born that way or just raised that way. It could be some combination of nature and nurture. No one really knows.

MS. WHISP

The other thing to think about is, why does it matter how someone comes to that revelation? Either route is a valid one on the path of self-identification we all must journey down at one point or another in our lives. Before it's all over.

(Avra rises for a monologue.)

AVRA

When this is all over, we'll all have a Breaking the Silence Ceremony in the cafeteria. We'll file down there and sit patiently at the staid gray tables, making not a peep, until the president of the GSA raises her first three fingers. Her index finger, the one that points not accusingly, but in cold recognition of homophobes *(Charlie stands up and points at Hogan, as though frozen)*. Her middle finger, the one that tells the people who are really asking for it to fuck off and leave people who are different from them alone *(Remy stands up and flips off Connor, freezing in place)*. And her ring finger, the one that her future wife will one day lovingly slip an engagement ring onto--not her civil union spouse or domestic partner, but her wife *(Jenny stands up and proffers her hand--her fingers arched and splayed as though showing off a ring--freezing in place)*. The president of the GSA will raise her fingers: one, two, three. And when they go up, all of us sitting will stand up, rise up, and scream as loud as we possibly can. We'll scream until our throats are raw and red. *(Avra raises the fingers of her left hand, one, two, three. On three, everyone in the class stands up and screams as loudly as they possibly can, then abruptly falls silent. Charlie, Remy, and Jenny unfreeze as this happens. After a beat, Avra continues.)* Because then, and only then, will the students of this school recognize the full gravity of the voices they are not hearing today.

(Back to normal.)

HOGAN

Here's why it matters. Let's say I've liked girls all my life, and then one day after basketball practice I'm in the locker room with Connor and I notice that he's got nice abs. If I just up and decide that I want to get with Connor and be gay because I like his six-pack, that's really messed-up and perverted. But if I've always been gay, then it's just normal for me. No homo!

CONNOR

Woah man, I was getting a little scared there for a second.

REMY

(Writes on looseleaf: "I bet Connor does have nice abs. No hetero!!!)

CHARLIE

(Magnanimously) But it's not fair for you to judge, and chalk it all up to lust. Some people claim to have known they were gay from practically the time they were in utero, but that's rare. I didn't know for sure until I was fourteen. It's much more common to realize later, but then look back and laugh at yourself because of all the, sort of, signs. Things you only recognize in retrospect. Hey, that day in the locker room could be the epiphany. *(Teasingly)* It has to happen sometime.

REMY

(While Charlie speaks, Remy writes on looseleaf: "I knew in utero.")

(Surprise--Connor rises for a monologue.)

CONNOR

Earlier in English this year, we read a book called Caucasia. I didn't like too much about the book, but this one character--his name was Ali--he wasn't too bad. He didn't take anybody's bullshit--especially not his father's, especially not when his father left his mother because as it turned out, the man was gay. His father married a woman, had a kid with her, lived a lie his entire life. He couldn't admit the truth about who he was for...years. *(Louder)* But it had to happen sometime. *(Beat, then changes tone and gets really honest)* I'm that guy. I'm afraid I might be gay, and there's no way I can deal with that, and there's no way I can admit it to my friends. So how could I be silent today, let alone respect *their* *(gesturing to the room at large)* silence, when it makes me want to scream my lungs out and break something? So I turn to cynicism and cruelty. Sarcasm. Hah. You know, that's another thing we learned in English class, when we read The Catcher in the Rye--that sarcasm is a weapon of the weak. A defense mechanism. Maybe I am weak, maybe I know that in the deep place. *(Truculently)* But the weak don't lay down their arms--no! They grasp their instruments of destruction more tightly to them, and they lunge and they jab and they thrust and they stab until the blood of their enemies and friends runs red. The weak destroy until they elevate themselves by sheer relativity, until they've created--not something to be proud of. But something that makes them seem stronger. *(Forlornly)* Because Remy and Charlie and Avra and

Jenny--they aren't the silent ones. I am. They're silent for the scared shitless, questioning people like me, but it's not helping.

(Back to normal.)

HOGAN

Whatever you say, Charlie.

DAVID

It's all so much worse than just verbal discrimination by students in schools--the way you devalue and dehumanize with your taunting and your teasing. Think of the barbarous hate crimes committed, innocent kids like Matthew Shepard and Larry King beat and bludgeoned to death because of their LGBT identities.

MS. WHISP

That's a very important point, David. And in an effort to salvage the original aim of today's lesson, we may also note all of the government-sanctioned, institutionalized discrimination against the LGBT community. How in 31 states it's still perfectly legal to fire employees on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. How gay individuals can't serve openly in the US military--although "don't ask, don't tell" will probably be repealed soon.

CHARLIE

Hopefully!

MS. WHISP

(Continuing)

How gay marriage is only legal in 5 out of 50 states, and how couples that settle for civil unions miss out on 1,138 different marriage benefits that straight couples take for granted.

REMY

(On loose-leaf: "Marriage is so gay --HRC :-]")

SKYE

Yeah, what's up with that? Some democracy. Our government's like the Animal Farm version of the Napoleonic Code: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

MS. WHISP

Nice connection.

CHARLIE

But on top of that--didn't we adequately establish with *Brown v. Board of Education* that "separate but equal" is a barefaced paradox? Isn't separate intrinsically unequal? In elementary school, we were all forced to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, to recite the line "with liberty and justice for all." But that isn't true! How is this the same nation where freedom rings from every mountainside?

Skye

Why can't we all just be equal?

MS. WHISP

(Wistfully) I don't know, Skye, I don't know. But we can observe the Day of Silence, civilly resist, and keep asking that question until it's no longer just rhetorical and we all do something about it. *(A beat, businesslike)* And on that note, I think we'll have to end, because our time is up. Thank you guys, really, for handling this conversation--for the most part--pretty maturely. Before you go, I'd like to remind you all to take a look at the little signs that are hanging up on lockers, above water fountains—you know, the usual places. These are signs upon which students have written their personal reasons for keeping silent on this day, and that you all should check out.

(Stage darkens, and the DOS Observers stand one by one as they speak their lines.)

REMY

I am silent because it is the honest and kind thing to do. I am silent for my cousin's friendship, which I refuse to give up on.

CHARLIE

I am silent to frustrate my childhood bullies, and those who torment me to this day. I am silent because silence is never wasted.

AVRA

I am silent because I love my moms. I am silent for all the kids who are red and ashamed to speak up about their same-sex parents. I am silent for what comes afterwards, for the moment we break our silence.

JENNY

I am silent because silence is much, much louder than sound. I am silent because I get to take a stance about my identity and my rights.

ALL FOUR

I am silent for those who don't have the means or courage to come out as I did...

REMY

As a lesbian, but screw labels.

CHARLIE

As gay or bi--there's no rush to figure out which.

AVRA

As the straight daughter of two moms.

JENNY

As gay.

(Back to normal. Everyone exits the room through the main classroom door, all except for Connor. The Speakers and Ms. Whisp move hurriedly, the DOS Observers move slowly and deliberately, but Connor takes his time tying his shoes and organizing his stuff until everyone else is gone. He turns around, facing straight into the audience unseeingly; he looks like he is about to cry, but he doesn't. Then he opens his mouth several times as though trying to speak, but he can't. He shakes his head, looks at the floor. Finally he turns around, and laggingly, painfully exits into the closet. Blackout.)