

Abbott Elementary
"Hands on Learning"

Written by

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ABBOTT ELEMENTARY - "HANDS ON LEARNING"

INT. TEACHERS LOUNGE - EARLY MORNING

JANINE walks in and sets down her tote bag and a stack of laminated worksheets. Gregory sits at the table with his head in a Biology textbook with BARBARA and MELISSA. JACOB is in the corner meticulously making coffee art.

JANINE (CHEERFUL)
Morning all! Who's ready for
another day of learning!

GREGORY
It's 7 a.m.

JANINE
Exactly! There's no better time to
start!

AVA bursts into the teachers lounge.

AVA
Good morning, Abbott staff! Due to
my leadership and commitment to
teacher morale, school will now
start at 11. You're welcome.

Ava leaves before anyone can say a word.

BARBARA
Lord give me strength.

JANINE
But what about the kids who can't
get to school that early?

BARBARA
They'll be outside. With the
pigeons. And regret.

JACOB (CHEERFUL)
This is actually a great chance to
rethink the structure of the school
day! The kids will be more engaged
in learning and will retain more
information!

GREGORY
Yeah. My kids aren't even conscious
till 10. Maybe now they will start
to understand my lessons.

JANINE

No. We can't just let them sit around. They will miss out on so much learning.

GREGORY

They already don't listen to me so what difference does it make?

JACOB

Thats because you are BORING. I've already told you to get the kids engaged in the learning.

MELISSA

So? What are we supposed to do?

JANINE

Exactly Jacob! The kids need to be engaged. I'll start a before-school program. That way the students who come early can be extra ready for when school starts.

BARBARA

In the parking lot? With what? Sidewalk chalk and Prayer?

MELISSA (MOCKING)

Oh yeah, great idea. I'll run a class on street smarts, haggling, hiding cash, maybe even a little witness protection.

JANINE

Yes! Maybe. I'll figure it out.

Barbra gives the camera a look.

BARBARA

No she won't.

JANINE TALKING HEAD

JANINE

Kids need structure. If the school won't do it, then I will. How hard can it be?

END COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

EXT. ABBOTT ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - EARLY MORNING

Janine stands proudly in front of a fold out table covered in newspapers, dull crayons, and a handmade sign that reads "MORNING ENRICHMENT PROGRAM". Barbara holds a thick novel and Melissa leans against her car with a coffee. A small crowd of kids mills around, confused but curious.

JANINE (CHEERFUL)

Okay! Station one is "Creative reading with Mrs. Howard. Station two is "Real World Skills" with Mrs. Schemmenti. And finally my station "Arts and Crafts"! We're building our brains and character before breakfast!

MELISSA

Or before common sense.

Janine pretends not to hear her, clapping her hands to get the kids' attention.

JANINE

All right, scholars, let's make some magic!

Barbara opens her book, monotone.

BARBARA

"Chapter One... In early July, in exceptional heat..."

A kid yawns loudly. Another lies down on the asphalt, using their backpack as a pillow. Barbara looks up at Janine.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

You said "Creative Reading." You didn't say creative listeners.

Melissa chuckles.

MELISSA

My turn. (to kids) First rule of the real world, never pay sticker price. Who's got a granola bar? Let's make a deal.

The kids perk up. A few pull snacks from their bags. Melissa starts an energetic lunch-trading frenzy.

JANINE (TO CAMERA)
See? Engagement! That's what
learning looks like!

Behind her, two kids argue over a pudding cup like it's a
high-stakes negotiation.

BARBARA
If this is learning, I'm retiring
tomorrow.

MELISSA TALKING HEAD

MELISSA
Why did I do this? She tries so
hard. Someone's gotta make sure she
doesn't burn down the parking lot.

Beat.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
But if she brings glitter out here,
I'm out.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATE MORNING

Gregory stands at the front with a marker, a textbook and a
quiet class.

GREGORY
So... photosynthesis. Plants take
in water, sunlight, and carbon
dioxide-

A student raises a hand.

STUDENT
Do plants have blood?

GREGORY
No... they (beat) Never mind. Lets
open our textbooks to page 237.

No one moves. A long silence. Gregory sighs.

GREGORY TALKING HEAD

GREGORY
Sometimes I think the plants are
learning faster than the kids.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATE MORNING

JACOB (O.S.)
Hey science Team! Who wants to
build their own ecosystem?

Jacob bursts into the room, arms full of shoeboxes and soil.

GREGORY
Jacob! I am in the middle of-

Jacob cuts off Gregory

JACOB
Learning! Exactly! But this is
hands-on learning. We're bringing
the nature inside!

The kids cheer. Gregory stares at the camera.

GREGORY TALKING HEAD

GREGORY
Every time Jacob says "I have an
idea," I lose three hours of my
life.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

Janine stands with a clipboard, whistle, and color coded
sheet. The chaos is somehow louder.

JANINE
Okay, everyone, transition time!
Crafts to reading, reading to
reflection circles!

No one moves. Half the kids are still with Melissa.

MELISSA
Lesson two, Hide your cash before
you haggle. Who's ready?

The kids cheer. Barbara lifts her book higher, pretending not
to see.

BARBARA
Janine my readers have fallen
asleep. Two of them are snoring in
unison.

JANINE

Thats ok. They're... resting their minds.

She turns to the camera smile twitching. A kid sprints past with a fistful of dollar bills.

JANINE TALKING HEAD

JANINE

Every program has a few hiccups at first. The important thing is structure. The kids need structure.

Behind her through the window, a kid tries to sell another kid his juice box while Melissa referees the deal.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Gregory tries to get the room back.

GREGORY

Let's focus up everyone...

Dirt flies. A leaf sticks to his shirt. Jacob beams proudly.

JACOB

Isn't this great? Learning through chaos!

GREGORY

That's one word for it.

Ava pokes her head in the door.

AVA

Gregory, I like a man who can handle a mess. This your dating strategy or your teaching one?

She smirks and leaves. Gregory deadpans to camera.

GREGORY

Both are going about the same.

JACOB TALKING HEAD

JACOB

People say I get carried away, but learning should be messy.

Beat.

JACOB (CONT'D)

...Still, I might've gone too heavy
on the compost.

END OF ACT 1

ACT TWO

EXT. ABBOTT ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - LATE MORNING

Janine's "Morning Enrichment" table is now a battlefield of half-melted crayons and spilled juice. Barbara fans herself with her book. Melissa's surrounded by kids bartering snacks.

JANINE

Okay, everyone, new plan! Let's do a team-building exercise! We're going to make a "Kindness Circle." Everyone say something nice about the person next to you!

The kids groan. One blurts out—

KID

DeShawn's shoes smell like sadness.

JANINE

That's... not kindness, that's feedback!

Melissa chuckles into her coffee.

MELISSA

If this circle gets any kinder, we'll need a paramedic.

BARBARA

Janine, maybe it's time to call it.

JANINE

Not yet! I just need more structure!

Janine grabs her clipboard and holds up a color-coded chart.

BARBARA

You said that two charts ago.

A gust of wind immediately blows it across the lot. The kids cheer, and begin throwing all of their sheets up in the air.

MELISSA

There's your structure. It's on the move!

JANINE TALKING HEAD

JANINE
Every good program starts with
trial and error.

Beat.

JANINE (CONT'D)
We're just... really focusing on
the "error" part today.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Gregory stands at the front of his classroom, arms crossed.
The room looks like a failed science fair – soil on desks,
broken shoebox "terrariums," and one kid proudly holding up a
worm like a trophy.

GREGORY
All right everyone, let's regroup.
What did we learn from this
experiment?

KID
Dirt tastes bad!

The classroom explodes with laughter. Gregory's eye twitches.

JACOB (JUMPING IN)
See, that's the beauty of it! We're
all ecosystems, interconnected,
evolving, messy, and alive!

GREGORY
That's not scientifically–

A kid sneezes directly into their shoebox. Mud splatters
Gregory's shirt.

GREGORY (CONT'D)
–accurate.

Gregory stares at the camera.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

Janine now stands beside a whiteboard that reads: "Morning
Enrichment: Revised Schedule 2.0."

JANINE

Okay! This time we're doing rotations! Everyone gets five minutes per station. Efficient, educational, engaging!

MELISSA

You're gonna need a stopwatch and a miracle.

Janine blows her whistle. The kids surge forward in a frenzy. Barbara's reading circle collapses as a soccer ball flies past her. Melissa's "Real World Skills" table is pure chaos, with kids waving snacks like cash.

BARBARA

We're losing them, Janine.

JANINE

They're just showing initiative.

Barbara gives her a look. Melissa walks by holding forty dollars, a sleeve of Oreos, and a blue Gatorade like trophies.

MELISSA

Turns out lunch trading pays better than teaching.

BARBARA

Sweetheart, I think your program just turned into a stock market.

Janine sighs, trying to stay upbeat as the kids cheer and sprint in every direction.

JANINE

Okay. Maybe too much initiative.

MELISSA TALKING HEAD

MELISSA

Look, she's trying. But if this goes on any longer, someone's gonna learn how to start a riot. (Beat) Probably me.

INT. CLASSROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

Gregory stands in the middle of his classroom, which now looks like a mudslide hit a Michaels craft aisle.

The kids are laughing, dirt on their hands, and Jacob is in full "engaged learning" mode.

JACOB

See, everyone? Chaos is just nature reorganizing itself!

GREGORY

I'm pretty sure that's just called a disaster.

One kid waves a broken shoebox around like a pirate flag, mud flying everywhere.

KID

Mr. Eddie, mine grew a mushroom!

GREGORY

No it didn't. That's a Cheeto.

The class erupts in laughter. Gregory pinches his nose.

JACOB

Okay, team, let's journal about what our ecosystems feel! Like emotionally!

GREGORY

Jacob, they're boxes of dirt. They don't have emotions.

JACOB

Actually, everything has emotions if you listen closely enough. Even dirt.

Half the kids immediately press their ears to their shoeboxes. Gregory just stares, exhausted.

GREGORY TALKING HEAD

GREGORY

I came here to teach. Today I supervised a dirt fight. (Beat) I don't even think science survived.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jacob trips on a stray shoebox, sending dirt flying. Gregory doesn't even flinch. He turns to the camera.

GREGORY

And people wonder why I water my
plants more than my friendships.

EXT. ABBOTT ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - NOON

Kids are sprawled across the asphalt like defeated soldiers.
The sign has melted, crayons fused to the pavement. Janine
stands in the middle of it, clutching her whistle.

JANINE

Okay. Okay. This... is not working.

She looks around helplessly. No one moves. A kid throws a
granola bar. Janine flinches.

BARBARA

Sweetheart, I think they're
reflecting on their poor life
choices.

MELISSA

And I think I just made fifty bucks
teaching economics.

JANINE

This is fine. I can fix this. I
just need... maybe a spreadsheet.
And a miracle.

Janine looks around the empty chaos. She blows her whistle.
It makes a sad squeak and dies.

JANINE TALKING HEAD

JANINE

It's not about giving up. It's
about... strategic surrender.

INT. AVA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ava is reclined in her chair, sunglasses on, scrolling her
phone. Janine bursts in, flustered, covered in melted crayon
residue.

JANINE (CONT'D)

Ava! We have a problem.

AVA

Girlllll, the only problem you have
is that outfit. What are you
wearing?

JANINE

No, Ava. The kids are outside with no structure, no supervision, and probably a mild sugar addiction!

AVA

So... a normal day at Abbott?

JANINE

This is because you pushed back the start time! I've been trying to run a before-school program, but it's chaos!

AVA

Wait, you've been running a what now?

JANINE

A before-school program! I emailed you the proposal three times.

AVA

Oh, I don't read those. I just reply "great idea" to keep morale up.

JANINE

Ava, please! We need resources, supervision, something!

AVA

Janine, I appreciate your energy, but I'm not giving up my beauty sleep so you can play teacher camp in the parking lot.

Janine blinks, defeated. Ava goes back to scrolling.

AVA (CONT'D)

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm in the middle of a self-care break.

JANINE

It's noon.

AVA

Exactly.

Janine stares at her, speechless.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

The classroom is a wreck. Shoeboxes are overturned, the floor is caked with dirt. Jacob is trying to keep the energy up while Gregory looks ready to quit teaching forever.

JACOB

Alright, everyone! Let's observe
how our ecosystems have evolved
over the last hour!

A kid proudly holds up a shoebox that's just mud and a broken crayon.

KID

Mine has grown into art!

JACOB

That's... beautiful, I guess.

Another kid throws a handful of dirt across the room.

GREGORY

No! No more growing! Everyone go
wash up before lunch. Now!

The kids cheer and race out, leaving muddy handprints on the walls. The door swings shut. Silence.

JACOB

Come on, Gregory. You can't deny
they were engaged.

GREGORY

They were feral. There's a
difference.

JACOB

At least they cared! You think
they'd remember your textbook
lecture?

GREGORY

At least mine didn't end in a
biohazard.

JACOB

You always say you want them
curious. Well, they were curious!
About dirt!

GREGORY
Yeah, Jacob. Because you told them
the dirt had feelings.

Jacob hesitates, trying to think of a comeback. Gregory
stares him down, then looks away, muttering as he starts
picking up papers.

GREGORY (CONT'D)
They don't pay me enough for
emotional soil.

Jacob crouches to help clean, quieter now.

JACOB
Maybe we just teach differently.

GREGORY
You think?

They share an awkward silence as they clean. The door opens.
MR. JOHNSON stands there, mop in hand, surveying the chaos.
He shakes his head slowly.

MR. JOHNSON
Mm. Educators.

He turns and walks off. Gregory and Jacob both sigh in
defeat.

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

The kids trickle back in, still damp from washing their
hands. Gregory and Jacob are quietly cleaning the mess, the
air tense and awkward.

KID (INNOCENTLY)
Mr. Eddie, are we still doing
science?

Gregory freezes. Jacob looks up from sweeping.

GREGORY
Not anymore. We're doing cleanup.

KID #2
But I liked the dirt. Can we do
more dirt tomorrow?

Jacob brightens a little. Gregory gives him a look.

JACOB

See? They're curious. That's learning.

GREGORY

It's also how you get bugs.

The kids giggle. Mr. Johnson leans on his mop, watching.

MR. JOHNSON

You know, real science doesn't need dirt. It just needs mystery meat.

Gregory turns slowly, already regretting asking.

GREGORY

I'm afraid to ask what that means.

Mr. Johnson shrugs, then pulls a cafeteria hot dog out of his pocket like it's completely normal.

MR. JOHNSON

Lunch science. Observe.

All of the kids crowd Mr. Johnson as he grabs a clear cup from a desk and drops the hot dog in. It bobs like a tiny buoy.

KID

Ew! Is that alive?

MR. JOHNSON

If it moves, it's extra credit.

The class bursts into laughter. Gregory rubs his forehead but can't help smiling a little.

JACOB (TO GREGORY)

Look, they're actually paying attention.

GREGORY

Yeah... and I didn't have to laminate anything.

Mr. Johnson stirs the cup with a pencil.

MR. JOHNSON

Lesson of the day: you can learn something from anything... even lunch.

Jacob grins. Gregory just shakes his head, half impressed, half defeated.

GREGORY
He's going to tell the board he's
teaching biology now, isn't he.

MR. JOHNSON
Already do.

GREGORY
Of course you do.

Gregory turns to the class.

GREGORY (CONT'D)
Alright, everyone. It's lunchtime.
Follow Mr. Johnson to the
cafeteria.

MR. JOHNSON
We're dissecting today's special.

The kids cheer and rush out after him. Jacob stays behind,
looking at Gregory. They both take a breath in the now-quiet
room.

JACOB
Hey, sorry. For the dirt storm.

GREGORY
Yeah. Me too. For yelling during
it.

JACOB
Guess we both learned something
today.

GREGORY
Yeah. Not bad for a dirt fight.

EXT. ABBOTT ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The parking lot is quiet now. The "Morning Enrichment" sign
lies facedown, half melted by the sun. A few crayons are
fused to the asphalt. Barbara fans herself with her book
while Janine collects scraps of paper into a trash bag.

BARBARA
Well, the good news is no one was
hurt.

JANINE
Physically. Emotionally, I think we
all took some hits.

BARBARA
You tried, dear. Sometimes the
lesson is knowing when to stop
teaching.

Janine sighs and sits on the curb beside her.

JANINE
I just Thought that if the kids had
structure they would actually
learn.

BARBARA
Structure is fine, but its not
always the solution. Sometimes you
need to work around the issue and
not go through it.

JANINE
Work around it...

She looks off toward the building, thinking.

BARBARA
Yes. Sometimes the best plan is the
one that bends.

JANINE
Right. Ava doesn't want to change
the schedule. So maybe I don't make
her.

Barbara raises an eyebrow.

BARBARA
Just make sure it's the problem
you're solving, not creating a new
one.

Janine nods, smiling slightly.

JANINE
That's the goal.

Barbara gives a small sigh and a knowing smile.

BARBARA
Well... good luck, baby.

Janine stands, brushing her hands off, determination creeping
back in.

JANINE
Thanks, Mrs. Howard.

INT. AVA'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Ava is reclined in her chair, wearing a sleep mask, earbuds in, and a smoothie balanced on her chest. Janine knocks lightly, then steps inside holding her clipboard.

JANINE

Ava?

Ava doesn't move.

JANINE (CONT'D)

Ava!

Ava lifts her sleep mask halfway.

AVA

You're interrupting my leadership meditation.

JANINE

Right. Well, I have a proposal that I think will help morale **and** get mornings back on track.

Ava perks up slightly.

AVA

Does it involve less work for me?

JANINE

Actually, yes.

Ava sits up, intrigued.

AVA

Go on.

JANINE

You said you needed mornings to recharge, right? So I thought, what if we moved your recharge time into your office during school hours instead of delaying the whole schedule?

Ava narrows her eyes, suspicious but tempted.

AVA

You're saying I get to nap and look productive?

JANINE

Exactly. I'll even make a sign for the door that says, "Principal in Deep Reflection."

AVA

Ooh, that sounds expensive. I like it.

JANINE

If you approve it, we can start regular hours again tomorrow. The teachers will think you're working, and you can still meditate.

Ava leans back, considering, then smiles.

AVA

You're sneaky, Janine. I respect that.

JANINE

Thank you. I've been learning from the best.

AVA

Me?

JANINE

Sure. Let's go with that.

Ava throws her feet up on the desk, already pulling the sleep mask back down.

AVA

Fine. Regular start time's back. Now close the blinds on your way out. Leadership needs darkness.

Janine quietly smiles to herself, mission accomplished. She turns to leave.

JANINE TALKING HEAD

JANINE

Sometimes you can't beat chaos. You just have to organize around it.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

EXT. ABBOTT ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - NEXT MORNING

Melissa stands beside her car, coffee in hand, a police cruiser parked behind her. A cop is mid-conversation with her while a few kids watch from the sidewalk.

OFFICER

Ma'am, you can't park in the fire lane.

MELISSA

Oh, I know. But if I parked anywhere else, these kids would have to walk in the street. You wouldn't want that on your conscience, would you?

The officer hesitates, then sighs.

OFFICER

Just... move it next time.

He walks off. Melissa turns to the kids.

MELISSA

And that's how you talk your way out of a ticket.

The kids cheer. Barbara passes, shaking her head.