

Tofu Soup for Everyone

A Play for 3rd through 5th Graders

by

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By Alan D. Perkins

Settings:

QUEENS NEIGHBORHOOD
BATTERY PARK
TIMES SQUARE
LINCOLN CENTER
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Characters

MR. MOHAMMED - A news vendor
FRANKIE - a 5th grader
JACKIE - a 5th grader
PAT - a 5th grader
MRS. RAMIREZ - Puerto Rican lawyer
MRS. LOK - Chinese woman
MR. KATZ - Tailor
TOUR GUIDE
6 TOURISTS (can be played by the same 2 actors)
HUCKSTER - a ticket huckster
DANCER - a ballet dancer
CURATOR - a museum curator

(A Queens neighborhood. Visible are a Korean Deli, a Pizzeria, a Tailor and a news stand. MR. MOHAMMED is straightening newspapers in the news stand. FRANKIE and JACKIE enter, depressed, and sit on the curb.)

FRANKIE

We're gonna be in so much trouble.

JACKIE

We had a week to work on that paper.

FRANKIE

Our teacher is going to kill us.

JACKIE

Our parents are going to kill us.

MR. MOHAMMED

You kids should stop sitting around and get working on that paper.

FRANKIE

We've tried, Mr. Mohammed. We're just having trouble figuring out what it's all about.

JACKIE

You read a lot. Maybe you can help us!

MR. MOHAMMED

Oh, I'd like to kids, but soon everybody will be going into that subway station and I'll need to sell them papers, just like I do every day for the last fifteen years.

JACKIE

Wow. Fifteen years. Does it get old?

MR. MOHAMMED

Of course not! Every day all those people expect to see me here, and I can't let them down. Besides, I have a house to pay for!

FRANKIE

Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Mohammed.

MR. MOHAMMED

Now scoot! Get to work.

(FRANKIE and JACKIE stand up
off the curb.)

FRANKIE

Why is this paper giving us so much trouble? It's just a
stupid paper!

JACKIE

When we flunk, it won't seem so stupid.

(PAT enters.)

PAT

How's that paper coming?

JACKIE

Don't ask.

PAT

Well guess what? I just finished my paper and now my folks
are taking me to the City!

FRANKIE

Why? What's there to see?

PAT

Are you kidding? There's statues and museums and shows ...
and even the Central Park Zoo!

FRANKIE

Really? There's a zoo in Central Park?

JACKIE

(To FRANKIE) What's Central Park?

PAT

You're kidding, right? Of COURSE there's a zoo in Central
Park. Haven't you ever been there?

FRANKIE

Sorry, I haven't.

JACKIE

Neither have I.

(MRS. RAMIREZ rushes by. She
wears a business suit and
carries a briefcase. She
stops at the newsstand to buy
a paper.)

MR. MOHAMMED

Good morning, Mrs. Ramirez.

MRS. RAMIREZ

Good morning, Mr. Mohammed.
(to the kids)
Good morning, kids.

FRANKIE

Good morning, Mrs. Ramirez.

JACKIE

Hey, Mrs. Ramirez - you work in the City, right?

MRS. RAMIREZ

Yes I do. I'm on my way to the subway now.

JACKIE

And you know a lot about the City, right?

MRS. RAMIREZ

I sure do!

FRANKIE

We need some information about New York City for our Social Studies report.

PAT

Hey, quit cheating! <Name of Social Studies teacher> didn't mean ask for help from your neighbors when she said ask questions and do research.

FRANKIE

Hey, what do you mean "cheating?" Mrs. Ramirez is what <Social Studies Teacher> would call a "Primary Resource."

MRS. RAMIREZ

I'd love to help you, but right now I need to run. I've got an important brief to write. I want to make Partner in my Law Firm some day!

FRANKIE

Okay. Bye, Mrs. Ramirez.

MRS. RAMIREZ

Bye, kids! (exits)

PAT

Well, I'll be right behind her. We're taking the subway in. Have fun with that paper!

JACKIE

Thanks. Rub it in.

(PAT exits. MRS. LOK and MR. KATZ enter from two different directions.)

MRS. LOK

Mr. Katz! I want to talk to you. My husband ripped his good sports coat.

MR. KATZ

Bring it in to me, MRS. LOK. I can sew it up in a jiffy.

JACKIE & FRANKIE

Hi, Mrs. Lok. Hi, Mr. Katz.

MRS. LOK

Morning, kids.

MR. KATZ

Good morning, children. What's doin'?

FRANKIE

Nothing, Mr. Katz. We're just trying to write a paper.

MRS. LOK

How can you write a paper out in the street?

FRANKIE

The paper is about the city. We're trying to figure it out.

MR. KATZ

Study hard, kids. It's the only way you'll succeed. I worked and studied hard for years, and now I'm one of the finest tailors in Queens!

MRS. LOK

I studied marketing and economics and business. You can't run a deli if you don't know about math and business

JACKIE

Thank you, Mrs. Lok. But this doesn't help us with our Social Studies paper.

MR. KATZ

Well kids, we have to get to work. Let us know if we can help you.

JACKIE

Thank you, Mr. Katz. We will.

(MR. KATZ and MRS. LOK go
into their respective
stores.)

FRANKIE

We're doomed. I have no idea what to write about. I don't even understand the topic!

JACKIE

If only we could go into the city to find it and figure it out.

(The CABBIE pulls up.)

CABBIE

Find what?

FRANKIE

It's for our paper. It's really important. It's about something in the city, but we don't know what it is.

CABBIE

Well, I'm glad I found you! I know this city inside and out - upside and down. There's nothing in the city I don't know.

JACKIE

Then you'll help us?

CABBIE

Sure! Hop in! So, what exactly are you looking for?

FRANKIE

We're not sure. I know that it's got to be really big ...

JACKIE

And made of metal.

FRANKIE

Yeah! Big and metal!

CABBIE

I know exactly what you're looking for. Let's go!

(They drive off. Scenery
changes to Battery Park.
Everyone gets out of the
cab.)

JACKIE

Where are we?

CABBIE

Where do you think you are? You're in Battery Park!

FRANKIE

Battery Park? I don't see any batteries.

CABBIE

No, no! It's nothing like that at all! Batter Park is a public park at the very Southern tip of Manhattan. There was once a fort here.

(TOUR GUIDE and TOURISTS
enter.)

TOUR GUIDE

This way, everyone. This way.

TOURISTS

(Overlapping) Wow! Look at that! Isn't that interesting
... (etc.)

TOUR GUIDE

Everyone quiet, please.

CABBIE

Hey, you'd better listen in.

TOUR GUIDE

We are now standing in Battery Park, named for the guns and artillery that was stationed here at various times by the Dutch and British. At one end of the park is Hope Garden, a memorial to AIDS victims. At the other end, ferries depart for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

CABBIE

See? What did I tell ya!

FRANKIE

That's not what we're looking for.

CABBIE

But you said you were looking for something big and metal!
There she is! The Statue of Liberty is big and metal!

TOUR GUIDE

The Statue of Liberty was given to the United States by France in the late 19th century, standing at Liberty Island in the mouth of the Hudson River in New York Harbor as a welcome to all returning Americans, visitors, and immigrants.

TOURIST 1

Hey, remember last year when we went up to the Statue of Liberty?

TOURIST 2

Yeah! That was so cool! I climbed all the way to the top!

JACKIE

You mean you can climb the statue?

TOURIST 2

Not on the outside. Inside there are stairs that take you all the way to the statue's crown.

TOURIST 1

In the crown there are windows and you can see for miles!

TOURIST 2

And then we went to Ellis Island! Hey, maybe the Tour Guide will say something about Ellis Island. Shh, let's listen.

TOUR GUIDE

Across from the Statue of Liberty you can see Ellis Island. Ellis Island was at one time the main immigration port for immigrants entering the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, processing more than 12 million immigrants.

FRANKIE

12 million immigrants!

CABBIE

You'd be surprised how many people's parents or grandparents came through there.

TOUR GUIDE

Ellis Island was the first stop for most immigrants from Europe. Before entering the United States, they had to pass a physical examination. Those with serious health problems or diseases were sent home or were held in the island's hospital. Next, they were asked a series of questions, including name, occupation, work experience, and the amount of money they carried with them.

JACKIE

That's cool! Hey, Cabbie, can you take us to Ellis Island after all this?

CABBIE

Not unless my cab grows fins. You can only get to Ellis Island or the Statue of Liberty by boat. You can catch a ferry here at Battery Park.

(The TOUR GUIDE leads the group off stage. PAT enters, who was at the end of the group of tourists.)

PAT

What are you two doing here?

FRANKIE

We're doing research for our paper.

JACKIE

We still can't find what we're looking for.

PAT

Well, you won't find it here. Trust me. The Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and Battery Park have nothing to do with your paper.

FRANKIE

Oh no! Cabbie, you have to help us!

PAT

I gotta go. I can't lose my tour!

(PAT exits.)

CABBIE

All right, kids. Hop in the cab and let's see if we can find what you're looking for. Any other clues?

JACKIE

Well ... I think there are a lot of people there.

FRANKIE

Yeah! Lots and lots of people!

CABBIE

Okay, NOW you're talkin'! I know exactly what you're looking for! Let's go!

(They hop in the cab. Set changes to Times Square. There is a bustle of people milling about. A HUCKSTER trying to sell tickets moves through the crowd.)

HUCKSTER

Come see the best show in town! Save 30 percent with this coupon! It's got singing! It's got dancing! It's been nominated for three Tony's!

FRANKIE

Where are we now?

CABBIE

We are at the Crossroads of the World!

FRANKIE

Where?

CABBIE

You don't know? This is Times Square! The center of it all!

HUCKSTER

You kids have never heard of Times Square?!

JACKIE

I think I've heard of it.

FRANKIE

Where's the clock? If it's "Times" Square, you'd think there'd be a clock.

HUCKSTER

No, no, no! They named it Times Square because it used to be the headquarters of The New York Times. It centers on 42nd Street and Broadway.

FRANKIE

And what's so special about Times Square?

HUCKSTER

You're kidding, right? Times Square is the Theatre capital of the world! Haven't you ever been to a Broadway show?

FRANKIE

No, I haven't.

TOURIST 3

You've never been to a Broadway show?! Last month my parents took me to see "The Lion King!"

JACKIE

I saw that on video.

TOURIST 4

Not the movie, but the Broadway show! People were on the stage live, right in front of us! They were singing and dancing and moving around with these incredible costumes!

TOURIST 3

(Starts singing) *Hakuna Matata ... what a wonderful phrase*
...

FRANKIE

Yeah, yeah, I get the idea.

TOURIST 4

There's nothing like seeing a show on Broadway. For my birthday I'm going to see "Beauty and the Beast."

JACKIE

That's on Broadway too? With live people singing and dancing?

HUCKSTER

Like I said, it's the Theatre capital of the world. There's more live theatre here than anywhere!

(TOURISTS exit.)

CABBIE

And that's not all! Ever watch Dick Clark on New Year's Eve?

FRANKIE

You bet! It's the only day of the year my Mom lets me stay up late!

CABBIE

Well, look right over there. Right where Broadway and 7th Avenue cross - right at 42nd Street. That's where the ball drops from!

JACKIE

You mean this is where all those people are on New Year's Eve?

HUCKSTER

I go every year! I wouldn't miss it. It just isn't New Years unless I'm here in Times Square. Over 750,000 people come here every New Years Eve to watch that ball drop.

(PAT enters.)

PAT

Oh, no. Not you guys again.

JACKIE

Are you following us?

PAT

Don't tell me you're looking here now for help with your paper. You guys are so off base!

FRANKIE

You mean we won't find it here?

PAT

What made you think you would?

JACKIE

This is the Crossroads of the World. It's GOT to be here.

PAT

Sorry. I never had to mention Times Square in my paper. Did I mention that I'll probably get an "A" on my paper? It's really good.

FRANKIE

Yeah. I'll be it is.

JACKIE

Well, ours will be even better!

PAT

It won't if you keep hanging around Times Square. <Social Studies Teacher> always reminds us to stay on-topic ... and the topic has nothing to do with Times Square.

CABBIE

Come on, kids. I'll make sure you find what you're looking for.

PAT

See you in school!

(PAT exits.)

JACKIE

So where do we go now?

CABBIE

You'll have to give me another clue.

FRANKIE

Well ... it has something to do with ... culture.

JACKIE

Yeah! Definitely culture!

CABBIE

I know exactly what you're looking for! Into the cab!

(The enter the CAB and drive off. The scene changes to in front of the fountain at LINCOLN CENTER.)

JACKIE

Where are we?

CABBIE

Lincoln Center!

FRANKIE

All of this for Abraham Lincoln?

CABBIE

No, The Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, home to twelve different arts companies.

JACKIE

Twelve? All around here?

CABBIE

You bet! This the cultural center of New York City!

(A ballet DANCER enters.)

DANCER

Can I help you three?

FRANKIE

Yes, thank you. We're looking for something cultural.

DANCER

Then you've come to the right place. Lincoln Center is all about culture. See that building on the right? That's Avery Fisher Hall, where people go to hear concerts. And see that building back to the right? That's the Vivien Beaumont Theatre where you see big theatrical productions.

JACKIE

Concerts AND shows? This really IS a cultural center!

DANCER

But there's more! See that great big building right in front of us? That's the home to the Metropolitan Opera Company.

JACKIE

Concerts, shows AND opera?

DANCER

And I work in that building on the left. I'm a member of the New York City Ballet, and that's where we perform.

JACKIE

Wo-o-o-o-o-w.

DANCER

But there's still more. At Lincoln Center you can find even more concert halls and theatres. The Julliard School for the Performing Arts is also here. And we even have a Performing Arts library!

FRANKIE

I can see why this is the Cultural Center of New York City!

DANCER

And that doesn't even scratch the surface! There's the Philharmonic, and the Chamber Music Society, and film festivals ...

FRANKIE

... uh, we get the idea.

DANCER

I'm sorry! I get so excited when I'm here! You can just feel the culture in the air!

CABBIE

See! Cultural!

(2 TOURISTS enter.)

TOURIST 1

Say, didn't we see you yesterday performing in "Swan Lake?"

DANCER

Yup! That was me!

TOURIST 2

Can I get your autograph?

DANCER

Absolutely! Thank you!

TOURIST 1

We try to see the ballet at least once a year.

TOURIST 2

And the opera! Don't forget the Opera. And since there are TWO opera companies who perform in Lincoln Center, we always have a lot of good choices.

TOURIST 1

Thank you for the autograph. You were wonderful!

DANCER

Thank you. Come and see us again sometime!

DANCER

Well, it was nice to meet you, but I have to go warm up. I'm performing "Swan Lake" this afternoon!

(DANCER dances off stage.)

JACKIE

Okay - that was cool!

FRANKIE

I wouldn't mind hanging out here for a while.

(PAT enters.)

PAT

Why am I not surprised?

FRANKIE

You can't fool us this time. We know that what we're looking for is cultural, and this is the cultural center of New York City!

PAT

I agree. But it's not going to help you with the paper.

JACKIE

Drat!

PAT

Now, if you don't mind, my parents and I are going to see if we can get tickets to see "Swan Lake." Happy hunting.

(PAT exits.)

FRANKIE

Okay, this is getting old fast.

CABBIE

Where to next? What's our next clue.

JACKIE

I'm getting tired of this.

FRANKIE

We can't give up now! I know that what we're looking for is ... historical.

JACKIE

Yeah! Definitely historical!

CABBIE

I know exactly what you're looking for!

FRANKIE

You've said that three times already.

CABBIE

Yeah, yeah. But this time I'm positive! Let's go!

(They enter the cab. Set changes to the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

JACKIE

What on Earth is this?

CABBIE

You mean WHEN on Earth, right? You're looking at the Temple of Dendur, which was built around the year 15 BC.

FRANKIE

Wow! That's old! What is it doing here?

CABBIE

It's on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, located on the East side of Central Park.

FRANKIE

It's still a weird place to find an old temple.

(CURATOR enters.)

CURATOR

It's not weird at all. It's actually quite a nice addition to the museum.

JACKIE

Who are you?

CURATOR

I'm one of the curators at the museum. Do you know what a Curator does?

JACKIE

I curator is someone who takes care of a museum's collections.

CURATOR

That's right. The Temple of Dendur is one of the Met's most favorite displays. It's a Nubian temple that was in danger of being flooded. So in 1965 the stones were packed in 661 crates and shipped to the United States where it was reconstructed here.

FRANKIE

So you saved it from drowning?

CURATOR

That's right. And if you look on the side, we've even saved some of the oldest graffiti that was written on the temple in the 19th Century.

JACKIE

Graffiti is a bad thing.

CURATOR

Usually, it is. But in this case it's historical graffiti. So we decided to leave it.

CABBIE

But the museum has much more than temples and stuff.

CURATOR

You are correct. This is one of the world's most important art museums. Its collection ranges from ancient Greek galleries to a great collection of American art. It also has art and artifacts from Egypt, Africa and Asia, as well as Middle Eastern, Byzantine and Islamic art.

FRANKIE

That's a lot of history.

CURATOR

But we have more than just art. Here you can see things like architecture and design ... and even antique weapons and armor from around the world!

(TOURIST 5 and 6 enter.)

TOURIST 5

I loved seeing all that armor!

TOURIST 6

It was like we were playing Knights of the Round Table, but it was all real!

TOURIST 5

It's one thing to read books about knights and armor, but to actually see it up close makes it so ...

TOURIST 6

Cool!

TOURIST 5

Yeah! It was cool!

JACKIE

Can we see them too?

CURATOR

Absolutely! Come with me!

CABBIE

Maybe you'll find what you're looking for there!

(PAT enters.)

PAT

Oh, no! Not you two again! Are you everywhere?

FRANKIE

We've got you this time. We KNOW we'll find what we're looking for here. This is one of the most important museums in the world! If our topic is anywhere, it'll be here.

PAT

You just don't get it, do you!

JACKIE

No, but we will! Come on, let's go see that armor!

PAT

No, I mean you don't get what the paper is supposed to be about.

FRANKIE

Well, we're trying to put it all together. We know it was metal ...

CABBIE

Like the Statue of Liberty.

FRANKIE

And we know it had lots of people ...

CABBIE

Like Times Square.

FRANKIE

And we know it's historical.

CABBIE

Like the stuff in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

PAT

You're right on all three, but you're still way off. You won't find what you're looking for in any museum. Now, I have to go. We're going to the Central Park Zoo. And you won't find it there, either! So don't follow me there.