



SCRIPT

For Better And For Worse

an original adaptation of Aristophanes' "The Clouds"

Directed by Scott Sedar

Characters

Strepsiades (Stretch), an old man

Randall, Strepsiades' young son

Servant of Strepsiades

Pupils of Socrates

Socrates the philosopher

Chorus of Clouds

The Better Argument

The Worse Argument

First Creditor

Second Creditor

SCENE I

Stretch:

Sweet googley moogley, what a horrible night! Will the moon ever go down? This night has been the BLOWER! This LIFE is the blower. I can't sleep cuzza my nightmares, but I'm miserable when I'm awake cuz I'm tired.

I heard my alarm ring about an hour ago, but my hamster is still sleeping. He's usually up eating by now. Doggone George Bush messed up everything. Now my hamster won't wake up in the morning. I'm stuck in this shack living from paycheck to paycheck and my only company is my worthless son who never gets a haircut and don't keep his room clean. All he ever does is fart, sleep, and snuggle up in the blankets eating Doritos all day and leaving the trash.

He's always spending my money buying brokedown Hondas and gambling on street races, knowing that he never wins. He even dreams about those hoopties, while I'm dreaming about a day when creditors aren't knocking my door down. While he keeps spending my money, I can't pay my rent and I'm going to get evicted. (to servant) Boy, take your crusty feet off my table and turn on the lights. This is a family room, not a spa. Now bring me the calculator so I can figure out how deep a hole I'm in.

Let's see, umm. 12 grand to Dee-Bo. Wait a minute—when did I borrow 12 grand from Dee-Bo? When I bought that Toyota lemon from Eastern Motors. How dumb could I be? I should have shot myself in the head.

Randall:

Dude! Get back in your lane and quit cheating.

Stretch:

You didn't think I was playing when I said he dreams about those hoopties. That's just the kind of mess that's done me in.

Randall:

Put the pedal to the metal, he's on your back.

Stretch:

And you're the monkey on my back. You have to get up right now. What's the next I.O.U? Three thousand dollars for a set of twenty inch rims?

Randall:

Speed up son, he's gaining on you.

Stretch:

And what do we have to gain from your pointless race shenanigans? Because of you and your dreaming, while you're rolling in my money, my creditors are trying to sue me for everything I have. Well, except you, ironically.

Randall:

For real! Is that why you can't sleep at night?

Stretch:

Duh! Bank of America keeps calling my phone for bills you made.

Randall:

It can't be that bad, Pops. I think you're seriously overreacting. Leave me alone to get some sleep.

Stretch:

OK wise guy. Sleep good cuz you know that's all you're good for. But God don't like ugly, and all the wrong you're doing will come back on you. Sheesh!

I wish I'd never met your mom on the internet. Cupid bammed out when he matched up the two of us. Before that I used to live the easy life, just chillen. I should've stayed in Florida. But I just had to go and marry the niece of a lavish life. A simpleton weds a spoiled snob. Who woulda thought?

Servant:

The light bulb bust.

Stretch:

Do I look like I wanna hear your voice right now? You never should've got those light bulbs from Family Dollar. Now come take your beating.

Servant:

I think I would rather not. I don't think I should get beat for trying to get a good price on light bulbs.

Stretch:

But everyone knows their bulbs don't work. I don't want to argue with you. It reminds me of when me and my wife were arguing about what to name my son. Oh, why was this boy ever born to me and my high-class wife? She wanted to give him a fancy name like Bartholomew, or Malachi, or Samuel. I wanted to give him a manly name, like Butch or Randy. That's when she made me my favorite chocolate chip cookies, so we worked out a compromise between Randy and Samuel and we named him Randall.

When he was little, his mother always told him stories about living the fabulous life, and he never listened to his father. He never learned how to do anything useful. But he does know how to swipe a credit card.

That's why I've been thinking about a way to talk to sense into him all night. But first I gotta get this knucklehead outta bed. I should say it like his mom, so he can wake up: Pretty Pie, Princey wincey!

Randall:

What, Dad?

Stretch:

Don't you, "What, Dad" me. Show your old man some love.

Randall:

What's going on?

Stretch:

Tell me, do you love me or hate me?

Randall:

By my man Ferrari, the Lord of Cars, I do.

Stretch:

Don't give me none of that. Honestly, do you love your father? Will you just do me one favor?

Randall:

And what is that?

Stretch:

Son, you need to do something positive, for a change.

Randall:
What's that supposed to mean?

Stretch:
Look, could you do it?

Randall:
On my man Lexus, I will.

Stretch:
Stop swearing on cars! That's what got me into this mess. You see that blue and green apartment building over there? That's a college.

Randall:
What's a college?

Stretch:
Oh, my goodness. It's called the Thinkery of clever souls. And they've got a law school, too. Some of those dudes in there are so deep they can have you honestly believing that OJ didn't do it. See, they teach you, and you pay them money to do it. And you learn how to win every argument, whether it's right or wrong.

Randall:
Who are those people, Dad?

Stretch:
I can't name them all, but they're upstanding gentlemen and they have major respect in the community.

Randall:
Go head, Pops! You know that ain't even my stylo. I know them trifling people, the fake backstabbers, the ones who wear Payless shoes. I wouldn't be like them if you gave me a brand new Escalade.

Stretch:
You see now, that's what I'm talking about. Quit talking like a child and start caring about my money. I want you to join their company and lay off the racing.

Randall:
I ain't rocking, Pops! You couldn't give me a million dollars to be something I'm not.

Stretch:
Come on now, son. Just do this one thing for me. Enroll in college. Thank god they don't let you in based on your GPA—Then you wouldn't have a chance. At least you have the opportunity. Think about it.

Randall:
Exactly what will I be studying?

Stretch:
Well, I heard that the curriculum is generally referred to as the better and worse argument, and it's guaranteed to increase your test scores. The worse argument can make a guilty man look innocent. I need you to learn how to argue like that, so you can convince people to forget about what we owe.

Randall:
I can't. I can't. I won't be walking around town being known as a rent-a-cop. Not on my watch.

Stretch:
Well, on my watch it's time for you to move. Get out of my house, you've had your last meal here. And take your cars with you, especially the Mustang. From now on, it's my way or the highway.

Randall:
My goodness, father, why are you so mean? I'll go stay at Uncle Mike's house. He'll give me money, and I'll pay you no mind.

SCENE II

Stretch:
I don't have to put up with his nonsense. I'll do it my self. But how can a forgetful old prune like me learn how to argue like Johnny Cochran? I guess I better just knock on the door.

Door:
Knock. Knock.

Pupil:
Fire in the hole! Who's at my door?

Stretch:
It's me, the son of a warrior from Southeast. Open the door.

Pupil:
Well, you must be a dummy, the way you bang on my door and interrupt all my important thoughts.

Stretch:
Sorry. I live a long way out. What were you thinking about?

Pupil:
It's against the rules to tell anyone but the pupils.

Stretch:

Don't worry about it. I'm about to be a pupil too, if you want to know.

Pupil:

I'll tell you, but you didn't hear it from me. It's highly confidential. This morning, Socrates asked Charles how many feet a spider has. The spider was crawling up his nose and bit him on the eye.

Stretch:

How can you count the feet on a spider?

Pupil:

You leave out a piece of cheese, and when a spider comes, you can count the footprints it makes.

Stretch:

What a genius! I wouldn't have thought of that.

Pupil:

That's nothing. Wait until you hear some more of Socrates' big ideas.

Stretch:

Tell me, pretty please. You've got to tell me!

Pupil:

Well, Mike asked if a dog barked out of its mouth or the other end.

Stretch:

And what did Socrates say?

Pupil:

The dog does not bark from its mouth, because it's not a cat.

Stretch:

So the dog turns out to be a trumpet.

Pupil:

But then he made me stay up all night to see if the sun could beat the moon in a race.

Stretch:

Did you find out?

Pupil:

Yeah, we showed him a video of an orange racing a grape on YouTube and he didn't know the difference.

Stretch:
What a great mind.

Pupil:
But yesterday he got angry over a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Stretch:
What was wrong with the sandwich?

Pupil:
It had too much peanut and not enough butter.

Stretch:
Did it make him sick?

Pupil:
Yeah, he's allergic to peanuts, but he eats them anyway. Then, the other night, we didn't have a thing to eat in the whole house.

Stretch:
So what did you have for dinner?

Pupil:
Socrates got a piece of chalk and drew a line in the air, so we all had airline food.

Stretch:
Wow! He's like Einstein. Open up these doors—I need to learn more. Right now. Open up. (the doors open)
Good God Almighty! They sure are ugly.

Pupil:
So's your mamma.

Stretch:
Why are they all bent over like that? They act like prisoners of war in there, looking on the ground like their eyes fell out of their heads.

Pupil:
They're studying geography.

Stretch:
But why are their backsides in the air?

Pupil:
Their butts are learning astronomy on independent study. But look, you guys. You can't be in this hallway without a pass. You better go before security catches you.

Stretch:

Wait. I want to talk to them. Maybe they can teach me something.

Pupil:

No way. They're not allowed out for any reason.

Stretch:

What are all these fancy tools? What are they for?

Pupil:

That one there's for reading comprehension.

Stretch:

What about these?

Pupil:

Algebra.

Stretch:

What's algebra for?

Pupil:

Dang if I know. We haven't studied that yet. And here's a map of D.C. See, this part's Southeast.

Stretch:

Naw, it can't be. I don't see any carryouts.

Pupil:

Seriously. This is the whole city.

Stretch:

Then where's my house? And where's the rec center? Why can't I see them?

Pupil:

It's a map. Just take my word for it.

Stretch:

But where's Northeast?

Pupil:

Here it is, over here.

Stretch:

Uh-uh. That's way too close. You better think that over and move them back some. I don't get along with those people.

Pupil:

Look, I can't do that. It's just a map.

Stretch:

You better move it or else... Hey, who's that guy?

Pupil:

He's the principal. That's Socrates.

Stretch:

Socrates! OK, tell him I'm here.

Pupil:

Tell him yourself. I'm out of here.

SCENE III

Stretch:

Oh Socrates! Big Sock. My man.

Socrates:

Who do you think you're talking to, punk?

Stretch:

Wait a minute. Just tell me what you're doing.

Socrates:

I've got my head up in the clouds, and I'm thinking higher thoughts.

Stretch:

What are you trying to do, spy on God up there? Can't you think your thoughts down here?

Socrates:

No way. My thoughts are clean and pure, just like the air. (cough, cough) It's dirty down there where you average people are.

Stretch:

What do you mean? Are you saying I have a dirty mind? I'm just here because I want to learn something. I want to get a education.

Socrates:

What do you think you need to know?

Stretch:

I need to learn how to argue and debate. I got a lot of people I owe money to, and I'm about to lose my house.

Socrates:
How did you get yourself into this mess?

Stretch:
It's kind of a mechanical problem. Something automotive. But don't worry about it. Just teach me how to talk my way out of it, and I'll pay you whatever you charge. And I swear to god I'll pay you in cash.

Socrates:
First of all, we don't swear to god here.

Stretch:
Then what do you swear on, money? Like Jay-Z?

Socrates:
You want to know the truth?

Stretch:
I swear to god I do. I mean...

Socrates:
You want to have your head up in the clouds, like me?

Stretch:
Oh yeah. That's what I want.

Socrates:
Then have a seat on our holy chair.

Stretch:
Wait a minute. Am I about to get executed? But I didn't do nothing.

Socrates:
No, you're all right. This is how everyone has to apply to get into our school.

Stretch:
But what's in it for me?

Socrates:
You'll be a great talker, a great debater, you could even run for President.

Stretch:
Uh-oh. I don't like the sound of that.

Socrates:
Let's teach this old man some respect for our way of thinking. He wants to learn to think higher

thoughts. Let's get his head way out into the atmosphere, until he sees nothing but clouds.
Come on clouds, show him the way!

Stretch:

Hold on. Let me get my umbrella, before I get soaked. Man, I should have worn my hat.

Socrates:

Come on, clouds. Come out, come out wherever you are. Snow clouds, rain clouds, clouds of smoke. Whether you're up on a mountaintop or just coming out of someone's tailpipe, come on over. I've got someone I want you to meet!

SCENE IV (PARADOS)

Chorus:

Here we are. We're the eternal clouds.
We're up in the sky, looking down on the earth.
If you mess with us, we'll rain on you.
We can ruin your game or your day at the beach.
So you better show us some respect.

Socrates:

Did you hear that, old man? The voice of thunder, the flash of lightning? They heard me.
They're here to teach you something.

Stretch:

Oh clouds, I do respect you. I get a little bit full of gas sometimes myself, and then I let loose with my own thunderstorm. In fact, I think I feel that way right now. Can I get a pass to use the restroom?

Socrates:

Quit clowning around. You asked for the clouds and you got them. Don't be such a baby. Now shut up and listen.

Chorus:

Clouds over D.C. Clouds over Southeast.
Looks like rain, maybe even snow.
Looks like Ballou caught fire again,
and smoke is coming down from the hill.
Let's have a fire drill, let's have a snow day,
It's time to party. Turn up the music,
get out your I-pods, everybody,
Let's dance.

Stretch:

Wow. Who are these amazing celebrities who sing so beautifully? Haven't I seen them on tv?

Socrates:

No, these are clouds from heaven. They're like gods to us. They're the ones who teach us how to think and argue and talk and debate. They give us the power to judge other people and always know we're right.

Stretch:

Just listening to them makes me feel smart already. I want to sharpen my pencil and take the test. I'm busting out with logic and intelligence. My brain is working so fast I'm blowing smoke out my ears. I'm ready as I'll ever be—Go on and school me!

Socrates:

They're coming this way. It's showtime!

Stretch:

Where? I don't see anything.

Socrates:

They're all over the place. Coming right down the middle of the street. Look, they're almost here.

Stretch:

I can't see a thing. What's happening?

Socrates:

Look out there. Out in the audience.

Stretch:

Oh. Now I think I see something.

Socrates:

That's right, Sherlock. Stevie Wonder could see them now.

Stretch:

Yeah, there they are. I see them now. They're everywhere.

Socrates:

You didn't believe me, did you? Now you know.

Stretch:

You're right. I thought they were just full of hot air and wind, like you.

Socrates:

Don't make fun of hot air and wind. It's hot air and wind that make the modern world go round. Where would lawyers and politicians be without hot air? And without wind, we'd have no talk shows on tv, and no psychic hotlines, no American Idol and no presidential debates. We need clouds of hot air and wind everywhere, just to keep the economy moving.

Stretch:

You're right. That's where the best song lyrics come from. And all the best tv shows.

Socrates:

So thank the Clouds. They're the ones that make it all possible.

Stretch:

But if they really are clouds, why do they look so much like regular people? The clouds up in the sky don't look like this.

Socrates:

What do you mean? What do the clouds up in the sky look like?

Stretch:

Well, I don't know exactly. Kind of like cotton balls or bunny rabbits, I guess. But not like regular people with eyes and noses.

Socrates:

Let me ask you something.

Stretch:

Go 'head.

Socrates:

Have you ever looked up and seen a cloud that looked just like an elephant? Or a pit bull, or an ice cream truck or a fat man?

Stretch:

Well, sure I have. But what do you mean?

Socrates:

A cloud can be any shape it wants to be. So if they see a girl with a bad weave, the clouds can weave themselves into a better hairstyle for her. Or if they don't like your shoes, they can shape themselves just like a boot to kick some sense into you.

Stretch:

What if they see someone like Britney Spears, with no hair?

Socrates:

They can shape themselves like paparazzi, to scare her away.

Stretch:

So that's why when George Bush was making a speech yesterday, the clouds looked like gas pumps.

Socrates:

You've got it. Now they see the Mayor. See? They're shaping themselves like a baseball stadium.

Stretch:

Oh, Clouds. You're the best. Please, can you do for me what you've done for these other guys? Let me hear some thunder.

Chorus Leader:

Hello there, you old prune-faced nobody.
You there, looking for clever words,
and you too, fastest, smoothest talker of all,
just tell us what you want.
You're the only ones we care about.
Of all the sorry losers in the world,
you're the ones we like best,
because you're willing to suffer to give us praise.

Stretch:

Oh, my goodness, what a beautiful sound. It's like hearing your favorite song sung by angels.

Socrates:

Yes, these are the only real gods. The rest are fakers and wannabes.

Stretch:

Wait a second. What about Zeus? Don't you think he's the boss of all the gods?

Socrates:

Zeus? Don't make me laugh. There's no such thing.

Stretch:

Wait a second. What do you mean? If there's no Zeus, then where does rain come from? That's what I want to know.

Socrates:

The Clouds make it rain, of course. There's no way you can disagree. Think about it—have you ever seen it rain when it wasn't cloudy? If Zeus makes the rain, then why can't he do it when there are no clouds around?

Stretch:

By god, I guess that makes sense. I always thought that when it rained it was Zeus crying. But then, who makes it thunder? That's what I want to know.

Socrates:

That's the Clouds, too. They make thunder when they go skating.

Stretch:

Uh huh. Sure they do. But tell me this: How?

Socrates:

OK, when they get filled up with water and they start to roll around, and they're all fat and heavy with rain sloshing around, then they start bumping into each other and BOOM—there's the thunder.

Stretch:

But what is it that makes them put their skates on. That's Zeus, isn't it?

Socrates:

Don't make me laugh. They're way up in the sky. They just get dizzy up there.

Stretch:

Dizzy? So you're saying that there's no Zeus, there's just dizziness? I don't think I can really believe that business about the thunder if you put it that way.

Socrates:

Let's just look at you, for example. Haven't you ever eaten, like five packs of Oodles of Noodles, and then your stomach gets all swollen and it starts to make a lot of noise?

Stretch:

By Zeus, I know what you mean! My stomach just goes nuts when I do that. First with the rumbling and grumbling and then out comes the big blast, just like thunder. Bam, Bam! Boom!

Socrates:

So if your little belly can let loose with that much noise, don't you think the whole great sky above us can make a thundering sound? As a matter of fact, that's why they call it "breaking wind."

Stretch:

OK, I guess you might be right. But then, what about lightning? I mean, you get hit by a bolt of lightning and the next thing you know you're just a pile of burnt french fries lying on the ground. Isn't getting struck by lightning the punishment for liars?

Socrates:

What an idiot! You're old school, going back to the cavemen. Punish liars? Then how come every time you turn on the tv, you've got some president or politician lying their head off, but none of them ever gets hit by lightning? But nnnnoooo...instead he usually hits something like one of his own oak trees. What for? Oak trees don't lie.

Stretch:

I don't know. Good point, though. But hold up—what is a thunderbolt?

Socrates:

When a wind lifts into the sky and gets locked up into a cloud, it fills it like a balloon until it gets

so big it has to burst. Then the wind comes out in a big whoosh, kind of like a balloon popping because of too much air.

Stretch:

Man, I've been through it. I was at a party, cooking hotdogs and I left one in the microwave too long. And Blam! It blew up just like a bomb. What a mess.

Chorus Leader:

Little man who wants from us
Lots of great thought and wisdom
You'll get much respect in Southeast
You'll be blessed in all of D.C.
If you're enough of a nerd to study all day
And quit eating junk food,
And stay away from your favorite iced tea and blue Gatorade,
If you don't mind standing around in the freezing cold
And never getting to go to the gym,
You can succeed in your goal of becoming slick!

Stretch:

Don't you worry about me, I got that true grit. I'm rough as a street full of potholes and tough as a cheap piece of meat. I'm used to staying up all night and starving all day. And I've got rock hard abs. I'm ready to take anything you have to throw at me.

Socrates:

Swear that you'll only pray to the gods we worship: hot air, clouds, and doubletalk—the big three.

Stretch:

Even if I ran right into the other gods on the street, I'd act like I didn't know them. I wouldn't give them a dime even if they came right out and asked me.

Chorus Leader:

Speak up. You'll be OK. If you just show us some respect, you'll get what you're looking for.

Stretch:

Ladies, I don't ask for much. I just want to be the best debater around, by about a hundred miles. I want to be able to out-talk my mother.

Chorus Leader:

Yeah, aight. We can do that. We gonna make sure no one can top you. You'll be writing all the rules.

Stretch:

Now wait a minute. I'm not all into the politics thing. I don't want what I say to be respected, I just want to be able to talk my way out of trouble.

Chorus Leader:

No problem. Just come on in and sign on the dotted line.

Stretch:

OK, let's do this. I got no choice anyway, since my no-good son and that gold-digging wife of mine have put my pockets on empty.

Now I'm surrendering to them. I'll do whatever they say—
Starve, get beat up...Just make my debts go away.
I don't care what people think or if they call me a liar,
They can say my values stink and I'll burn up in hellfire.
Let them call me two-faced, or let them call me trash,
If people hate me, that's OK. Just get me back my cash!

I'll let the Thinkers do whatever they wish.
They can grind up my bones to feed their fish.

Chorus:

He's got the strength, he's got the guts,
I do believe he'll make the cut.
So hit the books and learn our tricks
And you'll be famous just for kicks.

Stretch:

Let me know what I'm in for.

Chorus:

You'll live with us forever and ever
And everyone will know you're clever.

Stretch:

For real? You lyin'!

Chorus:

Imagine people asking for your advice,
And they'll pay a million bucks to hear it—
Now wouldn't that be nice.

Chorus Leader:

Now it's time to see how smart the old guy is. We'll find out how much he knows and how much he can learn. Let's see if he knows the basics.

Socrates:

So, tell me a little bit about yourself. I need to know what kind of personality you have, so I can use the very latest teaching methods and instruments.

Stretch:

Instruments? No way. I don't want to be in a musical.

Socrates:

Naw, man. I just want some simple stuff, like how good is your memory?

Stretch:

My memory works two ways:

If somebody owes me money, I'll never forget that; but if I owe money...wait a minute...what were we just talking about?

Socrates:

Well, how good a talker are you? You got any natural gifts?

Stretch:

I'm not much of a talker, no. But I'm great at Playstation 3.

Socrates:

Then how are you going to learn anything?

Stretch:

I'ma be alright.

Socrates:

OK. I'm gonna throw out little bits of my incredible wisdom, and you can just gobble them up.

Stretch:

But I'm not hungry.

Socrates:

What an idiot! This man's just plain stupid. I think you need to get jumped. What do you do if someone hits you?

Stretch:

I'll be like Tupac—Fake my death, then see if anybody saw so I can go to court and sue.

Socrates:

OK. Take off your shirt.

Stretch:

What I do?

Socrates:

Nothing. No on can come in unless they get naked.

Stretch:

But I ain't gonna steal nothing.

Socrates:

Look, we got tight security here. Now do what I say.

Stretch:

Well tell me this—If I do all my homework and pay attention in class, which one of your students do you think I'll be like?

Socrates:

You'll look just like Charles. He's a fine student.

Stretch:

But he looks like a zombie. I don't want to be like him.

Socrates:

Oh, just shut up and follow me. Hurry up.

Stretch:

You mind if I close my eyes? This is like a scary movie. I don't want to see no demons, no ghosts, no Freddy Krueger, nothing.

Socrates:

Stop making excuses. Move it!

(PARABASIS)

Chorus:

Good luck, old man. I wish you the best.
I sure hope you don't flunk the test.

Chorus Leader:

Listen up! I got something to say. Nothin' but the truth, I swear.
I tried to write a really good play, something I can make some money off of,
So I wrote this for an intelligent audience, but you'll have to do for now.
This might just be the best play I've ever written, but I can't seem to win any writing contests.
I think it must be your fault. I was so busy trying to please you.
But never mind, I'm not gonna abandon you.
You stuck with me through the hard times, before I was a big star, back when I was just a
nobody, waiting for my big break.
Ever since then, I've been able to count on you.
So now, just like Tyler Perry, I'm coming at you with a brand new comedy,
And I hope that you'll be smart enough to get the joke.
Cuz, see, this comedy's sophisticated.
It's not making fun of bald people, and there's no dumb jokes about people falling on their
butts
And no stupid fart jokes—OK, a few, but not too many stupid fart jokes,
Nope, this comedy trusts its own script.
And I'm just like that myself. I don't try to act like some kind of big shot,

I don't use the same old jokes over and over.
I bring out new ideas every time, and all of 'em are good.
Not like those haters and wannabes out there who try to copy off my work.
Do you think they're funny? If so, then I hope you hate this play.
But if you like my writing and the jokes I think up,
Then you know the whole world's gonna think you have excellent taste. Congratulations!

Chorus:

Okay, all you celebrities who came here to have some fun. Let's get this party started.
Here comes Zeus with his Gucci sunglasses and throwback jersey
Poseidon in his Black Label jacket and vintage Nike Airs
And Apollo, I swear he's just on fire
Up in the VIP section.

Chorus Leader:

All you critics and haters hear me out.
We've got something to say, and we'll say it now.
We've got an advantage over you, OK call it a grudge,
But the fact is us Clouds never get any credit,
Even though we do the most to help you out.
When you go out to vote for the wrong candidate,
We're the ones who send lightning to black out the city,
We're the ones who rain on your baseball games
And give you snow days off of school.
You know your city is making some bad decisions,
But we figure out how to fix this mess up, too.
Then you can have a chance to start all over again.

Chorus:

The goddesses are coming out to party, too.
Let's hear it for Artemis, looking finer than Beyonce,
And here comes Athena, the smartest girl around.
Look who's rolling in fashionably late—
It's Dionysus! You know he came to party!
Call out the paparazzi! CNN, BET, Fox, everybody come and watch,
Now let this show begin!

Chorus Leader:

When we were on our way to the show, the Moon ran into us on the bus
And said to send a shout out to all D.C.
She wanted to say "Hi," but she's also kind of mad at ya
For not treating her right.
She saves at least ten bucks on your electric bill every month
By showing up to light the sky at night,
But you just don't appreciate it.
And it sure was nice of her to make room for all your satellites and astronauts who never pick
up after themselves,

But you people never even said thank you.
And how would you ever keep your calendar straight without her?
You'd probably have months with forty-five days in them,
And only two weeks off in the summer.
So please, show some respect for the Moon,
Cuz you know she never lets you down.

SCENE V

Socrates:

By hot air and doubletalk and everything else that's holy, I have never met such a clueless, shoebox head Bama. I try to teach him a littly something, but he can't remember it long enough to get it straight. Let me get him out here. Hey, yo, Stretch! Get your behind out here. And bring your bed, too.

Stretch:

I can't. The bugs won't let me.

Socrates:

Come on, now. Stop playing.

Stretch:

Oh, there you are.

Socrates:

Aight, so what's the most important thing you need to learn, out of all the millions of things you don't know anything about. Since you can't learn anything, anyway. Come on, now. Is it metaphor, measures, diction, or what?

Stretch:

Measures, I guess. Cause I got scammed for some noodles at the store. 40\$ for one pouch?

Socrates:

Not that kind of measures, you dummy! What type of poetic measure do you like best, like a three-measure or a four-measure line?

Stretch:

As far as measures go, I think I like inches best. A mile can be a long way to walk to store for some noodles.

Socrates:

You crazy!

Stretch:

I like quarters, too. There's four quarters to the dollar, you know. I could go to the bubblegum machine.

Socrates:

You've got to be the biggest fool I've ever known. Maybe you know something about rhythms?

Stretch:

Sure I do. Let's see...You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out...Hokey pokey...or something like that.

Socrates:

You stupid idiot! What the heck did you come here to learn?

Stretch:

I want to study that subject you teach—the Worser Argument, or Worstest, you know.

Socrates:

You can't just start at the top. You've got to learn the basics first, like what animals are masculine.

Stretch:

I know what animals are masculine—anything with horns, like a goat, a bull, or a duck.

Socrates:

Which ones are feminine?

Stretch:

Umm, a girl goat, a cow, and...another duck?

Socrates:

That's the best you can do? You're even dumber than I thought, and I thought you were pretty dumb. Get out of here. Go back to bed.

Stretch:

Please, man, not in that bed. Can't I just lie on the ground?

Socrates:

There's no choice.

Stretch:

Awww, man! Them bugs gon' tear me up tonight!

SCENE VI

Chorus

Good night, sleep tight

Don't let the bedbugs bite

Go and get a good night's rest

So you can try to pass the test.

Stretch:
Ow Ow Ow Owwwch!

Chorus:
What's the matter with you? What's up with all the yelling?

Stretch:
I'm dying here. These dang bugs are biting me,
munching on my legs,
crawling on my stomach,
eating up my arms,
chewing on my butt,
they're eating me alive.

Chorus:
Well can't you suffer a little more quietly?

Stretch:
That's easy for you to say,
but I'm the one who can't find my wallet,
can't find my shoes,
I lost about a gallon of blood to these bugs,
I'm so Lost I should start a TV show.

SCENE VII

Socrates:
Whassup wit' you. Why you ain't thinking?

Stretch:
I am thinking.

Socrates:
About what?

Stretch:
How much of me these bugs are gonna eat.

Socrates:
Go to H-E-double hockey sticks!

Stretch:
What do you think this is?

Chorus Leader:
Come on, think of something. You're making us look bad.

Stretch:
Okay, I've got it.

Socrates:
What.

Stretch:
Here's how I can get out of paying my bills. On the last day of every month, I can throw out my calendar.

Socrates:
What good is that going to do?

Stretch:
Then the first of the month never comes, and I don't have to pay my bills.

Socrates:
Hey, that's pretty good. But let's say someone sues you for a million bucks? How are you gonna get out of that mess?

Stretch:
Well, I could just burn down the courthouse. That ought to wipe my record clean, and I could roast marshmallows on the fire and make s'mores.

Socrates:
That's alright too. Now you're up on your game.

Stretch:
Gimme another.

Socrates:
OK, how would you beat a case you were about to lose because you couldn't find a witness?

Stretch:
Easy. I'd wait til the day of my case, and first thing in the morning, I'd shoot myself in the head.

Socrates:
What? You lunchin'?

Stretch:
No way! Let's see them try and take a dead man to court.

Socrates:
Man, get outta here. I can't teach you nothing. I quit.

Stretch:

Now what am I gonna do? If I can't learn this game I'm a dead man. Yo, Clouds. Tell me what I'm s'posed to do.

Chorus Leader:

Old man, don't you have a full-grown son lying around on his butt all day? What don't you send him to school? He might could learn a thing or two.

Stretch:

I got a son, alright, but he won't learn nothin'. Won't do nothin', either.

Chorus Leader:

And you let him get away with it?

Stretch:

He's young and strong, but he comes from high-class people. Thinks he's too good for school. But I'll go get him and see what he says. If he says no again, I'll put him out on the street and he won't get another penny from me. Even if he's starving, I won't give him a french fry. Just wait here a minute.

Chorus:

Good luck, dogg. We'll get you straight with Socrates. He'll probably be real glad to teach anyone but you.

SCENE VIII

Stretch:

Get your sorry behind out of here. I'm changing the locks.

Randall:

What's up with you, dad? Why you trippin' on me? By Zeus, I don't understand.

Stretch:

Listen to this fool. Aren't you a little old to be believing in Zeus? You believe in the Easter bunny, too?

Randall:

What do you mean?

Stretch:

You're just so childish. But, look, if you promise not to tell, I'll tell you a little secret that might just make a man out of you.

Randall:

What's that?

Stretch:

There's no such thing as Zeus. He got knocked out of the ring. The Clouds are in charge now.

Randall:

Who told you that mess?

Stretch:

Socrates the brainiac.

Randall:

If he's so smart, how come he ain't rich?

Stretch:

Shut up and listen. The people at his school are so smart and sensible, so thrifty that none of them has ever wasted money on a haircut or deodorant or even soap. Meanwhile, you're spending my money like you're Donald Trump.

Randall:

But how are they going to teach me anything I don't already know?

Stretch:

Look, just do this for me, OK? I've done plenty for you haven't I? Ever since you were a snotty kid and got me to spend half my paycheck on a remote control Corvette at Toys R Us.

Randall:

You're gonna be sorry, dad. Just remember that.

Stretch:

Then you'll do it? Yesssssss! Hey Socrates! Where you at? I brought you my son, even though he'd rather be back home watching tv.

Socrates:

This kid? He looks like he ought to be in Pampers. How's he gonna get the hang of anything?

Randall:

How about you get the hang of things? Go hang yourself.

Stretch:

What's the matter with you boy? Show some respect.

Socrates:

Oooh, da wittle baby doesn't know how to talk to grown folks. But alright, I'll teach him if you pay me enough. Get out your checkbook.

Stretch:

Dogg, you know money ain't no problem. Just school this youngen'. It's in his blood—he's going to be great. He got straight A's in day care. Teach him both kinds of arguments: the Better,

whatever that is, and the Worse, the one that can make your crooked mess look straight as a perm. Or if you can't teach him both, just go for the Worse.

Socrates:

Just because it's in his blood don't mean it's in his brain. The Arguments can teach him that. I got better things to do.

SCENE IX

Better Argument:

Come on out here, don't be a chump.
Rock me, son, don't act like a punk.

Worse Argument:

Let's go then. The faster I knock you out,
the sooner I won't have to hear your mouth.

Better:

Knock me out? Who is you?

Worse:

I'm an argument, fool, and I can beat you, too.

Better:

Yeah, but you're the Worse Argument. How you gonna stop me?

Worse:

I'll fool you with big words and smooth talk, you'll see.

Better:

Oh yeah? Well I'll beat you by speaking the truth.
I'm a wise man and you're a messed up youth.

Worse:

Don't forget, I can outsmart you. I can tell you justice doesn't exist.

Better:

H-E-double hockey sticks.

Worse:

Then where does Justice live?

Better:

Justice lives in the courts and the laws they give.

Worse:

Then how come there's innocent people in jail and guilty ones on the street?

Better:
I'm about to throw up. I think you cheat.

Worse:
Thanks.

Better:
I think you play too much also.

Worse:
Thanks for the compliments.

Better:
And you are a killer.

Worse:
I am a killer and a clown—it don't hurt my feelings, I'm cool with that.

Better:
Back in the day, that was worse than calling your momma fat.

Worse:
Well times have changed. You need to get with it.

Better:
You're the reason why kids these days
Don't want to learn, they just want to get paid.

Worse:
And you're an old fart.

Better:
You got money now, but back then you were dirt poor.
You wore dirty clothes, but you acted smart, for sure.

Worse:
In your dreams.

Better:
The schools are being ruined by you and your kind.
I won't let you mess up this boy's mind.

Worse:
We bout to reck, old timer. Come here, young man.

Better:
Touch him and I'll smack your hand.

Chorus Leader:

Just stop it, both of you,
Here is what we're gonna do.
You show how they did it back in the day.
And you tell him how things are today.
Let the kid hear both of your sides
Then you both shut up and let him decide.

(AGON)

Chorus:

Now's your chance to show you're the boss,
show us how you think and speak.
Every chip is on the table
and this one's for the big money.
The future of our schools is what we're talking about.

Chorus Leader:

You know what it was like in the old days,
back when kids had some respect for grown folks.
Go 'head and show him what you got.

Better:

That's cool wit me.

Worse:

That's cool wit me, too.

Better:

I'm bout to show you how learning used to be before it was a fashion show, when you really learned. Back then, there was none of this back-talking the teacher, and fighting in the halls. Kids came to school on time, even when it was cold out, and they didn't stay home just cuz their hair wasn't done. You never saw a boy with his drawers hanging out walking all slow, afraid his pants would fall down.

If you thought for just a second to even put a beat to that classical music, you would get smacked. Not like nowadays, when you can crank dat solja boy and it's a law against whoopin' your kids.

And kids ate their school lunch instead of throwing it on the floor, even if it was a moldy boloney sandwich. They didn't waste all their money on soda and chips.

Worse:

Old fashioned piece of trash. You sound like a caveman.

Better:

On the real, though, you better listen to me. That's how we did it back in the day, and look at

my generation—we all got jobs and if there’s a war to fight, we got plenty of straight up warriors to fight it. But look at these big babies in your school, carrying dinosaur lunch boxes to college, and still living with their parents when they’re 30 years old.

Look here boy, do you want to be a man who shows respect? I’ll teach you how to act right, to give up your seat on the bus to senior citizens, to dress properly in the kind of clothes you can wear to work, and how to keep a good reputation.

Worse:

That’s right, shawdie. Listen to him so you can be the biggest nerd on the block.

Better:

No, if you listen to him you’ll be one of those skinny, pimple-faced boys trying to dance like Chris Brown and Omarion at Nee-Nee’s party. If you listen to me you’ll be strong and smart and you’ll have a good attitude. You’ll be able to get any job you want.

Chorus:

The old dude’s got a point! Things were a whole lot better back in the day. What do you have to say to that youngen?

Chorus Leader:

That’s right, you better talk fast, cuz he’s about to make a fool out of you.

Worse:

You people make me sick. But I got something for you. I got master skills, and you can’t stop me. I’m unstoppable. Watch the way I merk this fool.

You talk about before school was a fashion show, but how much money does the fashion industry bring in? Millions? Billions, maybe? And you fuss about dudes wearing their pants low, but how much does L’il Wayne make wearing jeans like that? And how much do old-school teachers like you make?

Better:

Money doesn’t make the man.

Worse:

Okay, hold on, I got you on lock already. Money might not make the man, but it makes the kind of life he lives. Now, you say you don’t like that fighting in the halls, but your generation was warriors ready to go to battle for their country. So how do you get to be a warrior without fighting?

Better:

There’s things that aren’t worth fighting for, and things that are.

Worse:

Sure. Now, right here I’m bout to hype it. You talk about showing respect. Well, how about people respecting me? I won’t get no respect walking around going “Yes, ma’am, no sir,” all day long. I don’t want to be nice, I want to get paid.

Better:

But nice guys get all the ladies.

Worse:

For a minute, maybe. Then they get dumped cuz they're not man enough. Women like their men tough. Every hunnie wants a thug in her life.

Life ain't worth living if you never have the finer things. And I'ma tell you how to get them. Look, son. Let's say you get caught cheating with your best friend's wife. You just show him all the big shot actors and politicians who cheat and tell him he should be glad to have such a high-roller on his speed dial.

Better:

But what if he gets his teeth knocked out? And his head bashed in?

Worse:

So what. That's what they make gold teeth for. And getting your head bashed in won't do any serious damage.

Better:

Unless it makes you stupid. I mean stupider than you are.

Worse:

Nothing wrong with being stupid. Long as I get paid.

Better:

You mean there's nothing worse than being stupid.

Worse:

How bout if I prove to you that's not true? Then will you shut up?

Better:

If you can prove it's okay to be stupid, I'll shut my mouth and go home.

Worse:

Okay, what kind of person is Paris Hilton?

Better:

Stupid.

Worse:

And all those lawyers and politicians you see yelling at each other on tv?

Better:

Stupid.

Worse:

That's right. And what about the person who runs the whole country?

Better:

Stupid.

Worse:

See what I mean? Your whole argument was bull. And what about that audience out there, most of them?

Better:

Most of them are pretty stupid, by Zeus. Him over there, definitely.

Worse:

So now what do you have to say?

Better:

I guess you got me beat, you dirty liar.

I'm coming over to join your side.

SCENE X

Stretch:

The 27th, 28th, then the 29th, and the day after that makes my knees shake and I almost pee my pants. I hope that day never comes, cuz that's the day everyone I owe money to is taking me to court. They gonna sue me and mess up my game. I've tried to hold them off, but they just call me a deadbeat and a loser. Well, let them come at me now. If my boy has learned his lessons smack on point, then I got something for 'em.

Let's knock on this here door and see what's up at the Thinkery. Yo, Boy! Whassup youngen?

Door:

Knock, knock.

Socrates:

Stretch, my man. My main skillet.

Stretch:

Hi. But here's a little cash, first. A little something for the teacher. How's my son doing? Did he learn anything.

Socrates:

He sure did. You'll be able to beat any case they throw at you.

Stretch:

Aiiiiight! That's my boy. Time to get your daddy out of the mess you put him in. Come on out here, son.

Socrates:

Take him, and get out of here.

Stretch:

Oh yeah, boy. I can see you've learned a lot. You've got look on your face, like "Who me? I ain't done nothing," even if you're standing over a dead body with a gun in your hand.

Randall:

You ain't got to be afraid of nothing, dad. Just let me handle it.

SCENE XI

First Creditor:

What do you mean I don't owe you anything. I lent you twelve grand to buy that Honda at the auction. There's no way I can forget that. I'm going to sue your sorry butt like the patriotic American I am.

Stretch:

Who are you?

First Creditor:

You swore to Zeus that you'd pay me back.

Stretch:

Could be, my memory's not too good. But that was before I learned the unbeatable Argument.

First Creditor:

Well that's no reason to get out of paying me.

Stretch:

Well, I ought to get something out of educating him.

First Creditor:

So, are you ready to swear in court that you don't owe me?

Stretch:

Swear to who?

First Creditor:

To Zeus, and all the other gods.

Stretch:

Sure, no problem. I don't believe in Zeus.

First Creditor:

Shame on you! I hope you fry in Hades.

Stretch:

You sure are ugly. I bet if you go into a haunted house, you'll come out with a job application.

First Creditor:

Now you're trying to jone on me? Almighty Zeus, you won't get away with this. Look, are you going to pay me back or not?

Stretch:

Hold on a minute, I'll be right back.

First Creditor (to audience):

What do you guys think he'll do? Will he pay me back?

Stretch:

Are you the guy who says I owe him money? I think you're too dumb to be trusted with a dollar for the soda machine. You ain't got no education.

First Creditor:

Does that mean you're not going to pay me?

Stretch:

See how dumb you are? You can't even understand plain English.

First Creditor:

I swear to Zeus, I'ma sue you.

Stretch:

Look, you just lost 12 g's. Why do you want to lose a lawsuit on top of that?

Second Creditor:

Oh, my aching back.

Stretch:

Who are you? Quit that awful crying. You're hurting my ears.

Second Creditor:

What do you care who I am? Just get your son to pay me the money he owes. I've been in a car wreck, and I can't work for a month.

Stretch:

Yeah, it must have knocked you out cold. I think you've lost your mind.

Second Creditor:

Are you calling me crazy? I just want my money back.

Stretch:

You must be crazy, if you think you're getting any of my money.

Second Creditor:

Well you're even crazier, if you think I won't sue you.

Stretch:

Okay, so answer me this. Do you think Zeus causes rain, or do you think it comes from the clouds?

Second Creditor:

I don't know. What do I care?

Stretch:

Then why should I give you my money. You're ignorant, and you're never going to get any smarter.

Second Creditor:

Look, I'm trying to be nice about this. If you don't have the money, just pay me the interest on what you owe.

Stretch:

Interest? What do you mean interest? What the heck is interest?

Second Creditor:

You know, when you borrow money, the amount you owe gets bigger the longer you owe it.

Stretch:

The amount I owe gets bigger...The tell me this: Look over at the Anacostia River—Is it any bigger than it was last year.

Second Creditor:

The river? No, that's the same river that's always been here.

Stretch:

Well, you big dummy. If Oxon Run and every other creek flows into the river, but the river never grows any bigger, why should the amount of money I owe you get bigger? You can just take your lawsuit of my property and get out of here. Boy, get me my belt!

Second Creditor:

That's it. I'm calling the cops.

Stretch:

Go 'head and call 'em. You're trespassing on my property. You want a whupping? Cause I sure could whoop your behind. Look at him go! He's faster than that souped up Crown Vic he's been trying to sell.

Chorus:

What goes around, comes around, and what comes around goes...

What's the answer? This old man thinks he knows.

He thought he could get out of paying his debts,
But his scheming could cause him some regrets.
He's got a son who knows it all—
Is that a good thing? You make the call.

SCENE XII

Stretch:

Help! Help me out here. Friends, family, neighbors, someone help me please.
Oh, my eye! Ow, ow, my ear! Oh, not there...ow ow ow! My no count son is beating me. He's about the beat me to death.

Randall:

Yeah, I sure am.

Stretch:

See—He admits it. What kind of evil, shiftless, no-good kid would beat up his own dad? You lowlife scum.

Randall:

Thanks. Coming from you, I take that as a compliment.

Stretch:

How can you do this to me?

Randall:

I'll tell you how after I'm done beating you. And I'll also tell you why it's the right thing to do. I've got an unbeatable argument.

Stretch:

Looks like you learned a lot at the Thinkery. I can't wait to hear this. Well, maybe I can.

(SECOND AGON)

Chorus:

Old man, you've got a job to do; you're son is getting out of line.
And it looks like he's learned more than you, so you're running out of time.

Chorus Leader:

What we want to know is how this fight got started in the first place. Tell us what happened.

Stretch:

Sure. All I did was try to have a nice graduation party for my son. I asked him to put on one of my Marvin Gaye records, and he told me no one listens to that old mess anymore.

Randall:

I should have whooped your behind right then and there. I had the whole party mix on my i-pod, and you wanted to mess everything up. You sure know how to kill a party.

Stretch:

You see—that's what he was like the whole time. And on top of that he called Marvin Gaye a chump. But I kept my mouth shut, because I didn't want to ruin his party. So I asked if I could get a picture of him with his diploma and he snatched my camera right out of my hand. I said, okay, I understand, you just want to party, I'll put on some James Brown. Well, then that young fool said all my music was just a bunch of sorry noise.

He said it was his party, so he was in charge of the music. Then right away he puts on some kind of CCB foolishness about 'dancing in the middle, bend it over, make it jiggle.' Well, I've about had it with that nasty go-go music of his, and I told him so.

Randall:

That's when I stole him. I don't need to hear any more of his talk about 'back in the day.'

Stretch:

Boy, I oughta smack you.

Randall:

And I'll smack you right back, just like you deserve.

Stretch:

I deserve it? What do you mean? I'm the one who raised you up from a little crying baby. I fed you and dressed you and changed your poopy diapers, too. And how do you pay me back? By beating the poop out of me.

Chorus:

Now all these young playaz want to know
what their man is gonna say
Cause if he proves he's right for sho'
The old folks better run away.

Chorus Leader:

Here's your chance now, show us what you got. Get your words to working and see can you talk into thinking what you did was right.

Randall:

Yeah. I'm so glad I got my education. I used to just want to lie up in the bed all day, watching tv and stay out all night at the street races. I didn't know anything. Now I'm a street lawyer, with all the right words. I know how to play the game, and this is how we do it these days.

Stretch:

Oh, please go back to the street races again. Want me to buy you some new leather seat covers? I'd rather go broke buying you cars than get knocked out being your punching bag.

Randall:

Let's get back to what I was trying to say before you interrupted me. First off, did you beat me when I was a kid?

Stretch:

Sure I did, when you needed it for your own good. I beat you because I loved you.

Randall:

So check this out:

I'm grown now, and it's time for me to be looking out for you the way you looked out for me. When I was little, I didn't know how to act, so you beat me. If beatings were good for me then, then they're good for you now. And you're old enough to know better, so when you don't act right, you really need a good beating.

Stretch:

That's just not right.

Randall:

Maybe that's what you thought back in the good old days, but times have changed. Us young people are in charge now, and we should be making the rules nowadays.

Stretch:

But the way it's supposed to be is, I punish you because I'm your father. Then when you have kids you can punish them.

Randall:

You mean, if I have kids. If I don't, there's no payback.

Stretch:

All you old folks out there better think this over. I got to give the youngen some credit for making his point. I guess they probably ought to give us a whooping if we don't act right.

Randall:

Yeah, and that's not all.

Stretch:

Uh-oh.

Randall:

No, I think you're going to appreciate this. It might make things easier on you.

Stretch:

Well, I don't see how it could get much worse. How can you help me now?

Randall:

By beating my mom the way I beat you!

Stretch:

What did you say? Boy, you must be on drugs!

Randall:

I can justify it. Want to hear my Worse Argument?

Stretch:

I think you might want to shut your mouth about now. Cause I'm about to put a stop to Worse Argument, and Socrates too.

SCENE XIII

Stretch:

Yo, Clouds, this is your fault. I thought I could trust you.

Chorus Leader:

You did this to yourself. You're the one who wanted to get out of paying what you owed. Now anything goes.

Stretch:

Why didn't you tell me this was going to happen? How could you let me do it?

Chorus Leader:

It's what we do every time. You came here all ready to learn how to be evil. So we let you dig your own hole.

Stretch:

Okay, I've learned my lesson. I shouldn't have tried to beat my debts. Son, how about we go and let Socrates have it for cheating us like this?

Randall:

Socrates is my teacher. I gotta show him respect.

Stretch:

How about respecting Zeus and your parents?

Randall:

That's old school. Remember, doubletalk and hot air are the new gods. Look, dad, I gotta go. I don't want to be late for class.

Stretch:

What was I thinking? I ought to be locked up in St. E's. That does it—I'm gonna burn this place to the ground. Someone go get me a can of gasoline. Now where's my lighter?

Pupil 1:

Hey what are you doing!

Stretch:

I'm having an intellectual debate with your house.

Pupil 2:

No you're not. You're setting a fire. You're gonna kill us all.

Stretch:

Riiiiiiight!

Socrates:

You! What the heck do you think you're doing.

Stretch:

I'm just out here thinking about my philosophy.

Socrates:

Cough, cough. Help! I'm choking on the smoke.

Pupil 2:

Me too! Where's the fire escape? I'm too young to die.

Stretch:

That's what you get for teaching that there's no such thing as right and wrong. The gods don't like ugly, and all your evil ways just came right back at you.

Chorus Leader:

The play's over. Now let's party!

End