

FAHRENHEIT 1700

(Temperature it takes to Incinerate a Brain)

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Time: Today. Scene: A city public school classroom. Cast: Students – Worm, Sketch, Spike, Rip, Score (can have more students - names are not gender specific). Teacher – Ms Dotson. Principal – Osgood. Cop/Security – Hank.

(Scene opens with the students dressed in mismatched parts of mandatory school uniforms. They are playing volleyball. Barriers of some sort have been erected instead of a net and to mark off boundaries. Depending on the number of students, instead of playing a few may be reading, sketching, dozing, etc. Teacher, Principal and Cop enter through the audience. Note: Questions are from actual NY and CA mandatory tests.)

(Ball is struck and goes out of bounds into the audience. Either Worm or someone in the audience retrieves ball as first lines spoken.)

SPIKE: *(Student that struck ball)* What are you doing?!

RIP: Doesn't this chair mark the boundary?

SPIKE: Weren't you listening when we made our rules?

SCORE: *(Teasingly)* Rip is too rule-bound to even comprehend a change of rules.

RIP: I don't understand how you can play the game without defined borders.

SPIKE: We have borders, but this is a *game* – that means, *fun*, and as for winning – who the hell cares? Fun is not watching everyone following the trajectory of the ball as it goes two inches out of bounds. *(Speaking goofily)* 'It's out...We get a point....Oh, goody, goody!' In our game you have to try to return the ball no matter where it is – and don't worry, you still get the point as long as you make a good effort. *(Play resumes)*

OSGOOD: *(From within audience. Angrily to Ms Dotson.)* You let them get away with this!?

MS DOTSON: You ordered a cut back in phys ed – so they have instituted their own. They will not stop and return to study.

(Ball struck out of bounds. Osgood grabs it. Students rush to retrieve ball. Hank joins struggle with Osgood. Students come away with the ball.)

OSGOOD: Now look here! I can have Hank call in assistance to place you all under arrest for assault and battery! This is a learning environment, not a playground!

SPIKE: No, this is a parrot-training aviary. If we accurately repeat back what you want – we are treated to positive feedback.

SCORE: Yeah, we demand education, not training!

WORM: That means being allowed to respond with correct answers and not those stamped with the official line. *(Brief pause)*

OSGOOD: *(To Hank)* Hank, let's get some order here.

HANK: *(Moving toward students)* Okay, kids, game over! Back to your seats! *(The volleyball is bounced off his head. He angrily tears down the 'net' and pushes the students toward their seats. Students organize a counterattack and subdue Hank. Osgood takes flight but is headed off by a student. Throughout Ms Dotson stays on sidelines as if a neutral observer)*

SPIKE: *(Pushing Osgood back toward stage)* Come on, your Highness, back to your throne. Recess comes after you pass your test.

OSGOOD: *(Angrily to Ms Dotson)* You set us up for this!

MS DOTSON: I did no such thing! They absolutely refused to go through the test rehearsal preparation.

OSGOOD: Rehearsal?!...It's you damn teachers that cause the problem. You keep yapping and complaining about every new development in education – 'it's rote learning,' 'it's assembly line basics for the underclass.' Naturally that will effect the behavior of impressionable children...

SKETCH: Actually, I'm more Constructionist than Impressionist. *(Holds up sign: Down with Educational Oppression)*

OSGOOD: *(Looking at sign and student)* Had you engaged in your studies rather than shirking them, you may have learned that these educational changes are not just something concocted by American leaders but part of a carefully developed world policy. As we speak the OECD is implementing the new programs around the world.

MS DOTSON: And had you been getting your news from sources other than mainstream, you would be aware of the student rebellions opposing the debasement of education in Mexico, Chile, England and elsewhere.

OSGOOD: Debasement?!...I *knew* it must be your negative attitude that caused this. Why, Ms Dotson, if this were a charter school, you would...

HANK: Sir...It makes no sense being upset with Ms Dotson. Traditional teachers haven't been educated in the new teaching model. Compare their performance to how well the corporate-funded instructors have done teaching corporate designed lessons. The military has trained instructors to teach new personnel a military version of what they need to know for the same jobs that exist in civilian life. Now that there is scarcely any difference between the two programs, all we have to do is bring those military instructors into our classrooms....

SPIKE: (*Whacks Hank*) Hank, quiet! Raise your hand and wait to be called if you wish to speak. (*brief pause*)

OSGOOD: (*After Hank begins to raise his hand*) Put your hand down!...Of course you can...

RIP: (*Whacks Osgood*) Osgood!...Did you request permission to speak?

(*brief pause as Osgood expresses his consternation*)

WORM: (*Standing before seated Hank and Osgood. As instructor.*) My dear...precious, elderly pupils. You will only be excused once you have demonstrated that critical thinking you claim as a concern but only use as a cover for our forced garbage learning experience. Now, here is an example from a NY history exam. "The theory of laissez-faire economics was used during the late 1800's to (1) justify unregulated business growth (2) call for more consumer protection (3) support Progressive programs (4) achieve equal distribution of income." Your answer, please. (*Brief pause*)

HANK:...Ummm...Could you repeat the question?

OSGOOD: (*Starts to rise from seat*) Quiet, Hank, we're not going to be part of this... (*Whacked with a ruler*)

SPIKE: Sit!...And don't budge until we are finished with you!

HANK: (*He and Osgood looking at each other*) I'd be doing something to get us out of this if you hadn't made me lock up my Glock. (*Brief pause*)

WORM: Your answer...Osgood...Hank?

OSGOOD: (*Blustering*) I'm not...enough is enough. (*Glances at stern students*) Well, it's obviously "justify unregulated business growth".....and what's wrong with that answer?!

SPIKE: That we are forced to give a garbage answer in order to get a correct mark.

SKETCH: Yeah, we don't have to believe it but we damn well better be willing to recite it.

OSGOOD: And I repeat – What *is* wrong with it?

SCORE: That's a question you must answer to demonstrate your critical capacity.

HANK: (*After Osgood looks at him for help*) Don't look at me – I thought 'achieve unequal distribution of income' was the correct answer.

OSGOOD: Hank, you numbskull, that wasn't even a choice. It wasn't 'unequal' it was 'equal.'

HANK: 'To achieve equal distribution of income?'...'laissez-faire economics?' (*Bursts out laughing*) That's a hot one! (*Brief pause*)

SCORE: I move that we should vote a 'C' for Hank because his laughter can easily be interpreted as an acceptable answer – and flunk Osgood.

RIP: Let's not give up on Osgood. After all, we have a teacher right here – Ms Dotson?

MS DOTSON: (*To Osgood*) Laissez-faire economics is experienced as a bad thing for most people, but the answer just says something about justifying business growth. Don't we frequently hear official sources tell us that business growth is a good thing? Therefore, the 'correct' answer contains a suggestion of acceptance when in fact the vast majority of Americans, then and now, reject the laissez-faire model.

WORM: This is my substitution if it were so permitted – “The theory of laissez-faire economics was used during the late 1800's to justify monopolization, price fixing, job cuts: in short, the unrestricted exploitation of the worker, both as producer and consumer.” Or a simplified version for our new pupils – to justify the unlimited greed of the capitalist class.

SKETCH: Triple A+ for Worm!!!

OSGOOD: But questions of this sort require more or less broad generic answers.

MS DOTSON: I think not because I am forced to teach the back story in support of the garbage answers. That means the garbage answer has been carefully prepared to be the correct one.

OSGOOD: Ms Dotson, must you call correct responses to questions formulated by our top educators 'garbage answers?'

SKETCH: Yes, because it leaves available harsher terms for other questions – like this one. “In *Korematsu v. United States*, the Supreme Court upheld the military order excluding Japanese Americans from the West Coast on the basis that the action was considered – and here is the answer we are commanded to give – “a matter of national security.”

HANK: Now that was excessive...

OSGOOD: Yes, it clearly was a regrettable action, but...

SPIKE: (*Whacks Osgood*) Stay focused on the construction of the question and answer.

SCORE: Note that in order to pick up our points we had to repeat back the official *justification/lie* for a racist Nazi-like action?

MS DOTSON: Also notice that the word “excluded” is used...What a benign term for having all your property stolen and then being marched into remote concentration camps?! Identical to the Nazi treatment of most Jews, except for the mass murder.

RIP: And we are forced to respond with that despicable garbage answer rather than the true one – that it was intended to foment racist hatred and 'fifth column' hysteria in support of the war effort. (*Brief pause*)

WORM: But some of these question are as slick as they are slimy. “The Espionage Act of 1918 included punishment for speaking or writing disloyal, scurrilous or abusive language about the form of government, the Constitution, the armed forces, or the flag...” The passage and enforcement of which reflected the belief that the – and the answer – that the “nations' war effort effort would be threatened if dissenters were allowed free speech.”

OSGOOD: What's wrong with that?!...It's a frank admission of the truth!

MS DOTSON: But it just leaves it hanging there...disconnected...not permitting anything to be learned from it. This should have been an essay...

SKETCH: (*To Ms Dotson*) You've already had your chance to repair the question...now let us give our answer. But you are right, it would take a long essay to deal with the political nature of a country that enacts legislation for the purpose of subverting a fundamental constitutional right, while at the *same time* criminalizing any disparagement of the esteemed document! How Orwellian can you get?!

RIP: And even though clearly unconstitutional, it's received the official stamp of approval by the top court in the land...and is still frequently used, most recently against Chelsea Manning for exposing crimes of the state.

SPIKE: (*To Hank*) Since the law is itself a criminal act, would you arrest the president for implementing it?

HANK: No, but I might turn my back as you make a citizens arrest. (*Brief pause*)

RIP: But let's be fair, Spike, some presidents do express beautiful sentiments, like here's Kennedy in his inaugural address – (*Sententiously*) “To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves....not because the communists may be doing it...but because it is right. If a free society cannot save the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich...” And the question - “According to the quotation, President Kennedy wanted to” followed by no choice appropriate to the intention of the statement...

SCORE: Yeah...I wrote that he wanted to “foist the biggest lie ever attempted on the poor people of the world,” and they said that it was wrong!

OSGOOD: But note the challenge – “If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, then it cannot save the few who are rich” – That spells it out... lays it all on the line..

MS DOTSON: Osgood, you've missed the contradiction in terms – What truly free society would give a shit about saving the few who are rich?!

OSGOOD: *(brief pause – angrily)* Ms Dotson, I didn't believe the rumors that you were a red diaper baby, but now I see that...

SKETCH:...Ruining reputations!...Just like our inglorious leader Theodore Roosevelt did to Stephen Crane regarding the...

SPIKE:...But first a lying question written to refurbish TR's rotten reputation. “Which was the first labor strike to end with the president intervening on behalf of the workers?” This was supposedly the 1902 anthracite coal strike. Roosevelt in fact sequestered and ignored his own aide's judgment on behalf of the workers, and his getting the workers to stop the strike killed it, causing them to return to work with their union still unrecognized.

RIP: The true slime of that lovable teddy bear is portrayed in the following skit.

(The following story should be acted out by the cast)

SKETCH: In 1896 the writer Stephen Crane was preparing an article on the nightlife of New York City. He had interviewed three women and was walking them home. The trolley for one of them arrived. Two women waited on the curb while Crane escorted her to the train.

WORM: Meanwhile, hiding around the corner, Charles Becker, Police Commissioner Roosevelt's favorite bad cop, was spying. He saw two men pass the women. Without stopping and inquiring of the men, he went up and charged both women with soliciting.

SKETCH: What's the chance of that being true with Crane to return to them in a few minutes?

SPIKE: When Crane came back he interceded on their behalf for which he was also threatened with arrest. One woman was released by falsely asserting Crane was her husband. Crane gallantly acknowledged the claim, but Dora Clark, AKA Ruby Young, was taken in custody.

SCORE: Against the advice of many, Crane publicly stated that he would testify on behalf of Clark. In the interval Roosevelt was inundated with pleas that he drop the obviously false charge. He refused. On Crane's testimony Clark was absolved.

RIP: Now the shoe was on the other foot. Clark was going to charge Becker with false arrest. Again, Crane was to testify on her behalf even though Roosevelt warned him against it. Becker (*played by Hank*) physically attacked Clark in public view when he learned he was to be tried. TR sent the police after Crane. They raided his apartment – interviewed people he was acquainted with – all to dig up dirt for a smear campaign. Just like today's cops in similar circumstance, Becker swaggered into court surrounded by his fellow thugs. Crane was systematically slandered under cross examination – His reputation permanently ruined among society twits and dipshit historians. Becker was acquitted.

(brief pause)

WORM: Charles Becker became a hero of the NYPD. Eventually he was promoted to lieutenant and head of a vice squad where he became the biggest graft taker on the force. In 1912 a bookmaker by the name of Herman Rosenthal publicly stated that he was paying out so much to the cops that he could barely make a living. Shortly before he was to meet with the Manhattan DA, Becker had him murdered.

SKETCH: Becker was arrested and eventually convicted of first degree murder. Many think he was punished only because his rash action cut off the graft slush fund that extended beyond the NYPD. At Sing Sing on July 30, 1915 Charles Becker became the first American cop to be executed for murder. *(Brief pause)* What do you think of that, Hank?

HANK: You mean...there had only been one?

SPIKE: *(Laughing)* We also found it hard to believe...Maybe also the last one, but at least our fair city was the first.

RIP: Expect a giant Times Square celebration this July 30th!

(Brief pause)

MS DOTSON: A heartwarming story...

OSGOOD:...But let's not forget that we allow Crane's works to be in our library, not just Red Badge, but...that...that other controversial one. *(brief pause)*

MS Dotson: *(to students)* But what about math and other categories of testing?

OSGOOD: Life is not all social revolutionary stuff. Where is your critical reasoning being applied to practical everyday matters?

RIP: Okay, here is a question that confronts a fundamental moral issue. Our beloved TR famously said that, "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead

Indians, but I believe nine out of ten are and I shouldn't like to inquire too close into the case of the tenth." So here we have a categorical defense by one of the most powerful leaders of the American ruling class of the genocidal mass murder of the native population. Roosevelt was a victim of an assassination attempt, as was Hitler. Should either have been successful, would you judge the perpetrator a criminal or innocent because he brought a just punishment to a person beyond the bounds of the established system of justice?

HANK: The answer would be an easy one if he was killed by a Native American.

OSGOOD: That's preposterous! Hitler killed millions.

SKETCH: Osgood, what is your cut off point on the number of murders before they start becoming crimes?

(brief pause – Osgood flustered)

RIP: As a person with authority over us. . .

SKETCH:..and the keeper of Hank's Glock. . .

RIP. . .we have the right to know because you might just feel the need to have Hank shoot one of us recalcitrants in the back. . .

HANK: No...no...no..You'll never pin that on me. If it happens, it will be Osgood...

OSGOOD: Hank, restrain yourself. . . no such thing will ever happen. . .

HANK: All I know is that if you don't answer this question right, I want my gun back.

OSGOOD: Roosevelt said a deplorable thing. . . absolutely indefensible. . .but it came after our sad treatment of the native population.

SKETCH: No, Osgood, TR lived out West for years when Indians were still being massacred. . .

MS DOTSON: . . .and for that matter, the Bureau of Indian Affairs sanctioned the murder of dozens of American Indian Movement 'recalcitrants' by its Pine Ridge Reservation goon squad as late as the 1960's and 70's.

SKETCH: Perhaps if Roosevelt had been brought to justice some of those murder victims would be alive today. . .Osgood, you are in danger of failing. . .

(brief pause)

SCORE: . . .Failing to help us learn the rules for a world that is worth living in. *(Brief*

pause) The test of an honest society, and genuine critical reasoning, is if such reasoning is also applied to those that administer it to others. In Cambodia the Khymer Rouge are said to have murdered almost 2 million people in their 4 years of rule. That number is derived from 175,000 direct killings. The rest being excess deaths due to conditions which mostly resulted from the American bombing campaign.

WORM: It's fine to wildly exaggerate the crimes of 'enemy' countries, while remaining silent about ones own. This country refused to make public its killing counts in the criminal invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan – those were only revealed to us thru leaks. The two invasions and embargo of Iraq come to about 200,000 direct murders, and 4.5 million excess death murders.

RIP: Accurate descriptions of historical events are required – or else how are people to make sound moral judgments about the society in which they live? (*brief pause*)

HANK: Is that a question?

MS DOTSON: (*After everyone pauses to look at Hank*) Yes, but a rhetorical one.

OSGOOD: (*As Hank looks confused*) It means: Shut up! (*Pause*)

SKETCH: The concept of excess deaths is an interesting one. An unequal system like capitalism causes millions of excess deaths compared to a more egalitarian one. Life expectancy plummeted after the system conversion in Russia, but the millions of excess deaths is ignored because that would imply a criticism of capitalism. Capitalist India, a country far richer in resources than formerly Stalinist China, has a life expectancy that is 10 years less than China's. The differential number is excess deaths? – many millions murdered by Indian capitalism.

SPIKE: Now, Hank and Osgood, write these figures down. Cuba is a very poor country with a so-called communist egalitarian government. Its infant mortality rate is less than 5 per 1000 live births. Brazil is a very rich capitalist country. Its infant mortality rate is about 20 per 1000 live births. And the question is – Given a Brazilian population of 85 million in 1967 and 190 million in 2010, calculate the excess deaths based on the mortality rates.

MS DOTSON: But that's no good. Brazil's infant mortality rate is at it's lowest point – it was very much higher in 1967...

RIP:...We know that...and Cuba didn't have such a low rate until years after the overthrow of capitalism. But this is a math question that still supports a general thesis. But thank you, Ms Dotson, for the clarification. (*Looking at watch*) Okay, start...now!

(*Hank looks at figures, but Osgood shows indifference*)

SKETCH: Osgood...If you don't do the lesson you will be kept behind indefinitely.

(Osgood angrily moves closer to Hank to see what he's doing)

OSGOOD: *(To Hank)* Well!..Well!, Come on...do the subtraction so that you have the net population increase.

HANK: I know that, but how the devil am I to figure out how many thousands make up all those millions? *(Osgood rolls his eyes)*

MS DOTSON: *(To Hank)* How many thousands in one million?

(Hank looks stumped)

OSGOOD: $999,999 + 1 =$ how much?

HANK: *(After hard thinking)* A thousand! *(Ms Dotson sticks a little star on his paper)*
Thanks!

OSGOOD: Since excess deaths is 15 per thousand, you just have two simple calculations.

HANK: *(Busily working)* The total.....is....1,507,500....Is that right?

SPIKE: Possibly...but as noted...the actual number is much higher. The essential point is that a very large number of children never get a chance to have a life because they are born into a vicious exploitative capitalist system.

WORM: Osgood, here is your second chance to develop a true moral vision by the application of critical reasoning in opposition to the moral turpitude of excess death societies. Can the execution of the entire ruling class of such a society be morally justified if in doing so it saved millions of innocent lives?

OSGOOD: Of course not!...Such an atrocity can never be justified. Other means, like world public opinion, can be used to force change.

HANK: But that would mean millions more innocent deaths before there is a very unlikely peaceful solution. I'd be for a partial mass execution of a selection of the worst people. That should get the rest to see the light.

MS DOTSON: The question is badly framed in that if we were in a position to perform the task, it must mean there had been a revolution in that society. Therefore, an egalitarian system has been set up and you only need to seek justice for past excess deaths.

HANK: Which means the baddest of the bad can be picked out...So it seems my answer is very close to the correct one.

OSGOOD: Hank, do you realize what you have assented to also applies to our country?

You are sanctioning the possible execution of your own employers.

HANK: Better than me.

SKETCH: *(To fellow students)* Hank is showing definite progress.

RIP: Yes, I do believe our comrade court would rule favorably on his minor infractions.

SCORE: *(Addressed to captives)* It may interest you to know that our school formed a comrade court after the exposure of another lying exam question sent to us by a comrade in California. This one had Lenin issuing a decree in 1919 ordering all obstreperous workers into concentration camps. The Truth: The decree was issued by the Counsel of Peoples Commissars of the RSFSR, not by Lenin personally as if it were one of Obama's decrees, and it democratized the process of dealing with workplace conduct (later amended to include secondary schools) by the formation of comrade courts made up of workers (or students) along with union and management.

SPIKE: And the most common punishments on conviction were a public apology, censure, reprimand, warning, 6 months loss of electoral rights...Imagine! – School and workplace elections!

WORM: Only after repeated violations would the most extreme measure be called upon – concentration camps being work camps, not like the Nazis had in capitalist Germany. You arbitrarily threatened us with much worse just a few minutes ago.

SKETCH: Yeah, there would be no more dragging off kids in handcuffs just because they threw a tantrum; or pointing a finger at someone if the gesture should mimic a pistol; or if they were wearing a pair of broken eyeglasses -- or daily searches in gross violation of the 4th Amendment. And as for the workplace, the dictatorial boss is free to discipline as he pleases, and can even fire you on the spot.

SPIKE: In short, compared to the police state we live under, the comrade court system has many positive features. *(Brief pause)*

OSGOOD: Did I understand you to say that this court scheme is school wide?

SCORE: Schools-wide. What is happening here has been synched with schools throughout the city. *(Taking out papers)* Since this has been an initial introduction, we will suspend any judgments. You simply must sign this agreement mandating the convening of a comrade court whenever you deem an infraction to occur.

OSGOOD: I will certainly not sign anything making me a comrade!

SPIKE: You are management, we are the comrades. The courts will consist of 3 comrades, 1 management and a teacher.

OSGOOD: But that gives you a majority!

WORM: That's because we *are* the majority!

OSGOOD: Well...I will never submit to mob rule!

(At this point actors, and members of the audience who choose to participate, crowd close behind Osgood and Hank.)

MS DOTSON: Osgood, look behind you.

OSGOOD: *(Looking around anxiously)* Well...What does it matter? *(Quickly signing paper)* It can't be enforced. But where did you pick up this commie stuff?

WORM: *Final Judgment* by Dina Kaminskaya – a book we were assigned to read.

OSGOOD: *Who approved such a book!*

MS DOTSON: You did. Remember the list you went through? She was a Soviet defense attorney expelled in the late 70's. Worked for The Voice of America over here. Her son actually became head of humanitarian institute created by none other than Richard Nixon! Thoroughly anti-communists. The same collegial system applied throughout workplaces. Me and you and the students would be running things together, democratically.

OSGOOD: Wouldn't work. The management of human nature requires a distinct power structure.

MS DOTSON: That's what Stalin also thought – but at least they were forced to keep the original plan officially in place.

RIP: *(Picking up document and laying another one before Hank)* Hank, yours is similar. No actions against us without comrade court sanction...That includes searches.

SKETCH: *(To Hank)* Instead of spending your day doing mostly nothing, you will now help us with gymnastics during whatever free school time we can squeeze in.

HANK: I have no problem with that – the job is kind of boring...

SPIKE:...and regarding the Glock...

HANK:...but you already know that pinhead *(Pointing at Osgood)* locked it away.

SPIKE:...you must arrange for us after school firearms practice at a shooting range.

OSGOOD: *(To Hank)* You're not going to agree to that!

HANK: *(Signing paper)* Why not?...Even the NRA supports such educational firearms training programs.

SCORE: We've come up with a good way to stop the illegal stop & frisks – Easily obtained concealed carry permits.

HANK: That sure would make me stop and *think* first! *(brief pause)*

OSGOOD: *(To Ms Dotson)* Whose side are you on in all of this?

MS DOTSON: *(Smiling and looking at her students)* They know I'm on the side of democracy as long as it's powerful enough to keep me employed. *(Brief pause)*

WORM: Mission accomplished! *(To Hank and Osgood)* You may leave... *(They rise and students put their arms around their shoulders)*...and we will accompany you.

OSGOOD: *(Trying to shake off arm around his shoulder)*. That is hardly necessary!

RIP: *(They are all exiting through the back of the theater)* Oh, but it is because we are going to your office....

OSGOOD:...my office?...

RIP:...to make copies of the agreement for distribution..

SKETCH: And the brief use of the public address system.

OSGOOD: The public address system!...but what will you say... I mean...I can't allow...

SKETCH: Sorry, the comrade court has made a judgment and you are now overruled.

(They all exit)

[End – Second edition]

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