

SCENE 4
MEETING CONTINUES, INTERRUPTED BY
A SIGNAL BELL AND CLASS CHANGE
COMMOTION.
THEN MEETING IS HALTED BY
AN AMBER ALERT

TERRY: Thanks, ladies. I mentioned Bingo a minute ago. Every mentee loves to play that. Bingo is a terrific way for them to learn how to play fair, be a gracious winner and not a sore loser or cheater. The younger ones practice reading numbers and letters. Older students use cognitive skills to figure out how to win, vertically, horizontally, diagonally, or corners....

A loud bell rings throughout the school. This signals class change at 9:20 A.M. for the upper grades. Students pass by noisily outside the permanently open Cafeteria doors. The meeting temporarily stops.

TERRY: (*yelling over din*) Oops. That's the class change bell for the middle grade students. I'm sorry, I should have warned you this would happen. Let's

pause for a bit. It's a good time to fill out your forms. Or go ahead and talk among yourselves.

JASON: Or check your emails.

(Class change hallway noise continues. The new people focus on filling out their forms. Barbara and Linda chat privately.)

BARBARA: Linda, do you think you'll have Beryl again this year? My Juan will be back. Terry said he returned his permission slip for this school year already signed. That kid is always so down to earth and efficient. I wonder if, over the summer, he learned chess well enough to beat me.

LINDA: I hope to see Beryl again. I'm prepared to start with a different mentee, though, if she has to leave. Her living situation is so dicey with the dad gone, and her mother getting treatments. Fingers crossed.

We did manage to meet once over the summer. We went to the Zoo with Tomas and Carlos, just after school ended. What a trip! We had to indulge Tomas' short attention span. Eventually we had to

split up. The boys only wanted to see stuff we had no interest in, snakes and spiders.

BARBARA: I hope Terry doesn't take more than a week or two to get everybody's paperwork straightened out. So we can all start meeting our mentees again.

Barbara's conversation with Linda and the hallway commotion are both interrupted by the Dreamscape, "Hippo Face Off." Poeta También appears on an elevated platform behind the scrim located center left behind the main stage. She reads the poem while images of hippos at the zoo are projected on the other three darkened scrims. The Orientation attendees mime continuing to converse and fill out forms during the Dreamscape.

"HIPPO FACE OFF"

*Hard to believe a hippo could hide, 'tis true.
But their hippos were hidden at the city zoo
in a building full of fish.
Granting his field trip wish*

*my eager 4th grade friend eventually
found the place,
pool home to three hippos
swimming below surface.*

*Completely underwater is where
they seem to want to stay.
They raise half a giant heavy head
sometimes in play
above the waterline.
Through tank glass borderline,
one turned her massive bulk around.
Impaired, she trotted at window
through water, stared.
Her head, wide as my
spreadeagled arms sideways
her giant face, with mostly mouth,
did me amaze.
I became alarmed and scared,
but my companion little guy
was unperturbed, undaunted, done.*

Sandra, always promoting mentoring at the school, strikes up a conversation with Jason as the hallway commotion continues but gradually subsides.

SANDRA: Jason, what do you think so far? Can you see yourself mentoring here?

JASON: I'm not sure yet. I think your hearts are in the right place. Like you, I also want to do something to help disadvantaged children. Something more tangible than just writing a check. But I've also looked into another program. It expects a one-year commitment, and runs several training sessions before matching you to a child. It's been in business a long time. I find that kind of formally-organized program to be more appealing. I'm torn, though, because I don't think I can commit the amount of time they require.

SANDRA: Please read our Handbook before you decide. We've evolved our methods during nine years of mentoring here. You'll find that the Handbook covers similar questions to the ones in their training sessions. You would spend an hour a week with a child in either program. It's true that we have a more improvised way of approaching

mentoring here. But that doesn't make it less effective.

JASON: As I said, my goal is to help an older child take the right steps to prepare for college.

Mentoring here seems to be a matter of just-do-it, with not a lot of prep time. I'm not entirely comfortable with that sort of "corporate culture." But with my time constraints, it might work for me. I'd have to live outside of my comfort zone for a couple of hours a week. Growth for me as well as for my student, I suppose. I am thinking seriously about it.

As the chaos from the class change subsides, Terry, who has been chatting with mentors, steps back to center front.

TERRY: OK, Well, that's over with. It just shows how flexible you'll need to be. Never a dull moment here. I'll collect those forms now if you've finished them. Does anyone have questions about items in your packet?

Terry recognizes Joey.

JOEY: How will we be notified when you've chosen the student for us? And how long until we have our first meeting?

TERRY: Believe me, we're all eager to get mentoring started this year. It takes about two weeks to get background check approvals for everybody. Meanwhile, I'll be matching and scheduling you with your students. I'll send you each an email with a short description of your match and a proposed hour to meet. If that's OK with you, we should all be able to start in late September. You can meet your student then.

In the meantime, you've got our Handbook, please read through it. Especially you newbies will find articles about mentoring and activities you might try.

CARLOS: What about those of us who are continuing with our mentees from last year, Terry? Can we come at the same time as last year and start meeting sooner?

TERRY: Carlos, I understand you're eager to start. Problem is, your mentees have advanced a grade and have new schedules. I have to make sure Tomas

and the others won't be missing important classwork when they're excused. I will check on that ASAP, I promise.

Smart phones start jangling all over the room as an AMBER Alert comes through on first one phone, then others. One with a robotic voice breaks through the noise of various phones.

PHONE VOICE: Emergency Alert. Child abduction in San Antonio, TX. Black 2011 Ford F150 XL Pickup with KXPN 4245. Victim is a 15-year-old Hispanic/male, Tomas Fuentes, who was last seen wearing a gray hoodie, blue shirt, tan slacks, and green sneakers. Suspect is a Hispanic/male who is a non-custodial parent, and abducted Fuentes at a school bus stop. Call 9-1-1 with information. Type: AMBER Alert.

Gradually all AMBER Alert alarms go silent. Carlos is upset to hear his mentee's name in the alert. Talking to himself in Spanish, he immediately goes to a corner of the room, speed dials the attendance clerk. He asks about both Fuentes children. Terry