

She rolled her eyes at him and told him to stop writing on his skin. “You’ll look like a criminal,” she scolded.

Robert stuffed his hands into his pockets as he rose from his seat. “What’s in the box?” he asked.

20 She muttered under her breath. She popped open the taped top and brought out skirts, hats, snowshoes, scarves, and vests. She tossed Robert a red beard, which he held up to his face, thinking it made him look handsome.

“I like it,” Robert said. He sneezed and ran his hand across his moist nose.

His classmates were coming into the classroom and looked at Robert in awe. “That’s bad,” Ruben said. “What do I get?”

Mrs. Bunnin threw him a wrinkled shirt. Ruben raised it to his chest and said, “My dad could wear this. Can I give it to him after the play is done?”

30 Mrs. Bunnin turned away in silence.

Most of the actors didn’t have speaking parts. They just got cutout crepe-paper snowflakes to pin to their shirts or crepe-paper leaves to wear.

During the blizzard in which Robert delivered his line, Belinda asked, “Is there something wrong with your eyes?” Robert looked at the audience, which at the moment was a classroom of empty chairs, a dented world globe that had been dropped by almost everyone, one limp flag, one wastebasket, and a picture of George Washington, whose eyes followed you around the room when you got up to sharpen your pencil. Robert answered, “Nothing’s wrong. I can see.”

40 Mrs. Bunnin, biting on the end of her pencil, said, “Louder, both of you.”

Belinda stepped up, nostrils flaring so that the shadows on her nose quivered, and said louder, “Sucka, is there something wrong with your eye-balls?”

“Nothing’s wrong. I can see.”

“Louder! Make sure the audience can hear you,” Mrs. Bunnin directed. She tapped her pencil hard against the desk. She scolded, “Robert, I’m not going to tell you again to quit fooling with the beard.”

“It’s itchy.”

50 “We can’t do anything about that. Actors need **props**. You’re an actor. Now try again.”

Robert and Belinda stood center stage as they waited for Mrs. Bunnin to call “Action!” When she did, Belinda approached Robert slowly. “Sucka face, is there anything wrong with your mug?” Belinda asked. Her eyes were squinted in anger. For a moment Robert saw his head grinding into the playground grass. **B**

“Nothing’s wrong. I can see.”

prop (prŏp) *n.* an object an actor uses in a play

B PLOT: RISING ACTION

Reread lines 42–56. What **conflict**, or struggle, is developing?