

## MAX UNDERSTOOD

By Nancy Carlin and Michael Rasbury

### CHARACTERS:

Max, an autistic boy, 7 years old

Mom, his mom, 30ish

Dad, his dad, 30ish

Homunculus "Munc" Jones, a gardener, a philosopher, a spirit-guide

Fin, a girl, a little older than Max.  
Bossy, powerful

Albert, a boy, 12-14. Book-ish, awkward

Peg, a girl, 12-14. Heavy-set, into clothes

### PLACE:

An apartment complex. The interior of Max's apartment and various exterior locations immediately surrounding it.

SCENE 1 - HOME

We find a boy standing by himself surrounded by darkness. He stands still but there is a noticeable inner fire burning brightly and ready to surge out of every area of his body. This is Max. His eyes are gleaming and wide open and far away and he wears a very large smile.

**SONG 1: NOISE SYMPHONY**

Loud sound of a leaf blower breaks the mood. It underscores the coming sounds.

Somewhere in the darkness a telephone rings. Max doesn't notice.

Then a microwave begins beeping from the opposite side of the stage. Again, Max is far away.

Other household and neighborhood sounds begin to randomly make noise.

Max still doesn't seem to notice, but he seems distracted. Although his eyes remain full and his smile bright, he begins shifting his hands in uncomfortable ways.

From the darkness around him, the cacophony of sounds begins to overlap and grow.

He starts making an ever growing and anxious sounding vocalization.

MAX

Noisy!

Max flaps his hands harder and faster, and his vocalization sounds even more anxious. But he still smiles and seems far away. The anxious sound is really pleasing for him to make.

The symphony of noise culminates in a clattering and electronic sounding crescendo. Max stops shaking. In a brief second, and as the reverberations of the noise symphony fade, we see Max's happy smile and distant eyes.

Max always looks happy while he replays stories in his mind.

Max grabs his president machine. The tinny, digital sound of a talking toy giving facts about presidents brings focus to the present space.

## **SONG 2: MEET MAX AND MACHINE**

### **PRESIDENT MACHINE**

Welcome to an interactive visit with the U.S. Presidents.  
Press any button to begin...

Pr...Pr...Pr...President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the thirteenth president from 1850-1853.

He rapidly presses the buttons preventing the machine from completing its sentences.

Mom appears. She holds a box of toaster waffles.

MOM

Max!

There is no response to this, as Max continues with his toy.

Dad appears in a separate space

DAD

Max?

He holds a toaster.

MOM/DAD  
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL  
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
Pr...Pr...Pr...President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as  
the thirteenth president from 1850-1853. Fillmore is a member  
of the Whig Party.

MOM  
Breakfast!

Sound of toaster ejecting toast.

SCENE 2 - HOME

Max sits on floor eating waffles and  
stimming (hands flapping, etc.)  
Television light illuminates his face.  
Sound of Ray Bolger in The Wizard of Oz  
saying, "...but some people without  
brains do an awful lot of talking..." Max  
has some of his favorite icons with  
him. Of particular interest is a  
little white Pegasus. He often uses it  
as a character to reenact stories in  
his mind.

With the remote control, Max  
continually repeats a sequence.

TV  
"... but how can you talk if you haven't got a brain? I don't  
know, but some people without brains do an awful lot of  
talking, don't they?"

Dad and Mom enter with coffee.

MOM  
That incessant leaf blower woke me up ag--

DAD  
Max, you wake up way too early in --

MAX  
I watch Wizard.

MOM  
And go to bed too late. Did you -

Wizard! MAX

...get any...? -- MOM

I slept with Max. But he kept me -- DAD

MAX  
(with the TV, for the umpteenth  
time)  
"..an awful lot of talking!"

He won't sleep without one of us there. DAD

MOM  
Can't that guy just take a break from relocating the leaves?  
This is the noisiest apartment -- --

DAD  
You can't watch this over and over --

MOM  
One of us is always alone --

MAX  
Why?

DAD  
You know he needs someone to --

MAX  
Why?

DAD  
(gently, to Max)  
Because it's just too much.

MAX  
Why?

DAD  
Because you have this memorized.

MOM  
This is getting old --

MAX  
WHY?

DAD  
BECAUSE I CAN'T --

MOM  
What?

DAD  
I can't watch this one more time!

MAX  
WHY!?

DAD  
I CAN'T TAKE THIS!

Dad turns off the TV. Max's eyes roll up in his head and stay fixated on an imaginary TV screen. He flaps.

Mom and Dad pause to look at him.

I'll be late again if I don't --

MAX  
I watch!

DAD  
I can't be late --

MAX  
I watch Wizard.

MOM  
You have to get up in the morning when he does.--

MAX  
I watch Brian Williams!

MOM  
That's what I have to do.

MAX  
Brian Williams!

DAD  
No more TV, Max. I WAS UP EVERY HOUR WITH HIM UNTIL --

MAX  
Be happy!

DAD  
No more!

MAX  
Need to, need to, need to!

Descends into a fit.

DAD  
OK stop, Ok. Just until you get dressed. But then we're turning it off.

MAX  
Need to watch!

DAD  
We'll watch while your getting dressed.

MOM  
We can't keep letting him--

MAX  
(sharply)  
Who was Millard Fillmore?

DAD  
You have to pick your (battles)--

MAX  
WHO WAS MILLARD FILLMORE?

MOM  
Well, you should stick to your-- You know, Max.

MAX  
You know.

MOM  
YOU know.

DAD  
But when you're through getting dressed, we're turning it off. (to Mom) It seems to comfort him sometimes. It really does--

MAX  
Maybe later I watch?

MOM  
I could have slept with him --

DAD  
What?

MOM  
I don't sleep anyway.

MAX  
Maybe tomorrow I watch?

DAD  
OK...But no more Wizard. Your favorite commercial is on this channel.

He turns it on to a morning news show.

MOM  
Just for a little while. But when you're dressed --

MAX  
Maybe later?

MOM  
We'll watch again later.

Max starts organizing Dad's hair.

MAX  
Maybe tomorrow I watch?

DAD  
OK, Max.

More hair organizing. Dad tries to ignore.

MOM  
You know, I'm worried about us.

MAX  
Like Brian Williams!

DAD  
What do you suggest --.

MAX  
Brian Williams!

MOM  
(Getting clothes for Max)  
We're stuck --

DAD  
We're doing the best we --

MAX  
Makes you look like Brian Williams! Like Good Squid! Good Squid!

MOM  
And we have no friends.

DAD  
The people in this town drive me (nuts)--

MOM  
Who'd last five minutes with us?

DAD  
I mean all they care about is their leaf-blown sidewalks.

MAX  
Good Squid!

MOM  
Same leaves. New location.

MAX  
Like Brian Williams!

DAD  
We need friends...

MAX  
Good Day, and Good Squid.

MOM  
(to Dad)  
What?!

DAD  
Brian Williams. When he was on Sesame Street. He said, "Good Day and Good Squid."

They pause a moment. They almost smile.

MAX

(in an echoalic way, some words  
sound incorrect)

"President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the  
'firthteenth' president from 1850-1853."

DAD

That's great...Hold on Max, just a sec.

Gets his work stuff together

DAD

We need to get him out more.

MAX

(begging a response)

Cornish Pixies...

DAD

He really needs the sunlight.

MAX

(more insistent)

Cornish Pixies...

DAD

(to Max, responding by rote)

"FRESHLY PLUCKED."

Max presses his toe on a little Casio  
keyboard. It plays a melody.

DAD

You should take him out more.

MOM

YOU try. It's too frustrating. You know he bumps into people.

DAD

I'm not sure he even wants to. Hey, Max, you want to go  
outside?

MAX

Mmm-hmmm.

MOM

Hey Max, are you a monkey wrench?

MAX

Mmm-hmmm.

DAD  
(point taken)

Ok...

MOM

If he was just a little more aware of his body...

DAD

People will just have to deal.

Mom turns the Casio off.

Dad goes off.

Mom takes a deep breath. She dresses Max as she has to every morning. These are the same clothes he is fixated on and must wear every day.

MOM

Max, you've got to always stay close to Mom.

Max turns Casio on

Remember, if you do want to go outside -- tell me. (trying to catch his eye) Where are you Max? Let me see your pretty eyes. You know, there are bad people in -- If you left without me, some bad person...You have to pay attention outside.(calling to Dad) GET ME A DAMP WASHCLOTH...

She turns Casio off

MAX

That wasn't in the job description!

Max turns Casio back on. Melody again.

MOM

...Cars not looking out for kids in the way...the drainage ditch has no cover on it.

DAD

You worry too much.

Trying to turn Casio off

No, Max.

MAX

Sponge Bob...ummm...ummm...ummmm....

MOM

He's not capable.

DAD

Where's the stop button on this thing?

Casio off

MAX

(he struggles with some of the words)

Sponge Bob and Drake Bell and, and, and Pegasus and Princess and, and, and Ben Stein and ummmm, ummmm, ummm, Pee Wee can come to my house and have triple chocolate power line cake with a red candle and a green, no, no, no, blue candle and red candle. OK?

DAD

Well, OK Max, but I'm not sure that can really --

MAX

Why?

Dad doesn't know how to respond.

Why?

DAD

Because --

MAX

Why?

DAD

Because you --

MAX

Why? (beat) Why?

MOM

Yesterday he smacked into some man at the store. The guy looked at me like I was such a bad par -- hold still Max!

Running away to do Dad's hair.

DAD  
(grabbing his hand firmly)  
Please leave my hair alone.

MOM  
They expect him to act different at his age.

DAD  
Please! Stop!

MOM  
People don't understand.

DAD  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

MAX  
Brian Williams!

DAD  
Pay attention!

Turning his face to catch his eyes and  
repeating the oft heard phrase  
Where are you Max? Over here, handsome.

MOM  
Here, I'll do it.

Giving Mom the wet washcloth which she  
proceeds to use to wipe Max's hair.

DAD  
Max, just make sure you get Mom and Dad if you want to go  
out.

MOM  
What happens when we're not around for him anymore?

DAD  
What do you mean?

MOM  
When he's old.

MAX  
(vocalizing his anxious sounds  
and flapping)  
Because I'm...dirty! Because he doesn't know!

MOM  
He'll be a teenager soon. What's the matter Max?

MAX  
Noisy!

This gentle washing feels like bricks  
on his skin. He lashes out and hits  
Mom.

MOM  
Ouch!

DAD  
Easy.

Max's hand gets caught in Mom's locket  
chain, almost choking her

MOM  
Let go!

Dad undoes the necklace

DAD  
Why'd you do that, Max? Try to be more careful. Pay  
attention!

MAX  
Can I rip that? Can I hurt that?

DAD  
That was not a good choice.

MAX  
Be happy!

DAD  
I know you didn't want to hurt Mom.

MAX  
Be happy!

I'm all right. MOM

DAD  
How are we ever going to get that boy in a bathtub? Water freaks him out so much.

MOM  
One step at a--

Max is all at once overcome by agitated remorse, moaning and shaking. Tears.

DAD  
All done! "Noisy" all done.

We love you...

A dressing ritual/game. Max follows directions in order to dress. Mom and Dad take a deep breath. Dad turns casio on.

MOM  
"Two steps to the left."

DAD  
"Peek round the bend." You're a very special boy.

MOM  
"Under the hedge."

DAD  
"Over the top." Other people don't understand you like we do.

MOM  
"Half step again."

DAD  
"One to the right."

MOM  
"A step at a time..."

DAD  
"And your day will be bright."

MOM  
That's right!

They dare to believe they've accomplished something. Max suddenly starts to pull his shirt off. He doesn't like how it feels.

MOM/DAD

No!!

They try unsuccessfully to put his shirt back on.

Be still!

MAX

(making fashion model poses)

Like Abercrombie! Like Abercrombie! With your camera!

DAD

Not right now, Max.

MAX

Maybe later we play Abercrombie?

DAD

Maybe later. (to Mom) I have to go! I'm really behind.

He starts off, but gets caught back up

MAX

(like Pee Wee)

Oh, hi! Today's secret word is fun! Now, you know what to do when anyone says the secret word, right?

MOM/DAD

(not fully committed, but trying. Fake smiles)

Scream?

MAX

That's right! Let's try it! Are you, um, fit...no, fat?

MOM

No, I'm fun.

MOM/DAD/MAX

Ahhhhhh!

MOM

(turning casio off)

I don't know how I'm going to finish all the--

MAX  
Powerful power lines.

DAD  
You always seem to manage.

MAX  
Powerful power lines.

MOM  
Barely.

MAX  
Powerful power lines are like dogs!

DAD  
(Handing Mom the locket)  
Max, wouldn't Mom have more fun if she took you to the --

No response  
More FUN?

MAX  
Ahhhhhh!

MOM/DAD  
(joining in for a good tension-  
releasing scream)  
Ahhhhhh.

TV sounds suddenly louder.

TV NEWS  
The problem is really societal.

Dad goes to watch.

TV NEWS  
We've been engaging in a mythology for a long time. A thing  
called "See and Avoid".

MAX  
Theodore?...Simon?...Alvin and the Chipmunks?...

TV NEWS  
...and we really don't have that much visual range and it's  
very easy to approach each other and neither of them see  
anything...

MAX  
Richard Nixon and the Presidents?  
(in the same intonation as Dave  
would yell to his chipmunk,  
"Al-vin!!!!")  
Nix-on!!!

Commercial comes on, intro

DAD  
Max, it's the commercial!

Max turns excitedly toward the TV. Mom  
and Dad know they have 30 seconds to  
get something done.

**SONG 3: NEGATIVITY**

TV  
With Nutri-scheme you can lose weight while you eat. Tanya  
lost 30 pounds while eating. TANYA: I'm 47 years old and  
haven't looked this good since high school. My husband calls  
me his trophy wife!

Watching Max watch the commercial

MOM  
How do you explain that? His obsessions are so bizarre.

DAD  
What, don't all kids visit power lines every day?

MOM  
Lose weight while you eat?

Max engages happily, as trio for Mom,  
Dad, and TV begins.

MOM  
THIS IS REAL  
THAT IS NOT  
DON'T COMPARE  
I AM STUCK

STUCK IN THIS  
IT'S FOR LIFE  
THEY CAN'T KNOW

STUCK, STUCK, STUCK

DAD

LOOK AT US  
I'LL ADMIT  
I'VE CHECKED OUT  
JUST TO COPE

PARALYZED  
MY MIND'S FRIED

MOM

STUCK, STUCK, STUCK  
STUCK, STUCK, STUCK

TV

THE PROBLEM IS REALLY SOCIETAL

MOM

Here you go, Sweetie Pie

TV

A THING CALLED SEE AND AVOID

DAD

Let's put this shirt on

TV

THE PROBLEM IS THEIR BLIND SPOTS

MOM

There ya go.

TV

AND NEITHER OF THEM SEE ANYTHING

MOM

We'll do Abercrombie later.

TV

THEY DON'T DEAL IN BLAME  
BLAME, BLAME, BLAME, BLAME

DAD

WISH I COULD  
MAKE IT GOOD  
GONE SO WRONG  
CAN'T REPAIR

PARALYZED  
MY MIND'S FRIED

FRIED, FRIED, FRIED

MOM  
STUCK, STUCK, STUCK

DAD  
FRIED

MOM  
STUCK

TV  
BLAME

DAD  
FRIED

MOM  
STUCK

TV  
BLAME

DAD  
FRIED

MOM  
STUCK

TV  
BLAME

Dad clicks the TV off. And exits.  
Everything stops.

MOM  
Max, sit here and play with your Presidents. I'll go fold the  
laundry. Max, you and Pegasus want to fold laundry with me?

Max? She gets no response

It's "fun"... No response

MAX

Ahhhhh!

MOM

You don't want to fold laundry?

No response

If you change your mind, I'm right over here.

She goes over to the adjacent laundry area.

On her way she nearly steps on an elaborate set-up of toys. She picks up a small plastic moose.

I should probably leave this set up. You'll be mad if I move it, huh?

Takes a load out of the dryer. During the following Max looks around to make sure no one is watching, grabs his backpack and helmet and gives a little wave good-bye to Mom, who is momentarily not paying attention. He heads for the door leading outside and slips out.

#### **SONG 4: WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL UNDERSCORE**

Why are you so obsessed with a store? Why Abercrombie? Is it the symmetry of the layout, or..? The topless male models? Not my taste, but. You download the images. Take your shirt off and make model poses. Something else other people can't understand. Try to explain that...

Admiring Max's work on the floor

You set that up so particularly. Like a kid with a doll house. But different.

She steps on something else...

Ouch!

...a talking toy. "Everybody Sing!"

Mine field! Something ready to go off any minute.

Mom kicks the toy aside. Rethinks. Puts it back in its place. The washer kicks in to a different cycle.

**SONG 5: RIBBON**

Another blasted noise maker!

MOM

IF I COULD HOLD  
BEAUTIFUL BOY  
NEED TO CONNECT

IF THIS PERSISTS  
INTO BEYOND  
I'M FEELING WEAK

IF I COULD CUT  
THE RIBBON THAT HOLDS  
MY HELIUM DOWN

IF I COULD FLY  
FURIOUSLY  
UNTIL THIS LIFE

WAS JUST A DOT

WHO WOULD LOOK UP?

Oh, she's just over there. "She'll be alright."

Loud buzz of cycle ending

Got to finish something!

**SCENE 3 - OUTSIDE**

Max scoots to a particular spot near the street and at the edge of the apartment complex. The sound of a busy street is heard. Max arranges small figurines from his backpack. He takes out his Pegasus, a moose, an Einstein action figure, and a mermaid.

Sound of a leaf blower is heard. This makes Max retreat and begin to make his noises. A neighbor girl enters. Self-possessed, bossy, a bit older than Max. She stares at him.

MAX

(nervously, not looking at her)

Oh, hi!!

FIN

You live here right?

Max doesn't answer

Right? You ride the little school bus don't you?

Max smiles but doesn't answer.

Don't you? I've seen you get on that little school bus. Those kids are all kind of weird, huh? Hel-lo. Anyone home?

A heavy-set preppily dressed teenaged girl and a stringy-haired boy of a similar age, wearing a shirt with "E=mc2", enter together.

FIN

Knock-knock.

ALBERT

I doubt that.

FIN

Don't you? Ride it?

PEG

So what? It's true. It cost \$300.

ALBERT

That's a waste.

PEG

How would you know? You wear the same thing every day.

FIN

(interjecting)

You're right he doesn't know anything! Anything useful! Egghead!

PEG

He knows more than you, fish face!

FIN

Yeah, you sit at home and edit Wikipedia all day. And read smelly old dictionaries cover to cover. What a nerd!

PEG

Not--

Nearly tripping over Max

Hey...oops!

ALBERT

(still to Peg)

Why spend that kind of money on stupid clothes? 'Specially when --

FIN

...she looks like a giant rhinoceros? No wonder your clothes are so expensive. It takes a lot of fabric to cover your big--

Leaf blower heard, off. Sound of car honking

PEG

(retreating)

Hey!

ALBERT

That's not exactly what I was getting at -

FIN

Shut up! Or I'll throw you into the traffic. Don't you have a Harry Potter convention to get to?

ALBERT

Keep talking, maybe you'll say something intelligent.

FIN

(threatening him)

What did you say???

ALBERT

Nothing.

PEG  
(to Albert)  
Just ignore her. (to Max) Aren't you the kid who's always  
with your parents?

No answer

Isn't he the kid who's always with his parents?

FIN  
Why don't you answer her? Are you retarded?

PEG  
You ride the little school bus, don't you?

ALBERT  
Don't you?

FIN  
Why don't you say something?

PEG  
Hey!

FIN  
Are you deaf or just dumb?

ALBERT  
Don't you? Ride it?

FIN  
Answer me!

PEG  
Don't you?

ALBERT  
Don't you?

**SONG 6: KIDS AND CARS**

FIN  
DON'T YOU?  
KIDS  
DON'T YOU, DON'T  
YOU, ETC.

\*  
\*  
\*

FIN  
YOU RIDE THE LITTLE SCHOOL BUS?

Max jumps anxiously

WHY DO YOU JUMP UP AND DOWN LIKE THAT?

PEG  
WHY DON'T YOU  
ANSWER HER?

KIDS  
ANSWER, ANSWER,  
ETC.

\*  
\*  
\*

PEG  
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?

ALBERT  
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?  
DON'T YOU TALK?

The leaf blowing man observes the  
situation.

FIN  
WHY ARE YOU  
HUMMING?

KIDS  
HUMMING, HUMMING,  
ETC.

\*  
\*  
\*

FIN  
WHY DO YOU SHAKE LIKE THAT?

PEG  
CAN'T HE ACT NORMAL LIKE US?

ALBERT  
HE RIDES THE LITTLE SCHOOL BUS

PEG  
WHERE ARE YOU LITTLE BOY?  
WHERE ARE YOU LITTLE BOY?

FIN AND ALBERT  
WHERE ARE YOU?  
WHERE ARE YOU?

The leaf blowing man comes closer, his  
blower adding to the rising noise level  
and tension

PEG  
WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER ME?

ALL THREE

WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?  
ARE YOU THERE?

ARE YOU THERE?  
WHERE ARE YOU?  
LOOK AT ME  
LOOK AT ME!

Max nervously kicks. His red croc flings off his foot into the street. Oblivious to danger he lunges into the street to retrieve his shoe. The kids watch in horror. Everything slows down. The man has blown leaves into a massive swirl in space, that elegantly form a shape. Max looks up and runs towards this vision just as the sound of car screeching is heard. It echoes into silence.

MAN

Hey kid. It's an INTERSECTION. Look. Both. Ways. First one way. Then the other. It's all there.

The other children are no longer there. Though deceptively back to normal, there is a distinct change now in the quality of light and setting.

MAN

## **SONG 7: SHAPE YOUR WORLD**

IT'S ALRIGHT,  
DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING  
IT'S ALRIGHT,  
DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING  
REALIZE  
YOU SHAPE THE WORLD THAT YOU SEE  
CLOSE YOUR EYES  
AND SHAPE THE WORLD THAT WILL BE

CLEAR YOUR MIND AND FLOAT AWAY  
MAKE THE WORLD YOU NEED TODAY  
SWIM THE STREAMS OF YOUR DREAMS  
YOUR BRIGHT EYES WILL FIND THE WAY

REVELATION'S NEAR TODAY!  
MAKE A FRIEND  
AND YOU'LL FLY SO HIGH  
TOUCH THE SKY, SO HIGH

HEAR THE STARS  
THE MUSIC OF YOUR BEAUTY  
SEE A SONG  
THE MUSIC OF YOUR HEART  
LOOK AROUND  
YOU SHAPE THE WORLD THAT YOU SEE  
LOOK AROUND

COME WITH ME  
AND YOU'LL SEE  
COME WITH ME  
AND YOU WILL BE

Man retrieves shoe for Max. The Man happens to be wearing the same shoes.

MAN

Nice shoes, little man.

MAX

Nice shoes, little man.

MAN

Reaching out to shake his hand

Homunculus Jones. You can call me Munc.

MAX

Doesn't take his hand, he rapidly shakes or flaps his own hands while jumping up and down

Nice shoes, little man.

MUNC

Does the same as Max, flapping his hands and jumping

Nice to meet you too.

They hop awhile together.

MAX  
(sounding remarkably like the  
Scarecrow in "Wizard of Oz")  
But some people without brains do an awful lot of talking.

MUNC

stops jumping

Talking much about oneself can also be a means to conceal oneself. Fortune cookie. Um...well...I got some work to do.

Munc starts up the leaf blower. He works an area not far from Max. Max gets noticeably agitated in response to the sound. After a few moments, Munc notices this. He turns it off. Max seems instantly better. Munc turns it back on, Max reacts. Off and on and off, Munc can play him like a conductor. He's fascinated.

I'll eat that

MAX

What do you mean?

MUNC

That.

MAX

That what?

MUNC

That noisy...

MAX

The leaf blower?

MUNC

I'll eat that leaf blower.

MAX

What do you mean?

MUNC

Need to do it

MAX

MUNC

Oh. OK. It won't taste very good. Kind of oily...but go ahead.

Max "eats" handfuls of air.

What's your name?

Max doesn't respond.

MUNC

Well, I can't keep calling you "little man" can I? This is a mystery. Can I call you Mystery? How about "M" for short.

Max begins to pack up his backpack

You gotta go or somethin'? Well, okay but do yourself a favor M, remember, look both ways. Know what I'm saying? But don't be afraid to try some things. Sometimes it's the scary stuff that makes you even bigger.

Max pulls on his own skin, rather vigorously

MUNC

Hey, hey, what're doing there, Mystery?

MAX

Need to do it! (then in Munc's voice) "Makes you even bigger."

MUNC

I see. But, ah, keep your skin on there. That stuff'll stretch with ya.

Max looks quizzically at Munc for a long beat, then shrugs as if in character. Max puts on his backpack and helmet and wobbles off, as clumsily and slowly as ever on his scooter. Unnoticed, Munc rights the scooter before it tips, and sends Max in a particular direction. He hesitates, then with concern follows watchfully.

SCENE 4 - HOME

TV

...Today, a seven-year old boy was found floating in a backyard swimming pool. And another child abduction shatters the comfort of a quiet community. Nationwide the numbers have grown exponentially. More on "Snatched" at 6...blah, blah, blah

MOM

Max?

Dad runs in

DAD

I'm back! I forgot something. No brains left.

MOM

(entering)

Well, good. Better pick up some more waffles today. That was the last one.

DAD

We have pancake mix.

MOM

He'll only eat those frozen waffles. And two other things.

TV

...killer SUVs, should you be worried about your family's safety?...

DAD

I know. Sounds simple.

MOM

You're telling me. You were supposed to get some yesterday.

DAD

I was?

MOM

With the spinach and turkey bacon?

DAD

When is his standardized--

MOM

Wednesday. Why didn't you get waffles?

DAD

I got pancake mix. I thought he might try --

MOM

Dream on. I didn't even know you'd left.

DAD

Well I did.

MOM

I'll get some later.

DAD

No, I'll stop on my way home.

MOM

Forget about it.

DAD

You don't think I'm capable?.

MOM

(mockingly)

"Well, you know God gives special children to special people."

DAD

Don't go there. You don't buy into that anyway.  
Why was the door open?

Freeze.

MOM

I didn't open it.

Ice. Look around.

DAD

Oh no.

TV

Reawaken the child in yourself! Indulge! Try it today!

They run around in different directions  
looking for Max.

DAD  
(having to yell even louder  
over the TV noise)  
Check the linen closet, he likes to sit in there.

MOM  
I need you here more!  
(from OS?)  
What if he left? What if he falls in the drainage ditch? They  
still haven't covered it. What about the broken glass near  
the dumpster? And you know how fast people drive out on the  
main street.

DAD  
He can't be too far.  
(cresting the TV ad's absurd  
volume)  
Dammit. (calling out) MAX?!

TV  
TRY IT! TRY IT! TRY IT!

Dad turns off the TV.

#### SCENE 5 - OUTSIDE BEHIND THE APARTMENTS

Max enters on his scooter. In one hand  
he clutches his Pegasus toy. He stops  
to sit and plays with his toy.

DAD  
(from off at a distance, but  
with urgency)  
Max! Max? Max!! Where are you?

Max pays no attention to the calls.  
Munc, who has been keeping an eye on  
Max out sight, appears.

MUNC  
Hey there, Mystery, do you think they're worried about you?

Max doesn't reply.

Well, worry's not the thing, exactly. Worry's in a hurry to  
get nowhere. You know? Well I know you don't want...or can't  
talk to me -- You wonder why I'm here?

MAX

Why I'm here?

MUNC

Why you're here. To share something about...um...reality.

MAX

Un-reality?

MUNC

Kind of. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to jump in and get your hair wet. Y'know, air is just water with holes in it. Bottle cap.

We hear other voices from off:

PEG'S MOM (OS)

Peg, will you get those wet things up on the line right now??

PEG (OS)

I'm on the phone, Mom

PEG'S MOM (OS)

Well get off and do it!!

PEG (OS)

Mo-o-om!

Peg, the teen girl, enters, stomps angrily across the stage and disappears pulling a clothesline. Munc and Max observe. Munc picks up the Pegasus toy.

DAD (OS)

(with still more urgency)

Max? Max!!

Max is still oblivious to the call for him, while almost simultaneously, a winged Peg reappears from the original side of the stage carrying the other end of the clothesline, complete with sheets, towels, underwear, etc. Music. She floats up, attaches the line, and swings up to standing on the clothesline.

PEG

Hey, look up! Come on up!

MAX  
Pegasus!

PEG  
Help me out. Follow me!

**SONG 8: DREAM**

LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT I SEE  
COME AND DANCE AND PLAY WITH ME  
REAL IS NOT REALITY  
IT'S A DREAM  
LIKE A DREAM  
NEED TO BE WHAT I BELIEVE  
FLY AWAY FOR ALL TO SEE  
SHARE A NEW REALITY  
IN A DREAM  
LIKE A DREAM

MAX  
Go up there! With Pegasus!

PEG  
Take my arm!

She dangles a sweatshirt for him to grab the "arm". He sees how high she is and gets nervous.

EMPTY ARMS WILL WAVE HELLO  
EMPTY FEET WILL DANCE BELOW  
NIGHTIES SWAY AND TOWELS PLAY  
IN THE WORLD WE MAKE TODAY  
IN OUR DREAM  
IN OUR DREAMS

MAX  
No, don't want to!

PEG  
Well then grab more of that line in the basket, will ya?

He doesn't know how to respond.

GRAB THE LINE COME PLAY WITH ME  
FEEL YOUR SENSES SOAR WITH ME  
IN A WORLD OF PURITY  
LIKE A DREAM

LIKE A DREAM

Here, I'll get that.

She swoops down and grabs some clothesline, which she flies up with to attach up high making a diagonal line.

You can start on the ground, see?

She attaches a number of clotheslines to criss-cross the stage.

You can climb it like a ladder. That's it, hold on.

MAX

(grinning)

Be careful Max!

He squeals, happily, and climbs up a few wobbly rungs.

PEG

Hey, my name's not Max...oh...you're Max?

MAX

I fly!

In his elation he misses a footing, flips over a string or two and lands with a thud on the ground.

PEG

Whoops! Watch out, Max!

MAX

I cracked my butt!

PEG

(laughing)

Ha, ha! Not possible! You're like a baby giraffe you know that?

MAX

(whimpering)

Be careful Max!

PEG

You need some wings too.

WE CAN GLIDE ON FEATHERED WINGS  
LEAVE ALL THE MASS OF EARTHLY THINGS  
IN OUR DREAMS

She shakes out a fluffy set of wings  
from the laundry basket and puts them  
on him.

Here, you try. It'll be fun!

MAX  
(she said the secret word. Max  
screams)

Ahhhhhh!

PEG  
What's the matter?

MAX  
Secret word.

PEG  
Oh, right!

She climbs, he follows in step.  
Now let go!

Music becomes airier. Pretty soon they  
are flying to higher rungs, spinning,  
dancing, hanging laundry every which  
way.

KIDS AND MUNC	PEG	*
EMPTY ARMS WILL	THEY DON'T KNOW	*
WAVE HELLO		
EMPTY FEET WILL	I CAN FLY	*
DANCE BELOW		
NIGHTIES SWAY AND	THEY CAN'T SEE.	*
TOWELS PLAY		
THE WORLD WE KNOW	THEY WON'T TRY	*
SO FAR AWAY		

PEG AND COMPANY

WE CAN GLIDE ON FEATHERED WINGS  
LEAVE ALL THE MASS OF EARTHLY THINGS  
REAL IS NOT REALITY  
IT'S ANYTHING YOU WANT TO BE  
IN YOUR DREAM

PEG  
IF YOU WANT TO BE LIKE ME  
OPEN UP YOUR EYES AND SEE  
REAL IS NOT REALITY

As the song and dance end, the lines of  
laundry detach and sproing off,  
suddenly clearing the space.

PEG'S MOM (OS)  
C'mon Peg, your appointment's in fifteen minutes, we've got  
to go now!

PEG  
Mo-om!!...coming! You know, Max, you can do anything. They  
make fun of *me* because I'm heavy. (lights up) I can fly!  
What's your secret?

By the way, I'm no Pegasus (sasily) I'm a gazelle with  
wings!

She runs off.

MAX  
(thinking about how to respond,  
then echoing that ad)  
I'm 47 years old and haven't looked this good since high  
school. My husband calls me his trophy wife!

Munc emerges from the laundry.

MUNC  
Hey, Max-man! You let go! Cool, huh?

Max gets his gear, and begins to ride  
off on his scooter, but this time he's  
quite a bit swifter.

MUNC  
Book-it, my friend.

SCENE 6 - OUTSIDE

**SONG 9: REACHING**

Dad runs on, out of breath. Music.

This is going to be OK. He's probably just a few feet away.  
He just got distracted and he's playing somewhere. Close.

DAD

HE'S JUST GOING TO SHOW UP  
THIS ALL WILL BE JUST FINE  
I CAN'T EVEN THINK THAT...  
HOW COULD I BE SO BLIND

COULDN'T SEE THE BLESSING  
TIL IT WAS SWEEPED AWAY  
THOUGHT I NEEDED QUIET  
QUIET'S TOO MUCH PAIN

Music plays out under next dialogue

SOMEWHERE ELSE, AT THE DUMPSTER

MOM (OS)

Max! Come on home honey! Max!! Where are you?

Without noticing this he gets out his  
Einstein action figure and plays with  
it.

Stringy haired boy from scene three  
stands precariously on top of dumpster  
spouting facts to an imaginary  
audience. Old books and magazines spill  
out.

ALBERT

...Did you know that when writing systems were invented in  
ancient civilizations, they used nearly everything that could  
be written on to write on, like stone, clay, and tree bark?  
Alphabetic writing began in Egypt around 1800 BC. At first  
the words were not separated from each other and there was no  
punctuation texts were written from right to left and left to  
right and even had alternate lines read in opposite  
directions the same way a farmer drives an ox to plough his  
fields!

MAX

(having noticed his T-shirt:  
"e=mc2")

Relativity!

Music again

DAD

I'LL REPEAT THE PRESIDENTS  
PLAY ALL HIS FUNNY GAMES  
LIFE'S A LOOP ALREADY  
I WILL NOT COMPLAIN

Suspension

IF I COULD CUT  
THE RIBBON THAT HOLDS  
MY HELIUM DOWN

IF I COULD FLY  
FURIOUSLY  
UNTIL THIS LIFE  
WAS JUST A DOT

ALBERT

Hey! Look at all these books that people just throw away. Did you know that every three seconds, a book just gets trashed? That's twenty books a minute. That's one thousand four hundred and forty perfectly good books a day. I read that somewhere. Let me see.

He shuffles through his books

DAD

(Music starts up again as he  
sings)

COULD I ESCAPE?  
WOULD I BE SANE?

MOM

FALLING OFF MY CENTER  
COULD I BREAK THE WALL  
PRACTICE REPETITION  
BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT, THAT'S ALL

ALBERT

Oh, this one's a beaut. Found it just the other day. "The Elegant Universe". He says string theory unravels the central Gordian knot of contemporary theoretical physics.

MAX

String theory!

ALBERT

From one principle, string theory provides a single explanatory framework capable of encompassing all forces and all matter. Einstein figured that out.

MAX

Your one stop solution for all your office needs!

Music starts up again

MOM

I'LL TAKE HIM TO THE EDGES  
RACE HIM DOWN THE STREET  
WE'LL DANCE UP ON THE HIGH WIRE  
NO SAFETY NET BENEATH

Suspension

MOM/DAD

IF I COULD CUT  
THE RIBBON THAT HOLDS  
MY HELIUM DOWN

ALBERT

Wait, wait, wait. Check out this one. It's a gigantic book about the Presidents of the United States. It only goes up to Eisenhower, but it has excellent descriptions, and here, look at these drawings! Oh, oh, hang on there a second, I've got this book on drawing that is guaranteed to get you to draw better than you ever thought possible. I read once that people have the most amazing, limitless creativity in them that just is waiting to be unlocked...or unleashed I think the author said. Some people never get theirs let out, but some have their gardens watered and so the energy in that capsule, seed, just explodes. Blooms. Most people don't seem to have any idea what I'm talking about most of the time, which is ridiculous because I know exactly what I mean. Why don't people just listen, you know? My parents tell me I talk too much, so I just quit talking around them. Hey, was that your mother calling for you?

MAX

I like the presidents, Millard Fillmore...

ALBERT

Did you know that Millard Fillmore's wife was so shocked to find out that the White House had no library that she asked the president to get Congress to pay for one and picked out the books herself?

MAX  
13th president, 1850-1853.

ALBERT  
That's right!

MAX  
Mount Rushmore!

ALBERT  
LOVE it! 4 of them on there. Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, Lincoln. 36 miles West of Rapid City. Covers 1,278 acres and is 5,725 feet above sea level. 2 million visitors annually.

MAX  
Sure!

MAX  
We can talk about Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, Lincoln, Johnson, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, Harrison, Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama, if you want to.

This impeccable list from the small child blows Albert's mind and literally blows him backwards into the dumpster

MAX  
Einstein?

Max pulls the president toy (from the first scene) out of his backpack. He presses a button or two. Same music with the facts. Just then the lights change. A hand reaches around from behind the dumpster to place a crappy old boom box. The hand re-emerges, pops in a cassette and hits "play". A throbbing beat. Rising up out of the dumpster, the first thing we see is the top of some Don King-like Einsteinian puffed up hair, revealing a new Gangsta Albert, his T-shirt now reading: "MC Squared."

At the end of each verse, Max will "jam"  
by "playing" his Presidents machine.

**SONG 10: GET RUSHED UP**

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET YOUR RUSH UP  
AND GET RUSHED UP  
AND LET THE SIXTY FOOT FACES GET YOU PUMPED UP  
GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA SAY- YEA

JUST A LITTLE SOUTHWEST OF RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA  
THERE'S A NATIONAL MEMORIAL SOMEBODY PROBABLY TOLD YA  
THAT IT'S ON THE MOUNTAIN...SIDE  
WAY UP IN THE...SKY  
FOUR FACES CHISELED, EACH 60 FEET...HIGH  
THEY REPRESENT 4 GREAT PRESIDENTS:  
WE GOT WASHINGTON, LINCOLN, TEDDY ROOSEVELT, AND  
JEFFERSON  
IT COST US MILLIONS JUST TO CARVE THEIR GRILLS  
I GUESS THAT'S WHY THREE OF FOUR GOT THEIR FACES ON OUR  
DOLLARS BILLS

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP  
AND GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA GET YOUR HANDS UP  
GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE THE PRESIDENTS SAY- HEY

A fashion-show runway appears and as  
each president is described, a model  
dressed recognizably like that  
president struts on down, back, and  
out. Max's obsession with Abercrombie  
models informing this fusion of images.  
These models are played by the rest of  
the cast, also informed by Max's need  
to "cast" those around him into his  
fantasies.

WASHINGTON WAS THE FIRST ONE TO LEAD US FROM THE CURSE  
OF  
THE KING OF ENGLAND TAKING MONEY FROM OUR PURSE  
BUT THEY DIDN'T WANT TO LET US GO  
UNTIL WE WON THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR WITH GEORGE AS THE  
GENERAL  
THEN HE BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT

AND SAID NEUTRALITY WITH EUROPE WAS IMPORTANT OVER  
EVERYTHING  
HISTORY CONFIRMS HE WAS A SMARTY...

Max presses buttons

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Washington was a member of the Federalist's party.

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP  
AND GET RUSHED UP  
AND LET THE SIXTY FOOT FACES GET YOU PUMPED UP  
GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA SAY- YEA

YEAH, THE 16TH PRESIDENT  
KNOWN FOR HIS RHETORIC  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN YEAH HE BEAT THE CONFEDERATES  
LEADING THE UNION THROUGH THE CIVIL WAR  
AS THE VERY FOUNDATION OF OUR NATION ALMOST HIT THE  
FLOOR  
HE WANTED EVERYONE TO STOP ENSLAVING  
TOLD US SO IN THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION. UH  
HIS LEADERSHIP KEPT THE NATION HARDY...

Max presses buttons

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Lincoln was a member of the Republican Party.

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP  
AND GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA GET YOUR HANDS UP  
GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU'VE BEEN TO MOUNT RUSHMORE, SAY- HEY

MR. TJ, WAS A FARMER FROM VA  
AN INTELLECTUAL IF YOU COULD ASK THEN HE'D SAY  
HIS FAVORITE FOOD WAS FOR THOUGHT  
HE LOVED MUSIC AND ART  
CHURCH AND STATE, HE WISHED THE TWO WERE APART  
HE SENT LEWIS AND CLARK TO GO DISCOVER THE  
LAND WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI BOUGHT FROM THE FRENCH  
GOVERNMENT  
HIS ARCHITECTURE SHOWS US HE WAS ARTY

Max presses buttons, but also joyously speaks with the machine.

PRESIDENT MACHINE AND MAX

Jefferson was a member of the Democratic-Republican party.

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP  
AND GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA GET YOUR HANDS UP  
GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE ALL THE PRESIDENTS SAY- HEY

Max decides he can do this himself the next time around. He slides the machine aside and prepares to do so.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT WAS ALWAYS KNOWN AS A TOUGH GUY  
HE LEAD THE ROUGH RIDERS AND NEVER WAS GUN SHY  
HE ALSO FOUGHT TO REFORM OUR NATION  
SO HE SHUT DOWN 40 GREEDY CORPORATIONS  
HE GOT THE PANAMA CANAL AND HE WAS SO WELL LIKED  
HE WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN TO WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE  
JUST IN TIME NOT A SECOND TARDY

MAX

Roosevelt was a member of the Republican party.

Max is overwhelmed by his own accomplishment. His excitement turns to high anxiety as he begins to contort his body, rocking and flapping.

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP  
AND GET RUSHED UP  
AND LET THE SIXTY FOOT FACES GET YOU PUMPED UP  
GET RUSHED UP  
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA SAY- YEA

MAX

(Alvin-y)Nix-on!!! (more angrily)Nix-on!!!!

He does the classic Nixon impersonation over and over again, shaking and vocalizing with increasing energy.

ALBERT

Easy! Easy! C'mon, easy does it.

Max begins throwing books and things around, decking Albert on the head with a copy of the Norton Anthology of Poetry.

ALBERT

Hey, hey, chill out!

MAX

No, I warm. Too hot!

ALBERT

No, I mean take a chill pill.

MAX

No pill, no pill.

ALBERT

We were cooking there, Max.

MAX

Hungry!

ALBERT

No, I mean you know a lot of information for a little guy. You know all that by heart?

MAX

Heart pumps 30 quarts of blood per minute.

ALBERT

Yeah, I know crazy stuff like that too. No, I mean by heart, like you don't need the book anymore to tell you.

MAX

Presidents Book talks.

ALBERT

Yes, but that's not really talking like we are doing now. Like friends do.

ALBERT'S MOM (O.S.)

Al-bert!! Get on home!

ALBERT

Well, gotta turn tail and --

MAX

You have a tail?

ALBERT

I have to get after it. Could you clean up a bit? I hate a messy dumpster. Oh --

He hands Max the anthology.

Here. You dropped this on my head like some kamikaze Newton apple. You should check out some of this poetry. It might calm you down.

Albert leaves

MAX

Friend?

He turns around in a few circles checking to see if he has a tail.

SCENE 7 DAD

**SONG 11: WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL UNDERSCORE REPRISE**

He is trying to stay calm.

DAD

If I were Max...where would I...If I were Max....?

(as if counting to five)

OK, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison...

**SONG 12: HIS NAME IS MAX**

DAD

JUST LET ME IN. TO KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE, MAX  
I'LL FIND YOU THEN. I'LL GET WHAT YOU SEE, MAX

Max scooters on and stops near Dad. He parks his scooter and sets up toys from his pack. Dad is unaware of Max's presence.

HE LIKES PIZZA  
AND PIZZA CHEESE  
AND PEGASUS

HE LIKES EINSTEIN  
AND STRING THEORY  
AND THE PRESIDENTS  
AND HE'S DIFFERENT

MOM  
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL

DAD  
HIS NAME IS MAX AND HE IS A GOOD BOY

MOM  
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL

DAD  
HIS NAME IS MAX AND HE IS A GOOD BOY

MUNC AND PEG  
THIS IS NORMAL

Dad starts hearing things

DAD  
HE LIKES PIZ--

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
President George Washington

DAD  
AND PIZ--

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
President Abraham Lincoln

DAD  
AND PEG--

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
President Thomas Jefferson

DAD  
HE LIKES EIN--

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
Was a member of the...was a member of the...

DAD  
AND STRING--

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
Press, press, press, press, press, press a button.

DAD  
AND THE PRESIDENTS  
THIS IS DIFFERENT

WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL?

Max?

PRESIDENTS MACHINE  
Ser-ser-ser-served as the sixty-first president of the United  
States from 2045-2049.

DAD  
How is that --?

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
Party. Party. Party, etc.

DAD  
Stop that!

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
No!

It stops. He regroups. Breathes.

DAD  
There's something wrong with --

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
No! No! No! No!, etc.

**SONG 13: PRESS A BUTTON**

DAD  
Please don't do that! Would you PLEASE STOP! (quoting a  
symptom) "They lack empathy!"

PRESIDENT MACHINE  
Press a button. Press a button. Press a button. Press a  
button.

DAD

(regurgitating)

They engage in repetitive movements, in 1856 accepted the nomination for President of the Know Nothing, such as rocking and twirling, twirling and rocking, self-abusive behavior, biting, head banging without any progress toward settling the major issues. They don't know how to play interactively. Religion: Unitarian. He emphasized nonintervention in foreign disputes with little regard for the interests of the person to whom they are speaking. There is no cure. Stereotyped, repetitive, typed repetitive, typed repetitive, or unusual use of language. No one to call. Was a member of. Was a member of. Was a member of. No help. Attended one-room schools, and fell in love with the redheaded teacher. Only characteristics. Preoccupation with occupation with occupation with occupation with certain objects or subjects. Object. Subject. Object. Subject. Object, subject, object, subjective, objective, subjective, subjective, subjective...

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Press a button. Press a button. Press a button. Press a button.

Dad rocks repetitively.

The following words are a recording of Dad's voice. Dad sings a duet with these words.



VOICES

YOU'RE OK. YOU'RE OK. YOU'RE OK, etc.

PRESIDENT MACHINE

PRESS A BUTTON....PRESS A BUTTON...

NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!, NO! NO! NO! etc.

Static noise drowns out everything

SCENE 8 - OUTSIDE AT THE DUMPSTER

Max and Munc organize the dumpster books and things into some kind of structure. Max sits on it, humming the Casio melody, and puzzling over the book Albert left him with. Munc helps.

MUNC

Sittin' on the tree of knowledge?

MAX

Ant hill. Newton Ant Hology.

MUNC

Newton who?

Checking out the book

Let me see here....That's a book of poetry. Oh! Norton Anthology. I wandered lonely as a cloud.

MAX

Cloud?

MUNC

That's a simile. Then we can move on to metaphor.

MAX

Meta-five? Meta-six? Met a friend.

MUNC

True friend?

MAX

I don't lie.

MUNC  
You don't lie.

MAX  
I standing up!

MUNC  
I'm standing up for you.

Beat.

MAX  
Let's sit down.

MUNC  
Simile. Something is like something. It's nice to tell a friend they're pretty like something.

MAX  
You are pretty like Abraham Lincoln.

MUNC  
Abe was good lookin' but that's not quite what I mean. What is something you like about Abe?

MAX  
His beard?

MUNC  
What's a beard made of?

MAX  
Hair?

MUNC  
Right! Now say you have hair as lustrous as Lincoln's beard.

MAX  
Luscious as Lincoln.

MUNC  
Maybe just, "you have pretty hair."

MAX  
You have pretty hair.

MUNC  
Why, thank you.

He looks back into the book.

MUNC

(relishing the name)

Mr. Words Worth.

**SONG 14: CLOUD**

MUNC  
I WANDERED LONELY  
AS A CLOUD  
THAT FLOATS ON  
HIGH O'ER VALES  
AND HILLS,  
WHEN ALL AT ONCE I  
SAW A CROWD,  
A HOST, OF GOLDEN  
DAFFODILS  
BESIDE THE LAKE,  
BENEATH THE TREES  
FLUTTERING AND  
DANCING IN THE  
BREEZE

PEG/ALBERT/FIN  
LONELY. FLOATING.  
YOU ARE.  
BESIDE THE LAKE,  
BENEATH THE TREES,  
FLUTTERING AND  
DANCING IN THE  
BREEZE

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

MUNC

Munc dances around like a daffodil

A "crowd" of daffodils swaying in time with the breeze! Like you're up there, you think you're all alone, and then you suddenly realize everything is dancing together.

MAX

I'm a golden daffodil!

He sways back and forth, his hands in the air.

PEG/FIN

BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES  
BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES

MUNC

You are in that crowd.  
You are that cloud.  
You are the lake.  
You are the breeze.

PEG/FIN

BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES  
BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES

MUNC

You're not "other". You're "it". You are...

MAX

You are.

MUNC

(pointing at Max)

YOU ARE

MAX

(gesturing with his whole hand  
towards Munc)

YOU ARE

MUNC

(pointing again)

YOU ARE

MAX

(now with his pointer finger,  
looks Munc in the eye, for the  
first time)

You are kinder than kindergarten!

MUNC

Whoa.

SCENE 9 - MOM

Mom enters

MOM

Max!

Max?

Max?

Figures appear in shadows. She sees  
one.

Oh! You scared me there. Have you found him? I searched every  
inch of the apartment. I've been in every closet five times.

I've been everywhere. I know he can't be far. But what if he is? I'm feeling queasy. Do you think he's out here somewhere?

Where is he? No answer

No answer

Who - MOM

**SONG 15: POWERFUL POWER LINES**

MOM  
ARE YOU?

VOICES  
ARE YOU, ARE YOU, ETC

MOM  
YOU'RE NOT MY -- WHAT DO YOU WANT?

WHAT'S HAPPENING, I CAN'T MOVE. I'M STUCK

I AM SO FROZEN IN-

VOICES  
FROZEN, FROZEN, ETC.

MOM  
SIDE, IT'S SO HARD  
THIS SHELL

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?  
DON'T YOU TALK?  
WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER

VOICES  
ANSWER, ANSWER, ETC

MOM  
I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING  
LADYBUG, DRAGONFLY  
FLY AWAY HOME RIGHT NOW

(empty space) HOUSE ON FIRE!  
(empty space) CHILD WILL --!

BURN

VOICES

MOM

You don't scare me!

WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER ME?  
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?  
ARE YOU THERE?

VOICES

ARE YOU, ARE YOU, ETC.

MOM

ARE YOU THERE?  
WHERE ARE YOU?  
LOOK AT ME  
I AM --

A bell and then silence.

MOM

Powerful power lines are like dogs!

Dad enters. Oddly detached, blissed.  
When they speak the following  
"echoalic" lines, they should sound  
like Max would, or did, say these  
lines.

DAD

(Pee Wee. Without making eye  
contact.)

"Oh, hi."

MOM

"I don't like the forest! It's dark and creepy!"

DAD

"Of course, I don't know, but I think it'll get darker before  
it gets lighter."

MOM

"Do - do you suppose we'll meet any wild animals?"

MAX  
"Mmmm...we might."

MOM  
"Oh."

DAD  
"Looks like we came a long way for nothing."

Mom looks Dad in the eye. The bliss  
fades. She is overcome with emotion.

DAD  
"What's the matter?"

MOM  
I can't...I can't...I can't...

DAD  
"President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the  
thirteenth--"

Max has entered. They don't see him.

MOM  
(trying to get back the bliss)  
"Cornish Pixies...!"

DAD  
"As the thirteenth--"

MOM  
"Cornish Pixies...!"

DAD  
"As the thirteenth--"

MOM  
"Cornish Pixies...!"

MAX  
Freshly plucked!

MOM  
"Why?"

DAD  
"Need to do it!"

MOM

"Why?"

DAD

"Need to, need to, need to."

MOM

"That wasn't in the job description!"

DAD

Slipping...slipping...slipping

MOM

Feeling...feeling...feeling

**SONG 16: GET CLEAR**

MUNC

YOU CAN FIND HIM. YOU'VE ARRIVED HERE.  
YOU SHOULD FIND HIM. NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE.  
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH. UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH  
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH. UH-OH UH-OH, UH-OH  
UH-OH

YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?  
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?  
YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?  
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?

YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?  
YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?

YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?  
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?  
YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?  
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?

YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?  
YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?

HOLD ON TO BOTH SIDES

YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE HERE,  
AND BE THERE AS WELL.  
LIVE IN BOTH WORLDS.  
JUST NEED TO GET CLEAR  
SO YOU CAN SEE HIM STANDING HERE  
IN HIS WORLD SO BLISSFULLY CLEAR

HE NEEDS YOU THERE AND HERE.  
JUST NEED TO GET CLEAR  
SO YOU CAN SEE HIM STANDING HERE  
IN HIS WORLD SO BLISSFULLY CLEAR  
HE NEEDS YOU THERE AND HERE.

MOM

AN EASY FEELING.  
I AM FLOATING, FLOATING  
THE SCHOOL BUS LEAVES AT EIGHT  
WHAT IS THIS LOVELY STATE?  
A BLISS. A BLISS. A BLISS. A BLISS.  
HAPPY. HAPPY. HAPPY. HAPPY. HAPPY.  
ADRIFT, SET FREE, TO BE, JUST BE  
SOARING THROUGH OPEN SPACE.  
BUY WAFFLES AGAIN  
NO LOVE WITHOUT HIM  
YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE HERE  
AND BE THERE AS WELL  
LIVE IN BOTH WORLDS  
FEEL LIGHT. DRIFT BLISSFUL. DRIFT BLISSFUL  
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH,  
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH  
I WANT TO STAY  
I WANT TO STAY WANT TO STAY

DAD

SLIPPING INTO A  
FUNNY FEELING BUT  
THRILLING OUT OF SIGHT  
THRILLING OUT OF SIGHT  
MUST TAKE CARE OF HIM  
FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE  
JUST TAKE CARE OF ME  
FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE  
A PRECIPICE. A PRECIPICE  
I WANT TO JUMP. BUT NOT TO LAND  
I WANT TO JUMP. BUT NOT TO LAND  
I WANT TO JUMP  
SWIRLING SO RECKLESSLY  
SWIRLING SO RECKLESSLY  
BUY WAFFLES AGAIN  
NO LOVE WITHOUT HIM  
YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE HERE  
AND BE THERE AS WELL  
LIVE IN BOTH WORLDS  
I FEEL ADRIFT  
CUT LOOSE, SEE ME  
I WANT TO STAY WANT TO STAY

(beat)

Here. DAD

I don't know how. MOM

Press any button to begin. MAX

Max presses his small casio keyboard into Dad's hand.

Here. Press the button. DAD

Mom looks at it. She presses a key. Music plays.

**SONG 17: CASIO POETRY**

Hope. MOM  
(from the feeling the music gives her)

MAX  
holds his chin like Abe Lincoln  
Hmm. Let's be methodical...I know!

using the dressing ritual he prepares Mom and Dad for a dance

Two steps to the left--

He brings Dad to Mom  
Peek round the bend--

He puts Mom's hand on Dad's shoulder  
Under the hedge--

He puts Dad's hand on Mom's waist  
Half step again.

Over the top-- He moves them a little closer  
One to the right-- He rest Mom's head on Dad's shoulder  
A step at a time. He removes himself, taking a big step  
MOM  
DAD  
Looking at her  
A step at a time. Mom and Dad dance to the music.  
MAX  
Free! He does his own little dance.  
MUNC  
"And then my heart with pleasure fills  
And dances with the daffodils."

(after Mom and Dad)  
Don't lose him.  
Final couplet.

#### SCENE 10 - OUTSIDE AT THE DRAINAGE DITCH

Max comes up to the drainage ditch, the water having collected into a pool before the stopped up cement block passage. On the far side of this sits a beautiful mermaid, formerly known as Fin.  
MAX  
(in awe)  
A waterfall! Sparkling like Mount Rushmore in the dazzling sunshine.  
MURMAID  
Hungry?

Who said that? MAX  
Over here! MERMAID  
Oh, yes. Hello there! MAX  
Hello! MERMAID  
Hi. MAX  
Hi. MERMAID  
Hi. Are you a mermaid? MAX  
Are you a merman? FIN  
Maybe so. MAX  
Maybe so. FIN  
How did you get there? MAX  
How did you get there? FIN  
Are you copying me? MAX  
Are you copying me? FIN  
Are you copying me? MAX  
Maybe so. FIN  
Beat.

MAX

Wish I could sit close to you  
Like a couple o'sardines in a tin  
Even if we had no view  
I could hold your fin.

MERMAID

(laughs)

You're funny!

MAX

You're pretty like Abraham Linc-- I mean, cake frosting.

MERMAID

You're dashing.

MAX

You're nice.

MERMAID

Thank you. Will you be my friend?

**SONG 18: POETRY**

MAX

YOU ARE MORE POETIC THAN POETRY  
MORE VISUAL THAN VISION  
WARMER THAN WOOL  
YOU ARE MORE DELICIOUS THAN DOUGHNUTS  
TASTIER THAN TRUFFLES  
SWEETER THAN CINNAMON SWIRLS  
YOU ARE KINDER THAN KINDERGARTEN  
MORE HONEST THAN HONESTY  
FREER THAN FREEDOM  
YOU FLOW THROUGH ME LIKE AIR

Mom and Dad have entered. They choose  
not to intervene. They watch. The water  
sounds begin to sound like ocean waves.

MAX

YOU ARE

MERMAID

AM I?

MAX

MORE POETIC THAN POETRY

YOU SEE  
MORER VISUAL THAN VISION  
SEE ME  
WARMER THAN WOOL.  
YOU ARE  
AM I?  
MORER DELICIOUS THAN DOUGHNUTS  
KNOW YOU  
TASTIER THAN TRUFFLES  
KNOW ME  
SWEETER THAN CINNAMON SWIRLS  
YOU  
AM I WHAT  
ARE KINDER THAN KINDERGARTEN  
YOU THINK I AM?  
MORER  
YOU MAKE ME

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

HONEST THAN HONESTY

MERMAID  
FEEL PRETTY. UNDERSTAND

MAX  
FREER THAN FREEDOM

MERMAID  
HOW I FEEL.

MAX AND MERMAID  
YOU FLOW THROUGH ME LIKE AIR

MERMAID  
I AM HERE, THIS IS REAL

MAX AND MERMAID  
FILLING MY HEART WITH POETRY  
SHOWING ME A DEEPER LAYER

**SONG 19: WATER**

MERMAID  
(with MOM and DAD echoing in  
one voice)  
I was so lonely. I have found you.

MERMAID  
Swim over here. Come to me.

The sound of the waves becomes more  
dramatic and threatening.

Max? Max? Max? Max? Max? Max?

MOM  
(overlapping Mermaid)  
Max? Max? Max? Max? Max? Max?

As she calls his name, her voice takes  
on first a mysterious siren call, then  
cross-fades into his mother's call.  
This time he is alert to her voice. Max  
jumps into the water to join  
Mermaid/Mom. There is a splash.

He falls under the water. He begins to sink. Heartbeat, then underwater sound perspective. More and more he quits fighting the waters and just lets go. He floats down and down back into his bed. The water drains leaving a fetal heartbeat, and then the sound of a ticking clock.

SCENE 11 - HOME

Max is slowly stirring. He is damp. His parents hover over the bed. The neighborhood kids are there as well.

MOM  
Max?

DAD  
Max?

PEG  
Max? Is he OK?

ALBERT  
Hey, Max?

FIN  
Max?

**SONG 20: THIS IS NORMAL**

MAX  
(seeing his parents standing  
over him)  
You and I are gonna be presidents and Mom can be first lady  
and we can sleep in the white house and in the morning we can  
get in the president's car and drive to the mall and go to  
Abercrombie and get pine cones and pipe cleaners and then  
Gramma can make up pancakes like Sponge Bob - in the morning  
and she can call for Gary Snail and she says, "Miss Tuftsie!"  
and for dinner we can have holographic meatloaf like  
Plankton...

DAD  
Max is...

Max is... MOM

We love you, Max. MOM/DAD

MAX  
(now noticing the other kids)  
Pegasus! Einstein! Fish-face!

He flaps his hands, excitedly,  
autistically.

Is he better? PEG

THIS IS NORMAL. MOM

Mm-hmmm. DAD

Max is perfect. MOM

Max is Max. DAD

Max is. MAX

Max is. Max. MOM/DAD

Is. MAX

THIS IS NORMAL. MOM/DAD

Munc enters carefully.

MUNC  
Excuse me, but I found this outside by the street. I believe  
it belongs to you?

You are? He hands Max the President Machine.

I am. MAX  
We are. He looks to his parents and friends.  
ALL  
THIS IS NORMAL.  
Munc nods and slips away.  
MAX  
I turn it off.  
Max presses the off button.  
PRESIDENT MACHINE  
Good night, and God bless America.