



## A Readers Theater Script

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### Cast of Characters

(in the order of the amount of lines)

#### **NARRATOR**

**MALCOLM**, the rat

**AGGY**, the iguana

**HONEY BUNNY**, the rabbit

**HARRIET**, the hedgehog

**BILLY** the Kid, the hamster

**JESSE** James, the hamster

**PETE**, the hermit crab

**TANK**, the turtle

**POLLY**, the parakeet

**THE THREE CHICKS** (3 people read together)

**OCTAVIUS**, the tarantula (no lines, just gestures)

**OSCAR**, the fish (no lines, just a sign)

**NARRATOR:** It began with a rat. There was also a glasses-wearing elderly iguana, a grumpy fish who could spell, a ghost in the clock tower, a secret message in the library, and twisted evil that lived on the fourth floor of our school. But those'll all come later. First, there was a rat: Malcolm.

A rat, who at this moment, is cornered in the school library. At midnight.

**MALCOLM:** [squeaks/high-pitched shriek]

**AGGY:** Aren't you coming?

**MALCOLM:** Coming?

**AGGY:** To join us, of course. The Midnight Academy. I'm Aggy Pop. And this is Honey Bunny. These hamsters are Jesse James and Jesse's good sister, Billy the Kid; Pete's the hermit—crab, that is; here's Harriet Beecher Stowe, the hedgehog; Octavius is our typist tarantula; our three chicks, Polly the parakeet, and that's Tank the Turtle. Of course, you've already met Oscar the Grouch.

[each character "takes a bow" when introduced]

**OSCAR:** [holds up sign] Nice to MEAT you.

**MALCOLM:** Nice to...meet you all, too.

**HONEY BUNNY:** [gruffly] So what are you doing here, mouse? Spying on us?

**MALCOLM:** Spying? What? I—I just came—I was...hungry.

**NARRATOR:** Malcolm wondered why he said that, of all things. Malcolm tried again.

**MALCOLM:** First of all, I'm Malcolm. And I'm not a—

**HONEY BUNNY:** [interrupting] Hold on—you're not a rat, are you? [to Aggy and Oscar] We can't have a rat. Not after what happened the last time. How do we know he's not a spy from the Fourth?

**HARRIET:** Look at him, HB. A rat? A spy? He's a mouse, and not much of one. He'd never survive the Fourth. The moths alone would eat him.

**NARRATOR:** Aggy banged her claws on the counter with her claws to get everyone's attention.

**AGGY:** Let's start over here. Let's call our meeting to order first. Malcolm, we'd like to welcome you to the Midnight Academy. It doesn't matter what you are. [to Harriet] Harriet?

**HARRIET:** [sighing] The Midnight Academy. Our pledge is to keep the halls of McKenna School safe through thick and thin as only critters can do. [sneezes]

**AGGY:** Well, you could say it with a little more gusto, Harriet.

**HARRIET:** [sneezes again] I'm sorry. I may be allergic to mice as well as people.

**MALCOLM:** Actually, I'm—wait. The Midnight Academy? You're a—a—a—club?

**HONEY BUNNY:** A club!

**THE THREE CHICKS:** Neep, greep, weep!

**OSCAR:** [Splash!]

**OCTAVIUS:** [crosses his first two legs over his brow]

**HONEY BUNNY:** [outraged] A *club*? Was it a club that exposed the natural gas leak at Roosevelt School? A club that alerted the media to the copy paper scandal? A club that helps to track down Michael

Simmons each and every time he runs away from art class? I don't think so.

**TANK:** And not only that, but we do it seamlessly. With no lankies or nutters even knowing we're there. We're clean. In and out without a trace.

**POLLY:** We're not a Brownie troop, snacking on cookies. This is a serious organization with years of prestigious history, long before your great-great-great-granddad was even a ball of fluff.

**HONEY BUNNY:** [to the Academy] Are we sure we want to share with this runt? He doesn't seem fully appreciative.

**MALCOLM:** Well, wait. I—you mean you're a secret group that helps the school?

**JESSE:** Not only helps the school, in many ways, we run the school. The Midnight Academy is the ears, eyes, nose, and whiskers of the school. We've got critters in high places all over the district.

**BILLY:** The lankies don't know, of course, but that's only because that the way we want it.

**MALCOLM:** Lankies?

**BILLY:** Lankies. You know, the people. Humans.

**JESSE:** Not to be confused with the nutters. Those are the little ones. The kids. Smell like peanut butter and act crazy most of the time.

**HONEY BUNNY:** [skeptical, to Aggy] He's not respectful. And he's a, well, what *are* you? Mouse or skuzzy rat?

**AGGY:** Oh, hush, Honey Bunny. He's only learning of the Academy for the first time right now. [to Malcolm] What do you think, Malcolm? Joining us would be a very serious responsibility. One that might mean putting the school's needs over your own wants.

**MALCOLM:** [pauses, then excitedly] I'd love to join you.

**AGGY:** Excellent. Octavius, please make a note of it.

**OCTAVIUS:** [salutes and types]

**AGGY:** Malcolm, you're our first pledge in quite a while. The chicks aren't full members yet, either of course. But it's a little different with them. They need to group up first.

**JESSE:** And learn how to talk in sentences.

**THE THREE CHICKS:** [together] Peep, cheep, deep!

**AGGY:** Pledges aren't full members right away. There's a trial period. And a lot to learn about the organization.

**POLLY:** First, we meet every Thursday night, right here, after the night custodian goes home.

**PETE:** Jesse will ring the all-clear bell. Do you need any assistance getting out of your cage? ...I suppose not; you're already here, aren't you?

**TANK:** Next are your intensive reading lessons. You aren't much use without them. We'll need to get you up to speed.

**BILLY:** Oh, lettuce wilt. He doesn't read?

**JESSE:** [to Malcolm] Cheez, you sure you didn't come from the kindergarten rooms?

**EVERYONE:** [grumbling]

**NARRATOR:** Aggy screeched her claws on the counter again for attention.

**AGGY:** Of course he doesn't read. We all started out not reading, Billy. It might do you good to remember. [to Jesse] And sometimes we learn a lot in the kindergarten rooms. Like manners.

**THE THREE CHICKS:** [together] Reap heaps.

**AGGY:** Now, now, Malcolm. Don't feel ashamed. Even our founding father, Thomas Jefferson, the guinea pig didn't read at first. And look at all he did for the schools. I'll teach you myself. Meantime, for tonight, Honey Bunny will help you go over the handbook and rules. Harriet, would you fetch it?

**HONEY BUNNY:** Hold on. I'm not taking on another pledge.

**TANK:** [under his breath] Let's hope not.

**AGGY:** Malcolm will be *my* pledge. Didn't I say I'd teach him? I thought you might meet with him as a favor to me, HB. You already know the ins and outs of what's on the agenda tonight. And Malcolm, as a pledge, is not ready to hear it all quite yet.

**NARRATOR:** Malcolm felt like the conversation was going too fast, like when Jenna reads aloud in class and it sounds like allthewordsaretypedtogetherwithoutanyspaces. Malcolm was still a few sentences back.

**MALCOLM:** But—but—wait! Reading's making sense of those shapes, isn't it? But they already do. Make sense, I mean. Look—[pointing to a sign]"Return books here."

**EVERYONE:** [gasping and murmuring]

**HARRIET:** How long did you say you've at a McKenna School?

**NARRATOR:** Malcolm felt himself shrink. But surely, reading was a *good* thing. Didn't all the other animals—critters—say they could read, too? But how *had* Malcolm learned to read? He didn't remember. It was simply something he knew.

**MALCOLM:** Since—since the—um, a day?

**AGGY:** [softly] Well, that's quite remarkable. You must have a Knack.

**MALCOLM:** A Knack?

**AGGY:** A special talent—something you're extra good at. Something to help you.

**POLLY:** Like how Jesse James and Billy the Kid can get into any room and Octavius can type two hundred words per minute.

**PETE:** Reading's an unusual one, though, because it's so complicated. Most humans take several years to learn to read.

**HARRIET:** And you're telling us you've already learned it. In a day.

**HONEY BUNNY:** We'll see about that.

**NARRATOR:** He shoved the Academy handbook at Malcolm.

**HONEY BUNNY:** Read.

**NARRATOR:** Malcolm felt like a cheese puff was stuck in his throat. He tried to swallow and made a loud gulping noise. He nosed open the cover of the notebook.

**MALCOLM:** [nervously] "Being Critter-Wise: The B-b-bylaws of the Midnight Academy. One, never get caught out of your cage. Two, never communicate with humans. Three, report suspicious activity to each meeting..."

**NARRATOR:** Malcolm's voice trailed off. He looked up.

**MALCOLM:** What? Did I...say it wrong?

**NARRATOR:** The critters of the Midnight Academy stared at him.

**HARRIET:** Who are you really? Are you working with Snip?

**MALCOLM:** [scared] What? S-snip? What's that? I don't know what you're talking about.

**NARRATOR:** Honey Bunny extended a heavy paw that smelled like fresh banana chips. Malcolm shifted as a claw—a not-at-all-soft-and-fluffy claw jabbed the skin on his belly.

**HONEY BUNNY:** You're a rat, really, aren't you?

**MALCOLM:** [terrified] I'm a pet. I swear! A pet—*ow*! I'm a pet—MOUSE!

**NARRATOR:** There was a long pause. Polly flittered. Tank stuck his head out while Pete pulled his in. Jesse and Billy giggled nervously. Even Oscar was still in his aquarium. Then finally, Honey Bunny boomed out.

**HONEY BUNNY:** Well. That's amazing. Reading. After only one day of fifth grade. [to Malcolm] You'll make a remarkable addition to our Academy...*mouse*.

**NARRATOR:** Malcolm blinked, looking around. "Mouse," again. Why had he said *that*?

**HONEY BUNNY:** By the way, we have a saying here in the Academy: "A critter reveals his true self at midnight." It means the way you are when no one is looking—that's the critter you really are.

**NARRATOR:** Honey Bunny jabbed Malcolm one more time.

**HONEY BUNNY:** But don't worry. We'll be looking. Oh yes, we'll be watching for your true self.

**NARRATOR:** And with that, Harriet closed up the Midnight Academy handbook, and Malcolm followed Honey Bunny to the back of the library. His pledge time in the Midnight Academy had begun.