

*Acting Edition*

# **The Best School Year Ever**

## **Expanded Cast Version**

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

*Acting Edition*

# **The Best School Year Ever**

## **Expanded Cast Version**

by Jahnna Beecham &  
Malcolm Hillgartner

Based on the book  
*The Best School Year Ever*  
by Barbara Robinson

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*THE BEST SCHOOL YEAR EVER* was produced by Nashville Children's Theatre in Nashville, TN, on September 7th, 2024. The performance was directed by Ernie Nolan, with sets and lighting by Scott Leathers, costumes by Billy Ditty, and sound design by Marsalis Turner. The Production Stage Manager was Will Farris. The cast was as follows:

**BETH BRADLEY** ..... Joy Pointe  
**CHARLIE BRADLEY** ..... Gerold Oliver  
**MRS. BRADLEY/MISS KEMP/MRS. MCCLUSKY/  
NURSE GREENBLATT** ..... Tamiko Robison Steele  
**IMOGENE HERDMAN** ..... Sejal Mehta  
**LEROY HERDMAN/EUGENE PRESTON** ..... Brian Jones  
**GLADYS HERDMAN/MISS NEWMAN** ..... Alisa Osborne  
**ALICE WENDLEKEN/MRS. WENDLEKEN** ..... Erika Haines  
**BOOMER MALONE** ..... Will Henke  
**LOUELLA MCCLUSKY** ..... Natalie Rankin

\*Please note that the above casting represents the standard version of *THE BEST SCHOOL YEAR EVER*, which utilizes doubled casting. This Expanded Cast Version does not contain doubled casting.

*THE BEST SCHOOL YEAR EVER* received a developmental reading with Nashville Children's Theatre on July 19th, 2024.

## CHARACTERS

### THE BRADLEYS

**BETH BRADLEY** – Earnest narrator of this story who sees the irony in a lot of what's happening. This fifth grader tries her best to be straightforward and kind to everyone, but the Herdmans make it difficult sometimes.

**CHARLIE BRADLEY** – The traditional kid brother who is a bit goofy and a little intimidated by older kids, especially the Herdmans.

**MRS. BRADLEY** – Unflappable, witty mom.

### THE HERDMANS

**RALPH HERDMAN** – Sixth grader, the enforcer in the family. Strong and silent.

**IMOGENE HERDMAN** – (Pronounced “IM-UH-JEEN”) Bossy fifth grader, leader of the Herdmans. She's very matter-of-fact and has her own logic.

**CLAUDE HERDMAN** – Fourth grader, Ralph's sidekick. He imitates Ralph.

**LEROEY HERDMAN** – Imogene's sly fox of a brother in third grade. He enjoys teasing other kids. He rarely smiles.

**OLLIE HERDMAN** – Second grader, wears glasses that are taped together. He's always trying to keep up with the older brothers.

**GLADYS HERDMAN** – Small and feisty first grader. She bites. She's dead serious.

### CLASSMATES

**ALICE WENDLEKEN** – This prim and proper fifth grader is a know-it-all and can be a tattletale if rules aren't followed.

**LOUELLA MCCLUSKY** – Beth's best friend in fifth grade who overreacts to most situations. She can be really mad. Or really in love. Or really silly.

**BOOMER MALONE** – This likeable fifth grader loves sports, is friendly to everyone, and is unaware that several girls have crushes on him.

**EUGENE PRESTON** – Painfully shy third grader who mumbles and has a hard time looking people in the eye.

**JUNIOR JACOBS** – A very cool, preppy-looking fifth grader.

**IVY JONES** – Popular fifth grader. She wears stylish eyeglasses and clothes.

**ROSE FIDDLER** – Friendly, sporty best friend of Ivy.

**LESTER BARNES** – A studious type in black glasses.

## ADULTS

**MISS KEMP** – Beth's fifth-grade teacher. She wears glasses with bold frames and is an enthusiastic teacher who loves her students.

**MISS NEWMAN** – Charlie's third-grade teacher. This very earnest, easily startled teacher wears wire-rimmed glasses and has frazzled-looking hair. She has lost the battle with the Herdmans and is a nervous wreck.

**MRS. MCCLUSKY** – Sweet, scatter brained mother of Louella. We meet her at the hair salon in foils and a brightly-colored cape.

**MRS. WENDLEKEN** – A self-righteous gossip who is not above bending the rules if it will benefit her perfect daughter, Alice.

**NURSE GREENBLATT** – An unflappable ex-army nurse. Nothing surprises her anymore.

**MARGE** – Boisterous volunteer mom in an orange vest at the Hug-n-Go.

**PRINCIPAL CRABTREE** – Over the microphone in his office, he seems to be controlled and smooth. Off microphone, he is impatient with everyone.

**VICE PRINCIPAL DERWOOD PELFRY** – A big worrier. Everything is a crisis. He's kind of a dorky assistant.

**MRS. PROCTOR** – Humorless school secretary.

## OTHER KIDS

**STUDENTS** – Additional third and fifth-grade students can be added in hallway, classroom, lunchroom, and talent show scenes.

**BABY HOWARD** – Can be played by an actor in a bald cap, or a bald doll can be used – first in a baby carriage and then a stroller. The tattooed top of his head is seen above the curtain.

## SETTING

The play takes place in several locations:

### **The Bradley house:**

Beth and Charlie's shared room.

The Bradley kitchen with phone/Mrs. Wendleken's kitchen with phone.

Mrs. Bradley's car, driving to and from Woodrow Wilson Elementary School.

### **Woodrow Wilson Elementary School:**

The hallway lined with lockers.

Miss Kemp's fifth-grade classroom with rolling blackboard.

The lunchroom with a table.

The door to the mysterious teachers' lounge.  
The door to the nurse's office.  
The Hug-n-Go drop-off in front of the school.  
The playground.  
Backstage/onstage at the school auditorium.

**Neighborhood shopping area:**

The storefront of a mom-and-pop grocery with beauty salon attached.  
A vacant lot with clothesline.

## **TIME**

This play, like the book it is based on, has the feel of an earlier time, around the 1960s or early 1970s, when unsupervised kids freely rode their bikes around neighborhoods and phones were attached by long cords to walls. Most moms stayed home to care for their families while the dads worked. Babysitters were paid fifty cents an hour. And the worst thing a kid could do would be to shoplift a candy bar or accidentally set fire to someone's toolshed.

## **NOTE ON SET DESIGN**

The set can be a series of panels that roll on and off. They can have different set elements on both sides. Benches, chairs, and tables can be configured to create other elements.

The school hallway can be defined by two rolling panels of lockers with doors that open. One panel can be turned to have Miss Kemp's classroom blackboard on the other side. The other panel can be Beth and Charlie's bedroom wall.

Mrs. Bradley's car could be two benches to indicate the front and back seat. Or a two-step stair unit. Mrs. Bradley can either hold a steering wheel, or mime one.

The benches or step unit can become the seats at the lunchroom or used for the classroom or on the playground.

Desks can also be on wheels and be put together to be a lunch table. Or they can be several step units.

Door to the teachers' lounge could have a door to the nurse's office on the other side.

Ranger Bear is a freestanding cutout on wheels.

## SOUND EFFECTS

Clock chimes  
School bell  
Sounds of kids talking, locker doors slamming  
Fire alarm  
Kids cheering  
Fire truck siren  
Loud whistle  
Car horn  
Car engine driving  
Car brakes  
Carnival music  
Baby cries  
Mixed responses from students  
Holiday music on car radio  
“Jingle Bells”  
Holiday instrumental  
Last bars of Alice’s “Flying Fingers” piano music (This is not a real song;  
it can simply be fast piano.)  
“Waltz of the Flowers” from *The Nutcracker Suite*  
Loud applause  
Knocking  
Jump rope chant of girls on the playground  
Loud knocking and pounding on teachers’ lounge door

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**Scene One**  
**Bradley House, Kids' Bedroom – September**

*(BETH is in one twin bed; CHARLIE is in the other. Both are having nightmares.)*

*(Sound effects: Clock chimes three a.m.)*

**BETH.** Mom! Mommmmmm! Ouch, that hurt! Stop it! Help! Mom!

**CHARLIE.** Mom! Don't help Beth – help me! Stay back!

*(MRS. BRADLEY appears at the door in her robe. She has curlers in her hair.)*

**MRS. BRADLEY.** What is going on in here? Charlie? Beth? Why is everyone shouting?

**BETH.** I had a nightmare.

**CHARLIE.** So did I!

**BETH.** It was the first day of school, and I had to take a note to the teachers' lounge, and Imogene and Gladys Herdman were there.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** That's impossible! Kids are never ever allowed in the teachers' lounge. Especially not the Herdmans.

**BETH.** Well, they were there, and Gladys was biting me. And Imogene stole my lunch and ate everything but the carrots.

**CHARLIE.** And I couldn't get into my locker 'cause I forgot the combination.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** Charlie, you know it by heart.

**CHARLIE.** Then I discovered that all six Herdmans were in my class.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** That could never happen. They're all different ages.

**BETH.** The teachers could have held them back.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** No teacher wants to spend two years with the same Herdman.

**BETH.** You're right! That would be insane.

*(To audience.)* The Herdmans are the worst kids in the history of the world! They tell lies and smoke smelly cigars, set fire to stuff, stay away from school whenever they want. And every September I pray that maybe this year the Herdmans will be gone. But every year, there they are on the first day of school, up to their old tricks.

*(While BETH talks to audience, MRS. BRADLEY is shuffling around, picking up their room.)*

**MRS. BRADLEY.** Charlie, why are you sleeping in your clothes?

**CHARLIE.** I want to get to school early so I can sit in the front row and not have to sit next to Leroy Herdman. He's mean.

**BETH.** That's a good idea. I should get dressed. We can go early and I won't have to sit next to Imogene.

*(To audience.)* She's meaner than Leroy.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** Whoa, whoa, whoa! It's three in the morning and I'm the one who will be driving you to school and I'm *not* getting up or getting dressed.

*(CHARLIE is out of bed, stuffing items into his backpack.)*

**CHARLIE.** Beth, I'll give you two candy bars for extra pencils.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** Why do you have candy bars?

**BETH & CHARLIE.** To trade.

**CHARLIE.** When they try to steal our lunches. I always offer a candy bar instead.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** That works?

**BETH.** Of course. Who wouldn't want a candy bar?

*(Hands **CHARLIE** some pencils.)*

Here's four.

**CHARLIE.** Thanks. Leroy is a big pencil thief.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** *(Looking over **CHARLIE**'s shoulder into his pack.)* Is that bug spray?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah. In case Ralph Herdman releases spiders in the lunchroom like he did last year.

**BETH.** Don't forget the Band-Aids and antibiotic cream.

**MRS. BRADLEY.** What for?

**BETH.** Gladys. She bites.

*(**CHARLIE** stuffs a catcher's mask in his bag or puts it on.)*

**CHARLIE.** And just in case there's punching and kicking...

**BETH.** Good point!

*(She grabs a bike helmet and puts it on.)*

**MRS. BRADLEY.** You two are being silly. Go back to bed. The first day of school should be fun.

**CHARLIE.** Fun?

**BETH.** *(To audience.)* It'll be a nightmare.

*(BETH and CHARLIE fall back in bed, clutching their backpacks, and MRS. BRADLEY flicks off the light.)*

*(Sound effects: School bell.)*

## Scene Two

### Woodrow Wilson Elementary Hallway

*(First day of school. A crowded hallway lined with lockers decorated with “Welcome Back!” signs.)*

*(Sound effects: Sounds of kids talking, locker doors slamming.)*

*(All the **KIDS**, except the **HERDMANS**, enter from both sides of the stage to merge into a tight group in the hall, trying to get to their lockers. They carry books, wear backpacks, and carry lunch bags and lunch boxes. They open locker doors. **ALICE** enters from one direction and heads for her locker.)*

*(**PRINCIPAL** steps into his office area, holding microphone.)*

**PRINCIPAL.** Welcome, students, to Woodrow Wilson Elementary. This school year should be better than ever. Find your lockers. If you can't remember your combination, we have them here in the office.

*(**LOUELLA** runs up to **ALICE**.)*

**LOUELLA.** Alice! I love your dress!

**ALICE.** Thank you, Louella. My mother got it in the city.

*(**BOOMER** enters from another direction. He's with **JUNIOR** and **LESTER**.)*

**LOUELLA.** *(Whispers excitedly to **ALICE**.)* Look! It's Boomer!

*(All the **KIDS** part to let **BOOMER** get to his locker.)*

**ALICE, LOUELLA, ROSE & IVY.** Hi, Boomer!

*(BOOMER acknowledges the GIRLS as he heads for his locker.)*

**BOOMER.** Oh, hey!

*(ROSE and IVY join ALICE and LOUELLA. LOUELLA turns to ALICE with a smile so big it looks like she's snarling.)*

**LOUELLA.** Notice anything different about me?

**ALICE.** Your hair?

**LOUELLA.** No.

**IVY.** Your sweater?

**LOUELLA.** No.

**ROSE.** You're wearing makeup?

**LOUELLA.** No!

**ALICE, ROSE & IVY.** I give up.

**LOUELLA.** I got my braces off!

**ALICE, ROSE & IVY.** Ohhh.

*(CHARLIE enters with EUGENE, trying different lockers, both confused.)*

**CHARLIE.** Is that it?

**EUGENE.** I don't think so.

**CHARLIE.** Nothing looks familiar, Eugene.

**LOUELLA.** Charlie, where's Beth?

**CHARLIE.** *(Looking to EUGENE, confused.)* Uh, I'm not sure.

**BETH.** *(Calling from her locker.)* Louella!

**LOUELLA.** There you are!

**BETH.** Our locker is over here.

*(The **HERDMANS** appear, striking a menacing pose.)*

**IMOGENE.** Hey losers!

**THE HERDMANS.** We're back!

*(All of the **KIDS** freeze, with panicked looks.)*

**KIDS.** Oh, no!

**BETH.** *(To audience.)* The Herdmans.

**BOOMER.** Guys! Hide your lunch.

**EUGENE.** In your coat.

**JUNIOR.** In your locker!

**LESTER.** In your backpack.

*(**CHARLIE** puts on his catcher's mask and all the **KIDS** reach for their lunches, trying to hide them in their lockers or coats as the **HERDMANS** move in a pack through the panicked **KIDS**. **IMOGENE** and **GLADYS** are frisking people.)*

**RALPH.** I'm looking for a ham sandwich!

*(**JUNIOR** looks at **EUGENE**.)*

**JUNIOR.** Uh-oh.

*(**RALPH** grabs sandwich from **EUGENE** and runs off with **CLAUDE**.)*

**RALPH.** Nice!

**CLAUDE.** I get half!

*(**GLADYS** grabs lunch bag from **IVY**.)*

**GLADYS.** Tuna? Yuck!

(**LEROY** grabs bag from **GLADYS**.)

**LEROY.** I like tuna!

**IVY.** But that's mine!

(**IMOGENE** is pulling a wagon filled with stolen goods. She goes to **ALICE**.)

**IMOGENE.** Fork it over, Alice!

**ROSE & BETH.** Alice, don't!

(**ALICE** hands over her fancy lunch box and runs off to tell the principal.)

**ALICE.** I'm telling.

(**GLADYS** grabs **BOOMER's** lunch bag.)

**GLADYS.** Egg salad? P-U!

(**BOOMER** smoothly takes the egg salad lunch from **GLADYS** and tosses it in his locker, the walls of which are covered with sports posters.\*)

**BOOMER.** A Herdman-proof sandwich! Score, Mom!

(**LOUELLA** holds up her lunch box to **BETH**.)

**LOUELLA.** (*Whispers.*) I'm so happy I can finally eat peanut butter and jelly again.

(**GLADYS** snatches **LOUELLA's** lunch box.)

**GLADYS.** Thanks, I'll take that.

**LOUELLA.** Gladys, give that back!

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**GLADYS.** Come and get it!

**IMOGENE.** Outta my way!

*(IMOGENE takes the lunch box from GLADYS.)*

Thanks, Gladys!

**GLADYS.** Imogene, that's mine!

**IMOGENE.** Not anymore.

*(To OLLIE, who is holding a Twinkie.)\** I see Twinkies!  
Ollie, give it here.

*(IMOGENE tries to grab the Twinkie from OLLIE.)*

**OLLIE.** *(Takes a huge bite of Twinkie.)* Now you see it, now you don't.

*(CHARLIE, who has been wandering in and out of everyone looking for his locker, runs up to BETH.)*

**CHARLIE.** Beth, I can't remember which locker is mine.

**BETH.** You're between Boomer Malone and Leroy Herdman.

**LEROY.** That's my name, don't wear it out.

**CHARLIE.** *(Whispers to BETH.)* Why do I always have to be next to Leroy?

**BETH.** Well, at least it isn't Ralph.

*(CHARLIE moves to open his locker, trying to stay away from LEROY.)*

**BOOMER.** Hey, where is Ralph?

**LEROY.** Don't look at me.

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*(ALICE reenters, a smug look on her face.)*

**ALICE.** He's been taken to the principal's office. He and Claude were caught letting the air out of kids' bike tires.

**LOUELLA.** On the first day of school?

**ALICE.** It's a good thing I told the principal.

**BETH.** *(To audience.)* See? The Herdmans are just as bad as last year.

**LOUELLA.** Wait a minute. There's Gladys, Leroy, and Imogene. Where's Ollie?

*(ALL look around nervously to make sure Ollie's not sneaking up on them to steal pencils or lunch.)*

**BETH.** *(To LOUELLA.)* Probably with Ralph and Claude in the principal's office.

*(As IMOGENE passes by, BOOMER notices his baseball glove in her loot wagon.)*

**BOOMER.** Imogene! That's my baseball mitt!

**IMOGENE.** Finders keepers.

**BOOMER.** But it's brand-new...

**BETH.** *(To audience.)* What did I tell you? Imogene just takes things and doesn't care if anyone sees her!

*(Sound effects: School bell.)*

*(PRINCIPAL steps into his office area, holding a microphone.)*

**PRINCIPAL.** Attention, students, go to your classrooms. Today is a big day and teachers have a lot to cover. Go to your classrooms now.

*(Most of the KIDS close lockers, scoop up books, and head quickly to their classrooms.)*

**BETH.** (*To LOUELLA.*) Come on. I want to get a seat in the front row.

**LOUELLA.** Beth? Notice anything different about me?

**BETH.** Yes. But I'm not sure what.

**LOUELLA.** It's my teeth. See?

**BETH.** Did you have them whitened?

**LOUELLA.** (*Frustrated.*) No! I got my braces off and not one person has noticed!

**BETH.** Sorry, Louella. They just look so shiny and white. Now hurry!

*(They run off.)*

*(CHARLIE struggles with his catcher's mask and pack.)*

**CHARLIE.** Oh, no. Where's my classroom?

*(LEROY leans against his locker, finishing another kid's lunch.)*

**LEROY.** Not that way. That leads to the teachers' lounge. And you know what happens in there.

**CHARLIE.** No, what?

**LEROY.** (*Smiles smugly.*) That's for me to know and you to find out.

*(LEROY points at CHARLIE's chest, CHARLIE looks down and LEROY flips his chin up.)*

Fooled ya!

*(LEROY grabs the catcher's mask from CHARLIE and runs off.)*

**CHARLIE.** (*Follows LEROY.*) Leroy, give that back!

*(Sound effects: School bell.)*

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