

High School (non) Musical: The Liner Notes

High School (non) Musical can be enjoyed in many different ways by audiences of all ages. There are plenty of moments of physical comedy and sheer silliness, but there are also a plethora of cultural references, and I thought it might be useful to provide a bit of a reference "glossary" of sorts. This isn't necessarily exhaustive, but I hope you find it helpful. If there are other areas of the script for which you think it would be necessary to have some explanation, please let me know and I'll see what I can do.

Act I, Scene 1

Roswell, New Mexico is the site of the famous UFO incident of 1947 and has since become a magnet for those who believe in extraterrestrial activity.

"Computers and pencils and formulas, oh my" is a play on "lions and tigers and bears, oh my" from the ***Wizard of Oz***.

Toy's howled **"Gaberella"** is a takeoff on Stanley Kowalski's similarly howled "Stella" from the Tennessee Williams classic, ***A Streetcar Named Desire***.

Act I, Scene 2

I suspect that most people realize that the Surgical Decathletes' "song" (**"The hip bone's connected to the..."**) is a "Hokey Pokey" takeoff, though it doesn't have to be, and that the **"I am the knight who says knee"** is channeling a bit of Monty Python.

Truth or Consequences is a real city in New Mexico.

Mrs. Beckett von Shakespeare's **"Every time a person shatters the sacred silence, a mime falls down dead"** is a ***Peter Pan*** allusion, while **"A mime is a terrible thing to waste"** plays off the old United Negro College Fund ads that told us, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

Shitzu is actually doing real lines from Ophelia's death in ***Hamlet***. I'd heard about a production of a ***Hamlet*** takeoff, ***The Skinhead Hamlet***, in which Ophelia drowned in a fish bowl. I thought it would be funnier if she drowned in a sponge. Opinions, of course, may vary. [As a sidenote, when Cryin says **"Skip, skip, skip,"** he's referring to skipping text in the play, not to the physical action of skipping.]

Area 51 is a nickname for a very secretive US military base, actually in southern Nevada that, among other things, is at the center of UFO lore. While technically they're not in the same state, it's easy to conflate it with Roswell, so I did. I love taking the easy way out. 😊

Act I, Scene 3

Toy's "**I am a mime. Hath not a mime eyes?**" speech is a send-up of Shylock's speech in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

"**Swing Low, Sweet Chariot**" is, of course, a traditional spiritual.

"**A still, small voice**" is, in the Bible, the voice God used to speak to the prophet Elijah.

Beckett von Shakespeare's "**Imagine a world**" speech is actually a riff on Dr. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream."

Shitzu and Cryin, when talking about **lighting up Mrs. Beckett von Shakespeare's life**, are paying homage to the song by Debbie Boone. By way of reply, the teacher then launches ("**We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore**" etc) into a riff on the President's speech in the movie *Independence Day*.

"**Be gone before someone drops a house on you**" is, of course, straight out of *The Wizard of Oz*. Glinda, the good witch of the North, to be precise.

Act I, Scene 4

"**Mirror, mirror on the wall**" are the words the evil queen would speak to her mirror in *Snow White*.

Act I, Scene 5

As Cryin identifies, Mrs. Beckett von Shakespeare uses a combination of quotes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Of course, “**a disturbance in the force**” is from *Star Wars*, and “**my spider sense is tingling**” is a brief homage to *Spiderman*.

When the student comes in and starts uncontrollably shouting **food names**, what I had in mind was a sort of surgically induced Tourette’s Syndrome.

Act I, Scene 7

“**I am woman. Hear me roar**” comes from the 1972 number one hit by Helen Reddy. Similarly, “**sunshine on a cloudy day**” is a reference to the old Temptations song.

“**The early worm...**” is a revision of the old adage, “The early bird catches the worm.”

Beckett responds with her comment, “**Nice bouquet,**” etc. That speech is a takeoff on the typical wine critic’s commentary.

“**We are all in this together,**” is, of course, from *High School Musical*.

Beckett von Shakespeare’s reference to the “**crutch without an owner**” refers to the Ghost of Christmas Future’s showing Scrooge the possible death of Tiny Tim in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*.

The black spot comes from *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, in which it was a mark of guilt and judgment from one’s fellow pirates, foretelling imminent death.

“**Wonder twin powers, activate**” is a reference to the old animated teen superhero series.

Code Blue is a hospital emergency code, often used to describe a patient in need of immediate resuscitation (typically because of cardiac arrest).

The Various Auditioners exiting are meant to be talking about an alien landing (e.g. “**They’re here**”).

The football is a reference to the briefcase containing the United States nuclear launch codes, as well as other top secret information necessary in case of a nuclear attack. It is carried by an armed military aide and is always in close proximity to the President.

Act II, Scene 2

Darfur is the region of Sudan where a massive civil war has taken place, resulting in genocide and mass displacement of many, many people.

The Bermuda Triangle is a legendary area in the Atlantic in which numerous ships have mysteriously disappeared.

Act II, Scene 3

The **Zambezi River** is the fourth longest river in Africa, and the largest that flows into the Indian Ocean. It includes the spectacular Victoria Falls. Australia's **Great Barrier Reef** is the world's largest coral reef, and greatly threatened by global warming. **Mt. Everest** is, of course, the world's tallest peak.

Act II, Scene 4

Beckett von Shakespeare and Shitzu are sending up the **plays of Samuel Beckett** in which his stage directions are so meticulous as to include the exact motions of each actor, down to the number of footsteps.

In the meantime, the bowlers' "**kill the pin**" refrain is straight out of ***Lord of the Flies*** by William Golding.

Act II, Scene 5

Elephant Butte is a real place in New Mexico. There's apparently a rather nice lake there.

Special Note about Music

In the Stevenson School production, in Act II, Scene 5, we used "Flight of the Bumblebee" as musical accompaniment for the big showdown against Truth or Consequences (the entire ballet-like sequence that encompasses the surgical and bowling competitions).