

PRODUCTION NOTES

Setting

Summer 1965, Mount Airy, North Carolina, on a short, tight-knit street two miles west of town where everyone knows everyone else's business.

Plot

A well-meaning family is persuaded to purchase an unnecessary and overengineered upgrade for their ordinary toaster. What begins as a minor convenience quickly escalates into domestic disruption, exposing tensions, habits, and assumptions already simmering beneath the surface.

Theme / Central Idea

When technology promises convenience, efficiency, and perfection, human judgment is often the first casualty. The play explores how ordinary people react when everyday tools gain exaggerated abilities, revealing both the humor and fragility of modern life.

Tone and Genre

Absurdist comedy with a realistic core, infused with Dadaist wit that transforms familiar routines into chaotic, unpredictable comedy.

Time Period

The play is firmly set in 1965 in Mount Airy, North Carolina. The time period and location are essential to the cultural references, and themes, and should not be updated.

Style and Realism

Primarily realistic characters and dialogue, with occasional absurd elements and heightened comedic moments. The play sometimes breaks the fourth wall, addressing or interacting with the audience to enhance humor and story.

Language Notes

Dialogue reflects 1965 speech patterns and cultural references. Southern accents are optional. The play features interruptions and overlapping dialogue to heighten the comedy.

Location / Audience Placeholders

To clarify lines that may change depending on the local context or audience interactions.

Guidelines / Examples:

- **[CONSTRUCTION PROJECT NAME] in [LOCAL CITY AND STATE]**
- Insert a real, current project familiar to the local audience to increase engagement. Example: "Oh look, they're gonna build an *aquarium* in *Syracuse, New York*... in the future."
- **[APPLIANCE NAME CALLED OUT BY THE AUDIENCE]** - The audience is asked to shout out words in Act Two, Scene Two. Keep track of these for use later in the next scene. Any kitchen appliance suggestion is valid, provided it's not a toaster. Example: "At the above stated time, the *blender* was observed *dancing*." (A suggestion if the audience does shout out the word *toaster*, the actor should say, "Okay toaster... Oh, toaster oven?... Oh, *just oven*, okay, got it!")

Character Notes

Stagehands may cover minor extras. Flexible casting is encouraged. Character doubling is highly preferred to reinforce the play's thematic use of the number "two" and to contrast roles visually. Peter Jettison is a fast-talking salesman, always in a rush to convince and entertain. Mary Understudy is performed by a burly male stagehand, creating a humorous contrast between character expectation and performer presence.

Scenic Concept Statement

The scenic design presents a grounded, realistic home that can flex into heightened theatrical worlds without ever feeling like a full reset. The Father's office acts as an anchor, remaining visually consistent while the surrounding environment transforms from a functional family kitchen into a stylized infomercial and, ultimately, an antique store. These shifts rely on reconfiguration, color, and added elements rather than complete replacement, allowing the set to evolve in plain sight. The design supports practical effects, clear sightlines, and physical comedy, favoring smart adaptability over spectacle for spectacle's sake.

A flexible, realistic home set serves as a stable anchor that can quickly transform into heightened theatrical environments, prioritizing clarity, comedy, and practical staging over heavy construction.

Scenic Set Requirements

The primary setting consists of two permanent zones that support multiple transformations throughout the play. Upstage right is the Father's office, which remains structurally intact for the duration of the production. The office should clearly reflect his profession as a geologist through rocks, tools, and related décor which includes a sign that says "Geology Rocks" somewhere on the wall. It must include a desk oriented toward stage left, a shelf or unit holding a small television that does not need to function beyond emitting flickering light or an equivalent effect, a working phone prop, a chair suitable for reclining, and a blanket used for staged sleep. The remainder of the stage represents a family kitchen, featuring a dining table with a lazy susan on top. The table seats four with no chairs placed on the audience side, and an upstage wall of cabinetry incorporating a sink and stove. Downstage, partially extending into the pit, is a custom built kitchen cabinet or counter unit designed to visually match the upstage cabinetry and conceal multiple stagehands beneath it. This unit should stand slightly taller than the stage and sit about one foot or so from the stage edge to support practical effects, including a prominently placed toaster at down center. A hole under the toaster allows it to be jostled from underneath.

In Act I, Scene 3, the kitchen area transforms into a brightly colored infomercial set while the office remains unchanged, requiring a large demonstration table, visible studio camera, and theatrical lighting elements. The scene concludes with a descending marquee sign with lighting effects and optional overhead confetti.

By Act II, Scene 5, the stage is largely emptied. What remains suggests a barren antique store. The office becomes a checkout counter, accompanied by a small amount of display shelving. A non functional glass door labeled "Antique Store" sits downstage left as a visual exit.

Alternate Staging Option: Down Center Toaster Placement

As a cost saving alternative to building a full prop counter, the toaster may be placed on the front edge of the stage at down center on a small riser. This keeps the visual focus exactly where the audience already wants to look and simplifies the build considerably. A scrim should still be used to conceal stagehands in the pit for toast tosses and resets if possible. While the physical act of toast popping up will be slightly less realistic without a counter, the comedic effect and storytelling intent remain intact.

Props

- Optional napkins to hand out with the program (possibly custom printed napkins)
- Toaster (1950s-1960s style, nonfunctional OK)
- Stage smoke devices (non-toxic, theater-safe smoke)
- Drumstick and 6x10 HVAC register (for toaster popping sound)
- Burnt toast (dozens of slices)
- Kitchen plates and glasses
- Cola bottle
- Lazy susan with fruit
- iPad with children's protective cover (can be fake)
- Fire hose (very long)
- Cooking with a Two Slot Toaster books 1 and 2, by Patrick R. F. Blakley
- Sorry! (board game, 1960's version)
- Multiple letters in envelopes
- Toast by mail catalog
- On-air light up sign
- Studio Cameras on tripods (two is preferred)
- TV studio light reflector/diffuser board
- White posterboard cue cards that say "APPLAUSE" and "WOW" and "STANDING OVATION"
- Seagrams gin bottle (can substitute tea)
- Giant marquee sign that says "BUY YOUR WIFE JETTISON TOASTER SPRINGS!" (with optional flashing lights)
- Brightly colored confetti
- A shirt patch that clearly says MICHAEL for the Jettison Installer

- Clipboard with working pen
- Some absurd tools to fix the toaster
- Mad Libs cheat sheet for the assistant fire chief actor to use when reading the uniquely customized citation
- Glass door for Antique Store entrance with a hanging "Open/Closed" sign (stationary/non-functional)
- Computer checkout or cash register

Toast Toss Practical Effect

In Act One, Scene Three, a piece of toast is tossed from the pit area onto a plate held by a character near center stage. A successful catch on the first toss is ideal, but a miss is acceptable and can enhance the comedy. The toss may be repeated as needed until the toast is successfully caught.

For best results, the stagehand should use a gentle frisbee style motion, keeping the throw slow and controlled, and remaining fully concealed from the audience. The toast should spin flat and remain stable in the air rather than tumbling. The actor catching the toast should angle the plate slightly forward and may use their body as a subtle backboard if necessary.

A similar toss occurs in Act Two, Scene One, this time caught by a character's hand. This toss is generally easier. An underhand slow whipping motion works best, producing a clean vertical spin while minimizing tumble.

Sound Effects

All referenced sound effects are included in the script stage directions and can be downloaded at PatrickBlakley.com/Play

Staging and Technical Requirements

- The toaster remains downstage center on a built-up countertop in the pit area, with a slight gap to the stage.
- The counter hides a few stagehands tossing burnt toast and striking a metal HVAC register with a drumstick to simulate the toaster popping sound.

- The front of the counter should resemble kitchen cabinets matching the backdrops until the final scene of the play where it appears as an antique store shelf.
- Backdrops: reversible or sliding. Kitchen/office scenes are drab 1960s style; the infomercial dream scene is bright and colorful; Act Two returns to drab home/kitchen tones.
- The final scene removes all backdrops to reveal a present-day antique store setup.
- Fake theater smoke may be used from behind the front counter; the wings of the stage recur throughout the show.
- A huge sign with optional marquee lights at the end of the infomercial scene.

Scene Flow

Scenes should flow naturally, with blocking from the previous scene serving as a setup for the next where appropriate. If doing a post-show talkback, it may be conducted inside the antique store setup at the end of the play.

Content Advisories

- Appropriate for all audiences.
- Fake smoke effects occur throughout.
- Toast may be tossed into the audience in Act Two.
- Fake residential smoke detector sounds occur in multiple scenes; these are explained in the pre-show announcement.
- Alcoholic drink may be replaced by tea if needed.

Author's Intent

- Preserve absurd jokes, flying toast, and audience participation.
- Character names and the Jettison Toaster company are fixed for continuity with prior cookbooks.

- Toast, NC, the town is hinted at as "two miles west of Mount Airy" and is essential to the setting, though the town of Toast is never directly stated.
- The toaster must be from the 1950s-1960s, but need not function; antique store props suffice.
- Character doubling is fully intended and should emphasize visual and thematic contrast.
- The Antique Store scene should not be cut. It underscores the theme that ordinary objects quietly accumulate stories that are rarely known or understood, paralleling how people age with forgotten memories, guarded secrets, and experiences they choose not to share, further reinforcing the recurring idea of *two*: something visible and something hidden.

Flexibility Statement

Cast ages, backdrops, and wardrobe are flexible. The play can be adapted for high school or independent theaters. Visual and costume choices should communicate the setting within budget.

Running Time

Approximately 110 minutes; timing may vary with pacing and delivery.

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