THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

(ACT 1)

A play by SUSAN NAMUS

Based on the book by NORTON JUSTER

SURNAME, NAME:

CLASS:
CAST (in order of appearance)

- THE CLOCK
- MILO, a boy
- THE WHETHER MAN
- SIX LETHARGARIANS
- TOCK, THE WATCHDOG (same as the clock)
- AZAZ THE UNABRIDGED, KING OF DICTIONOPOLIS
- THE MATHEMAGICIAN, KING OF DIGITOPOLIS
  - PRINCESS SWEET RHYME
  - PRINCESS PURE REASON
- GATEKEEPER OF DICTIONOPOLIS
- THREE WORD MERCHANTS
- THE LETTERMAN (fourth Word Merchant)
  - SPELLING BEE
  - THE HUMBUG
- THE DUKE OF DEFINITION
- THE MINISTER OF MEANING
  - THE EARL OF ESSENCE
- THE COUNT OF CONNOTATION
- THE UNDERSECRETARY OF UNDERSTANDING
  - A PAGE
- KAKAFONOUS A. DISCHORD, DOCTOR OF DISSONANCE
  - THE AWFUL DYNNE
  - THE DODECAHEDRON
- MINERS OF THE NUMBERS MINE
- THE EVERPRESENT WORDSNATCHER
  - THE TERRIBLE TRIVIUM
  - THE DEMON OF INSINCERITY
  - SENSES TAKER
THE SETS

1. MILO’S BEDROOM: with shelves, pennants, pictures on the wall, as well as suggestions of the characters of the Land of Wisdom.

2. THE ROAD TO THE LAND OF WISDOM: a forest, from which the Whether Man and the Lethargarians emerge.

3. DICTIONOPOLIS: a marketplace full of open air stalls as well as little shops. Letters and signs should abound.

4. DIGITOPOLIS: a dark, glittering place without trees or greenery, but full of shining rocks and cliffs, with hundreds of numbers shining everywhere.

5. THE LAND OF IGNORANCE: a gray, gloomy place full of cliffs and caves, with frightening faces. Different levels and heights should be suggested through one or two platforms or risers, with a set of stairs that lead to the castle in the air.
**ACT I, SCENE I: The Tollbooth**

*The stage is completely dark and silent. Suddenly the sound of someone winding an alarm clock is heard, and after that, the sound of a loud ticking is heard.*

*(LIGHTS UP in the CLOCK, a huge alarm clock. The CLOCK reads 4:00. The lighting should make it appear that the CLOCK is in the air (if possible). The CLOCK ticks for 30 seconds.)*

**CLOCK.**  See that! Half a minute gone by. Seems like a long time when you’re waiting for something to happen, doesn’t it? Funny thing is; time can pass very slowly or very fast and sometimes even both at once. The time now? Oh, a little after four, but what that means should depend on you. Too often, we do something simply because time tells us to. Time for school, time for bed, whoops, 12:00, time to be hungry. It can get a little silly, don’t you think? Time is important, but it’s what you do with it that makes it so. So my advice to you is to use it. Keep your eyes open and your ears perked. Otherwise, it will pass before you know it, and you’ll certainly have missed something!

Things have a habit of doing that, you know. Being here one minute and gone the next.

In the twinkling of an eye.

In a jiffy.

In a flash!

I know a girl who yawned and missed a whole summer vacation. And what about that caveman who took a nap one afternoon, and woke up to find himself completely alone. You see, while he was sleeping, someone had invented the wheel and everyone had moved to the suburbs. Then of course, there is Milo. *(LIGHTS UP to reveal MILO’s Bedroom. The CLOCK appears to be on a shelf in the room of a young boy – a room filled with books, toys, games,*
maps, papers, pencils, a bed, a desk. There is a dartboard with numbers and the face of the MATHEMAGICIAN, a bedspread made from KING AZAZ’s cloak, a kite looking like the spelling bee, a punching bag with the HUMBUG’s face, as well as records, a television, a toy car, and a large box that is wrapped and has an envelope taped to the top. The sound of FOOTSTEPS is heard, and then enter MILO unhappily. He throws down his books and coat, flops into a chair; and sighs loudly.) Who never knows what to do with himself – not just sometimes, but always. When he’s in school, he wants to be out, and when he’s out, he wants to be in. (During the following speech, MILO examines the various toys, tools, and other possessions in the room, trying them out and refusing them.) Wherever he is, he wants to be somewhere else – and when he gets there, so what. Everything is too much trouble or a waste of time. Books – he’s already read them. Games – boring. T.V. – dumb. So what’s left? Another long, boring afternoon. Unless he bothers to notice a very large package that happened to arrive today.

MILO. (Suddenly notices the package. He drags himself over to it, and disinterestedly reads the label.) “For Milo, who has plenty of time.” Well, that’s true. (Sighs and looks at it.) No. (Walks away.) Well ... (Comes back. Rips open envelope and reads.)

A VOICE. “This package contains the following items:” (MILO pulls the items out of the box and sets them up as they are mentioned.) “One (1) genuine turnpike tollbooth to be made according to directions. Three (3) precautionary signs to be used in a precautionary fashion. Assorted coins for paying tolls. One (1) map, strictly up to date, showing how to get from here to there. One (1) book of rules and traffic regulations which may not be bent or broken. Warning! Results are not guaranteed. If not perfectly satisfied, your wasted time will be refunded.”
MILO. (Skeptically.) Come off it, who do you think you’re kidding? (Walks around and examines tollbooth.) What am I supposed to do with this? (The ticking of the CLOCK grows loud and impatient.) Well ... what else do I have to do? (MILO gets into his toy car and drives up to the first sign.)

VOICE. “HAVE YOUR DESTINATION IN MIND.”

MILO. (Pulls out the map.) Now, let’s see. That’s funny. I never heard of any of these places. Well, it doesn’t matter anyway. Dictionopolis. That’s a weird name. I might as well go there. (Begins to move, following map. Drives off.)

CLOCK. See what I mean? You never know how things are going to get started. But when you’re bored, what you need more than anything is a rude awakening.

(The ALARM goes off very loudly as the stage darkens. The sound of the alarm is transformed into the honking of a car horn, and is then joined by the blasts, bleeps, roars and growls of heavy highway traffic. When the lights come up, MILO’s bedroom is gone and we see a lonely road in the middle of nowhere.)
ACT I SCENE II: The Road to Dictionopolis

(ENTER MILO in his car.)

MILO. This is weird! I don’t recognize any of this scenery at all.

(A SIGN is held up before MILO, surprising him.) Huh? (Reads.)

WELCOME TO EXPECTATIONS. INFORMATION, PREDICTIONS AND ADVICE CHEERFULLY OFFERED. PARK HERE AND BLOW HORN. (MILO blows horn.)

WHETHER MAN. (A little man wearing a long coat and carrying an umbrella pops up from behind the sign that he was holding. He speaks very fast and excitedly.) My, my, my, my welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome to the Land of Expectations, Expectations, Expectations! We don’t get many travelers these days; we certainly don’t get many travelers. Now what can I do for you? I’m the Whether Man.

MILO. (Referring to map.) Uh… is this the right road to Dictionopolis?

WHETHER MAN. Well now, well now, well now, I don’t know of any wrong road to Dictionopolis, so if this road goes to Dictionopolis at all, it must be the right road, and if it doesn’t, it must be the right road to somewhere else, because there are no wrong roads to anywhere. Do you think it will rain?

MILO. I thought YOU were the Weather Man.

WHETHER MAN. Oh, no. I’m the Whether Man, not the weather man. (Pulls out a SIGN or opens a FLAP of his coat, which reads: “WHETHER.”) After all, it’s more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be.

MILO. What kind of place is Expectations?

WHETHER MAN. Good question, good question! Expectations is the place you must always go to before you get to where you are going. Of course, some people
never go beyond Expectations, but my job is to hurry them along whether they like it or not. Now what else can I do for you? *(Opens his umbrella.)*

MILO. I think I can find my own way.

WHETHER MAN. Splendid, splendid, splendid! Whether or not you find your own way, you will surely find some way. If you happen to find my way, please return it back to me. I lost it years ago. I imagine by now it must be quite rusty. You did say it was going to rain, didn’t you? *(Escorts MILO to the car under the open umbrella.)* I’m glad you made your own decision. I do so hate to make up my mind about anything, whether it’s good or bad, up or down, rain or shine. Expect everything, I always say, and the unexpected never happens. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, good…

*(A loud CLAP of THUNDER is heard)* Oh dear! *(He looks up at the sky, puts out his hand to feel for rain, and RUNS AWAY. MILO watches in a puzzled way and drives on.)*

MILO. I’d better get out of Expectations, but fast. Talking to a guy like that all day would get me nowhere for sure. *(He tries to speed up, but finds instead that he is moving slower and slower.)* Oh, oh, now what? *(He can barely move. Behind MILO, the LETHARGARIANS begin to enter from all parts of the stage. They are dressed to match with the scenery and carry small pillows that look like rocks. Whenever they fall asleep, they rest on the pillows.)* Now I really am getting nowhere. I hope I didn’t take a wrong turn. *(The car stops. He tries to start it. It won’t move. He gets out and tries to fix it.)* I wonder where I am.

LETHARGARIAN 1. You’re … in … the … Dol … drums … *(MILO looks around.)*

LETHARGARIAN 2. Yes… the … Dol … drums … *(A YAWN is heard.)*

MILO. *(Yelling.)* WHAT ARE THE DOLDRUMS?
LETHARGARIAN 3. The Doldrums, my friend, are where nothing ever happens and nothing ever changes. *(Parts of the Scenery stand up or Six People come out of the scenery colored in the same colors of the trees or the road. They move very slowly and as soon as they move, they stop to rest again.)* Allow me to introduce all of us. We are the Lethargarians at your service.

MILO. *(Uncertainly.)* Very pleased to meet you. I think I’m lost. Can you help me?

LETHARGARIAN 4. Don’t say think. *(He yawns.)* It’s against the law.

LETHARGARIAN 1. No one’s allowed to think in the Doldrums. *(He falls asleep.)*

LETHARGARIAN 2. Don’t you have a rule book? It’s local ordinance 175389-J *(He falls asleep.)*

MILO. *(Pulls out rule book and reads.)* Ordinance 175389-J: “It shall be unlawful, illegal and unethical to think, think of thinking, surmising, presume, reason, meditate or speculate while in the Doldrums. Anyone breaking this law shall be severely punished.” That’s a ridiculous law! Everybody thinks!

ALL THE LETHARGARIANS. We don’t!

LETHARGARIAN 2. And most of the time, you don’t, that’s why you’re here. You weren’t thinking and you weren’t paying attention either. People who don’t pay attention often get stuck in the Doldrums. Face it, most of the time, you’re just like us. *(Fall, snoring, to the ground. MILO laughs.)*

LETHARGARIAN 5. Stop that at once. Laughing is against the law. Don’t you have a rule book? It’s local ordinance 574381-W

MILO. *(Opens rule book and reads.)* “In the Doldrums, laughter is frowned upon and smiling is permitted only on alternate Thursdays.” Well, if you can’t laugh or think, what can you do?
LETHARGARIAN 6. Anything as long as it’s nothing, and everything as long as it isn’t anything. There’s lots to do. We have a very busy schedule...

LETHARGARIAN 1. At 8:00 we get up and then we spend from 8 to 9 daydreaming.

LETHARGARIAN 2. From 9:00 to 9:30 we take our early mid-morning nap...

LETHARGARIAN 3. From 9:30 to 10:30 we dawdle, waste time and delay...

LETHARGARIAN 4. From 10:30 to 11:30 we take our late early morning nap...

LETHARGARIAN 5. From 11:30 to 12:00 we bide our time and then we eat our lunch.

LETHARGARIAN 6. From 1:00 to 2:00 we linger and loiter...

LETHARGARIAN 1. From 2:00 to 2:30, we take our early afternoon nap...

LETHARGARIAN 2. From 2:30 to 3:30, we put off for tomorrow what we could have done today...

LETHARGARIAN 3. From 3:30 to 4:00, we take our early late afternoon nap...

LETHARGARIAN 4. From 4:00 to 5:00 we loaf and lounge until dinner...

LETHARGARIAN 5. From 6:00 to 7:00, we dilly-dally...

LETHARGARIAN 6. From 7:00 to 8:00, we take our early evening nap and then for an hour before we go to bed, we waste time.

LETHARGARIAN 1. (Yawning.) You see, it’s really quite strenuous and tiring doing nothing all day long, and so once a week, we take a holiday and go nowhere.

LETHARGARIAN 5. Which is just where we were going when you came along. Would you care to join us?

MILO. (Yawning.) That’s where I seem to be going, anyway. (Stretching.) Tell me, does everyone here do nothing?
LETHARGARIAN 3. Everyone but the terrible watchdog! He’s always sniffing around to see that nobody wastes time!!! The most unpleasant character.

MILO. The Watchdog?

LETHARGARIAN 6. THE WATCHDOG!

ALL THE LETHARGARIANS. (Yelling at once.) RUN! WAKE UP! RUN! HERE HE COMES! THE WATCHDOG! (They all run off and ENTER a large dog with the head, feet, and tail of a dog, and the body of a clock, having the same face as the character THE CLOCK.)

WATCHDOG. What are you doing here?

MILO. Nothing much. Just killing time. You see...

WATCHDOG. KILLING TIME! (His ALARM RINGS in fury.) It’s bad enough wasting time without killing it. What are you doing in the Doldrums, anyway? Don’t you have anywhere to go?

MILO. I think I was on my way to Dictionopolis when I got stuck here. Can you help me?

WATCHDOG. Help you! You’ve got to help yourself! I suppose you know why you got stuck.

MILO. I guess I just wasn’t thinking.

WATCHDOG. Exactly! Now you’re on your way.

MILO. I am?

WATCHDOG. Of course. Since you got here by not thinking, it seems reasonable that in order to get out, you must start thinking. Do you mind if I get in? I love automobile rides. (He gets, in. They wait.) Well?

MILO. All right. I’ll try. (Screws up his face and thinks.) Are we moving?
WATCHDOG. Not yet. Think harder.

MILO. I’m thinking as hard as I can.

WATCHDOG. Well, think just a little harder than that. Come on, you can do it.

MILO. All right, all right. ... I’m thinking of all the planets in the solar system, and why water expands when it turns to ice, and all the words that begin with “q,” and ...

... (The wheels begin to move.) We’re moving! We’re moving!

WATCHDOG. Keep thinking.

MILO. (Thinking.) How a steam engine works and how to bake a pie and the difference between Fahrenheit and Centigrade...

WATCHDOG. Dictionopolis, here we come.

MILO. Hey, Watchdog, are you coming along?

TOCK. You can call me Tock, and keep your eyes on the road.

MILO. What kind of place is Dictionopolis, anyway?

TOCK. It’s where all the words in the world come from. It is used to be a marvelous place, but ever since Rhyme and Reason left, it hasn’t been the same.

MILO. Rhyme and Reason?

TOCK. The two princesses. They used to settle all the arguments between their two brothers who rule over the Land of Wisdom. You see, Azaz is the king of Dictionopolis and the Mathemagician is the king of Digitopolis and they almost never see eye to eye on anything. It was the job of the Princesses Sweet Rhyme and Pure Reason to solve the differences between the two kings, and they always did so well that both sides usually went home feeling very satisfied. But then, one day, the kings had an argument to end all arguments...
(The LIGHTS DIM on TOCK and MILO, and come up on KING AZAZ of Dictionopolis on another part of the stage. AZAZ has a great stomach, a grey beard reaching to his waist, a small crown and a long robe with the letters of the alphabet written all over it.)

AZAZ. Of course. I’ll accept the decision of Rhyme and Reason, though I have no doubt as to what it will be. They will choose words, of course. Everyone knows that words are more important than numbers any day of the week.

(The MATHEMAGICIAN appears opposite AZAZ. The MATHEMAGICIAN wears a long flowing robe covered entirely with complex mathematical equations, and a tall pointed hat. He carries a long staff with a pencil point at one end and a large rubber eraser at other.)

MATHEMAGICIAN. That’s what you think, Azaz. People wouldn’t even know what day of the week it is without numbers. Haven’t you ever looked at a calendar? Face it, Azaz. It’s numbers that count.

AZAZ. Don’t be ridiculous. (To audience, as if leading a cheer.) Let’s hear it for WORDS!

MATHEMAGICIAN. (To audience, in the same manner.) Cast your vote for NUMBERS!

AZAZ. A, B, C’s!

MATHEMAGICIAN. 1, 2, 3’s! (A FANFARE is heard.)

AZAZ AND MATHEMAGICIAN. (To each other.) Quiet!

Rhyme and Reason are about to announce their decision.

(RHYME and REASON appear.)

RHYME. Ladies and gentlemen, letters and numerals, fractions and punctuation marks – May we have your attention, please. After careful consideration of the problem set before us by King Azaz of Dictionopolis (AZAZ bows.) and the Mathemagician of Digitopolis (MATHEMAGICIAN raises his hands in a victory salute.) we have come to the following conclusion:
**REASON.** Words and numbers are of equal value, for in the cloak of knowledge, one is
the *warp* and the other is the *woof*.

**RHYME.** It is no more important to count the sands than it is to name the stars.

**RHYME AND REASON.** Therefore, let both kingdoms, Dictionopolis
and Digitopolis, live in peace.

*The sound of CHEERING is heard.*

**AZAZ.** Boo! Is what I say. Boo and Bah and Hiss!

**MATHEMAGICIAN.** What good are these girls if they can’t even settle an argument in
anyone’s favor? I think I have come to a decision of my own.

**AZAZ.** So have I.

**AZAZ AND MATHEMAGICIAN.** *(To the PRINCESSES.)* You are hereby banished from this
land to the Castle-in-the-Air. *(To each other.)* And as for you KEEP OUT OF MY
WAY! *(They stalk off in opposite directions.)*

*During this time, the set has been changed to the Market Square of Dictionopolis. LIGHTS
come UP on the deserted square.*

**TOCK.** And ever since then, there has been neither Rhyme nor Reason in this
kingdom. Words are misused and numbers are mismanaged. The argument
between the two kings has divided everyone and the real value of both words
and numbers has been forgotten. What a waste!

**MILO.** Why doesn’t somebody rescue the Princesses and set everything straight
again?

**TOCK.** That is easier said than done. The Castle-in-the-Air is very far from here, and
the one path which leads to it is guarded by ferocious demons. But hold on,
here we are. *(A Man appears, carrying a Gate and a small Tollbooth.)*
GATEKEEPER. AHHHREMMM! This is Dictionopolis, a happy kingdom, advantageously located in the foothills of Confusion and touched by gentle breezes from the Sea of Knowledge. Today, by royal proclamation, is Market Day. Have you come to buy or sell?

MILO. I beg your pardon?

GATEKEEPER. Buy or sell, buy or sell. Which is it? You must have come here for a reason.

MILO. Well, I …

GATEKEEPER. Come now, if you don’t have a reason, you must at least have an explanation or certainly an excuse.

MILO. (Meekly.) Uh … no.

GATEKEEPER. (Shaking his head.) Very serious. You can’t get in without a reason. (Thoughtfully.) Wait a minute. Maybe I have an old one you can use. (Pulls out an old suitcase from the tollbooth and rummages through it.) No … no… no… this won’t do… hmmm…

MILO. (To TOCK.) What’s he looking for? (TOCK shrugs.)

GATEKEEPER. Ah! This is fine. (Pulls out a Medallion on a chain. Engraved in the Medallion is: “WHY NOT?”) Why not. That’s a good reason for almost anything… a bit used, perhaps, but still quite serviceable. There you are, sir. Now I can truly say: Welcome to Dictionopolis.

(He opens the Gate and walks off.)
ACT I SCENE III: A Feast of Words

(CITIZENS and MERCHANTS appear on all levels of the stage, and MILO and TOCK find themselves in the middle of a noisy marketplace. As some people buy and sell, others hang a large banner which reads: WELCOME TO THE WORD MARKET.)

MILO. Tock! Look!

MERCHANT 1. Hey-ya, hey-ya, step right up and take your pick. Juicy tempting words for sale. Get your fresh picked “if’s,” “and’s” and “but’s”! Just take a look at these nice ripe “where’s” and “when’s”.

MERCHANT 2. Step right up, step right up, fancy, best-quality words here for sale. Enrich your vocabulary and expand your speech with such elegant items as “quagmire,” “flabbergast,” or “upholstery”.

MERCHANT 3. Words by the bag, buy them over here. Words by the bag for the more talkative customer. A pound of “happy’s” at a very reasonable price... very useful for “Happy Birthday,” “Happy New Year,” “happy days,” or “happy-go-lucky.” Or how about a package of “good’s,” always handy for “good morning,” “good afternoon,” “good evening,” and “goodbye.”

MILO. I can’t believe it. Did you ever see so many words?

TOCK. They’re fine if you have something to say. (They come to a Do-It-Yourself Bin)

MILO. (To MERCHANT 4 at the bin.) Excuse me, but what are these?

MERCHANT 4. These are for people who like to make up their own words. You can pick any assortment you like or buy a special box complete with all the letters and a book of instructions. Here, taste an “A”. They’re very good. (He pops one into MILO’s mouth.)

MILO. (Tastes it hesitantly.) It’s sweet! (He eats it.)
MERCHANT 4. I knew you’d like it. “A” is one of our bestsellers. All of them aren’t that good, you know. The “Z,” for instance – very dry and sawdusty. And the “X”? Tastes like a trunkful of musty air. But most of the others aren’t bad at all. Here, try the “I.”

MILO. (Tasting.) Cool! It tastes icy.

MERCHANT 4. (To TOCK.) How about the “C” for you? It’s as crunchy as a bone. Most people are just too lazy to make their own words, but take it from me, not only is it more fun, but it’s also de-lightful, (Holds up a “D.”) e-lating, (Holds up an “E.”) and extremely useful! (Holds up a “U.”)

MILO. But isn’t it difficult? I’m not very good at making words.

(The SPELLING BEE, a large colorful bee, comes up from behind.)

SPELLING BEE. Perhaps I can be of some assistance… a-s-s-i-s-t-a-n-c-e. (The Three turn around and see him.) Don’t be alarmed … a-l-a-r-m-e-d. I am the Spelling Bee. I can spell anything. Anything. A-n-y-t-h-i-n-g. Try me. Try me.

MILO. (Backing off, TOCK on his guard.) Can you spell goodbye?

SPELLING BEE. Perhaps you are under the misapprehension… m-i-s-a-p-p-e-h-e-n-s-i-o-n that I am dangerous. Let me assure you that I am quite peaceful. Now, think of the most difficult word you can, and I’ll spell it.

MILO. Uh… o.k. (At this point, MILO may turn to the audience and ask them to help him to choose a word or he may think of one on his own.) How about “…Curiosity”?

SPELLING BEE. (Winking.) Let’s see now … uh … how much time do I have?

MILO. Just ten seconds. Count them off, Tock.
SPELLING BEE.  (As Tock counts.) Oh dear, oh dear. (Just as the last moment, quickly.) C-U-R-I-O-S-I-T-Y.

MERCHANT 4.  Correct! (ALL Cheer.)

MILO.  Can you spell anything?

SPELLING BEE.  (Proudly.) Just about. You see, years ago, I was an ordinary bee minding my own business, smelling flowers all day, occasionally picking up part-time work in people’s bonnets. Then one day, I realized that I’d never amount to anything without an education, so I decided that...

HUMBUG.  (Coming up in a booming voice.) BALDERDASH! (He wears a lavish coat, striped pants, checked vest, spats and a derby hat.) Let me repeat ... BALDERDASH! (Swings his cane and clicks his heels in the air.) Well, well, what have we here? Isn’t someone going to introduce me to the little boy?

SPELLING BEE.  (Disdainfully.) This is the Humbug. You can’t trust a word he says.

HUMBUG.  NONSENSE! Everyone can trust a Humbug. As I was saying to the king just the other day...

SPELLING BEE:  You’ve never met the king. (To Milo.) Don’t believe a thing he tells you.

HUMBUG.  Bosh, my boy, pure bosh. The Humbugs are an old and noble family, with honorable descendants. Why, we fought in the Crusades with Richard the Lionhearted, crossed the Atlantic with Colombus, blazed trails with the pioneers. History is full of Humbugs.

SPELLING BEE:  A very pretty speech... s-p-e-c-h. Now, why don’t you go away? I was just advising the lad of the importance of proper spelling.

HUMBUG.  BAH! As soon as you learn to spell one word, they ask you to spell another. You can never catch up, so why bother? (Puts his arm around Milo.) Take my
advice, boy, and forget about it. As my great-great-great grandfather George Washington Humbug used to say...

**SPELLING BEE.** You, sir, are an impostor _I-M-P-O-S-T-O-R_ who can’t even spell his own name!

**HUMBUG.** What? You dare to doubt my word? The word of a Humbug? The word of a Humbug who has direct access to the ear of a King? And the king shall hear of this, I promise you...

**VOICE 1.** Did someone call for the King?

**VOICE 2.** Did you mention the monarch?

**VOICE 3.** Speak of the sovereign?

**VOICE 4.** Request the Emperor?

**VOICE 5.** Call his highness?

(Five tall, thin gentlemen regally dressed in silks and satins, plumed hats and buckled shoes appear as they speak.)

**MILO.** Who are they?

**SPELLING BEE:** The King’s advisors. Or in more formal terms, his cabinet.

**MINISTER 1.** Greetings!

**MINISTER 2.** Salutations!

**MINISTER 3.** Welcome!

**MINISTER 4.** Good Afternoon!

**MINISTER 5.** Hello!

**MILO.** Uh ... Hi.
(All the MINISTERS, from here on called by their numbers, unfold their scrolls and read in order.)

MINISTER 1. By the order of Azaz the Unabridged...

MINISTER 2. King of Dictionopolis...

MINISTER 3. Monarch of letters...

MINISTER 4. Emperor of phrases, sentences, and various figures of speech...

MINISTER 5. We offer you the hospitality of our kingdom...

MINISTER 1. Country

MINISTER 2. Nation

MINISTER 3. State

MINISTER 4. Commonwealth

MINISTER 5. Realm

MINISTER 1. Empire

MINISTER 2. Palatinate

MINISTER 3. Principality.

MILO. Do all those words mean the same thing?

MINISTER 1. Of course.

MINISTER 2. Certainly.

MINISTER 3. Precisely.

MINISTER 4. Exactly.

MINISTER 5. Yes.
MILO. Then why don’t you use just one? Wouldn’t that make a lot more sense?

MINISTER 1. Nonsense!

MINISTER 2. Ridiculous!

MINISTER 3. Fantastic!

MINISTER 4. Absurd!

MINISTER 5. Bosh!

MINISTER 1. We’re not interested in making sense. It’s not our job.

MINISTER 2. Besides, one word is as good as another, so why not use them all?

MINISTER 3. Then you don’t have to choose which one is right.

MINISTER 4. Besides, if one is right, then ten are ten times as right.

MINISTER 5. Obviously, you don’t know who we are.

(Each presents himself and MILO acknowledges the introduction.)

MINISTER 1. The Duke of Definition.

MINISTER 2. The Minister of Meaning

MINISTER 3. The Earl of Essence.

MINISTER 4. The Count of Connotation.

MINISTER 5. The Undersecretary of Understanding.

ALL FIVE. And we have come to invite you to the Royal Banquet.

SPELLING BEE: The banquet! That’s quite an honor, my boy. A real h-o-n-o-r.

HUMBUG. DON’T BE RIDICULOUS! Everybody goes to the Royal Banquet these days.
SPELLING BEE: (To the HUMBUG.) True, everybody does go. But some people are invited and others simply push their way in where they aren’t wanted.

HUMBUG. HOW DARE YOU? You buzzing little upstart, I’ll show you who’s not wanted… (Raises his cane threateningly.)

SPELLING BEE: You just watch it! I’m warning w-a-r-n-i-n-g you! (At that moment, an ear-shattering blast of TRUMPETS, entirely off-key, is heard, and a PAGE appears.)

PAGE. King Azaz the Unabridged is about to begin the Royal banquet. All guests who do not appear promptly at the table will automatically lose their place. (A huge Table is carried out with KING AZAZ sitting in a large chair, carried out at the head of the table.)

AZAZ. Places. Everyone take your places. (All the characters, including the HUMBUG and the SPELLING BEE, who forget their quarrel, rush to take their places at the table. MILO and TOCK sit near the king. AZAZ looks at MILO.) And just who is this?

MILO. Your Highness, my name is Milo and this is Tock. Thank you very much for inviting us to your banquet, and I think your palace is beautiful!

MINISTER 1. Exquisite.

MINISTER 2. Lovely.

MINISTER 3. Handsome.

MINISTER 4. Pretty.

MINISTER 5. Charming.

AZAZ. SILENCE! Now tell me, young man, what can you do to entertain us? Sing songs? Tell stories? Juggle plates? Do tumbling tricks? Which is it?
MILO. I can’t do any of those things.

AZAZ. What an ordinary little boy. Can’t you do anything at all?

MILO. Well... I can count to a thousand.

AZAZ. AARGH, numbers! Never mention numbers here. Only use them when we absolutely have to. Now, why don’t we change the subject and have some dinner? Since you are the guest of honor, you may pick the menu.

MILO. Me? Well, uh... I’m not very hungry. Can we just have a light snack?

AZAZ. A light snack it shall be!

(AZAZ claps his hands. Waiters rush in with covered trays. When they are uncovered, Shafts of Light pour out. The light may be created through the use of battery-operated flashlights, which are secured in the trays and covered with a false bottom. The Guests help themselves.)

HUMBUG. Not a very substantial meal. Maybe you can suggest something a little more filling.

MILO. Well, in that case, I think we ought to have a square meal...

AZAZ. (Claps his hands.) A square meal it is! (Waiters serve trays of Colored Squares of all sizes. People serve themselves.)

SPELLING BEE. These are awful. (HUMBUG coughs and all the Guests do not care for the food.)

AZAZ. (Claps his hands and the trays are removed.) Time for speeches. (To MILO.) You first.

MILO. (Hesitantly.) Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take this opportunity to say that...

AZAZ. That’s quite enough. Mustn’t talk all day.
MILO. But I just started to...

AZAZ. NEXT!

HUMBUG. (Quickly.) Roast turkey, mashed potatoes, vanilla ice cream.

SPELLING BEE. Hamburgers, corn on the cob, chocolate pudding p-u-d-d-i-n-g. (Each Guest names two dishes and a dessert.)

AZAZ. (The last.) Pâté de foie gras, soupe à l’oignon, salade endives, fromage et fruits et demi-tasse. (He claps his hands. Waiters serve each Guest his Words.) Dig in. (To MILO.) Though I can’t say I think much of your choice.

MILO. I didn’t know I was going to have to eat my words.

AZAZ. Of course, of course, everybody here does. Your speech should have been in better taste.

MINISTER 1. Here, try some somersault. It improves the flavor.

MINISTER 2. Have a rigmarole. (Offers breadbasket.)

MINISTER 3. Or a ragamuffin.

MINISTER 4. Perhaps you’d care for a synonym bun.

MINISTER 5. Why not wait for your just deserts?

AZAZ. Ah yes, the dessert. We’re having a special treat today... freshly made at the half-bakery.

MILO. The half-bakery?

AZAZ. Of course, the half-bakery! Where do you think half-baked ideas come from? Now, please don’t interrupt. By royal command, the pastry chefs have...

MILO. What’s a half-baked idea?
(AZAZ gives up the idea of speaking as a cart is wheeled in and the Guests help themselves.)

**HUMBUG.** They’re very tasty, but they don’t always agree with you. Here’s a good one.

*(HUMBUG hands one to MILO.)*

**MILO.** *(Reads.)* “The earth is flat.”

**SPELLING BEE.** People swallowed that one for years. *(Picks up one and reads.)* “The moon is made of green cheese.” Now, there’s a half-baked idea.

*(Everyone chooses one and eats. They include: “It Never Rains But Pours,” “Night Air Is Bad Air.” “Everything Happens for the Best,” “Coffee Stunts Your Growth.”)*

**AZAZ.** And now for a few closing words. Attention! Let me have your attention!

*(Everyone leaps up and Exits, except for MILO, TOCK, and the HUMBUG.)* Loyal subjects and friends, once again on this gala occasion, we have...

**MILO.** Excuse me, but everybody left.

**AZAZ.** *(Sadly.)* I was hoping no one would notice. It happens every time.

**HUMBUG.** They’re gone to dinner, and as soon as I finish this last bite, I shall join them.

**MILO.** That’s ridiculous. How can they eat dinner right after a banquet?

**AZAZ.** SCANDALOUS! We’ll put a stop to it at once. From now on, by royal command, everyone must eat dinner before the banquet.

**MILO.** But that’s just as bad!

**HUMBUG.** Or just as good. Things which are equally bad are also equally good.

Try to look at the bright side of things.

**MILO.** I don’t know which side of anything to look at. Everything is so confusing, and all your words only make things worse.
AZAZ. How true. There must be something we can do about it.

HUMBUG. Pass a law!

AZAZ. We have almost as many laws as words.

HUMBUG. Offer a reward. *(AZAZ shakes his head and looks madder at each suggestion.)* Send for help? Drive a bargain? Pull the switch? Lower the boom? Toe the line?

*(As AZAZ continues to scowl, the HUMBUG loses confidence and finally gives up.)*

MILO. Maybe you should let Rhyme and Reason return.

AZAZ. How nice that would be. Even if they were a bother at times, things always went so well when they were here. But I’m afraid it can’t be done.

HUMBUG. Certainly not. Can’t be done.

MILO. Why not?

HUMBUG. *(Now siding with MILO.) Why not, indeed?*

AZAZ. Much too difficult.

HUMBUG. Of course, much too difficult.

MILO. You could, if you really wanted to.

HUMBUG. By all means, if you really wanted to, you could.

AZAZ. *(To HUMBUG.) How?*

MILO. *(Also to HUMBUG.) Yeah, how?*

HUMBUG. Why... uh, it’s a simple task for a brave boy with a powerful heart, a focused dog and a useful small automobile.

AZAZ. Go on.
HUMBUG. Well, all that he would have to do is cross the dangerous, unknown countryside between here and Digitopolis, where he would have to persuade the Mathemagician to release the Princesses, which we know to be impossible because the Mathemagician will never agree with Azaz about anything. Once achieving that, it’s a simple matter of entering the Mountains of Ignorance from where no one has ever returned alive, an effortless climb up a two thousand food stairway without railing in a high wind at night to the Castle-in-the-Air. After a pleasant chat with the Princesses, all that remains is a leisurely ride back through those chaotic steep rocks where the frightening fiends have sworn to tear any intruder limb from limb and swallow him down to his belt buckle. Finally after doing all that, a triumphal parade! If, of course, there is anything left to parade... followed by hot chocolate and cookies for everyone.

AZAZ. I never realized it would be so simple.

MILO. It sounds dangerous to me.

TOCK. And just who is supposed to make that journey?

AZAZ. A very good question. But there is one far more serious problem.

MILO. What’s that?

AZAZ. I’m afraid I can’t tell you that until you return.

MILO. But wait a minute, I didn’t...

AZAZ. Dictionopolis will always be grateful to you, my boy, and your dog. (AZAZ pats TOCK and MILO.)

TOCK. Now, just one moment, sire...

AZAZ. You will face many dangers on your journey, but fear not, for I can give you something for your protection. (AZAZ gives MILO a box.) In this box are the letters of the alphabet. With them, you can form all the words you will ever
need to help you overcome the obstacles that may stand in your path. All you must do is use them well and in the right places.)

MILO.  *(Miserably.)* Thanks a lot.

AZAZ. You will need a guide, of course, and since he knows the obstacles so well, the Humbug has cheerfully volunteered to accompany you.

HUMBUG. Now, see here ...!

AZAZ. You will find him trustworthy, brave, resourceful and loyal.

HUMBUG. *(Flattered.)* Oh, your Majesty.

MILO. I’m sure he’ll be a great help. *(They approach the car.)*

TOCK. I hope so. It looks like we’re going to need it.

*(The lights darken and the KING fades from view.)*

AZAZ. Good luck! Drive carefully! *(The three get into the car and begin to move. Suddenly a thunderously loud NOISE is heard. They slow down the car.)*

MILO. What was that?

TOCK. It came from up ahead.

HUMBUG. It’s something terrible, I just know it. Oh, no. Something dreadful is going to happen to us. I can feel it in my bones. *(The NOISE is repeated. They all look at each other fearfully as the lights fade.)*