(ABSOLUTE DARKNESS. A voice in the dark. After a moment, a flashlight explores the stage, moves along the bottom length, then up, finding Josh asleep on the jail bed. Josh jumps to his feet.)

JOSH
Who's there? Who is it? Who's there?

(Michael holds the flashlight under his chin illuminating only his face.)

MICHAEL
Why me?

JOSH
What is this? What is this?

MICHAEL
We played ball together. You were awesome on the field. You were unstoppable.

JOSH
Survival of the fittest, baby.

MICHAEL
And you were only a freshman. You could've been team captain in your senior year. Why'd you kill me? I never hurt you.

JOSH
It was more fun than droppin' dudes in a video game.

(Michael's flashlight goes out. Katie holds her flashlight under her chin.)

KATIE
Why me, Josh?

JOSH
Why not? World's overpopulated. I wanted to do my part.

KATIE
You liked me.

JOSH
Once upon a time.

KATIE
Why'd you have to kill me?

JOSH
Felt like it, okay? Happy now?
(Katie's flashlight goes out. Matt holds his flashlight under his chin.)

MATT
Why me?

JOSH
What is this?

MATT
Why me? I don't even know you.

JOSH
You were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

(Matt's flashlight goes out. Jessie holds her flashlight under her chin.)

JESSIE
Why me?

JOSH
Why not you? Everybody's gotta die sometime. Might as well get it over with.

(Jessie's flashlight goes out. Josh lays back on the bed. Emily leans over him, holds her flashlight under her chin. Josh springs up, surprised.)

EMILY
Why me, Josh? We live on the same street. We used to make mud pies together when we were little kids. I taught you how to blow bubbles with chewing gum. I came to your birthdays, you came to mine. When we were eleven you let me play war with you and the other boys because you liked how I died.

(Let the five deceased improvise pre-teen kids playing war, using their fingers for guns and making shooting sounds. They run around in the dark, their flashlights sweeping the floor, looking for the enemy, the lights criss-crossing. Let them shout "bam, bam you're dead" ("pow, pow" and other variants). Eventually Emily "kills" Katie and Matt who drop dead. Michael shoots Jessie who falls dead. Michael and Emily shoot each other at the same time. Michael drops dead at once. Emily dies very dramatically with all the appropriate sounds. Beat.)

EMILY (LYING ON FLOOR)
Hope I didn't disappoint you in the cafeteria this morning. Hope I died just right for you, Josh.

JOSH
You didn't have to fall on me and get me all bloody.
EMILY
Want to see it again? --Go on. Shoot me again.

(Josh pretends to shoot her. She dies again very dramatically.)

JOSH
Love that feeling.

ACTOR 2
Love it.

ACTOR 4
Crave it.

ACTOR 5
Need it.

ACTOR 2
Gotta have a gun grip in your hand.

(Chorus echoes the word "hand.")

JOSH
Always wanted to be an Army Ranger parachuting behind enemy lines, ever since I could hold a--

ACTOR 4
Cap gun.

ACTOR 5
Water gun.

ACTOR 2
Air gun.

ACTOR 4
Pop gun.

ACTOR 5
B.B. gun

JOSH
Twelve gauge.

ACTOR 2
22.

ACTOR 4
38.

ACTOR 5
45.

JOSH
A gun makes you feel alive.
(Chorus echoes "alive.")

Respect.

ACTOR 2

Watch out!

ACTOR 4

Move aside!

ACTOR 5

JOSH

Nobody can touch you.

ACTOR 2

When you have a gun--

JOSH

Nobody mocks you.

ACTOR 4

When you have a gun--

JOSH

You can take on anybody.

ACTOR 5

Anybody.

ACTOR 2

The champ wrestler.

ACTOR 4

The whole wrestling team.

ACTOR 5

The bad dudes.

ACTOR 2

Gang bangers.

JOSH

When you have a gun, people talk nice.

ACTOR 4

When you have a gun--

JOSH

People look at you like a V.I.P.

(Chorus echoes "V.I.P.")

ACTOR 5

Somebody bumps you, they say, Excuse me.
You walk different--
When you have a gun.

JOSH

You talk different--
When you have a gun.

ACTOR 2

You think different--
When you have a gun.

ACTOR 4

It's so cool--
When you have a gun.

ACTOR 5

(Chorus loudly echoes "gun."

ACTOR 4

It's an A-plus.

ACTOR 5

Slam dunk.

ACTOR 2

Touchdown.

ACTOR 4

Put down.

ACTOR 5

All in one.

(Chorus echoes "one."

ACTOR 4

Love that military stance!

JOSH

You ain't got a chance--

ACTOR 2

Respect!

ACTOR 4

Watch out!

ACTOR 5
ACTOR 2

Move aside!

ACTOR 4

You can be whatever you wanna be--

JOSH

'Cause a gun in your hand is a Ph.D.

(Lights on Actor 1 and Actor 3 as Josh's parents. The deceased train their flashlight beams on the parents as they enter.)

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)

Josh, there's no way we're buying you a rifle.

JOSH

Mom, will you listen to me?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)

First you had to have a p.c., then every video game ever made, then a laptop--

JOSH

For school, dad.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)

Then a cell phone, a beeper and the newest style Nikes every three months--

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)

You have to have every CD you hear on the radio.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)

An expensive mountain bike you rode three times.

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)

A snowboard you never used. And now a rifle? Please.

JOSH

Grandpa wants to take me hunting.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)

I'm absolutely against it.

JOSH

Grandpa hunts. Are you rejecting what your own father thinks?

Of course not.

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)

JOSH

Then I should have the rifle, right?
ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
I wish you felt as passionate about your grades as you do about a rifle.

JOSH
You're changing the subject.

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
You've got a high I.Q. Your B's and C's could be all A's.

JOSH
Will you get off my back about my I.Q.?

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
We might feel differently if you were living up to your full potential.

JOSH
Okay, you get me the rifle and I'll bring home all A's on my next report card. Deal?

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
We'll talk about a rifle when we see all A's.

JOSH
You don't even trust me.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
Josh, you know that's not true.

JOSH
If you trust me, then get me the rifle now.

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
When you get all A's, we'll discuss it.

JOSH
Hunting season will be over before grades come out. Then I have to wait a whole year!

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
You have to learn patience.

JOSH
Hunting teaches patience. Grandpa said. But what's he know? He's only your father. All I want is to spend some time with grandpa and hear his stories about when he grew up. Learn some responsibility. Learn respect for firearms. How is all that bad?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
It's not bad, Josh. It's just that we're not comfortable with guns.
JOSH
If I wanted to, I could get a gun in school for fifty bucks.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
How?

JOSH
Easy. I know a kid who stole a gun from his father. But I wouldn't buy it because that would be wrong. Is this what I get for being honest?

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
Maybe his honesty deserves the rifle for a reward.

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
Maybe you shouldn't cave in every time Josh throws a tantrum.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
What about the electric guitar you got him when he threw himself on the floor?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
At least that showed an interest in music.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
Yeah, and now it's collecting dust in the closet.

(Actors 1 and 3 walk off arguing.)

JOSH
Divide and conquer. Works every time. So don't blame me. Blame my folks, okay? They didn't have to buy me a rifle.

EMILY
You still didn't answer my question. Why me? Why did you kill me?

JOSH
It's simple math. My rifle holds five bullets. Five bullets, five people. Perfect.

MICHAEL
The bullet that killed me pierced my parents' hearts, too.

KATIE
Pierced my brothers' and sisters' hearts.

MATT
Pierced my friends hearts.
JESSIE
Pierced the hearts of parents who send their kids to school.

EMILY
Just five bullets wounded hundreds.

Thousands.

MICHAEL
Wounds that bleed.

KATIE
Wounds that weep.

MATT
Wounds that never heal.

JESSIE
Wounds that are very real.

EMILY
Wounds that are very real.

ALL
Thousands!

JOSH
Get lost.

(Josh lies down to sleep again. Emily pulls off his blanket.)

EMILY
That's not a good enough answer, Josh.

MICHAEL
And that's not fair.

KATIE
Not fair.

MATT
Not fair at all.

JESSIE
That our bodies lie in coffins.

EMILY
While you still breathe the air.

JOSH
Look at it this way: you got yourselves a cozy little place, and you can't beat the rent.

MICHAEL
It's not fair.
KATIE
Not fair.

MATT
Not fair at all.

JESSIE
That we're under the earth--

EMILY
And you don't even care.

JOSH
Know what's not fair? Some dude jumped me before I had a chance to reload. I could've dropped a lot more bodies and made history.

MICHAEL
We demand an honest answer, Josh. Why? Why'd you kill us?

JOSH
It was fun.

(The deceased stand in a circle and push Josh around like a ball.)

KATIE
You don't have the proper frame of mind.

MATT
We'll be all over you.

JESSIE
Up one side.

EMILY
Down the other.

MICHAEL
In your face.

KATIE
Under your skin.

MATT
Till you tell us why.

JESSIE
Why?

EMILY
Why'd you kill us?

JOSH
Lay off me.
MICHAEL
We're gonna open you up.

KATIE
Dissect you like a frog.

MATT
Pluck out your heart.

JESSIE
Just for a start.

MICHAEL
Till you tell us why.

EMILY
Why?

MICHAEL
Why me?

KATIE
Why anybody?

MATT
Why?

JESSIE
Why?

EMILY
Why'd you kill us?

JOSH
'Cause there was nothing good on t.v.

MICHAEL
We'll do whatever it takes tonight.

KATIE
Whatever it takes.

MATT
To crack you open.

JESSIE
Till then you'll live in hell.

EMILY
Without love.

MICHAEL
Without decency.

KATIE
Without comfort.
A kid in a cage.

MATT

In a zoo of misfits.

JESSIE

Even until your release.

EMILY

When you're a stooped--

MICHAEL

Broken--

KATIE

Bitter, old man.

MATT

Full of scars.

JESSIE

Scars on body and mind.

MICHAEL

Friendless.

KATIE

Hopeless.

MATT

Mindless.

JESSIE

Soul-less.

EMILY

Some lawyer'll get me off.

JOSH (LAUGHING)

If you survive.

MICHAEL

Survive what?

JOSH

Yo, bad boy.

DRUMMER (AS CON)

You talking to me? My name's Josh. What's yours?

JOSH

You the new dude that offed seven people?
JOSH
If that dude didn't jump me I had enough ammo on me to take out a hundred more. I'd've made history.

DRUMMER (AS CON)
Tomorr' we gonna see just how bad you are.

JOSH
What do you mean?

DRUMMER (AS CON)
You'll see what we mean, bad boy.

JOSH (to himself)
Whoa.

MICHAEL
Feel your cell start to shrink?

KATIE
Feel the walls closing in?

MATT
Compressing your thoughts?

JESSIE
Cramming your brain?

EMILY
Driving you insane?

MICHAEL
You'll wish you were dead every so often.

KATIE
Your six by eight will be your coffin.

MATT
Nobody will hear.

JESSIE
When you scream and cry.

EMILY
Why? Why? Why'd you kill us?

JOSH
You can't hurt me. You're all dead.

MICHAEL
We need some answers, Josh.

KATIE
We want some answers tonight, Josh.
MATT
We want the truth.

JESSIE
The whole truth.

EMILY
And nothing but the truth.

JOSH
As the cop said, I have the right to remain silent. Anything I say can be held against me in a court of law.

(Quick drum rhythm. The deceased up-end the box converting it to a judge's bench by opening the lid so that it's up vertically. Actor 2 stands behind box and bangs the gavel. [Because the courtroom scene is just a fantasy, it should be played speeded up, without pause, so that Josh's nightmare trial is over in a matter of seconds.])

ACTOR 2 (AS JUDGE)
The court will hear the prosecutor's opening statement.

ACTOR 4 (AS PROSECUTOR)
Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury: seven dead bodies. Dozens of witnesses. What's to think about?

ACTOR 2 (AS JUDGE)
The court will now hear from the public defender.

ACTOR 1 (AS PUBLIC DEFENDER)
Josh was a good student, a popular student, a good son. There's only one explanation--temporary insanity.

ACTOR 4 (AS PROSECUTOR)
I call witnesses for the prosecution!

ACTOR 3 (AS WITNESS)
Josh pulled the wings off a butterfly when he was five and he plagiarized on a paper for English class.

ACTOR 2 (AS JUDGE)
The court will now hear closing statements.

ACTOR 4 (AS PROSECUTOR)
As I see it, you the jury have a very difficult choice between the electric chair and lethal injection.
ACTOR 1 (AS PUBLIC DEFENDER)
Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, he's just a child.
I urge you to put Josh in a psychiatric ward.

JOSH
I'm not psycho just because my parents forced me to see a shrink. I knew what I was doing!

ACTOR 2 (AS JUDGE)
Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?

ACTOR 5 (AS JURY FOREWOMAN)
We have Your Honor. Life imprisonment without possibility.

JOSH
Possibility of what?

ACTOR 5 (AS JURY FOREWOMAN)
Without possibility of anything good.

(Beat. Lights fade. Chorus exits. Deceased and Josh remain.)

MICHAEL
You'll never achieve your dreams.

KATIE
Never skydive.

MATT
Never scuba off Australia.

JESSIE
Never explore the caldera of a volcano.

EMILY
Never fly a helicopter.

MICHAEL
Never be a sportscaster.

KATIE
Never ski again.

MATT
Never body surf.

JESSIE
Never meet people on the internet.

EMILY
Never know what you could've been--
Loved in your lifetime.

Now you'll never know all the happiness that was yours.

But you'll wonder.

And the wonderment will eat you alive.

Eat you for breakfast.

Eat you for lunch.

Eat you for dinner.

While all your dreams mock you--

Mock you--

Mock you--

Mock you through the bars.

(The box is restored to a bed. Josh lies down to sleep on the blanket.)

Who cares? The whole thing will be off my record when I'm eighteen anyway. Maybe I'll be out of here when I'm twenty-one. You're all just a bad dream.

Sometimes bad dreams come true.
(The deceased wrap Josh in the blanket, pick him up, making the box a coffin. They drop him in, close the lid. We hear Josh kicking and screaming inside. They turn the box on its side, open the lid. Josh tumbles out screaming and thrashing around. He begins to look at the deceased with new respect.)

MICHAEL
That's how it is under the earth.

KATIE
In the dark.

MATT
Alone.

JESSIE
In silence.

EMILY
We really need some answers, Josh.

JOSH
Answers to what?

MICHAEL
What were you thinking?

KATIE
What was in your heart?

MATT
Why'd you smile when you killed us?

JOSH
I'm just a friendly guy.

JESSIE
Didn't you feel badly?

EMILY
Did you think of the buck when you shot me?

(Josh is astonished they know about his hunting experience. The tone changes. Josh is feeling vulnerable that they know his mind.)

JOSH
What buck?

(They deceased pick up the box and move it to another location.)

MICHAEL
You know what buck.
KATIE
Your first time hunting.

MATT
With your grandpa.

JOSH
How do you know that?

JESSIE
We know everything about you.

EMILY
All your thoughts.

MICHAEL
Feelings.

KATIE
Memories.

MATT
Dreams.

JESSIE
We know all your deep, dark secrets.

JOSH
How? How can you know all that?

EMILY
We're all in your head.

JOSH
Psych! Tell me one fact about that day. Tell me one thing grandpa said.

MICHAEL
Just you and grandpa in his old, red truck.

(Actor 1, as Grandpa, sits next to Josh on the box that now becomes a truck.)

ACTOR 1 (AS GRANDPA)
Respect the animals. Don't take a shot unless you know it's sure. Do it quick and clean. Otherwise the animal suffers.

JOSH
Wow.

KATIE
That old logging road is full of ruts.
JESSIE
You both bounce on the seat. You can't wait to shoot your new rifle.

JOSH
I'm pumped.

MICHAEL
Grandpa parks the truck. You both sit there. Waiting for six a.m.

KATIE
Waiting to shoot your new rifle.

ACTOR 1 (AS GRANDPA)
Let's go, Josh.

MATT
You both get out of the truck. It's cold. You can see your breath.

JESSIE
Grandpa watches you load the rifle's magazine.

EMILY
Five shiny bullets.

MICHAEL
You show him the safety is on.

ACTOR 1 (AS GRANDPA)
Atta boy. You'll be a man by the end of the day.

KATIE
Grandpa pats your back.

MATT
You both head for the forest.

JESSIE
You see other hunters.

EMILY
All grown men with rifles.

ACTOR 1 (AS GRANDPA)
Now you wait here. Keep still. I'll drive the game towards you.

MICHAEL
You sit on a log for two hours.

(Josh sits on the floor.)

KATIE
Hours on a cold, wet log covered with moss.
MATT
Wishing you were still in a warm bed.

JESSIE
Wishing you ate the oatmeal your mother begged you to eat.

EMILY
Nose goes numb.

MICHAEL
Fingers go numb.

KATIE
Toes go numb.

MATT
And you have a profound thought:

JOSH
Hunting sucks.

JESSIE
You doze off.

EMILY
Doze for five, ten, fifteen minutes.

MICHAEL
Something wakes you up.

KATIE
Rustling of dry leaves.

MATT
You don't move.

JESSIE
The rustling leaves sound comes closer.

EMILY
And then you see it.

MICHAEL
A buck.

KATIE
Eight pointer.

JOSH
Like in a dream. Amazing.

MATT
Magnificent.
You forget you're hunting.

MATT
You're taken by its beauty.

JESSIE
Utterly taken by its feral beauty.

EMILY
Its hot breath making weird ghosts in the cold air.

MICHAEL
And then you notice the rifle in your hand.

KATIE
You remember why you're there.

MATT
To kill.

JESSIE
Kill the magnificent--

EMILY
Kill the strong--

MICHAEL
Kill the proud--

KATIE
Kill the keen buck.

MATT
The time has come.

JESSIE
Time to be a man.

EMILY
But deep inside you don't know if you can really pull the trigger.

MICHAEL
But you must go home a man by the end of the day.
Or stay a boy who plays bang, bang, you're dead.

The buck sees me. Freezes.

You hear your heartbeat.

You raise your rifle.

(Josh mimes a rifle. GUNS IN ANY FORM MUST NEVER BE PART OF THIS PLAY.)

Can't find the buck in the scope--

Because your hands are shaking.

Hold your breath.

Crosshairs under the buck's shoulder.

The moment of truth has come.

But this buck's too beautiful to kill.

So you make your face a mask.

A mask that hides your face.

A face that hides the pain.

A pain that eats your heart.

A heart nobody knows.

You pull the trigger! Nothing happens!

The safety's still on!

You panic!
JESSIE
You click the safety off.

EMILY
The buck turns and runs like the wind.

You take aim--

MICHAEL
You take aim--

ALL DECEASED
Bam!

(On each "Bam," one loud drumbeat.)

KATIE
First shot misses!

ALL DECEASED
Bam!

MATT
Second shot misses.

ALL DECEASED
Bam!

JESSIE
Third shot misses!

ALL DECEASED
Bam!

EMILY
Fourth shot misses!

MATT
Down on one knee.

KATIE
Find the buck in the crosshairs.

MICHIEL
It is so beautiful.

JESSIE
Magnificent.

EMILY
Proud.

MICHIEL
Strong.

KATIE
All you want to be.
But the buck has to die so you can be a man--

Has to bleed.

Has to fall.

Has to die.

So you can be a man.

Bam!

(Final drumbeat.)

Buck goes down!

Cool!

You tear across the field.

Your eyes meet the buck's.

You see who you used to be--

(Slight beat.)

Full of fear--

Helpless.

Its chest heaves as blood pulses out like catsup--

Its legs kick as if to run on the air.

And it makes a pitiful sound that makes you hurt inside--

A cry that could be human.
Awww, man.

You wish it was all a game.

A game.

A video game.

Just hit reset.

And start again.

Start again.

Start all over again.

Because it hurts to see a---

Beautiful---

Magnificent---

Proud---

Keen buck dying on the ground.

You watch its life run out.

Blood thick as catsup.

And wish you could take it all back.

Take back the bullet.

Put back the blood.

Restore the buck to its majesty.
MICHAEL
Give back its pride.

KATIE
Return its strength.

MATT
Make it keen once more.

JESSIE
Let it be what it is and run like the wind.

JOSH
I thought it would be fun. I didn't know it would be like this. Please don't die.

EMILY
Your buck takes its last breath...You almost let yourself weep.

MICHAEL
But you hear boots on dead leaves.

KATIE
Grandpa comes out of breath.

MATT
He sees your dying buck.

JESSIE
He looks at you like no one's ever looked at you before.

EMILY
Like a man.

MICHAEL
As promised.

KATIE
A man by the end of the day.

MATT
Grandpa takes out a camera.

ACTOR 1 (AS GRANDPA)
C'mon, Josh. Can't you smile in your moment of glory?

JESSIE
You stop your tears.

EMILY
And you pose for the camera.
MICHAEL
You make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

(Actor 1, as Grandpa, takes a polaroid picture, hands it to Josh.)

MICHAEL
Now you have proof of who you are.

JESSIE
You carry the snapshot everywhere.

(Deceased carry the box back to original place.)

EMILY
You want the world to see you and your buck.

KATIE
You're dying to tell the story.

MATT
The story of how you took it down.

JESSIE
How you took its magnificence.

EMILY
Took its pride.

KATIE
Took its strength.

MATT
Made it part of you.

JESSIE
Part of your mask.

EMILY
The kid that nobody knows.
(Lights on Katie writing in a notebook. Enter Josh.)

JOSH
Hey, Katie.

KATIE
Hi.

JOSH
Writing your thing for speech class?
(she goes back to her work)
Guess what I wrote about.
(hands her the snapshot)
The buck I killed last weekend. Man, it was so
cool. What's yours on?

KATIE
How to dump somebody.

JOSH
How's it go?

KATIE
Say for example your boyfriend says he's gonna meet
you at the mall and take you to a movie but instead
he goes hunting.

JOSH
C'mon, Katie. We could go out this coming weekend.

KATIE
I don't think we should see each other anymore.

JOSH
Can't you give me another chance?

KATIE
I like somebody else now.

JOSH
Who?

KATIE
What's it matter?

JOSH
Just tell me who.

KATIE
 Doesn't matter.

JOSH
Matters to me.
KATIE
Believe it or not there are some people who don't take me for granted.

(Enter Michael.)

MICHAEL
Sorry I'm late. Hey, Josh.

JOSH
Him? It's him? I thought we're friends?

MICHAEL
We are.

JOSH
Some friend who sneaks around with my girl.

KATIE
I'm not yours.

MICHAEL
Nobody's sneaking around, Josh.

KATIE
Can we just go please?

(Josh pushes Michael who pushes him back and knocks Josh to the ground. HUGE LAUGH FROM THE RUMORS. Exit Katie and Michael hand in hand. Lights on Josh. Voices in the dark. Constant rhythm from the drum under all rumors.)

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
Hear about Josh?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
No, what about him?

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
Killed a buck.

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
No wonder he walks around all big and bad.

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
Not anymore.

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
What happened?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
Katie dumped him for Michael.

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
Whoa! How'd Josh take it?
Like he doesn't care.

(Let the following rumor lines overlap in succession: Actor 5 begins, "I wonder..." Cue Actor 1 with, "What? Josh..." Cue Actor 2, "What? The..." And so on till the line, "What a dork," which should stick out.)

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
I wonder if he really killed the buck.

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
What? Josh didn't shoot the buck?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
What? The snapshot's a fake?

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
What's a fake?

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
The snapshot!

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
Josh never shot a buck?

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
I think he shot the bull.

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
What a dork!

(The voices in the dark laugh mockingly.)

JOSH
Every kid in school is laughing at me.

MICHAEL
So you make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

(Voices in the dark laugh.)

JOSH
Someday, somebody's gonna laugh once too many times.
(All laugh. Josh mimes loading a rifle, aims at the laughter, fires three times, each shot highlighted with a loud drumbeat outside the rhythm. The laughter stops abruptly after the third shot. Deceased shine flashlights at Josh. Drum out.)

MICHAEL
Who are you killing, Josh?

JOSH
You see anybody bleeding?

KATIE
Who are you killing in your mind?

JOSH

MATT
Are you stuck in the movie again?

JOSH
What movie?

JESSIE
Your favorite movie.

JOSH
How would you know my favorite movie?

EMILY
The movie that makes the pain go away.

JOSH
How's it go?

MICHAEL
The kid goes back to school with a shotgun.

JOSH
And?

KATIE
Blows away all the kids who mocked him the day before.

JOSH
Shut up.

MATT
Blows away the teacher too.

JOSH
Get out of my face.
JESSIE
Why are you cutting gym class?

JOSH
Maybe I got something better to do.

EMILY
Like sneak down the empty hallway?

MICHAEL
Like sneak in an empty classroom?

(Josh uses the fourth wall as a blackboard, mimes writing on it with a piece of chalk.)

KATIE
What are you writing on the blackboard?

JOSH
(speaking words as he writes them:)
"Everybody...in...this...class...is...dead...meat."

MATT
Do you enjoy making everyone afraid?

JOSH
It's just for laughs.

JESSIE
Except nobody's laughing.

JOSH
I am! And they're not laughing anymore.

EMILY
You enjoy police coming to investigate?

JOSH
More than I can say!

(Short drum rhythm. A police siren blares as a red flasher sweeps the stage. Josh laughs.)

ACTOR 5 (AS COP)
Alright, I want everyone to stand by his or her locker. This your locker?

JOSH
Yes, officer.

ACTOR 5 (AS COP)
You know anything about the words on the blackboard?

JOSH
No, officer.
ACTOR 5 (AS COP)

You sure?

JOSH

Positive.

ACTOR 5 (AS COP)

You see anybody go in or come out of the classroom?

JOSH

No.

ACTOR 5 (AS COP)

Where were you when the words were written on the blackboard?

JOSH

I'd have to know when the words were written, wouldn't I, officer?

ACTOR 5 (AS COP)

Let us know if you hear anything.

(Lights on Josh laughing. Voices in the dark. Drum rhythm under rumors.)

ACTOR 1/RUMOR

The principal's calling an assembly.

ACTOR 2/RUMOR

What for?

ACTOR 3/RUMOR

Maybe they found out who did it.

ACTOR 5/RUMOR

That's what I heard.

ACTOR 1/RUMOR

Don't know--but he's gonna be hauled up on stage in front of the whole school and suspended on the spot.

JOSH

(laughing)

Gotta find him first.

ACTOR 2/RUMOR

They should take away all the guns.

(Lines begin overlapping again.)

ACTOR 3/RUMOR

Ever hear of the Constitution and the right to bear arms?
ACTOR 4/RUMOR
How are we supposed to get an education dodging bullets?

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
It's all a hoax.

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
Ever hear of Paducah?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
What about Jonesboro and Springfield?

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
It could happen anywhere.

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
There's a killer in every school.

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
Teachers should carry guns.

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
Yeah, and we should all wear bulletproof vests.

(Josh stands amid the actors 1-4 and the deceased who make idle chatter like kids gathering in the auditorium. Deceased shine flashlight on Principal as she enters. New drum rhythm at entrance, then drum out.)

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
(Repeat)
Alright people, let's settle down...

ACTOR 2
You're sweating, Josh.

JOSH
It's hot in here, okay?

(Flashlights out.)

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Someone in this auditorium wrote some very threatening words on the blackboard. Perhaps the blackboard phantom wrote those words in jest, perhaps in anger. Whatever the case...

JOSH
Blackboard phantom! Love that!

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
...If the guilty party surrenders in my office sometime today, the punishment will be minimal...
ACTOR 3
Maybe she knows it's you, Josh.

JOSH
If she knew it was me, she wouldn't say it like that.

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
But if we discover who he or she is...The punishment will be severe. If you know who the blackboard phantom is and don't tell us, you will be just as guilty.

ACTOR 4
She's looking at you, Josh.

JOSH
And I poker-face her right back.

MICHAEL
So you make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

(Lights on Josh. Drum rhythm under rumor lines. Voices in the dark. Deceased gather behind Josh.)

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
Who could it be?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
I think it's Randy.

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
How do you know?

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
The look in his eye.

DECEASED
Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield.

(Josh, uneasy, crosses away, but still enjoys the rumors. Deceased follow.)

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
They don't have a clue!
ACTOR 1/RUMOR
Who could it be?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
Anybody in this school.

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
My parents want me to stay home till the killer's found.

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
What killer? Nobody's dead.

DECEASED
Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield.

(Josh moves away from them again. Deceased follow again, but not so closely, perhaps upstage.)

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
You lucked out. Wish my parents felt that way.

(Lines begin to overlap again, building in intensity. Josh enjoys them thinking he's finally escaped the deceased.)

ACTOR 1/RUMOR
We're all just waiting for a massacre to happen.

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
We shouldn't talk about it.

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
Why not?

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
Maybe we could make it happen if we keep talking about it.

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
We need some excitement around here.

That's stupid.

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
For all I know, you're the killer.

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
Yeah, and maybe it's you.

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
Who knows? This could be the last day of my life.

ACTOR 5/RUMOR
I think it's Melissa.
ACTOR 1/RUMOR
Why do you say that?

ACTOR 2/RUMOR
Her locker is right next to the classroom.

ACTOR 3/RUMOR
I was with Melissa all day.

ACTOR 4/RUMOR
Then maybe you and Melissa did it together.

DECEASED
Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield.

(From behind Josh, they startle him.)

JOSH
Love to see 'em squirm! It's killing me not to tell.

(Deceased, except Katie, step back as area lights go up on Katie reading a book. Josh turns to see her there.)

JOSH
Hey, Katie.

(Katie looks at Josh, beat, goes back to her book.)

JOSH
Can't you say hi?

KATIE
Hi.

JOSH
Wha'cha doin'?

KATIE
Duh.

JOSH
Wanna go for a pizza after school?

KATIE
Michael wouldn't like that.

JOSH
Tell you the truth, I wasn't thinking of bringing him along.

KATIE
Excuse me. I'm busy.

JOSH
Who do you think it is?
KATIE Who?

JOSH The blackboard phantom.

KATIE I have no idea, but he did me a favor.

JOSH How?

KATIE Calculus class was cancelled for the assembly. I wasn't ready for the test.

JOSH I know who it is.

KATIE Give him my regards.

JOSH I will.

KATIE Who is it?

JOSH Promised I wouldn't tell.

KATIE You're just a lot of talk.

JOSH Think so?

KATIE Know so. Who's he mad at? Who's gonna be dead meat?

JOSH He didn't say but he's like Santa Claus--making a list, checking it twice.

KATIE List of what?

JOSH Names to write on the bullets. Every bullet has somebody's name on it.

KATIE Why would the blackboard phantom confide in you?

JOSH We're buds.
KATIE
You're full of it.

JOSH
Think so?

KATIE
Know so.

JOSH
You're wrong.

KATIE
Who is it?

JOSH
I promised.

KATIE
You don't know.

JOSH
You won't tell?

KATIE
No.

JOSH
Promise?

KATIE
Yes.

JOSH
Cross your heart and hope to die?

KATIE
Yes.

JOSH
You'll be the only person who knows besides me.

KATIE
Who is it?

JOSH
You're lookin' at him.

(Katie laughs and exits. The chorus laughs mockingly. Josh confronts them.)

JOSH
Anybody wanna laugh in my face?

(Chorus goes silent)

That's what I thought. There's a potential killer on the loose! Wonder who he or she is?
(Josh turns to find the school principal in his face.)

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Can I speak with you in my office, Josh? Come in.
Have a seat.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Anything you want to say to me?

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Not really.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
You sure?

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Oh, yeah. Great hair.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Anything else?

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Well, yes, there is something.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
Good. What's that?

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
We all really hope you catch that nut who wrote on the blackboard.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
You do?

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
We'll all feel better knowing we're safe.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
We know for a fact that you're the blackboard phantom, Josh.

(Josh laughs)

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
You want to confess?

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
The instructor said you took a very long bathroom break.

JOSH

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)
You can't prove a thing.
We have a snitch.

JOSH

Who?

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)

You.

JOSH

What?

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)

We compared the writing on the blackboard to your last essay in English class. It's a perfect match.

JOSH

Katie, right? Wasn't it Katie?

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)

Do you want to make it easy and confess?

JOSH

Why confess when I didn't do anything?

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)

It's tragic when a gifted young man throws away an education--for what? A childish prank. You know about our zero tolerance policy of violence or even the threat of violence. I have no choice but to expell you for the rest of the year.

JOSH

Because of some stupid words on the blackboard I have to repeat the grade?

ACTOR 5 (AS PRINCIPAL)

Not if you make it up in summer school.

(Josh backs away screaming "I won't go" as Chorus laughs mockingly. Lights off Actor 5. Lights on Actor 1 and 3 as Josh's parents.)

JOSH

I won't go! I won't go!

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)

Josh, you will go to summer school no matter what.

JOSH

Sit in hot class all day while other kids can do what they want? And study on summer nights?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)

You should've thought about that before you wrote on the blackboard.
ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
And you're grounded, Josh.

JOSH
For how long?

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
All summer.

JOSH
I can't go hunting with grandpa?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
You broke your promise. We've taken your rifle away.

JOSH
I'd rather be dead!

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
Oh, Josh, you don't really mean that.

JOSH
You'll see if I mean it! You'll all see! I can take only so much! Expelled! Summer school! Off the football team! Kids laughing at me! No hunting! I'm pushed to my limits!

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
I think you should calm down.

JOSH
I want my rifle back. You gave it to me.

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
We're sorry. You'll get it back when we see a real change in your attitude.

JOSH
It was a gift. At least you said it was. Guess I can't believe a word you say.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
You're in enough trouble, Josh. Don't make it any worse.

JOSH
I hate you both. I wish you would just die so I wouldn't have to look at you anymore.

(Josh mimes a pistol with his hand, shoots them both.)

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
You can't talk that way to us anymore. Go to your room!
JOSH
No! Why do you have to take away the thing that means the most to me?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
Because we've raised you wrong. We tried to give you a good life but all we did was feed your appetites.

JOSH
Where is it? Where's my rifle?

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD)
It's locked up. And if your attitude doesn't improve, we'll sell it.

ACTOR 3 (AS JOSH'S MOM)
And starting tomorrow morning you have an appointment with a psychotherapist.

JOSH

(Josh throws a tantrum pounding on the floor shouting "It's over." Lights on Actor 4 as Psychotherapist.)

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
How are you, Josh?

JOSH
How good could I be if I'm forced to see a psychotherapist?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Don't you want to get to the bottom of your problems?

JOSH
I have nothing to say to you.

Why not?

JOSH
If I told you then I would have something to say, wouldn't I? Duh.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
I've talked to some people at your school.

JOSH
Talked to who?
ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Your football coach praised your team spirit. Despite your need to be the class clown, your teachers say you're very bright and pleasant. You have had amazing grades in the past. There's a rumor that you're a big hit with the girls.

JOSH
I broke a few hearts.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
With all of that going for you, why did you make a threat on the blackboard?

JOSH
Why'd the chicken cross the road?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
I give up.

JOSH
To prove it wasn't chicken.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Why'd the monkey fall out of the tree?

JOSH
Don't know?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
It died. Why'd the second monkey fall out of the tree?

JOSH
Don't know.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
It died. Why'd the third monkey fall out of the tree?

JOSH
It died.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
No. Peer pressure.

JOSH
Ha, ha, ha.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Why did you write on the blackboard, Josh?

JOSH
Maybe it's my childhood. Maybe it's my genes. Maybe it's my zodiac. Maybe the Devil made me do it.
ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Maybe you just chose to do it and it's nobody's fault but your own.

JOSH
I don't like you.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
That's not required. But it is required you tell the truth. Did you mean what you wrote on the blackboard? Is there somebody you want to turn into dead meat?

JOSH
Why'd the chicken cross the road?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
To avoid answering questions.

JOSH
I'm outta here.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
You need psychotherapy sessions to get back into school.

JOSH
Maybe I'm not going back to school.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Oh? What will you do?

JOSH
Maybe I'll join a gang.

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Don't you think that's self-destructive?

JOSH
So what. My life is junk. Maybe I'll just kill myself.

BOOM. No more pain.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Hear about Josh?

ACTOR 5 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
No, what now?

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Blew out his brains.

ACTOR 5 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
What a loser.
Always was a weenie.

ACTOR 5 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

You think about suicide, Josh?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

Sometimes.

JOSH

Like when?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

When I hear the voices.

JOSH

What voices?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

Voices. I can just imagine what they must be saying about me.

JOSH

Voices in the air or voices in your head?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

In my head.

JOSH

Whose voices?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

Kids.

JOSH

Kids you know?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

Kids, kids, all the kids at school.

JOSH

Why does that bother you?

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)

It just does, okay?

JOSH

Hear about Josh?

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

No, what?

ACTOR 5 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Principal made 'em see a shrink.
ACTOR 5 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Blackboard phantom's doin' summer school.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
The great hunter's gotta repeat the grade.

(All laugh.)

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Josh, I'd really like to run some medical tests to see if we can relieve your pain with medication. You'll have to stay overnight in the hospital.

JOSH
The looney bin? You know how much face I'll lose with kids at school when they find out I'm a nut case? My life sucks.

(All laugh.)

ACTOR 4 (AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST)
Why'd the monkey fall out of the tree?

JOSH
Because I shot it dead!

(Lights off Actor 4.)

JOSH
Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!
(Voices laugh mockingly)
Wish somebody would put me out of my misery!

(After a moment of absolute silence--)

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Boom.

Who's there?

JOSH
Boom.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
No more pain...

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Who said that?

JOSH
You.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Your life is over, Josh.
Over.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Over.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Over.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Who's there?

JOSH

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

You.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

You.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

You.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Do it in the living room for your parents to see.

(Drum returns softly.)

JOSH

What do you mean?

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Leave your brains on the wall.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Make 'em feel bad.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

The rifle's locked in the closet.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Break the lock.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Boom.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

No more pain.

JOSH

That's dumb.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Josh the joke will be a year behind all his friends.

(Voices laugh mockingly.)
ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
While everybody's having fun in the sun, Josh is reading gobble-de-gook in a book!

(Voices laugh mockingly.)

JOSH
Shut up! Stop it!

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Only you can make them stop, Josh.

JOSH
How?

You know.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
What do you mean?

JOSH
Boom.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Whoa.

JOSH
Whoa.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
One bullet would quiet them forever.

(Voices laugh mockingly. Drum returns.)

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
You'd end your pain and stop the voices in your head.

JOSH
I don't want to be thinking this!

(Voices laugh mockingly.)

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Show 'em who you are. The whole school would stand in awe of you. You'd be a legend for years to come.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Kill the voices, Josh.

JOSH
Does it hurt?

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)
Bullet in the head? You'll never feel a thing.

JOSH
I'm scared.
How do I do this?

(Drum out.)

Make your face a mask.

A mask that hides your face.

A face that hides the pain.

A pain that eats your heart.

A heart nobody knows.

Here goes... But suppose I botch it?

You'll be a joke.

Hear about Josh? Tried to off himself but he blew it!

You'll be a joke.

Now he's a pathetic wannabe forever!

Josh the joke!

I can't do this! I'll be Josh the joke forever!

Then you have to stop the voices another way, Josh.

How?

Two boxes of bullets should do it. It's almost lunchtime.

(Voices laugh mockingly.)
JOSH

Whoa...They'll all be in the cafeteria now.

ACTOR 2 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Imagine their faces when the hunter walks in. They see you in camo holding your rifle. Instant respect. Judgment day.

Like the movie.

PADUCAH.  

Actors in the dark: 

ACTOR 1 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

JONESBORO.  

ACTOR 3 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

SPRINGFIELD.  

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

Take 'em with you.

With you.

With you.

JOSH

Whoa. Nobody could top that.

ACTOR 4 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

You don't hear the voices laughing anymore, do you, Josh?

JOSH

ACTOR 1 (AS JOSH'S DAD, VOICE IN DARK)

Josh? You home?

(Drum returns. Voices laugh mockingly in a rising crescendo with the drum.)

JOSH

Who's that?

JOSH

ACTOR 2 (AS JOSH'S DAD, VOICE IN DARK)

Josh? You home?

ACTOR 1 (VOICE IN THE DARK)

They'll take you to the looney bin!

(Lights on Actor 1 as Josh's dad.)
Josh, the doctor called me at work and asked your mother and I to drive you to the hospital...How'd you get the rifle?

Don't chicken out now!

Unless you wanna be Josh the joke.

Put that down!

(Actor 1 advances. The drum rises to a crescendo.)

 DEAD! DEAD! DEAD!

(Lights out on Actor 1. He turns back to the audience and stands still.)

What did I do?

Josh? What was that noise?

(Josh)

Make your face a mask.

A mask that hides your face.

A face that hides the pain.

(ACTOR 3 as Josh's mom kneels and gestures to the body we can't see.)

A pain that eats your heart.

A heart nobody knows.

I love you, mom.
(Josh flicks the flashlight twice.)

DECEASED AND CHORUS

DEAD! DEAD!

(Actor 3 turns her back to the audience. All lights off. Josh holds the flashlight under his chin as he speaks to the turned backs of his parents.)

JOSH

Mom?

(A female voice in the dark starts to hum and then sing "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" under the monologue)

Dad? You made me do this. I wanted to kill you but I didn't want you dead. How else could I tell you what's on my mind without you interrupting? Mom? How are you singing now if you're dead? Stop it. You used to sing that to me when I couldn't sleep. Stop it, please? Don't I have enough pain? Isn't it hard enough being nobody? Isn't it tough enough that everybody looks at me like I'm a broken trashbag? Where do I fit in? Where can I go and not have anybody on my back? At school the teachers are giving this test and that paper and don't do this and don't do that. Then I come home and you always find something that I didn't do and I'm never good enough. I guess I'm just sick of you being disappointed in me all the time. Remember when you taught me the outfielders glove, dad, and I caught a high-fly in the Little League championship game and you carried me off the field? Why can't it be like that? Why's it so easy to talk to you now? Anyway, thanks for listening.

(Chorus exits. The five deceased enter one by one, now each wearing white; Matt in a white dress shirt, Katie in a white blouse, Jessie in a white t-shirt, Michael in a white sweatshirt and white baseball cap turned backwards, Emily in a white sweatshirt. Matt enters first, carries a bottle of catsup, sits, pours some on some imaginary fries, begins to eat, then starts on some homework. Katie enters, sits next to Matt and asks to borrow a homework assignment, Matt agrees, but asks her to wait till he finishes the problem he's working on. Michael enters asking Katie to go with him to get some food, Jessie rushes in to tell Matt she's been accepted to college. Emily stops by to tell Katie she'll be late, etc. Improvise casual dialogue but don't allow anything to affect plot or character. As the dialogue builds to a crescendo, Matt, desperately trying to concentrate on his homework, finally raises his voice and asks them to be quiet so he can do his work. Silence, then together everyone continues at the same volume and pace. Matt slumps in defeat.)
Lights up on Josh only, in a military stance. Silence. Beat. Katie takes her flashlight, turns it on under her chin.)

KATIE
Why me? You liked me.

JOSH
You snitched on me.

KATIE
Why do you have to shoot me through the heart?

(Michael squeezes catsup into Katie's hand. She smears it on her heart.)

JOSH
Where do you think you shot me? Why do you pretend I'm not there? My parents don't see me. Kid's in school don't see me. You don't see me. I'm invisible sometimes.

(Michael steps forward, flashlight under chin.)

MICHAEL
Why me? I had a football scholarship.

JOSH
You were everything I wanted to be.

(Jessie squeezes catsup into Michael's hand. He slaps it on his hat, on the side of his head.)

MICHAEL
Why do you have to shoot me through the head?

JOSH
You should have figured that when you pushed me.

(Jessie steps forward, flashlight under her chin.)

JESSIE
Why me? I don't even know you.

(Matt squeezes catsup into her hand)
I never even spoke to you. Why me? What right do you have to take all the life I could've lived?

(slaps catsup on her abdomen)
Feel like a man when you shot me in the stomach?

(Matt and Emily squeeze catsup in their own hands during Jessie's line.)

JOSH
You have no idea what it's like to be somebody one day, and nobody the next.
(Matt steps forward, flashlight under his chin.)

MATT
Why me?  I had my whole life before me.

JOSH
So did I.

MATT
(Matt squeezes catsup on his shirt collar)
How'd it feel to shoot me through the neck?

JOSH
Don't know.

(Emily steps forward, flashlight under her chin.)

EMILY
All my life I've been taught to forgive.  That forgiveness is for the forgiver.  But I just can't. Not until I know what's really in your heart.  I need to know, Josh.  Why me?
(slaps it on her chest)
Why me?

JOSH
If you know all my thoughts, why don't you know that?

EMILY
We want to hear you say it to yourself...Why, Josh?

MICHAEL
Why her?

KATIE
Why him?

MATT
Why them?

JESSIE
Why me?

EMILY
Why anybody, Josh?

JOSH
Sometimes I hate being alive, but I'm afraid to be dead.

KATIE
Know what I hate about being dead?  You can't call up and order a pizza.

(Deceased gather around the box casually.)
Pepperoni.  
Extra cheese.  
Garlic.  
Hold the anchovies!  
Cheeseburgers.  
With bacon.  
And fries.  
Drenched in ranch dressing.  
Triple chocolate milkshakes.  
Chocolate chip cookies.  
With milk.  
Cold milk.  
So many things to miss.  
You could never name them all.  

Never.

(With background music. The tone is sad--joy--sad that it's gone, joyful in remembrance. Sometimes they are oblivious of Josh, other times they direct the lines at him. At the director's discretion, cut one or two of the following sections (5 or 10 lines) and let the Actors improvise. Let each actor personalize things they now have that they miss. Let each line begin with, "I miss---". Let none of it interfere with plot, character or tone.)
MICHAEL
I miss cruising, windows down, radio up.

KATIE
I miss lying on my bed in the dark falling asleep to a CD.

MATT
I miss getting shot down by girls.

JESSIE
I miss when a guy gets that look in his eye! And you know he's gonna ask you out!

EMILY
And then he says, Can I borrow your math book?

(These lines begin to overlap.)

MICHAEL
I miss when she answers before you even finish asking--

KATIE
I'd love to!

MATT
I miss when you go in for the kiss and then it happens and it's much, much better than you dreamed it would be.

JESSIE
I miss bowling.

EMILY
I miss seeing Jody when she has that look on her face that she's got another stupid joke to tell me.

MICHAEL
I miss mom's rock-hard brownies.

KATIE
I miss my dog when I come home from school.

MATT
I miss how my dog jumps all over me and barks for a treat.

JESSIE
I miss caffeine.

EMILY
I miss when you take a new pair of jeans in the dressing room and put them on and they fit perfect.
MICHAEL
I miss cheese puffs.

KATIE
I miss soda fizz tickling my nose.

MATT
I miss loving someone.

(Emily gets everyone's attention. They listen.)

JESSIE
I miss fixing my hair in the morning.

EMILY
I miss going to the mailbox and getting a letter that I didn't expect.

MICHAEL
A hand written letter.

(Katie moves DC. The others follow one by one on their lines. This is addressed to the audience.)

KATIE
I miss jumping into a cool pool on a hot day.

MATT
I miss sneezing.

JESSIE
I miss sleeping.

EMILY
I miss good times in Louisiana.

MICHAEL
I miss rollerblading.

KATIE
I miss when you start the school year and you open a book for the first time and the spine cracks.

MATT
I miss going into the cafeteria and deciding who I want to sit with.

JESSIE
I miss laughing so hard I start to cry.

EMILY
I miss waterskiing in Georgia.

MICHAEL
I miss being home alone with a microwave bag of popcorn and the remote in my hand channel surfing.
KATIE
I miss giving my dog a bath and she shakes and gives me a shower.

MATT
I miss mom's cooking.

JESSIE
I miss mom's cooking wafting through the house and trying to guess what it is.

EMILY
I miss picking a college.

MICHAEL
I miss talking with friends on the phone after midnight.

KATIE
I miss going in a grocery store and being able to buy anything I want.

MATT
I miss hanging out.

JESSIE
I miss the end of a race when I'm out of breath and I feel so good about myself.

EMILY
I miss screaming at the football games.

MICHAEL
I miss the end of the day school bell, the feeling in the air when you can go home.

(Katie crosses to a new position to look at Josh. The others follow on their lines.)

KATIE
I miss my bed.

MATT
I miss singing in the shower.

JESSIE
I miss getting into a fight with my brother and acting like nothing happened five minutes later.

EMILY
I miss making mom laugh so hard she can't hardly breathe.

MICHAEL
I miss watching the sky go from light to dark.
KATIE

And dark to light.

MATT

I miss, even at my age, not being able to sleep on Christmas Eve.

JESSIE

I miss learning new songs on the piano.

EMILY (TO DECEASED)

I miss singing to the radio in front of the mirror.

MICHAEL (JOINING IN)

And pretending I'm in concert.

KATIE AND ALL

SRO!

MATT (DECEASED, XC, LINES OVERLAP)

I miss Sunday brunch.

JESSIE

I miss Krispy Kreme donuts.

EMILY

I miss opening a door on a winter's day and feeling the cool rush of cold air on my face.

MICHAEL

I miss hitting on girls.

KATIE

I miss jumping on the trampoline with six people at a time.

MATT

I miss swimming in the fountain at midnight.

JESSIE

I miss people watching.

EMILY

I miss the look in my brother's eye just before he pulls his newest wrestling move on me.

(Music fades out. Josh interrupts.)

JOSH

I never thought I was taking away all that! Never!

MICHAEL

Never? What do you know about never? I'll never do all I wanted to do.
KATIE
I'll never achieve my dreams.

MATT
I'll never see all I wanted to see.

JESSIE
I'll never know all I wanted to know.

EMILY
I'll never--

(At the director's discretion, cut one or two of the following sections (5 or 10 lines) and let the actors improvise. Let the actors personalize those things they never had. Let each line begin with, "I'll never--". Let none of it interfere with plot, character, or tone.)

KATIE
I'll never be an aunt.

(Music continues. Characters listen respectfully to each other.)

MICHAEL
I'll never know what it is to live on my own and be independent.

MATT
I'll never have the chance to be a better person.

JESSIE
I'll never go to college and have a double major.

EMILY
I'll never find the right person to spend my life with.

MICHAEL
And make a marriage work.

(Josh, on the outside, moves in, hoping for an invitation. They ignore him.)
JOSH
I miss--

(They drown him out.)

KATIE
And give love.

MATT
And get love.

JESSIE
I'll never meet a beautiful, intelligent, caring fraternity boy who will look at me and see perfection.

EMILY
I'll never be married in a white dress and have a huge wedding.

MICHAEL
I'll never make new friends.

KATIE
I'll never be a psychologist.

MATT
I'll never play catch with my son.

JESSIE
I'll never have long talks at a candle lit table in the corner of a little restaurant.

EMILY
I'll never be nineteen the way I always dreamed about.

MICHAEL
I'll never know what it is to come home from work and open the door and all my kids run to me and pull me down on the floor and smother me with hugs and kisses.

KATIE
I'll never find out if the psychic was right--will I get what I want or sell used cars?

MATT
I'll never know what it is to own my own car.

(Moving DC, to the audience. One by one the rest join him.)
JESSIE
I'll never have my beautiful frat boy hold my hand in the delivery room of the maternity ward telling me to push, push, push while I tell him to shut up.

EMILY
I'll never own a red convertible.

MICHAEL
I'll never fly a plane.

KATIE
Or sail a boat.

MATT
Or see the Dead Sea.

JESSIE
I'll never have three children who look just like my frat boy so that when I kiss them I'm kissing him.

EMILY
I'll never see my limits.

MICHAEL
Or really know myself.

KATIE
I'll never learn all mom's recipes.

MATT
I'll never have a chance to make dad proud of me.

JESSIE
I'll never cry at my children's graduation.

EMILY
I'll never see Paris.

(Turning to Josh. One by one, each turn on their own lines.)

MICHAEL
Or Tokyo.

KATIE
Or learn to fly fish.

MATT
Or get washboard abs.

JESSIE
I'll never have an epitaph that reads "Beloved mother, grandmother, and wife. Died at 17."
JOSH
What do you want from me? I can't bring you back to
life! If I could, I would! Don't you see that?
It's over! It's over!

MICHAEL
Over for us, Josh.

KATIE
But it's just beginning for you.

MATT
For the rest of your life.

JESSIE
You'll have us in your head until you're dead.

EMILY
And you'll see us over--

And over--

And over--

And over--

Again and--

Again--

EMILY
As you saw us yesterday in the school cafeteria.

CHORUS
DEAD!
(Katie drops dead)
DEAD!
(Michael drops)
DEAD!
(Jessie drops)
DEAD!
(Matt drops)
DEAD!
(Emily throws her arms around Josh, drops. Josh touches her blood and cries out. One
light on Josh.)

JOSH
I didn't know it would be forever. I thought it was
"bang bang you're dead" again. I thought I could
just hit the reset button and start over. Why can't
I have another chance? When I killed you I killed
all my possibilities, too.

(more)
JOSH (cont'd)
I'll never have anything to look forward to. Never.
(One by one the deceased rise dream-like and
begin to exit slowly turning out their lights.)
Is this the rest of my life?
(Josh goes to his knees, devastated)
Oh God.

(Emily turns out her light on Josh. Darkness.)

END
Bang-Bang, You’re Dead / the box...
Design by Mark Huisenga, Thurston High School Tech Director

- **2 - 5/8” plywood sides**
  - 20”x 78”

- **5/8” plywood top**
  - 30”x 78”

- **5/8” plywood bottom**
  - 30”x 78”

- 2x2 corner braces

- Leave 5/8” space on each end for overlap

- Hinges are about 1’ from each end. Attach to underside of lid, and to outside of back side.

- Hand holes for carrying Box
Attach a 1x4 to the bottom of each side, so that when you attach the bottom to the sides, there is solid wood to screw into, instead of just the plywood. Screw in from inside and outside, and make sure the screws don’t go all the way through!

Leave 1 1/2” space for 2x2 corner braces. When installing the bottom, remember to screw into the 1x4 and 2x2 brace instead of the edge of the plywood.

Hand holes for carrying Box

2 - 5/8” plywood ends
20”x 30”

Install 1x4 blocks to strengthen the hinges.

When installing the bottom, remember to screw into the 1x4 and 2x2 brace instead of the edge of the plywood.

Brackets hold rope to stop lid from opening all the way to protect the hinges.

Remember to make sure you are screwing into the 2x2 brace, instead of the edge of the plywood side. Drywall screws are the easiest to use.

Pad the inside with 4-6” of foam rubber on bottom, and 3” on sides.