

TALK BACK!

1. Who's right about the father, Jessica or Patric?
2. Can you understand Jessica's point of view regarding her father?
3. Could Jessica handle the situation differently with her dad?
4. Do you think parents get their feelings hurt by kids?
5. What does being "adult" mean?
6. Is Gillian being honest or kind at the end?
7. Why do people like ghost stories?

ESP: EXTRA-SCARY PERCEPTION

9F, 9M

WHO

FEMALES

Colleen
Jennifer
Josie
Kelly
Lori
Lottie
Mom
Natalie
Teacher

MALES

Dad
Dean
Faber
Howie
Joe
Luke
Mark
Peter
Sullivan

WHERE Scene 1: At home; Scene 2: At school.

WHEN Present day.

- ☞ One way to get into character is to decide your character's likes and dislikes, dreams and fears. Try it!
- ☞ Write your own play about getting ESP. What's good and what's bad about being able to read other people's minds?

Scene 1: Strangeness

(MOM, DAD, COLLEEN, and DEAN are sitting and eating breakfast. LOTTIE rushes in suddenly and starts making her breakfast.)

LOTTIE: I know, I know, I'm late! Hurry up! You don't have to tell me. *(Beat.)* Mom! I do not do this all the time!

MOM: I didn't say anything.

LOTTIE: Yeah, right. *(Beat.)* You're right, Dad. There is too much drama in this house.

DAD: Huh?

LOTTIE: See, Mom, Dad likes me like I am. He doesn't want to change me all the time.

MOM: I like you how you are. I just wish you wouldn't be late in the morning. It ruins your whole day when you can't eat a proper breakfast.

LOTTIE: Oh, yeah. You're so great, Dean. Making it downstairs to breakfast ten minutes before me makes you so cool. Too bad no one likes you.

(At this moment, all stop bustling and freeze except DEAN and LOTTIE. DEAN stands and walks to the front of the stage.)

DEAN: I wish she wasn't so mean to me. I don't need to be reminded that I don't have as many friends as her. Can't I just get through breakfast without being reminded of my pathetic life? Would it be so much to

spend fifteen minutes without being made fun of? I get enough of that when I get to school. Thanks a lot, sis. You're great. You're so cool. No wonder you're popular in school. You're such a nice person.

(DEAN walks back to his seat and the scene returns to normal.)

LOTTIE: Dean, did I . . . hurt your feelings?

DEAN: Please. You wish.

LOTTIE: But . . . ?

DEAN: Shut up, weirdo.

LOTTIE: But . . . whatever.

(LOTTIE sits down with the rest of the family. Suddenly DAD stands and speaks, facing front.)

DAD: I hate this house. I can't stand this house. I feel trapped. Get me out of here!

(DAD sits down calmly.)

LOTTIE: Dad?

DAD: Yes, honey?

LOTTIE: Are you OK?

DAD: Certainly.

(Beat.)

LOTTIE: Are you sure?

DAD: Yes. *(Stands and faces front.)* Why do I have to explain myself all the time to this family? I bring in money so they can eat and have a roof over their heads, isn't that enough? *(Sits.)*

LOTTIE: Well, yeah, that's enough. I didn't mean to bother you.

DAD: What?

LOTTIE: I didn't mean to bother you. I was just trying to be nice. Even though Dean thinks I'm not nice, I was just trying to show that I'm a good daughter and I listen to you. You guys don't give me enough credit.

(COLLEEN, the baby, suddenly stands.)

COLLEEN: Milk! Milk!

MOM: Yes, honey. You want milky-wilky?

LOTTIE: Mom, you should speak to her like a person. She's a person.

MOM: I spoke to you this way.

LOTTIE: And I hated it.

(MOM faces front and steps forward.)

MOM: I can't believe this is the daughter I raised. What happened to the sweet little girl who liked to play on the swings and eat strawberry ice cream? How could I have raised such a brat?

(MOM goes to get COLLEEN her milk from the cupboard.)

LOTTIE: I am not a brat!

MOM: Well, yes you are. Or you're behaving like one today.

(DAD stands. The next several lines happen very quickly.)

DAD: I have to get out of here! You're all driving me crazy!

(DAD sits. MOM faces out.)

MOM: I wish I could have some peace and quiet and some nice, decent, well-behaved children for one day of my life!

(COLLEEN stands.)

COLLEEN: Milk!

(MOM brings COLLEEN her milk. COLLEEN and MOM sit. DEAN stands.)

DEAN: No one notices me. I am invisible! Mom loves the baby most, and Dad loves Lottie most, and then there's me. All alone. I hate everything!

(DEAN sits. LOTTIE stands.)

LOTTIE: Is this whole family going crazy?

MOM: What the problem now, Lottie? We're all just trying to enjoy a nice, quiet meal.

LOTTIE: I don't know what you think is a nice, quiet meal, but this isn't it. Dad's screaming that he

wants to get out of the house, you're thinking I'm a horrible brat and you wish I wasn't alive, Dean's thinking I'm cruel and no one pays attention to him, Colleen keeps screaming for milk—

COLLEEN: Milk!

LOTTIE: This whole family is going crazy! Everyone keeps standing and sitting and saying the most awful things. You're scaring me! Really. This isn't right. I don't know why you're all acting this way all of a sudden. Today is the same as every other day. How come today everyone is so mean? Dad, I don't know why you want to get away from me so badly. I'm always nice to you. I can see if maybe Dean isn't so crazy about me, I am a little mean to him sometimes—

DEAN: Sometimes! More like all the time!

LOTTIE: —but I'm always nice to you! And Mom, it's your job to love me. How come you hate me so much? It's not allowed. I'm almost a teenager. I complain sometimes. So sue me! I hate all of you. You're all terrible. And I want to get out of this house, too. Unfortunately, I'm not old enough yet.

(Beat. LOTTIE sits.)

MOM: I never said I wish you were never born.

LOTTIE: Yes, you did. You said that you don't know how you raised such a brat and how I was such a nice little girl and I liked strawberry ice cream.

MOM: I didn't say that.

LOTTIE: Yes, you did.

DEAN: No, she didn't, nutcase.

(DAD stands.)

DAD: Everyone, will you please shut up! I want to enjoy a meal in silence!

(DAD sits.)

LOTTIE: Jeez, Dad, take it easy. You're going to have a heart attack or something.

DAD: I'm fine.

LOTTIE: You were just screaming.

DAD: No, I wasn't.

LOTTIE: Yes, you were. About how you want everyone to shut up so you can eat in silence.

DAD: I . . . *thought* that, but I didn't *say* it.

MOM: Lottie, you're scaring me a little. *(Beat.)* That thing about the ice cream, I *thought* that as well.

DEAN: Oh my God! *(Stands.)* Don't think bad thoughts! Don't think bad thoughts! *(Sits.)*

DAD: Do you think it's possible . . . ?

MOM: Can a person read minds?

DAD: What am I thinking now? *(Stands.)* Watermelons. *(Sits.)*

LOTTIE: Watermelons.

MOM: What about me? *(Stands.)* I've got to do the ironing, vacuuming, and wash Dean's underwear. *(Sits.)*

LOTTIE: You've got to vacuum, iron, and wash Dean's underwear.

DEAN: No fair!

COLLEEN: Cookies!

LOTTIE: *(Pointing to DEAN.)* No fair. *(Pointing to COLLEEN.)* She wants cookies.

DEAN: We both said those things out loud, dummy.

LOTTIE: I can't even tell anymore!

DEAN: ESP is not actually possible. Scientists have tested it. It's bogus. A certain amount of the time people guess things right by sheer luck. Especially when you know something about the person or the situation, which you totally know in this case since you're related to us. So guessing that Mom's thinking about housework is a no-brainer. She's always saying she has too much to do. Plus, people can learn to read people's body language really well. That's what so-called psychics do. Dad is sitting with his arms folded. He could be stressed or want to get away. And psychics say general information. Anyone could do it. I could pretend to read your mind now, Lottie. You're probably thinking I'm a stupid dork.

LOTTIE: Lucky guess.

DEAN: See? Anyone can do it. You don't have powers. No one does. The only real power is knowledge. The mind is capable of incredible things. Like it can stop thinking conscious thoughts, clearing the mind—that's what Buddhist monks try to do—and continue involuntary thoughts that keep us breathing and stuff. So stop pretending to be psychic already. I don't know if you're just trying to get attention, but it's really weird, even for you.

LOTTIE: Why don't you demonstrate the clearing the mind stuff right now?

DEAN: Fine. I'll clear my mind right now.

(Beat. DEAN closes his eyes. Beat. DEAN stands suddenly.)

DEAN: Lindsey Lohan! *(Sits.)*

LOTTIE: Lindsey Lohan!

DEAN: No fair!

LOTTIE: I was right! And you have no chance with her.

DEAN: Duh. I know that.

DAD: She was right.

DEAN: Well . . . yeah.

DAD: You *can* read minds.

LOTTIE: I guess so.

DAD: We are all in really big trouble.

Scene 2: Freakville

LOTTIE: Don't be psychic. Don't be psychic. Don't be psychic. You don't want to read these people's minds! These people are animals. Shut them out. Or do I want to read their minds, find out their secrets? It could be interesting. I could blackmail them and get rich! Then again, do I really want to know if Howie secretly eats bugs or if Kelly hates me? No! But this is definitely real. This is definitely happening, right? I'm not crazy. Well, I am, but I'm not. I mean, I'm not making this up. If I made this up, it would be a lot more fun. This *is* supposed to be fun! I'm supposed to be able to use this information for my own evil purposes! People are supposed to think funny things, not sad, depressing stuff. And I've had just about enough of boring stuff. If I hear one more person think about what they're going to wear or eat for lunch, I'll scream! OK, classmates, dazzle me!

(SULLIVAN stands.)

SULLIVAN: Kelly smells like flowers.

(SULLIVAN sits.)

LOTTIE: Ugh!

(KELLY stands.)

KELLY: I hate this shirt. I can't believe my mom made me wear it. I look like a dork.

LOTTIE: You do look like a dork.

KELLY: I want to go home!

LOTTIE: You can't go home.

(KELLY sits slowly, looking scared. The TEACHER enters the room.)

TEACHER: Class, take out a pencil. We are having a test today.

(All students except LOTTIE stand and scream in unison, then sit. TEACHER passes out the tests.)

TEACHER: Eyes on your own paper. Start now.

(LUKE stands.)

LUKE: A, C, D, A, B, B, B. True. False. President Lincoln was shot in a theater. Jefferson Davis. Gettysburg.

(LUKE sits. During his speech, LOTTIE frantically circles and writes the answers he calls out.)

TEACHER: Time's up! Pass forward your tests.

(The STUDENTS pass up their tests. HOWIE stands.)

HOWIE: I totally failed. *(Sits. To LOTTIE.)* I totally failed.

LOTTIE: You're not very complicated are you, Howie?

HOWIE: Huh?

TEACHER: Quiet, please. Read from chapter eleven while I grade your tests.

(During the next section, the STUDENTS speak one right after the other, even overlapping their lines.)

LORI: *(Stands.)* Mark Gilbert is sooo cute.

HOWIE: *(Stands.)* This is boring.

NATALIE: *(Stands.)* I wish I were on TV.

PETER: *(Stands.)* I'm going to beat up Luke at lunch.

LUKE: *(Stands.)* "After Lincoln's death, Vice President Andrew Johnson . . ."

JENNIFER: *(Stands.)* Mark Gilbert is so cute.

MARK: *(Stands.)* I hope those two girls don't poke me all through lunch again.

JOE: *(Stands.)* It would be funny if I made a farting noise now.

FABER: *(Stands, sings.)* La la la la la.

JOSIE: *(Stands.)* How long 'til school's over? I'm starving!

LORI/JENNIFER: *(Stands.)* Mark Gilbert is sooo cute!

PETER: *(Stands.)* I hate Mark Gilbert. I'll beat him up at lunch.

JOE: *(Stands.)* How does that joke go about the three guys in the boat?

LUKE: *(Stands.)* . . . and the nation remained divided . . .

FABER: *(Stands, singing.)* La la la la la.

HOWIE: *(Stands.)* Boring, boring, boring.

NATALIE: *(Stands.)* At the Oscars I would wear a red dress.

FABER: *(Stands.)* La la la la la!

LOTTIE: Aaaaaah!

TEACHER: Lottie? What are you doing?

LOTTIE: Well . . . I . . .

(The bell rings and the STUDENTS exit in a hurry.)

TEACHER: Lottie and Luke, stay after class.

LOTTIE: I'm sorry about that. I got . . . overwhelmed.

TEACHER: Yes, well, I've asked you to stay after class for another reason.

LUKE: I'm already tutoring a lot of students. I don't think I could do any more and keep up my own work.

TEACHER: Luke, who killed Abraham Lincoln?

LUKE: John Wilkes Booth.

TEACHER: Lottie, describe General Lee?

LOTTIE: It's orange, has four wheels—

LUKE: She means the man, not the car!

TEACHER: That's enough, Luke. You can go now.

LUKE: OK.

(LUKE exits.)

TEACHER: Lottie, you cheated on this test.

LOTTIE: No, I didn't.

TEACHER: You answered all the questions *exactly* the same as Luke.

LOTTIE: Coincidence?

TEACHER: I don't think so.

LOTTIE: But we were sitting on opposite sides of the room.

TEACHER: True. I don't know how you cheated, but it's clear that you did.

LOTTIE: Well, I couldn't help it.

TEACHER: I'm going to help you out then.

LOTTIE: That's not going to be good, is it?

TEACHER: You're going to copy out the test questions and answers ten times.

LOTTIE: *(Speaking in unison with teacher.)* —copy out the test questions and answers ten times. No! I mean, don't you see? I couldn't help it!

TEACHER: Lottie, this isn't a joke. And when you're done with that, you can copy—

LOTTIE: —chapter eleven out of the textbook!?

TEACHER: The best thing for you to do right now is get to work and stop arguing.

LOTTIE: But—

TEACHER: *(Warningly.)* Lottie . . .

LOTTIE: I'm psychic! I can tell what other people are thinking.

TEACHER: Oh really? Then what am I thinking?

LOTTIE: You're thinking that you wish the cafeteria had tater tots today.

TEACHER: I think that every day. I probably told you that once.

LOTTIE: Now you're thinking you don't believe me.

TEACHER: Of course I don't believe you!

LOTTIE: Think of something totally different then!

TEACHER: Fine. Give me a minute.

(TEACHER takes a moment to think of something new.)

LOTTIE: Ew! What's that?

TEACHER: What's what?

LOTTIE: There's a picture, a painting of a man and it's all reddish and he's . . . I think his guts are being pulled out by a bird!

TEACHER: That's a famous painting.

LOTTIE: Don't tell me you still don't believe me.

TEACHER: Well . . . I guess I have no choice. That was very impressive.

LOTTIE: That's the first time you said I was impressive.

TEACHER: So how does this ability make you cheat?

LOTTIE: I can't stop hearing people's voices.

TEACHER: You can't block them out?

LOTTIE: I don't know. I don't think so. That's why I screamed before. Everyone was so noisy. Plus, Mark Gilbert is not that cute.

TEACHER: It seems to me that you can be selective. Why did you cheat off of Luke and not another student? How could you focus in on just his thoughts?

LOTTIE: They were the loudest?

TEACHER: Sorry, Lottie that theory doesn't work for me. If this is in fact true, this psychic thing, then I think you do have some control over it. So you can start writing out the test now. In an hour or so, you'll know more about history than even Luke does.

(TEACHER exits.)

LOTTIE: I hate this, I hate this, I hate this! I knew I should have asked the genie for another wish! But it seemed like such a good idea. But now I know my dad wants to get away from his family, my mom hates me, my brother hates me (well, I knew that), the bus driver didn't take a shower, and lots of girls think Mark Gilbert is cute . . . I can't even get away with cheating on tests! What's the use of having a superpower if you can't use it for fun? That's it! I don't want to be psychic anymore. "I wish I could not be psychic anymore!" Oh no! Why am I so impulsive? Why don't I think things through? Now I'm not special anymore. Now I have no powers. Now I can never go on TV and make lots of money guessing that people know someone whose name begins with the letter "D"—I was going to be rich and famous! Much richer and more famous than Natalie Greenberg. Now I'm nothing! Nothing! Nothing good ever happens to me. I'm doomed! I wish something good would happen to me! *(Beat.)* Oh no! I made another wish! That's it then. It's over. But I messed up! No fair! Do over!

(MARK enters.)

MARK: Oh, hi, Lottie.

LOTTIE: Hi.

MARK: What are you doing in here?

LOTTIE: I have to copy stuff out as punishment.

MARK: That's annoying.

LOTTIE: I know! What are you doing in here?

MARK: Jenn and Lori are just bugging me, so I had to get away, know what I mean?

LOTTIE: I guess so.

MARK: Yeah. So. You want me to help you with the copying?

LOTTIE: Our handwriting's different.

MARK: Well, if we both print . . .

LOTTIE: That's so nice.

MARK: No big deal.

LOTTIE: Seriously, you'd help me? Because you don't have to. I don't know if I'd help you.

MARK: It's OK. I don't mind. It's something to do.

LOTTIE: Wow. Thanks.

MARK: Lottie, how come you never poke me?

LOTTIE: What?

MARK: Most of the other girls do. It's like a sport with them. I don't know why they pick on me. It's annoying.

LOTTIE: They think you're cute.

MARK: Weird. Whatever.

(Beat.)

MARK: So I guess we're just friends, right?

LOTTIE: Right.

MARK: Oh. Great.

LOTTIE: I guess we should start writing then.

(MARK and LOTTIE write.)