The STRUGGLES

By Kendra Thomas

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1. The full name of the play
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To Mrs. Ruth Ann Jewell,

Thank you for believing a dyslexic, disorganized, weird, hyperactive child could grow into a teacher and a writer. Thank you for encouraging my passion for words even when I couldn’t spell them. Thank you for all of your years of encouragement and support not just of me but of all of your students. You have touched many lives, and I am so grateful that one of them was mine.
# THE STRUGGLES

By KENDRA THOMAS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

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<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Lines</th>
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<tr>
<td>MEGAN</td>
<td>Typical student who struggles with dyslexia and ADD but is highly artistic; worried about her future and conflicted in her perception of herself</td>
<td>151</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>(F/M) speaks as one of the voices of self-doubt; also plays the SCIENCE TEACHER, a loving young teacher who tried to encourage Megan</td>
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<td>TWO</td>
<td>(F) speaks as one of the voices of self-confidence; also plays SASHA, who is extremely gifted and very quirky</td>
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<td>THREE</td>
<td>(M) speaks as one of the voices of self-doubt; also plays PAUL and the ART MANAGER, adult Megan’s supervisor</td>
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<td>FOUR</td>
<td>(F) speaks as one of the voices of self-confidence; also plays Megan’s MOTHER, a loving parent who has trouble understanding her daughter’s perspective</td>
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<td>FIVE</td>
<td>(F/M) speaks as one of the voices of self-doubt; also plays the MATH TEACHER, a by-the-book disciplinarian</td>
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<td>SIX</td>
<td>(F) speaks as one of the voices of self-confidence; also plays Megan’s school COUNSELOR</td>
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<td>SEVEN</td>
<td>(F) speaks as one of the voices of self-doubt, but bridges the gap into Megan’s developing self-confidence; also plays BRITTANY and the ART TEACHER</td>
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NOTES ON CHARACTERS
It is important that the actors understand that the Struggles are not evil. Though at times they taunt or tease Megan, it is always with a purpose. They need to make her remember, to dwell on her memories in order to better understand herself. The odd numbered Struggles tend to be more aggressive while the evens take a softer approach as they represent the more understanding people in Megan’s life. Additionally, it is possible to have additional Struggles or to split the characters so the Struggles never play a “real-life” person in Megan’s life. Casting is extremely flexible in this regard.

SETTING
While the majority of the play is set in Megan’s imagination, the scenes that play there take place at her home, in a school classroom and in her school counselor’s office.

SET DESCRIPTION
The set is a bare stage. A table and a few chairs are all that are used to create the scenes, and scene changes are done by the actors moving them around the stage. Other than Megan’s backpack and the things in it, all other props are pantomimed. The central area of the stage should be illuminated with the outskirts shrouded in darkness.
THE STRUGGLES

LIGHTS UP: MEGAN sits on a chair CENTER STAGE in a pool of light. She sits awkwardly with her feet pulled into the chair Indian style and leaning on her elbow. Her eyes are closed. As she sits, the STRUGGLES slither and creep out of the darkness. They are dressed in black, their skin pale and dirty, bruised and battered. Occasionally, the STRUGGLES may speak together or echo one another.

ONE: What are you doing, Megan?
TWO: What is it…
THREE/FOUR: …you’re doing?

MEGAN: (Snaps awake, then relaxes.) I’m thinking.

STRUGGLES: Thinking?
FIVE: Why are you thinking?
SIX/SEVEN: About what…
ONE/FOUR: …are you thinking?

MEGAN: Everything.
ONE: That’s a lot…
ONE/FOUR/SIX: …to think about.
TWO: That’s too much…
TWO/THREE/SEVEN: …to think about.

MEGAN: I must be dreaming.
TWO: Dreaming.
SIX: Sleeping.
ONE: Knowing.
FIVE: Thinking.

MEGAN: Who are you?
SEVEN: Who are you, Megan?
TWO/THREE: Who are you?
SIX: Or what are you?
ONE: What is it that…

STRUGGLES: …defines you?
MEGAN: I’m just… Megan.

STRUGGLES: Just Megan?
MEGAN: I’m just Megan.
SEVEN: Who is Megan?

ONE: Is she short?
THREE: Or tall?
ONE: Is she long?
THREE: Or wide?
TWO/THREE/SEVEN: What does Megan know?
FOUR: Is Megan good...
THREE: ...or evil?
SIX: Is Megan shy...
SEVEN: ...or proud?
FOUR: Is she smart?
STRUGGLES: Is Megan smart?
MEGAN: People don’t say I’m smart.
TWO: What do people say, Megan?
MEGAN: They say I’m... not smart. (The STRUGGLES are suddenly aggressive.)
ONE/FIVE: Stupid!
THREE/FIVE: Dumb!
ONE/THREE/FIVE/SEVEN: Not good enough!
MEGAN: Stop it! (Vicious, the STRUGGLES dance their way into setting up a classroom scene with the chairs.)
ONE/THREE/FIVE/SEVEN: Megan is a loser!
ONE: You can’t do anything right.
FIVE: Why bother?
SEVEN: Stupid!
FIVE: I don’t know why I even bother with you.
ONE: Did you forget again?
FIVE: How could you—again, Megan?
SEVEN: Really, Megan?
THREE: Remember, Megan!
ONE/THREE/FIVE/SEVEN: Remember class today, Megan? (The LIGHTS CHANGE and reveal the classroom. TWO, THREE and SEVEN play Megan’s classmates while ONE plays the SCIENCE TEACHER. Each of the STRUGGLES should play their role realistically. The others take positions in the darkness. MEGAN, too, changes and becomes “in the moment”—a part of this scene from the past. She now has her backpack. There are no other props. The STRUGGLES pantomime to suggest desk tops, books and other objects.)
ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Now, class, today we will start chapter seven in your life science book. Please get out your text and turn to page 78. (Pauses. THREE, FIVE and SEVEN mime taking out books and opening them. MEGAN does not move.) Turn to page 78 in your textbook. Yes, Brittany, that’s the right page. Everyone,
raise your hand when you’re ready. (Waits again. MEGAN starts looking around. SCIENCE TEACHER continues patiently.) Megan, are you ready?

MEGAN: What?

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: We’re in our science textbook.

MEGAN: Oh! (Digs in her backpack for her book. The CLASS giggles.) What page are we on?

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Now, class. (They are silenced.) Page 78, Megan. Do you have your book?

MEGAN: Um, I think so… (Digs some more, finally pulling it out. Relieved.) Yes, here it is!

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Thank you, Megan. Now hurry and get caught up. Sasha, why don’t you start by reading the first two sentences.

TWO as SASHA: (Reads.) “There are differences between elements and compounds. Elements cannot be separated into simpler substances, but when elements are mixed together, they can form compounds such as water and salt.”

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Very good. Paul, please continue.

THREE as PAUL: (Reads.) “Stanley Miller, an American scientist in the 1950s, was trying to find a recipe for life. He put elements found in the earth’s early atmosphere into a special box.

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Excellent. Megan, can you pick it up from there?

MEGAN: (Stands to read, stumbling through the words. The CLASS should giggle and point at various times when she reads. It should be subtle, realistic.) “There… are… diff…“ (Trips over her words.) Wait, that’s not right… um… (Finds the spot with her finger, studying the words closely.) “Miller put an… elec… tric… char… ge through the cont… ain… container to sim… simul… ate light… light… en… ing. He found… amin… amino ak… id… ids...”

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Amino acids. Good job, Megan. Who would like to continue? Oh, yes. Very good, Jonathan. Why don’t you pick it up from there. (ONE FREEZES and the other STRUGGLES revert to playing themselves.)

MEGAN: I wish she wouldn’t do that!

FOUR: Make you read aloud?

FIVE: Read aloud?

SIX/SEVEN: For all to hear.
MEGAN: I can’t do it like the other kids, and I can hear them… whispering behind my back. (The STRUGGLES whisper to each other as STUDENTS again.)

THREE: So stupid.

FIVE: Dummy.

SEVEN: They say slow learner.

FIVE/SEVEN: Special class.

THREE: Shouldn’t she know…

THREE/FIVE/SEVEN: …how to read?

MEGAN: I try. I try really hard! (The STRUGGLES take the roles of Megan’s teacher and classmates again and ONE UNFREEZES, approaching Megan.)

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Megan? Megan!

MEGAN: Oh! Sorry.

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Are you okay?

MEGAN: Yes, I’m fine.

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: You haven’t started your worksheet.

MEGAN: Worksheet?

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Yes, I set it on your desk when we stopped reading ten minutes ago.

MEGAN: Ten minutes ago?

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: You’d better get started. There are only a few minutes left before the end of class, and I know how long it takes you to do things sometimes.

MEGAN: Can I take it home if I don’t finish?

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Megan, if I let you take it home, I may never see it again.

MEGAN: Please?

ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Fine. But only if you need to. And remember to bring it back first thing in the morning!

MEGAN: Yes. I will. I promise. (ONE FREEZES while the other STRUGGLES surround MEGAN, now as themselves.)

SEVEN: Don’t make promises…

THREE/FIVE: …you can’t keep.

MEGAN: (Looks at the worksheet.) I will remember… I will remember… (SEVEN mimes taking the worksheet from her and tearing it up while THREE and FIVE laugh.) Hey! Stop it!

THREE: But you didn’t remember.

FIVE: You didn’t remember.

SEVEN: Did you, Megan?
TWO: It got lost.
FOUR: Gone.
TWO: Forgotten.
SIX: Somewhere.
TWO: Locker.
FOUR: Backpack.
TWO/FOUR/SIX: Who knows? (ONE UNFREEZES, becoming the teacher again.)
MEGAN: (To the SCIENCE TEACHER.) I’m sorry. I lost the paper you let me take home yesterday. Can I have another copy?
STRUGGLES: Her words said…
ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Megan, not again. Please try harder to keep up with your work, okay?
STRUGGLES: But her face said…
ONE as SCIENCE TEACHER: Idiot! You’re so stupid! How could you forget again?! You’re the worst student ever! (The STRUGGLES laugh.)
MEGAN: Mrs. Connor is always so nice to me, but I can see that she’s mad at me sometimes in her face, in her eyes. I don’t like it when I disappoint her.
FIVE/SEVEN: Disappoint.
ONE/FOUR: You’re such a disappointment, Megan. (SOUND EFFECT: SCHOOL BELL.)
MEGAN: Oh no, am I late again? (LIGHTS SHIFT to a new classroom, and MEGAN picks up her backpack and runs “in”, arriving late. FIVE becomes the MATH TEACHER.)
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: This is the third time this week.
MEGAN: Sorry!
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: That’s your sixth tardy total. We’ve only been in class two weeks!
MEGAN: I’m really sorry.
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: Megan, you know after your fifth tardy I have to send you to see the counselor.
MEGAN: I won’t be late again… I… I…
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: That’s what you said last time. Go on, Megan. Go now. (MEGAN starts to leave, but the voice stops her.) Oh, wait just a second, Megan. Do you have your homework?
MEGAN: We had homework?
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: I don’t know why I even ask.
MEGAN: Wait! Was it that section in the book that you assigned yesterday? I think I have it. Hold on! (Digs through her backpack.) Yes, it’s right here. I have it. It’s right here! (Pulls out a crumpled sheet of paper and holds it up.) Oh, but I only got to number three.

FIVE as MATH TEACHER: There were ten problems assigned.
MEGAN: I guess I’ll finish it later.
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: By the end of the day or it’s late. (MEGAN shoves homework into backpack.) Now, go to the counselor’s office to report your tardies.

MEGAN: I don’t want to miss the lesson.
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: Well, if you weren’t tardy all the time you wouldn’t be missing the lesson, would you? You can get notes from a friend later.

MEGAN: A friend?
FIVE as MATH TEACHER: Go!
MEGAN: (As she leaves, under her breath.) What friend? (The STRUGGLES clear the classroom.)
ONE/THREE/SEVEN: Did you forget again, Megan?
TWO/FOUR/SIX: Did you really forget?

MEGAN: I try to remember to do my assignments. To turn them in. I really do! I just get so… distracted. There’s always other things to think about.
ONE/THREE: Distracted!
TWO: Other things.
FOUR: Lots of things.
SIX/SEVEN: Important things.
MEGAN: Important things.
STRUGGLES: Like what, Megan?
MEGAN: Well, sometimes I think up adventures in faraway lands. I think about being someone other than myself, someone with magical powers or a genius brain.
STRUGGLES: And that’s important?
MEGAN: When I think about that, I’m not myself anymore. I don’t have to be me.

SEVEN: Not yourself, Megan.
TWO: What’s so bad…
FOUR: …about being yourself?
TWO: What’s so bad…
TWO/FOUR/SIX: …that you don’t want to be you?
MEGAN: I… I don’t know.
STRUGGLES: Dyslexia.
MEGAN: What?

STRUGGLES: A-D-D.
MEGAN: The test I took... a long time ago... (LIGHTS SHIFT to a counselor's office. SIX becomes the COUNSELOR. The OTHER STRUGGLES retreat to the shadows.)

SIX as COUNSELOR: A-D-D, that's what your file says. And you're dyslexic.

MEGAN: Uh-huh.

SIX as COUNSELOR: Do you know what that means, Megan?
MEGAN: It means I'm... I'm... It means...

TWO: Say what you think.
FOUR: Say what it means.
ONE/THREE/FIVE/SEVEN: It means you're stupid!

MEGAN: It means I'm different.

SIX as COUNSELOR: How do you think you're different?
MEGAN: I can't focus. I'm always behind on my work. I can't ever find things. My grades aren't so good. I can't read like the other kids. Oh, and math just makes my head hurt. I'm tardy sometimes...

Okay, I can't seem to ever be on time for anything. That's why my math teacher sent me here.

SIX as COUNSELOR: I hear a lot of "can'ts."
MEGAN: There's a lot I can't do. That's what it means.

SIX as COUNSELOR: There are some things you have trouble with, yes. But everyone struggles with something. Have you thought about the things that you can do?

MEGAN: Like what?

SIX as COUNSELOR: You tell me.
MEGAN: I can't think of anything.

SIX as COUNSELOR: You didn't think very long.
MEGAN: I can't think very good. Just ask my teachers. (Pause.) Can I go now? I don't want to miss my math lesson. I'm already behind.

SIX as COUNSELOR: I thought you said math made your head hurt?
MEGAN: It does. And Mr. Tyler... (Pause.)

SIX as COUNSELOR: Yes?
MEGAN: I don't think he likes me.

SIX as COUNSELOR: But you want to go back to class?
MEGAN: I want to do good in school. I'd do anything to make good grades and not be so lost all the time! I'm not... I'm not stupid. At least I don't want to be stupid.

End of script sample.
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE

Chairs, table.

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON

Megan’s backpack containing a mess of crumpled papers, an old notebook, a planner, a pencil case and a science textbook. All other props are mimed.

SOUND EFFECTS

School bell.

COSTUMES

It is important that Megan look like a normal student, but not too put together.

In the original production, the Struggles all wore torn black jeans with black tights underneath and long-sleeved, black shirts. Makeup was used to make the actors’ skin appear pale and ghost-like. Gray and black paint was used on their edges of the costumes to give them an almost static-like appearance.
ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The original production was directed by Kendra Thomas and presented at the 2014 North Carolina Theater Conference Middle School Play Festival, where it won Excellence in Production Design, Outstanding Achievement in Ensemble Acting and Top Rating of Superior.

Megan..................................................Hayden Price
Struggle One/Science Teacher .............Laura Balan
Struggle Two/ Sasha .........................Marie Thompson
Struggle Three/ Paul/Art Manager ..........Kaden Pfiester
Struggle Four/Mom .............................Christy Dickman
Struggle Five/Math Teacher ..................Toby Vestal
Struggle Six/Counselor .......................Madi Nash
Struggle Seven/Brittany ......................Julia Szigethy
Assistant Director ..............................Marie Thompson
Stage Manager .................................Elizabeth Crouse
Assistant Stage Managers ...................Guy Frazier, Parker Mayes
Costumes, Makeup, Running Crew .......Laurel Chatham

The

STRUGGLES
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