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# **Left to Our Own Devices: Staying Connected in the Digital Age**

By

DALE DUNN and LYNN GOODWIN

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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(LEFT TO OUR OWN DEVICES)

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“*Left to Our Own Devices* was originally developed in collaborative conjunction with students of Santa Fe University of Art and Design and the New Mexico School for the Arts.”

*Left to Our Own Devices: Staying Connected in the Digital Age* was first produced by Just Say It Theater at Warehouse 21 in Santa Fe, N.M., in April 2014.

**CAST:**

The play was written and performed in collaboration with Santa Fe University of Art and Design students: Bisi Ademulegun, Zoe Baillargeon, Kim Blacknall, Morgan Dawson, Angelo Giusti, Chantel Mitchell, Robert Neel, Blanca Olivas, Irene Sanchez and Curtis Williams, and New Mexico School for the Arts students: Lyle Frauenglass, Nicolai Pedersen, Briana Ritter, and Tilcara Webb.

**PRODUCTION:**

Director ..... Lynn Goodwin  
Dramaturg ..... Dale Dunn  
Production Manager ..... Carla Garcia  
Lighting Designer ..... Skip Rapoport

In addition to the students from the original production, we thank the following people for their support and collaborative spirit: Leslie Dillen, Tulah Dillman-Stanford, Mark Dunn, John Helfrich, Adam Kraar, Lucy Shattuck, Tilcara Webb and Suzan Zeder.

# Left to Our Own Devices: Staying Connected in the Digital Age

## CHARACTERS

THE GIRL (w): Wide-eyed, wants to fit in, observant, genuine.

BRIANA (w): A reticent young woman holding a deep secret of the power to hurt.

LYLE (m): A senioritis-type of exuberance, caring.

NICOLAI (m): Thinks he has all the answers but has a lot yet to learn.

ANNOUNCER (a): This is a “real person”—the one who gives the curtain speech, if there is one. Appears only at the beginning and is not part of the ensemble.

### CHORUS MEMBERS:

CM-1 (a): Gay, queer or gender fluid; fiercely creative; loves life; wears makeup, artfully done. (Bully Chorus)

CM-2 (a): Energetic, wears heart on their sleeve. (Book Chorus)

CM-3 (w): An intellectual social misfit who wants to fit in, Black. (Book Chorus) (Joe’s auntie/uncle, Nigerian)

CM-4 (w): Motherly, wants the best for everyone and is not afraid to stand up for it with love, Black. (Book and Bully Chorus) (Joe’s ma/Adolisa)

CM-5 (m): Grounded, sensitive, highly observant with a wry sense of humor, Black. (Joe Thomas)

CM-6 (w): Intelligent and articulate, Latina, speaks Spanish. (Book and Bully Chorus).

CM-7 (w): The popular one, breezy and at times self-centered. (Book Chorus).

CM-8 (w): Intelligent and energetic, connects the dots like a pinball machine. (Book Chorus).

CM-9 (a): Articulate, sings.

CM-10 (w): Observant, still waters that run deep.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

**Casting:** We encourage fluidity in casting that supports the script: multiethnic, multiracial and multigender.

**Staging:** In keeping with the collaborative spirit of its origin, this ensemble piece requires performers to be onstage for the duration of the play. The use of the collective voice creates dynamic flow, energetic tempo and tension. It is important to stage the chorus so that it serves as a witness, observing action played out by other characters. The chorus often directly addresses the audience, engaging them, drawing them in, making the audience a silent extension of the chorus. Importantly, the play contains a drive, the need to tell this story of discovery and to impart it with energy and humor rather than sentimentality.

**Doubling Possibilities:** While judicious redistribution of lines in order to cast more or fewer than fourteen performers is possible, the four characters of Briana, Nicolai, Lyle and The Girl should play no other parts and join the chorus only as indicated. The roles of CM-3 and CM-10 may be combined, as well as CM-1 and CM-9, with some line adjustments.

**Contemporary References:** Recognizing that technology changes quickly and can become outdated, if the director feels the script needs updating, please use judicious consideration and keep the integrity of the context intact.

**Music:** To create a specific mood and rhythm for the play, the original production used the following for the opening sequence: “String Quartet No. 3 (Mishima): 1962-Body Building,” by Philip Glass, for its beauty and ethereal grace; “Fitter Happier,” by Radiohead, for its technological drive; and “String Quartet No. 3 (Mishima): November 25-Ichigaya,” by Philip Glass, for its other-worldliness. You may, of course, choose your own opening music.

## Left to Our Own Devices: Staying Connected in the Digital Age

*(Fourteen chairs line the edges of the stage, one chair for each performer. There is a small platform UC.*

*Contemporary, minimalist music plays. BRIANA, LYLE and NICOLAI enter from various sides, meet C and briefly make silent, neutral contact with the audience. They turn toward one another, a loose triangle, and look one another in the eyes, connecting, “balancing” the space. They break and purposefully place the chairs on the stage at odd angles so that the chairs do not directly face each other, staggered, disconnected, covering the entire stage. They exit.*

*The music segues to something more electronic. The ENSEMBLE enters, one by one, each looking at their cellphones. Without acknowledging one another or the audience, they wander briefly, and each takes a seat in one of the chairs. THE GIRL enters last, through the house, with her cellphone in her pocket. She looks at each of the actors, all seated, engrossed in their phones. She finds the last empty seat as the music comes to an end.*

*The ANNOUNCER enters and gives the prepared curtain speech and reminds everyone to turn off their cellphones. Each performer’s attention stays focused on his/her screen, except THE GIRL’s. She simply listens and observes.*

*The ANNOUNCER starts to exit but turns back and addresses the ENSEMBLE.)*

ANNOUNCER. Hey, that means everyone. Turn off your phones. Please.

*(The ENSEMBLE scarcely acknowledges the request, if at all, remaining engrossed in their devices. The ANNOUNCER exits.)*

*The music shifts again to a contemporary, otherworldly sound. The actors speak, still staring at their phones, unless otherwise indicated, as the music slowly fades throughout.)*

CM-4 (*looks up*). This—

ENSEMBLE. Blue screen—

CM-4 (*back to phone*). Staring at you, I realize I don't know you well enough to tell you I love you.

CM-2. Looking at you, I realize I haven't seen you enough to tell you I know you.

CM-6. Talking to you, I realize I couldn't say enough to tell you what you make me feel.

CM-3, 5, 6, 8 & NICOLAI. I'm a million miles away.

CM-6. *Estoy a años luz.*

CM-1. But behind this desk—

CM-9. Perched before this blue screen—

CM-4. I'm just a red-T-shirt wearing girl.

ENSEMBLE. Stuck.

CM-4. Staring at a walking dream.

CM-10. Wondering how to become a queen.

CM-3. Wondering how to become your need.

CM-4. Wondering how to keep you from leaving.

*(As the music fades, the ENSEMBLE looks up from their devices at the audience.)*

CM-3, 5, 6, 8 & NICOLAI (*standing*). The internet.

CM-2, 7, 9, BRIANA & THE GIRL (*standing*). The net.

CM-1, 4, 10 & LYLE (*standing*). Cyberspace.

*(Energetically, the ENSEMBLE moves their chairs to either side of the stage on their lines.)*

CM-4. The internet is a place where I surrender myself.

CM-1. The net is adrift in time.

CM-2. It's a place I am free to explore.

CM-5. Where I go for stimulation.

CM-3. Where I'm part of something.

CM-10. Where I can't hide.

CM-1. Where I *can* hide.

CM-6. The internet is a place where I sink my mind.

CM-7. A place where I learn.

CM-8. Where I go to shut down.

CM-10. It's where I lose my initiative.

NICOLAI. Where I lose myself and my work.

THE GIRL. It's where everything is just a few clicks away.

LYLE. Where I get my connection.

BRIANA. Where I lose my intelligence. But gain my social status.

CM-1. Like.

CHORUS. Like, like, like, like, like.

CM-9. I got sucked into my computer by some sort of wormhole.

*(CM-9 moves his chair to the side and then heads to the upstage platform.)*

CM-4. Oh! He's back!

CM-7. His YouTube video is outrageous!

CM-6. His new TikTok went viral!

THE GIRL. I'm following him on—!

CM-7, 4 & 6 (*pushing in front of THE GIRL*). Instagram!

CHORUS. Ooohhh!

CM-9 (*continuing, climbing onto the platform, which he uses as a stage, addressing the audience as if they're his groupies*). It was really loud in there, kinda like a bazaar except more virtual. People yelling at me to buy this, visit here, click there, pop-up ads flying around my head like dragons, making annoying “click me! click me!” noises.

CM-1. Wanna get away? Bargain prices available!

CM-8. Google: Wanna get away.

CM-1. Gone in sixty seconds—buy now!

CM-2. Good buy.

CM-7. Goodbye.

CM-8. What the internet *actually* is:

CM-5. An eighteen-lane multi-circuit highway running straight into your life.

CM-4. Your brain.

CM-1. Mortgage pop-up?

CM-7. Blue house—put down down payment now.

CM-9 (*singing, as if composing a bluesy, minor-key tune*).  
Blue da da de da da die.

CM-3. Blue cat—has science gone too far?

CM-7. Blue pills: extra strength Advil. Only need one.

CM-9 (*continuing*). After getting sucked into the YouTube wormhole, I face-planted in TikTok.

CHORUS. TikTok, TikTok, TikTok ...

CM-9 (*continuing*). It felt like a huge blue room that looked like a casino, and there were about a billion people in there. Deafening. Cha-ching, cha-ching. Scrolling through people's TikToks like you're playing a one-armed bandit. Do you want to learn to knit? How to skateboard? News in sixty seconds! People singing, dancing, skydiving, free falling. Have you seen that? They put like this flying-squirrel outfit on and they jump off a cliff!

CHORUS. LIKE, LIKE, LIKE, LIKE, LIKE, LIKE!

CM-9. Dive bombing! Like the seagulls in *Finding Nemo*!

CHORUS. LIKE, LIKE, LIKE, LIKE, LIKE, LIKE!

CM-9 (*continuing*). Surfboarders riding the “big one”—balancing on the waves! After wading, *wading* through TikTok for what seemed like eons, I wiped out in Twitter. That was unfortunate. Somebody would say something, then somebody else would repeat it, then add a sentence or two of their own, then somebody else would repeat that, until the whole room was saying the same things over and over and over. It was like the seagulls from the TikTok room, only weirder and more obsessed. #bigmistake. Everybody in the Twitter room talks in hashtags.

CM-1. And on Instagram or SnapChat.

CM-5. SnapChat—that's gone in thirty seconds. #yourface.

CM-4. #followyourdreams.

CM-5. #sodone.

CM-6. #missinghome.

CM-9 (*continuing*). It was hard to form a coherent thought in there without somebody else going into something related cuz of all those damn hashtags. I really wanted to get out, but the blue screen is a place from which I LITERALLY CANNOT ESCAPE! (*He jumps off the platform.*)

*(The ENSEMBLE rises and walks in many directions, creating a cacophony.)*

CM-7 & 9 *(overlapping)*. Hashtag—

CM-6 & 2. Twitter—

CM-1. Tweet—

CM-8. TikTok—

CM-6. Troll—

CM-5. Catfish—

CM-6. Twitter—

CM-1. Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet.

CM-5. Selfie!

*(The ENSEMBLE quickly tries to get in on a group selfie.)*

CM-8 *(to THE GIRL, putting her down)*. You can't take a decent selfie with that thing. You know that, don't you?

*(THE GIRL retreats to her seat.)*

NICOLAI *(overhearing CM-8, he surreptitiously pockets his old phone)*. Yeah.

*(The ENSEMBLE returns to their seats on each side of the stage.*

*BRIANA, thinking she's late, moves C into a "classroom," but no one else is there. She brings out a low stool, takes out her phone, sits and disappears into her screen.*

*NICOLAI enters the classroom.)*

NICOLAI. Hey.

*(BRIANA does not acknowledge him. He brings out a stool and sits. He pulls out his phone and then, again, pockets it dejectedly. He looks longingly at BRIANA's new phone, and then pulls out nail clippers and becomes engrossed in clipping his fingernails. BRIANA glances up in disgust and returns to her phone.)*

*LYLE enters. NICOLAI quickly pockets the nail clippers.)*

LYLE. Hey.

BRIANA *(barely looking up)*. Hey. *(Goes back to her phone.)*

NICOLAI. So, should we do this thing, like Mr. Martinez said? Try to connect?

LYLE. You're the boss.

NICOLAI. What does that mean?

LYLE. Nothing.

NICOLAI. What's up with you?

*(LYLE doesn't respond.)*

NICOLAI *(cont'd)*. Hello? Are you in there? This is going to be pleasant—*not*.

LYLE. I just wasted five hours of my life. I was supposed to be writing the paper on *As I Lay Dying*.

NICOLAI. Kill me now.

LYLE. Right? So, I was looking up the SparkNotes online and next thing I know, I'm on YouTube bingeing on X-Game skateboarding highlights from before I was even born. Then it was like my brain plugged into a million streams of information. Is it information? I get on Instagram, and I'm slammed with the social life and eating obsessions of every person I've ever known, some I don't even really know ... or like. My brain feels like this big, funky, lazy sponge,

sucking up every bit of other people's lives. And after five hours of that, everything looks ... yellow and dull. Last thing I want to do is be here.

NICOLAI. Screw the internet. Mr. Martinez wants us to listen to each other. Get connected. Let's get on it and get out of here.

LYLE. Well, you're the reason we're in detention.

BRIANA. This isn't detention.

LYLE. Being told to stay after until we work things out? Feels like detention to me.

NICOLAI. Yeah. I'm supposed to be at practice right now. Coach will probably make me sit out the next game.

LYLE. You were the one acting like there was no one else on stage with you.

NICOLAI. You're just jealous you didn't get the lead.

BRIANA. Guys.

LYLE. You want to go there?

BRIANA. Guys.

LYLE. You really want to go there again?

BRIANA. Guys!

LYLE. Whatever.

BRIANA. So, did you read it?

*(They look at her, blankly.)*

BRIANA. *As I Lay Dying.*

LYLE. Are you kidding? That would have taken like ...

BRIANA. Five hours.

LYLE. I haven't gotten through any of the reading this year.

BRIANA *(to NICOLAI)*. Did you read it?

NICOLAI. Reading's overrated.

CM-6 (*standing*). Words.

*(Led by CM-6, the BOOK CHORUS slowly moves downstage, directly addressing the audience as the classroom scene continues.)*

NICOLAI. I saw the movie.

CM-6. *Palabras. Letras.*

BRIANA. I love to read.

CM-6. Black symbols with a deep meaning only understood by the human brain, the human mind, the human sensitivity.

BRIANA. But there are so many distractions.

CM-6 (*overlapping*). Distractions

CM-8. Distractions.

CM-2. Distractions.

CM-4. Distractions.

CM-3. Distractions.

CM-7. Distractions. Sink inside a book.

CM-3. First I smell the book. This can be the intentional page-to-nose sniff of a new book. Or it can be the arm's length whiff of an old book.

BRIANA. My phone dings, and I think it will just take a second ... then I'm lost in a web of witty sayings, meaningful quotes, exuberant colors ... I think, oh, I'll just watch this one video and get back to my book. I have to get back.

CM-7. No matter how often I check my phone, it would never be enough to turn books I actually want to read into a bad thing ... I just read them on the app!

CM-3. I flip the pages. If I'm in a hurry, only the verbs. About ten words a page, the rest are being photographed in my brain, piecing each page together, binding them with glue until the chapter is complete.

CM-8. I wish I would have Googled the author before I started reading this, gotten some context for the book, been able to understand what she was feeling when she was writing ...

CM-6. *Letras. Palabras. Frases. Historias. Una vida.* A life. Several lives within a world. Pristine light of delightful senses. *El subconsciente en su estado más puro, como hormiguitas, like little ants, minúsculos polvos de energía, se posan en mi piel,* climb up my skin, bristle my hair. *Y me abrazan.*

CM-8. That line was brilliant. I should write it down. No, just keep reading. Just underline it.

CM-2. The world, as I know it, with its distractions, noise, bills to be paid, is pushed aside. The world created by the author becomes my world too. From the moment my eyes land upon the first black letters, I am transported. I sink deeper into the pillows that cradle my back. The characters speak to me. I feel the sun. The wind. I feel the silence.

CM-8. I didn't even know this was happening in the world. How did I not know this? Am I not reading enough news? Should I subscribe to more newsletters? Not right now. Right now I need to read. Finish this chapter before checking my phone. That's unrealistic. Finish this page.

BRIANA. Then I get a text, and I want to say something smart, but not smartass, something funny, but not stupid, and my book is there, waiting ... it never seems to work.

CM-3. I'm not "reading" by the third page. I don't hear my own voice speaking the text. Instead the story is taking place in my mind. I'm not physically aware I'm turning pages. I'm not noticing the light has changed.

CM-7. The characters are alive in my head and will remain so until I choose to release them back into the ether, back into the glow, submerged in my phone, until I want to pull them up again out of the blue. Or until I get a text.

CM-4. I become *the* character, not *a* character. I become you. If you are a he, I will lose myself in your masculinity. I'll take out the trash. I'll fix the sink. I'll over-tip the pizza guy and flirt with all the waitresses whose skirts expose more desire than thigh. I'm gone. I'm in a setting outside of my head, in a field of dreams with flowers that don't wilt and rivers that never dry.

*(The BOOK CHORUS turns to go onstage, then looks back over their shoulders at the audience.)*

BOOK CHORUS. My name is imagination. How are ya?

*(The BOOK CHORUS returns to their seats, except CM-7 and 3.)*

CM-3. What if you lose your phone?

CM-7. I won't.

CM-4 *(making a notification sound)*. \*MEOW\*

*(CM-7 checks her phone.)*

CM-3. I lost my phone in my bra once, for hours. I panicked, thinking it was stolen, until someone called and my boob buzzed.

CHORUS. Like, like, like, like, like.

CM-4 *(making a notification sound)*. \*MEOW\*

*(CM-7 checks her phone again.)*

CM-7. That never happened to anyone in the history of ever.

CM-3. Believe what you will, but ...

CM-2, 7, 9, BRIANA & THE GIRL. #shithappens.