

THE TROUPE — PROJECT BRIEF

Format

Feature Film

Genre / Tone

Dark Comedy / Coming-of-Age Dramedy

The Holdovers meets *Whiplash*.

Budget / Buyer Lane

Low / contained school-set ensemble dramedy

Searchlight, Focus Features, Hulu/20th, Topic, FilmNation lane

Core Hook

A washed-up method actor takes over a high school theatre troupe and collides with a generation fluent in emotional boundaries, forcing everyone to ask what art can demand — and what it should never take.

One-Sentence Pitch

When an aging, broke method actor is hired as a high school drama teacher, his brutal old-school standards clash with a cautious, hyper-verbal theatre troupe until their district-censored production of *Uncle Vanya* pushes their most guarded student into the spotlight.

Why It's Timely

It explores generational conflict around art, safety, trauma language, identity, censorship, education, and the question of whether emotional truth can be taught without causing harm.

Main Characters

Frank Fenwick — A failed actor whose talent has curdled into bitterness. He treats rehearsal like combat because theatre is the last place he still feels powerful.

Jude — A guarded trans student who survives by staying small. Frank's methods nearly break him, but also force him to discover his anger, presence, and voice.

Sage — The stage manager and protector of the rehearsal room. She understands emotional safety, but has to learn that protection and control are not always the same thing.

Silas — A student who performs seriousness without real vulnerability.

Mackenzie — A student fluent in image and self-branding who has to discover what remains when performance stops being social.

Kai — A student with sensory processing issues whose needs challenge Frank's narrow definition of discipline.

Story Snapshot

1. Frank Fenwick, a broke and bitter former method actor, takes a high school theatre job he thinks is beneath him.
2. He immediately clashes with the students, especially Sage, who treats the rehearsal room as a protected space, and Jude, who tries to disappear inside it.
3. The troupe begins rehearsing *Uncle Vanya*, and Frank pushes them past polite performance into something rawer, riskier, and more emotionally dangerous.

4. The district objects to the production, complaints build, and the students are forced to decide whether Frank is helping them make art or simply using their pain to prop up his own failed life.
5. As the production is censored, defunded, and nearly shut down, the troupe stops being Frank's classroom and becomes an ensemble with its own voice.

Ending / Final Image

The final performance is not a perfect Hollywood triumph. It is messy, compromised, and alive. Frank loses almost everything he thought he was protecting, but Jude has found his voice, and the troupe no longer needs permission to take the stage.

Theme in One Line

Art can ask people to tell the truth, but it cannot treat their pain like raw material to be stolen.

Positioning

It's a darkly funny school-theatre dramedy about the collision between old-school artistic brutality and modern emotional boundaries — and the strange, painful place where both sides turn out to need each other.

Materials Available

One-pager and full screenplay available upon request or through the private script library.

RYAN CLARKE

Screenwriter & Playwright | Albuquerque, NM

Dark Comedy | Satire | Character Drama | Social Thriller

Ryan Clarke is an Albuquerque-based screenwriter and playwright whose work blends dark comedy, social satire, and intimate character drama. Across a slate of 20+ feature scripts, his stories often follow deeply flawed people pushed into impossible situations, finding humor, tension, and humanity in characters who are entirely in over their heads.

His screenwriting recognition includes Grand Prize Winner, 30th Annual Fade In Awards Comedy Competition (*#FightForNoah*); Semifinalist, 30th Annual Fade In Awards Comedy Competition (*The Trencherman*); 2026 Top 10 Finalist, ISA Table Read My Screenplay at Cannes (*A Walking Shadow*); 2026 Quarterfinalist, Finish Line Script Competition (*#FightForNoah*); two-time Semifinalist, ISA Emerging Screenwriters Competition (*Flashbang* and *Ghost of the Highway*); and four additional 2026 Honorable Mentions from Finish Line (*The Finalists*, *How to Be a Human: A Musical with No Songs*, *Ghost of the Highway*, and *Dead Signals*).

As a playwright, Ryan is a three-time winner of FUSION Theatre Company's short works festival, "The SEVEN", in 2024, 2025, and 2026. The stage version of *A Walking Shadow* was also selected in 2026 for The Road Theatre Company's 17th Summer Playwrights Festival.

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