

*(At rise: SOUND: animal and bird noises. Weekday morning in May, at a city zoo. COCKATOO enters, perches in tree, surveys the picnic area, spying audience. Sounds fade.)*

COCKATOO

Hey! Hello!  
Lovely day,  
Looking 'round  
to see what play  
I can find  
along the way.

Welcome friends  
to the zoo!  
I'm Cockatoo.  
Who are you?

Sorry, HUSH!  
Talk suspend.  
Keeper will hear,  
cage me again!

SHHHH!

*(Zookeeper\* enters, scanning area, and COCKATOO quickly hides.)*

ZOOKEEPER

Good day! Come in for a fine zoo visit.  
First, I must ask your help for a minute.  
You know our rules, but I'll repeat,  
Don't feed the animals and don't tease.

*(JOSH dashes in, but stops, seeing the ZOOKEEPER, and tries to hide.)*

ZOOKEEPER (Cont'd)

Kids squealed at Cockatoo: she escaped!  
Now someone spied her near the front gate.  
So I must go—

*(ZOOKEEPER turns fast, bumping JOSH, who jumped accidentally into his path.)*

\*Perhaps ZOOKEEPER carries a sign like "Cockatoo's missing: big beak, loud squawks"

ZOOKEEPER (Cont'd)

Whoa! I'd watch it, son.

JOSH

Sorry.

ZOOKEEPER

At the zoo, there's no need to run.

JOSH

All right.

ZOOKEEPER

Slow! Oh, slow: there's plenty of fun.

*(ZOOKEEPER exits; COCKATOO emerges to escape, and JOSH lunges but can't catch her. COCKATOO exits. JOSH starts after her, but hears KEVIN approaching and jumps on picnic table. KEVIN enters carrying his shoe.)*

JOSH

I won! I won! Whoop-dee-whoop!

KEVIN

You didn't race fair, I lost my shoe.

*(Ms. PEDICURIUS enters carrying a large colorful tote bag, followed by FLOR, LIZA and ASHLEY.)*

MS. PEDICURIUS

Off you flew like rockets fired to "Go!"

JOSH

In a race I won, but he says, "No!"

MS. PEDICURIUS

Race?

FLOR

Josh, she said, "GO! Take that gator's photo!"

ASHLEY

Not "gator" but a croc that yawned its giant jaws.

LIZA

Really wide! And you guys ran scared, because–

ASHLEY

When Liza snapped the croc, it flopped in the mud!

FLOR

You had to get away or faint: falling, THUD!

LIZA

Wow! That would be the best picture ever.

MS. PEDICURIOUS

Never. Let's be friends and really stick together

LIZA

Yes, Ma'am. That's best for the zoo scrapbook.

JOSH

Still, shoot me like this:

(Striking a crazy pose.)

Look! Liza, Look!

KEVIN

Oh, hey! Take one at the bird house instead,  
when Josh gets surprised by poop on his head.

ASHLEY

Gross! That's funny! Did you hear what he said?

JOSH

Nope! Closed my ears. He wants me to turn red.

MS. PEDICURIOUS

Your silly teasing sounds like monkeys' foolish chatter.  
Jokes and pranks are the least important matters.

*(JOSH, LIZA and KEVIN simultaneously put hands to mouth, ears and eyes,  
respectively. ASHLEY and FLOR laugh.)*

MS. PEDICURIOUS (Cont'd)

Hit pause, please. Re-boot good attitudes.  
It's time for snacks. How about some tasty food?

JOSH

Me first! I'm hungriest! I could eat a cow.

KEVIN

No way! Listen: can you hear my stomach growl?

FLOR

Eeww, Ms. Pedicurious. Make them stop, now.

MS. PEDICURIOUS

It's nice stomachs sing with bubbly sounds.  
Snacks are in my pack.

FLOR

I'll pass them around!

*(MS. PEDICURIOUS gets Purell from her pack and squirts some into students' palms. FLOR pulls sacks out onto table.)*

MS. PEDICURIOUS

Clean your hands, fingers and palms, everyone.  
Rub-a-dub the gel! Make sure most germs are gone.

*(They slather, slap, etc. to apply gel. The ZOOKEEPER passes through, nods approvingly. SOUND: a peacock's cry catches MS. PEDICURIOUS's attention, Off. MS. PEDICURIOUS taps FLOR to view the peacock's spreading tail.)*

MS. PEDICURIOUS

The peacock's call! See his tail open! How grand!

JOSH

Where's juice? I'm thirsty, and my mouth's like sand.

*(MS. PEDICURIOUS quickly glances around, chagrined.)*

MS. PEDICURIOUS

Left behind. Oh, dear.  
(Gesturing, Off.)  
Get cold drinks from that stand.

*(MS. PEDICURIOUS hands ASHLEY a coin purse.)*

ALL KIDS

Yay! Eat and play!

*(They exit, running. MS. PEDICURIOS and FLOR watch the peacock close its tail.)*

MS. PEDICURIOS

Lovely display! Flor, lead the way.

*(MS. PEDICURIOS and FLOR discover they're alone.)*

FLOR

Excuse me, they left. What did you say?

MS. PEDICURIOS

Oh, yes, they vanished! Lead later today.

*(FLOR and MS. PEDICURIOS exit. JOSH runs back in with his drink. SOUND: loud thumping in the distance. Grabbing his snack, he exits on a path toward sounds, which die out as STUDENTS enter with their drinks. KEVIN goes to a bench, GIRLS sit at the table, as MS. PEDICURIOS enters and begins passing out snack sacks.)*

MS. PEDICURIOS

Sacks aplenty! Ashley. Liza. And yours, Flor.  
Kevin's. He was here. Where in the world?

KEVIN

Over here, on my very own bench!  
Not surrounded by any nosy girls.

MS. PEDICURIOS

Very well then, suit yourself, feel free.  
Josh disappeared! Where could he be?

KEVIN

I don't know. He was ahead of me.

MS. PEDICURIOS

*(Looking for Josh.)*  
Maybe he darted behind that tree?

ASHLEY

There's no sack, so he took his snack.

FLOR

Want me to find him and bring him back?

MS. PEDICURIOUS

No, my dear. Time to stay with our pack.  
Or, perhaps there's a joke under my nose.

*(MS. PEDICURIOUS looks under the table, behind bushes, behind Kevin's bench.)*

MS. PEDICURIOUS (Cont'd)

A class prank! Fool the teacher is how it goes.

*(Laughing.)*

You got me. Now tell what do you know?

FLOR

Nothing! Where's the restroom? Maybe there?

ASHLEY

With his lunch? Uh-uh. Not on a dare!

LIZA

But we teased that he ran, afraid of croc's jaws.  
He's after adventure to get our applause.

MS. PEDICURIOUS

Sound conclusion, Liza. Please quickly tell me  
which dangerous animal did Josh most want to see?

KEVIN

Ms. Pedicurious, the lions who can roam,  
not left to snooze in cages, bored and alone.

FLOR

Oh, lions rule their space.

KEVIN

Yeah, like the whole pride of them.

ASHLEY

A pride? What's that?

MS. PEDICURIOUS

Explain please, Kevin.

KEVIN

They're a "pride," because no animals hunt them.

MS. PEDICURIOS

As a group of crocs is a "bask." "Why?" I ask.

FLOR

They lie in the swamp, mostly don't swim.

MS. PEDICURIOS

Correct! Now, eat, but don't wander wide!

I'll stroll to fetch Josh from the lions' pride.

*(MS. PEDICURIOS exits. KEVIN eats on his bench. The GIRLS eat at the table, looking at the animal pictures on Liza's camera.)*

LIZA

Love scary close-ups? Look, if you dare.

ASHLEY

I'm not afraid: it's the Asian Bear.

FLOR

Itchy. Yikes! The powerful Grizzly, there!

LIZA

See his huge hairy head, teeth and sharp claws.

ASHLEY

You'd have to run fast to escape those jaws!

FLOR

Show us the next. Give the bears a pass.

ASHLEY

Find my favorite: the beautiful giraffe!

KEVIN

With her goofy head up high? What a laugh.

FLOR

Her eyes are sweet, and I love her lashes most.

KEVIN

When her lonngg tongue comes out, isn't it "gross?"

ASHLEY

Every move she makes, even walking, is graceful.

FLOR

Like bending down to her baby, so cute and lovable.

KEVIN

She's all skinny legs and neck, if you ask me.

*(JOSH dashes in with his drink.)*

ASHLEY

Hey, Josh! Why run in such a hurry?

FLOR

Stop, catch your breath.

LIZA

Tell us, what did you see?

JOSH

You won't believe it! How they jumped and kicked!

ASHLEY

Who jumped, where?

KEVIN

Aw, it's one of his tricks.

JOSH

Tall kangaroo hurt a small one! It's true!

LIZA

Boy, you're in trouble, teacher's looking for you!

JOSH

Little guy fell down, but then ran away!

KEVIN

How: with fences all around the place?

FLOR

Yeah, like he's in—what's the word I mean?

KEVIN

Captivity.

FLOR

Not “cavity,” “captivity.”

KEVIN

Exactly.

ASHLEY

And small kangaroo just hopped out: free?

*(They all laugh.)*

ASHLEY (Cont'd)

Josh, you tell us really BIG stories.

KEVIN

We don't believe it. What a whopper!  
Finish your drink, chill and recover.

*(LIZA gossips as JOSH and KEVIN lounge on the bench, kicking off their shoes. All finish food and drinks.)*

LIZA

Could that strange tale happen at the zoo?

FLOR

Maybe. Kangaroos box with feet, it's true.

*(LIZA motions GIRLS to ease toward BOYS to eavesdrop.)*

JOSH

Hey, I'll describe those awesome kangaroos.  
They faced to fight with feet that are so huge!  
It could be a game, but the big one towered over  
the little one, who, still, hopped bravely with power.

KEVIN

You saw that to fight they lean on strong tails—

JOSH

Then kick, box, kick, box 'til one's balance fails.

KEVIN

Looks like baby play, with tiny arms pushing!  
Kangaroos box to practice defending,  
mainly against wild dogs known as dingoes.

JOSH

They punch so fast, hitting toe to toe.  
Then both feet at once! WHOP! like this, just so!

*(JOSH topples trying the move. Everyone laughs as he gets up.)*

LIZA

When kangaroos box, are they so awkward?

KEVIN

They have to kick front—can't go backwards.

ASHLEY

And without a strong tail, Josh falls forward!

JOSH

Listen to my story, here's the best part:  
Knocked down, little roo climbed the rocks so high,  
Took one bounce and he jumped out of sight!

FLOR

Where'd he go?

JOSH

Beats me, but he landed, hard!

KEVIN

Maybe he left tracks. Could be 'round that curve.

JOSH

What if he kicks us? Have you got the nerve?

KEVIN

Yes! You said he lost the fight, for real.

JOSH  
Tell me what he eats. Don't want to be his meal!

KEVIN  
Only leaves, plants, no meat, don't you worry.  
Here's the main thing: we've got to hurry!

*(JOSH and KEVIN start off.)*

LIZA  
Uh-oh, you're asking for bigger trouble now.

JOSH  
Say we went to the restroom. Don't have a cow!

FLOR  
You're looking for a runaway kangaroo!

KEVIN  
Just stick to your girl talk until we're through.

*(The BOYS exit, with LIZA following. ASHLEY pulls her back.)*

ASHLEY  
Liza, stay here. We'll have a better time.

LIZA  
So, you have an idea?

ASHLEY  
One that's just fine.  
I packed our rope,\* hoping there'd be room.

FLOR  
Yay! Chinese Jump Rope. I'm ready: ZOOM!

*(ASHLEY gets 5'-6' jump rope from MS. PEDICURIOS's tote bag.)*

LIZA  
Go first, ASHLEY, since you thought it up.

\*See Chinese jump rope game variations.

*(LIZA and FLOR tie it around their ankles and move apart about 3' to make the space for ASHLEY to "jump.")*

FLOR

Jump the cool steps. Don't fall! Good luck!

*(ASHLEY steps a pattern, jumping inside and outside the ropes, as JUAN enters, with limping hops, and hides behind the bench. The GIRLS pause to raise the rope, higher, to their shins, as JUAN snatches one of KEVIN's shoes and hops behind a bush. Seeing his tail as he disappears, the GIRLS scream.)*

ASHLEY

Shhhhhhhhhh! That could be the little roo!

FLOR

Oh, my, oh, my! What should we do?

LIZA

And, look! He took one of Kevin's shoes!

ASHLEY

Be really quiet; don't make a sound.  
Maybe, just maybe, he'll come back around.

*(JUAN wails and snorts.)*

LIZA

Such crying!

ASHLEY

Was that a snort?

LIZA

Or worse.

*(JUAN moans twice.)*

FLOR

Painful sounds.

LIZA

He could be badly hurt.

ASHLEY

Josh said he fled.

FLOR

I hope he's not dead!

*(JUAN moans again.)*

LIZA

He's alive! You could sing to help him rest.  
I'll tiptoe with my camera—

FLOR

Oh, yes! What song's best?

ASHLEY

*(Singing.)*  
Rock-a-bye baby kangaroo  
In the treetop  
When the wind blows—  
The cradle—

FLOR

No, stop!  
The words don't fit!

LIZA

Kangaroo cradle? Not one bit.  
Instead, let's try my favorite—  
*(Singing.)*  
*Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques,*  
*Dorme vous, dorme vous?*

ASHLEY

No, not in French. You lose, too.  
They speak English in Australia, home of roos.

LIZA

My grandma taught me the sweet song's flow  
in French and in English—here's how it goes:  
*(Singing.)*  
*Are you sleeping, are you sleeping,*  
*Brother Joe, Brother Joe?*

FLOR  
Joe?

ASHLEY  
Baby roos are “Joeys.”

LIZA  
That’s good to know!

*(JUAN gives a loud cry and jumps to girls.)*

JUAN  
Joe’s coming? Uh-oh. Just what I dread!  
I fear next time he’ll stomp my head.

ASHLEY  
Which Joe? Who?

LIZA  
The BIG kangaroo–  
who injured the little one, just like Josh said.

JUAN  
He boxes hard! I never get a fair go.  
I’ve had it with his kicking–better hide low!

LIZA  
What’s your name, then, if it’s not “Joe?”

JUAN  
Sorry! G’Day, I’m Juan, the wallaroo.  
Excuse me, now I must get out of this zoo!

FLOR  
Wait, little one, please, what’s a wallaroo?  
And why are you wearing Kevin’s shoe?

JUAN  
We’re family: the kangas and wallaroos.  
But it’s endless boxing from my cousin Joe.  
He gets too excited–and loses control.  
I can’t take more whopping. What’s there to do?