

## LET'S ALL PUT OUR PHONES DOWN

Music by Ron Watson

Lyrics by Ron Watson and Steve Ackley

Script by Steve Ackley

### Cast (order of appearance):

The play is written for ten cast members. Three teen females (Michelle, Valarie, Ruby), three teen males (Tony, Jeff, Dave), and two adults, one male, in his forties or fifties (Mr. Phillips) and one female, late twenties (Ms. Campbell). There are also two small parts (a store clerk and a homeless person).

- **TONY** - self-absorbed; materialistic; wants to be rich and famous; knocks over Mr. Phillips at bus stop; barista at coffee bar
- **MR. PHILLIPS** - middle-aged; wise but frustrated with younger people; gets knocked over by Tony; principal at school
- **JEFF** - sarcastic; cruel; works at coffee bar with Tony; street scene with Ruby (his date/girlfriend); gives Ms. Campbell attitude
- **MICHELLE** - insecure; self-deprecating; customer at coffee bar; no boyfriend
- **VALARIE** - conceited; materialistic; customer at coffee bar with Michelle; goes to show with Dave (her date/boyfriend)
- **RUBY** - compassionate; questioning; street/store scene with Jeff; points out Jeff's hypocrisy

- MS. CAMPBELL - late-twenties; inexperienced teacher; overwhelmed with new job; condescending; sometimes defensive
- STORE CLERK\*
- DAVE- observant; conscious of those around him; frustrated with Valarie's insensitivity; shows kindness to homeless person
- HOMELESS PERSON\*

\*The HOMELESS PERSON and STORE CLERK parts could be played by the same person (male or female). A quick costume change would need to be done during Scene V (the school scene).

### Musical Numbers:

1. I Don't See You (was Brother-Sister's Keeper)
2. Lift Up Your Head (was Connection)
3. Better World (was Reform)
4. Kindness (was Virtue)
5. Educate
6. Sincerely We Ought to Change
7. Brand New me
8. Changing for the Better
9. Now I See You - Reprise of I Don't See You (Brother-Sister's Keeper)

### Scene I – opening

*The stage is completely dark. The six younger cast members stand in a line. As the first words of the song, "I Don't See You," are sung four times, different cast members illuminate their faces by turning on their phones. (These could be real phones, or phone-sized pieces of wood with button operated lights in them.)*

Song: I Don't See You (was Brother's-Sister's keeper)

ALL:

I don't see you

I don't see you

I don't see you

I don't see you

*NOTE: As TONY and MICHELLE sing into their phones. Those not singing, react with facial expressions in accordance with the lyrics.*

TONY:

In my phone I see tropical shores  
Attractive faces and beautiful cars  
Famous people, easy and free  
I want to be a celebrity

MICHELLE:

I look in my phone and I get afraid  
I see all the rest and how they've got it made  
Going new places and making new friends  
Will I ever win?

*Bridge*

TONY

I look at my phone and I see happiness

MICHELLE

I look at myself and I just see a mess

Verse 3

TONY

I see the things that I think I need

MICHELLE

I see where I'll be if I don't succeed

TONY

I see everything that's shiny and new

TONY and MICHELLE Together

I see everything, but I just don't see you

ALL:

I don't see you

I don't see you  
I don't see you  
I don't see you

*The cast exits, except for TONY, who remains center stage looking into his phone. After the rest exit, he turns and begins walking, still staring into his phone.*

## Scene II – the bus stop

*Lights come up on MR. PHILLIPS standing stage left, next to a bus stop sign. TONY walks right into him, almost knocking him to the ground.*

MR. PHILLIPS: Hey! Watch where you're going!

TONY: Oh, sorry sir, I didn't see you.

MR. PHILLIPS: Obviously not. Why can't you just turn that thing off when you're walking? One of these days, you're gonna walk into the middle of that traffic and kill yourself. What's so important inside that phone anyway?

TONY: I was just looking at my updates, you know. I mean back in your day, you were always reading at the newspaper, right? So, what's the difference?

MR. PHILLIPS: The difference is I didn't go around knocking folks over.

TONY: Well, like I said, I'm sorry.

MR. PHILLIPS: I'll accept your apology, if you'll accept some advice.

TONY: Advice?

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes. Words of wisdom ... call it what you want.

TONY: OK. Fine.

MR. PHILLIPS: Look forward.

TONY: What?

MR. PHILLIPS: Look forward. And I don't mean just pull your nose out of that phone. I mean look around you. Look at where you're going in life.

*[Music for LIFT UP YOUR HEAD begins]*

MR. PHILLIPS (speaking over intro): And especially look at other people. Not the people in your phone. But the flesh and blood folks that, if you don't see, you might just knock them to the ground.

Song: Lift up Your Head (was Conneciton)

*MR. PHILLIPS sings:*

Lift up your head and look all around  
See all the colors and hear all the sound  
Accepting new people wherever you go  
Bonding and caring abundantly  
We are connected, together we stand  
With your hand in my hand, perfectly band  
Perfectly band, perfectly band

TONY: I see.

MR. PHILLIPS: I hope you do. Now my bus is here.

*MR. PHILLIPS exits stage left and the lights go down on the bus stop.*

Scene III – the coffee bar

*Upstage right, the light come up on a coffee bar (a la Starbucks). JEFF is working behind the bar. MICHELLE and VALARIE are seated at the bar. VALARIE is laughing at pictures on her phone that she enthusiastically shows to MICHELLE who sits with a straight face, disinterested.*

**Production note: a simple counter with stools**

*TONY walks into the scene and grabs an apron from behind the bar and puts it on.*

TONY: Sorry I'm late. I was helping out this old guy at the bus stop.

MR. PHILLIPS (off stage): Helping out this old guy? Helping out!?

*TONY looks around. He doesn't see anyone. Shakes his head.*

JEFF: Yeah, right. Whatever, man. Just finish these orders for me. I gotta get going. I'm gonna meet my girl. It's her birthday. Got to buy her something special. Ya got to give in order to get, if you know what I mean.

*JEFF laughs at his own joke, then quickly removes his apron and exits stage right.*

*TONY looks at the orders on a computer screen and begins making the beverages. Lights come up on to girls. As the they talk, TONY listens and reacts.*

VALARIE: Cancún was the bomb. Every day we were sittin' out there on the beach. And the boys ... let me tell you, there are some cute dudes down there. I even picked up a little Español from this boy named Carlos. Here, let me show you his picture.

*VALARIE scrolls around in her phone, find the picture, and shows it to Michelle. MICHELLE looks at the picture. Silently nods.*

MICHELLE: Yeah, he's cute.

VALARIE: So, what about you; what did you do this summer?

MICHELLE: Oh, not much ... stayed home ... worked.

VALARIE: Oh, sorry to hear that. You got to get out of here, Michelle. You know, get out and see the world.

MICHELLE: From the way you're talking, sounds like mostly what you saw were cute boys.

VALARIE: Hey, nothing wrong with that.

*VALARIE laughs*

VALARIE: Well, I gotta get going. Dave's got tickets to a show tonight.

*VALARIE gets up and begins to leave.*

VALARIE: You coming?

MICHELLE: No, I think I'm gonna stay. I'm just gonna sit here and read for a while.

VALARIE: OK. Whatever.

*VALARIE exits stage right.*

*MICHELLE takes out a book from her backpack and flips through the pages.  
TONY comes over.*

TONY: Would you like a refill on your coffee?

MICHELLE: Oh ... sure.

*TONY takes her cup and goes to the back of the coffee bar and fills it, looking over his shoulder at Michelle. He brings it back and sets it on the counter.*

TONY: So, what are you reading?

MICHELLE: Just a school book. I started back up this week after summer break.

TONY: Yeah, I heard you and your friend talking about your vacations.

MICHELLE: Her vacation, not mine. I didn't go anywhere. My family is not, uh ... we're not the Cancún type, if you know what I mean.

TONY: I get it. Mine neither.

MICHELLE: Well, maybe someday I'll go somewhere.

TONY: Where would you like to go?

MICHELLE: I don't know exactly.

*[music for BETTER WORLD begins]*

MICHELLE (speaking over intro): But when I do go. I'd like to have a reason .... not just to lay on the beach and meet boys. But to see the people ... to learn ... and to change ... I want it to change me ... in here (she pats her chest).

Song: Better Word (was Reform)

*MICHELLE sings*

I want to be the best I can  
Journeying throughout the land  
As I mend and change within  
Better world it will be

Embracing new and different ways  
To grow and learn throughout my days  
Warm and kind and gracious  
You and I are to be

*TONY sings*

Looking just at yourself, puts your mind upon a shelf  
Giving into jealousy, takes away your eyes to see  
Understand the world around, and your purpose will be found  
Seek out the worthy, wise, and true ///

*MICHELLE and TONY sing*

Together we must learn to live  
Reaching out from deep within  
Embracing you my friend  
Better world it will be  
You for me, I for you  
Better world it will be

*Stage goes to black*

Scene IV – the street/store

*JEFF and RUBY stand on the street in front of a trendy clothing store.*

**Production note: storefront can be a frame depicting a double door with a sign above it. The same prop could be turned around and used in scene VI for the theater.**

JEFF: So, anything you want, baby. You can get that jacket you want. Or, if something else looks good, get that.

RUBY: Are you sure? This place is expensive.

JEFF: But the other day, when we were walking by, you said you loved that jacket. You said you had to have it.

RUBY: Yeah, but I was just talking.

JEFF: Well, anything for you, baby. C'mon, it's your birthday.

*Enter MS. CAMPBELL. She's very well-dressed. She's looking into her phone.*

MS. CAMPBELL: Excuse me, but can you tell me the way to Carter Middle School. This app I'm using is all wrong.

JEFF gives MS. CAMPBELL a long look up and down, smiles and shakes his head.

JEFF: Carter Middle School? Are you sure?

MS. CAMPBELL: Yes, I'm meeting with the principal this afternoon. I'm starting a new teaching job this semester.

JEFF: (sarcastically) Well, good luck with that.

MS. CAMPBELL: What do you mean?

JEFF: I went to Carter. And, Lady, those kids are gonna chew you up.

RUBY: Jeff! Cut it out.

MS. CAMPBELL: Well, that's a bit presumptuous, don't you think? You don't even know me.

JEFF: What are you? Teach for America? Are you doing time in a Title 1 school to pay off your school loan? Helping out the poor kids.

RUBY: Stop it, Jeff. *(to Ms. Campbell)* Carter's just down the street. Go down to Fourth Street and turn right. You can't miss it.

MS. CAMPBELL: Thank you.

*MS. CAMPBELL exits.*

RUBY: What was that all about?

JEFF: I don't know. I just don't like those gentrification folks coming into our neighborhood. I had to deal with them when I was in school. They all treat us like we're stupid.

RUBY: How do you know what she is? She's right. You don't even know her.

JEFF: I can tell by her looks. The way she walks. Her tone. *(pause)* Come on. Let's just go inside.

*RUBY and JEFF move upstage. The lights come up on the inside of the store ... racks of clothing, display lights, etc.*

*They begin looking at clothes. As they do, a STORE CLERK enters stage left. The clerk stands and watches the two.*

*Jeff takes a jacket from the rack and holds it up.*

JEFF: So, this is the one, right?

*The clerk moves a few steps closer.*

STORE CLERK: Can I help you?

JEFF: No. We're just looking.

RUBY: Yeah, that's the one.

JEFF: Great. (to clerk) Is there a dressing room?

STORE CLERK: Yes. (pointing) Over in the far corner. Let me show you.

JEFF: That's alright. We'll find it.

JEFF and RUBY being moving stage right. The clerk follows.

JEFF (turning to clerk): I said we'll find it.

*The clerk backs off, then exits stage left.*

RUBY: What's wrong with you today anyway? You have a bad day at work?

JEFF: I just didn't like the way he/she was watching me. They think I'm rip off the place.

RUBY: What makes you think that?

JEFF: You know ... they don't like the way I walk or talk. They don't like my demographic.

RUBY: That sounds familiar.

JEFF: What do you mean?

RUBY: That's the same thing you said about that teacher.

JEFF: What? Aw, that's different.

RUBY: Is it?

*Jeff rolls his eyes and throws his hands in the air.*

RUBY: You have to give people the benefit of the doubt until you know otherwise. Or else we'll all just be walking around afraid of each other.

JEFF: Yeah but, you know, this stuff happens all the time. I'm speaking from experience.

*[music for KINDNESS begins]*

RUBY: I know, I know ... and I'm not saying don't watch your back. But try showing people a little kindness instead of being judgmental and things might change.

Song: Kindness (was Virtue)

*RUBY sings*

Kindness is what we must have to bond and live together  
Fairness, understanding, and respect for all around us

Harmony and empathy  
Keep these in your heart  
Graciousness and courtesy  
So we can be who we're meant to be

As we journey through this world, we must learn to live together  
Nurturing the bond we have is what will get us through  
We must keep this bond alive  
We must keep this bond alive

*Stage goes to black*

Scene V – the school

**Production note: Classroom can be represented by a teacher's desk and a white board or chalkboard.**

*MR. PHILLIPS enters a classroom with MS. CAMPBELL who is looking into her phone.*

MR. PHILLIPS: Ms. Campbell?

*MS. CAMPBELL quickly puts her phone in her purse.*

MS. CAMPBELL: I'm sorry, Mr. Phillips. I was just texting a friend. We're gonna meet up in an hour.

*MR. PHILLIPS stares at MS. CAMPBELL for a moment.*

MR. PHILLIPS: You know, when you're up in front of the class, that phone is gonna have to disappear for a while.

MS. CAMPBELL: Oh yes, of course.

MR. PHILLIPS: Good. So, anyway, this is it. This will be your classroom.

*MS. CAMPBELL looks around, wide eyed.*

MS. CAMPBELL: Wow. It's hard to believe. My first teaching job.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, everyone's got to start somewhere. Welcome to Carter!

*There's a moment of silence. MS. CAMPBELL looks down.*

MR. PHILLIPS: Is there anything wrong?

MS. CAMPBELL: Oh, it's nothing. I'm just nervous, that's all. I ran into this young man on my way over here. I asked for directions and we started talking. He was kind of rude. I guess he's a former student. When he found out I was going to be teaching here, he laughed and told me the kids were gonna chew me up.

MR. PHILLIPS: Ah, I see. Well, I can say it won't be a challenge. I'm not going to lie, Ms. Campbell. This is an inner-city school. But I and all my staff will be here to support you. And I think in time, you'll find these kids ... are just kids. They need the same things as all kids do. And in them is curiosity and talent and potential. I mean, that's why you became a teacher, isn't it, to bring that out?

MS. CAMPBELL: Yes. Yes, of course.

*[music for EDUCATE starts]*

MR. PHILLIPS: And if you do that. Bring out those characteristics. They'll respect you for helping them see themselves, and for helping them see the possibilities around them.

Song: Educate

*Mr. Phillips sings:*

You and I are here to educate  
Help the human race care for one another  
As we teach, we are to elevate  
Love and appreciate the value of each other

Caring sharing ought to be our formula for living  
To communicate and appreciate and blend

In my years I've learned to motivate  
Mold, and articulate the beauty that's within

*Instrumental - during this time, Mr. Phillips has Ms. Campbell sit at her desk. He then writes her name up on the chalkboard/whiteboard.*

Caring sharing ought to be our formula for living  
To communicate and appreciate and blend

Younger teacher, help these kids today  
Chase all fears away through teaching inspiration  
Education, revelation, confirmation, dedication, education

*Stage goes to black*

Scene VI – the theater

**Production note: Theater can be represented by a simple marquee sign above a door (same prop as in scene IV, turned around).**

*VALERIE and DAVE enter stage right. Upstage, near the theater door, is a HOMELESS PERSON sitting on the street with a "HELP" sign.*

*VALERIE is absorbed in her phone.*

DAVE: I hope you're not gonna look at that thing the whole time during the show.

*VALERIE looks up, perturbed.*

VALERIE: Why not? It's a concert. People will be taking selfies and tagging themselves.

DAVE: Whatever. Why can't you just listen and enjoy the music?

*VALERIE shows her phone to Dave.*

VALERIE: You see! There's my friend Jenna. She's already inside. (sarcastically) Taking pictures of herself. So, what's the big deal? Are you ready to go in?

*While VALERIE was speaking, DAVE noticed the homeless person.*

DAVE: Hold on a second.

*VALERIE resumes looking at her phone.*

*DAVE walks over and hands the homeless person some money, then pats him/her on the shoulder and silently says something. As he's doing so, VALERIE notices. DAVE then returns to Valerie.*

VALERIE: What did you do that for?

DAVE: What?

VALERIE: Give that bum that money?

DAVE: It was just a few bucks. They looked like they could use it.

*VALERIE shakes her head.*

VALERIE: Whatever, Dave. Let's just go in. You got the tickets?

*DAVE reaches into his pocket and hands Valerie her ticket.*

*[music for SINCERELY WE OUGHT TO CHANGE starts]*

DAVE: Why can't you be a little more compassionate?

VALERIE: Compassionate!

DAVE: Yeah. There's nothing wrong helping folks out.

VALERIE: You wanna be Mother Theresa, do it on your own time, not mine.

*DAVE stares at Valerie.*

VALERIE: What?

DAVE: I just can't believe you.

VALERIE: Can't believe what?

DAVE: How cold you are.

VALERIE: Forget you, Dave. You want be Mr. compassion, you go right ahead. I'm going inside.

*VALERIE exits upstage, through theater doors.*

Song: Sincerely, We Ought to Change

*Dave sings:*

I want to be mending people's broken hearts with mercy  
Compassion and tenderness

I believe in miracles healing people, if we all work together  
Peacefully in harmony

If we want our world a place filled with joy  
Let's cast off our judgement; our hatred destroy

With mercy, forgiveness, replenish the world  
Let's open our hearts and let kindness unfurl

*[intro to BRAND NEW ME begins]*

As intro plays, DAVE goes back to the homeless person and helps them to their feet.

Song: Brand New Me

*Dave sings:*

If we stand together and live in harmony  
There will be joy and peace along with victory

*Homeless person sings:*

Now my life is so brand new with you, my friend  
I must thank you for this brand new me.

*Dave sings:*

Let us lift up our eyes and take a look around  
Lonely hearts, hungry mouths, and broken dreams abound

*Both sing:*

You warmed my heart and gave me a reason to stand

I must thank you for this brand new me  
I must thank you for this brand new me

DAVE and HOMELESS PERSON exits stage right.

*Stage goes to black.*

## Scene VII – finale

JEFF and VALERIE enter from opposite sides of the stage. They both stare into their phones as they walk. They bump into each other.

VALERIE: What do you think you're doing? Why don't you watch where you're going?

JEFF: ME? You were the one with your nose buried in that phone!

VALERIE and JEFF (together): Wait a second, I know you.

VALERIE: You work at that coffee shop I go to.

JEFF: Yeah, I've seen you in there a lot. I've seen you with your boyfriend.

VALERIE: *EX*-boyfriend.

JEFF: Oh REALLY. Well, welcome to the club. I broke up with my girlfriend the other day ... and just after I spent all that money on her birthday.

VALERIE: You broke up, huh?

JEFF: Well ... we broke up. It was mutual, you know.

*RUBY comes up in a spotlight upstage, as if she's Jeff's conscience.*

RUBY: I broke up with you, Tony. Because you don't know how to treat people. And I could care less about the birthday present.

JEFF: Whatever. (to Valerie) And what about you? What's your story?

VALERIE: Just lifestyle differences, you know. He was so serious. Wants to save the world. I figure there's time for that. I'm young. But right now, I want to have fun.

*DAVE comes up in a spotlight upstage, as if he's Valerie's conscience.*

DAVE: Who knows how much time we have left, Valerie. We need to show compassion as the opportunities present themselves.

JEFF: Well, it sounds like you and I have a lot in common.

*VALERIE smiles flirtatiously.*

VALERIE: Mm ... maybe.

*MICHELLE comes up in a spotlight.*

MICHELLE: What makes you think he's gonna be any different, Valerie? All these boyfriends, one after another? Just give it a rest.

JEFF: So, what're you into? You on Instagram ... Snapchat? Maybe I can look you up.

*VALERIE and JEFF raise their phones in front of their faces and begin tapping on their screens.*

*THE REST OF THE CAST now come up in spotlights, all are now standing in an illuminated semi-circle upstage of Valerie and Tony.*

MR. PHILLIPS: Or maybe you could just put those phones down. And look at each other's faces.

MS. CAMPBELL: Talk to each other.

DAVE: See the people around you.

RUBY: Change.

ALL: Change!

*VALERIE and JEFF both drop their phones.*

VALERIE and JEFF (together): What was that?

*[music for CHANGING FOR THE BETTER starts]*

Song: [Changing for Better](#)

*As the characters sing, VALERIE and JEFF stand frozen, looking at each other.*

*Dave sings:*

Now is the time to start changing from within  
Look deep inside and you'll see how to begin

*Ruby sings:*

Let go of yearning for the things that surely pass  
Take hold of caring for the values that will last

*Mr. Philips sings:*

Learn from each other's lives; learn how to grow and thrive  
See with each other's eyes; continue to seek and strive

*As Ms. Campbell sings, the entire cast moves downstage and stands in a line, with VALERIE and JEFF in the middle.*

*Ms. Campbell sings:*

Flowing abundantly forever, changing for better  
Changing for better, changing for better  
Changing for better, changing for better for you and me.

*[music for NOW I SEE YOU starts immediately - no break]*

Song: Now I See You (was Brother's-Sister's keeper)

*All sing:*

Now I see you  
Now I see you  
Now I see you  
Now I see you

*Jeff*

I see the people moving around  
I see all the colors, I hear all the sound  
My eyes were made to look at these things  
Not spend my time staring at a screen

*Valerie*

In this world we live  
We are to love and to forgive  
Increase harmony  
Bringing peace to all we see

*Valerie and Jeff together*

Let's free up our minds from our technology  
Put aside gossip, hate, and jealousy

*VALERIE and JEFF look at each other*

It's ok if I don't know all the news  
I may not see it all, but I now I do see you

**All sing:**

Now I see you  
Now I see you  
Now I see you  
Now I see you

*Black out.*

**##END##**