

# "absurd person singular" by alan ayckbourn essay sample

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Absurd Person Singular is a play written by Alan Ayckbourn in the 20th century. Absurd Person Singular is a black comedy where the characters have very strong characteristics that the audience can relate to. The play was written in three acts, each act is performed in three different kitchens over three consecutive years, on Christmas day. I will be taking the role as a director and will be advising you the actor playing the part of Sidney Hopcroft, one of the characters of absurd person singular, on how to play your role.

Act 1: Act 1 is played in the kitchen of Sidney and Jane Hopcroft on the first Christmas. Sidney Hopcroft is married to Jane Hopcroft, he is very insensitive towards Jane " Jane: I don't want to let you down. Sidney: You never have yet" I want you to pause shortly and stare into Jane's eyes before saying yet, there should also be a vocal emphasis on the " yet". There was no need for Sidney to say what he did, he could have said something else that would have been nicer towards Jane and not put her under so much pressure. Linking in with the previous point Sidney also controls Jane, " Sidney: you will have to go back in there and explain. Jane: No I couldn't. Sidney: Of course you must. Jane:(On the verge of tears again) I couldn't.

Sidney: (furious) you take off all that – and you go back in there and explain." He tries to make her do what he wants, he could have said it in a different way and not make Jane cry but he is too busy trying to impress his guests. As your saying these lines to Jane I want you to lean over Jane slightly, bang a glass on the table and be at the brink of shouting, whereas Jane will be ducking slightly of terror and speaking quietly back to you.

Sidney's social status is along way below his guests Ronald who is a successful bank manager and his wife Marion who is an alcoholic snob. There is also Geoffrey who is in act one a very well known architect and his wife Eva who is really just interested in herself. Sidney's guest notice Sidney's social status and ridicule him because of it " Marion: simply loathsome little house. I mean how can people live in them. Geoff: they're designed like this mainly because of cost and people who are desperate for somewhere to live." Now a days people would not be that interested about someone else's house, but when this play was set (late 60's-early 70's) people would only be around other people of the same social class, this is why Marion, Ronald, Eva and Geoff are not that happy to be around with Sidney and Jane.

Another characteristic of Sidney is that he is quiet clumsy, for instant when he is wanting to use the air freshener but uses the fly spray by accident " Sidney: just coming to terms with your air freshener. Jane: that's fly spray" this just proves the point that he is clumsy because its not every day that someone get the fly spray mixed up with the air freshener? Before Jane comes in and sees that Sidney has sprayed himself with the fly spray Sidney is on his own reading the instructions " Shake can before use. Remove cap. Hold away from body and spray into air by depressing button" the light should be focused on Sidney, as you move around the kitchen trying to find sufficient light to read the instructions, you should also bump slightly into one of the chairs as you make your way around the kitchen. As you are moving around the kitchen hold the can slightly above eye level and I want

you to speak in a posh accent to seem like you are an expert at what your doing.

Act 2: The second Christmas takes part in the kitchen of Geoffrey and Eva Jackson. A year has past since act 1 and Sidney who did not have a social status has seemed to have move up in life, we can clearly see that he has changed when Ronald asks Sidney about his business " Ronald: must be pretty pleased with your year, I should imagine. Sidney: Oh, yes. Had a few lucky hunches. Seemed to pay off." In act 1 Sidney had invited Ronald, who is a bank manager, so that the bank could lend him some money to expand his business. This seemed to have paid off for him, so he must have increased his business so he will get more money from his business which will therefore get him respect from richer people and move him up in the social class. When you are talking to Ronald I want you to be surprised when he asks you about Sidney's business and then put your pointing finger and thumb on your chin and look into Ronald's eye's as if you had no idea what he is talking about.

The control that Sidney had over Jane has also increased, Jane now tries to compliment Sidney on the things he does or what he is good at " Jane: You want to know anything, you just ask Sidney" and she is starting to copy his words " Sidney: Each to his own. Jane: Each to his own." This might be because of Sidney's rise in his social status or it might be because she is frighten that he will react in a bad way and she doesn't want him to shout at her. In act 1 Sidney was making Jane feel bad by putting her under pressure but in act 2 he shouts at her for making a mistake that she didn't want to

happen. " Sidney: Look at what you've done! You silly woman! (Beating her away) Don't do that! Don't do that! It's too late for that." Even though Sidney told her not to pour anything down the drain because he was fixing it she did it by accident. He should not have reacted the way that he did because he just snapped at her in front of the other people which would be really embarrassing for Jane and make her look like she's just with Sidney and obeys his rules. Alan Ayckbourn's stage directions " beating her away" make Sidney look cold and sinister almost like a dictator trying to be in control. After Jane pours the dirty water over Sidney you should just shout really loud until your face goes red and putting your hands on Jane's shoulders to push her down, she will be blubbing beneath Sidney. The other characters should be gasping in astonishment, the light should be dimmed to make the scene look more sinister.

In this act Sidney is not really that clumsy with material objects but he is very precise and fussy when he is trying to explain things by drawing unneeded diagrams that nobody is interested in, " Sidney: Look, you've got your two wires coming down... look, I'll draw it for you (he whips out his pencil again and searching for a piece of paper, picks up Eva's suicide note. With a casual glance at it) noting important is it? (Without waiting for a reply, he turns it over and starts to sketch) being of a higher class I think that Ronald would rather just have Sidney do the work instead of showing everyone how to do it. Alan Ayckbourn intended Absurd Person Singular to be a black comedy, in act 2 the audience knows that the note that Sidney writes on is Eva's suicide note and that she was trying to kill herself through

the entire act, Ayckbourn wanted the audience to laugh at the fact that the other characters are too stupid or concentrated on themselves to notice Eva trying to kill herself. When you talking to Ronald explaining to him how to fix the lights I want you to talk very slowly as the other watch you carefully. As you take the note I want you to have a quick glance and a shrug of the shoulders, meanwhile Eva will be hanging her head down in disbelief.

Act 3: The final act is played in the kitchen of Ronald and Eva Brewster-Wright. Firstly Sidney gets Jane to come inside the house in which all the lights are off because they are not wanted " Ronald: if we sit quietly they'll go away." This is because Ronald and Geoff are both jealous of Sidney because of his business success " Ronald: He happens to have a large deposit account with my bank" and their failure " Ronald: sorry to hear about your problems Geoff. Hear it fell through" and " Ronald: we're not in the red, yet" Sidney has clearly become more successful than Ronald and Geoff since act 1 and with that has a better social status.

After the lights get turned on Jane asks Sidney if they should hand out the presents " Jane: (very, very quietly) Sidney. (Still mouthing and miming) shall we give them their presents now?" Jane is whispering to Jane because they only bought presents for Ronald and Eva, so it would be a bit awkward to give some people presents and not to the others because it would make them feel left out. Sidney on the other hand is not bothered " Sidney: Yes, yes that's why we've brought them." This is where Sidney is being insensitive to Marion and Geoff because they have given Ronald and Eva presents but not Geoff and Marion, but he doesn't realise it. When you say

your lines " yes, yes of course. That's why we've brought them." You should be talking as if it was a silly question from Jane and pulling a facial expression as if to say why did you even bother asking.

Sidney is not able to understand that when he came in and turned on the lights that the others were trying to hide from him " the other four are in various absurd frozen postures obviously caught in the act of trying to find a hiding-place" he does not get that they were trying to hide from him because he is socially inept and thinks the others are his friends and is obviously fooled " Sidney: Completely fooled. Walked straight into that. Well, happy Christmas, all." I want you to act surprised when they tell Sidney that it was a game and whilst saying the lines give them a quiet applause to congratulate them all.

The control has completely shifted to Sidney's side, as all Jane can do is copy the things he says " Sidney: you should know those. Jane: you should know those, shouldn't you?" and " Sidney: what a house. Beautiful. Jane: Lovely." Jane either doesn't know what to say or she doesn't want to get Sidney in a mood. At the end of act 3 Sidney gets every one to play a game where they have to dance to music and when Sidney stops the music they have to freeze and if someone moves they get a forfeit. " Sidney: And off we go...!" Sidney has them doing what he wants, like a ringmaster cracking his whip to keep everyone in line. Right at the end Sidney get obsessed and keeps telling them to " Sidney: Dance. Come on. Dance. Dance. Come on. Dance. Dance. Dance. Keep dancing. Dance..." Sidney gets carried away, he doesn't know when to stop now that he has got them doing what he wants.

To conclude Sidney has developed in a great way over the three acts. He's gained a lot of control; from only controlling Jane in act 1 to controlling everyone by making them dance to his tunes his upgrade in social class will have helped him with this because if he was still poor like in act 1 no one would have even taken notice of the things he says.