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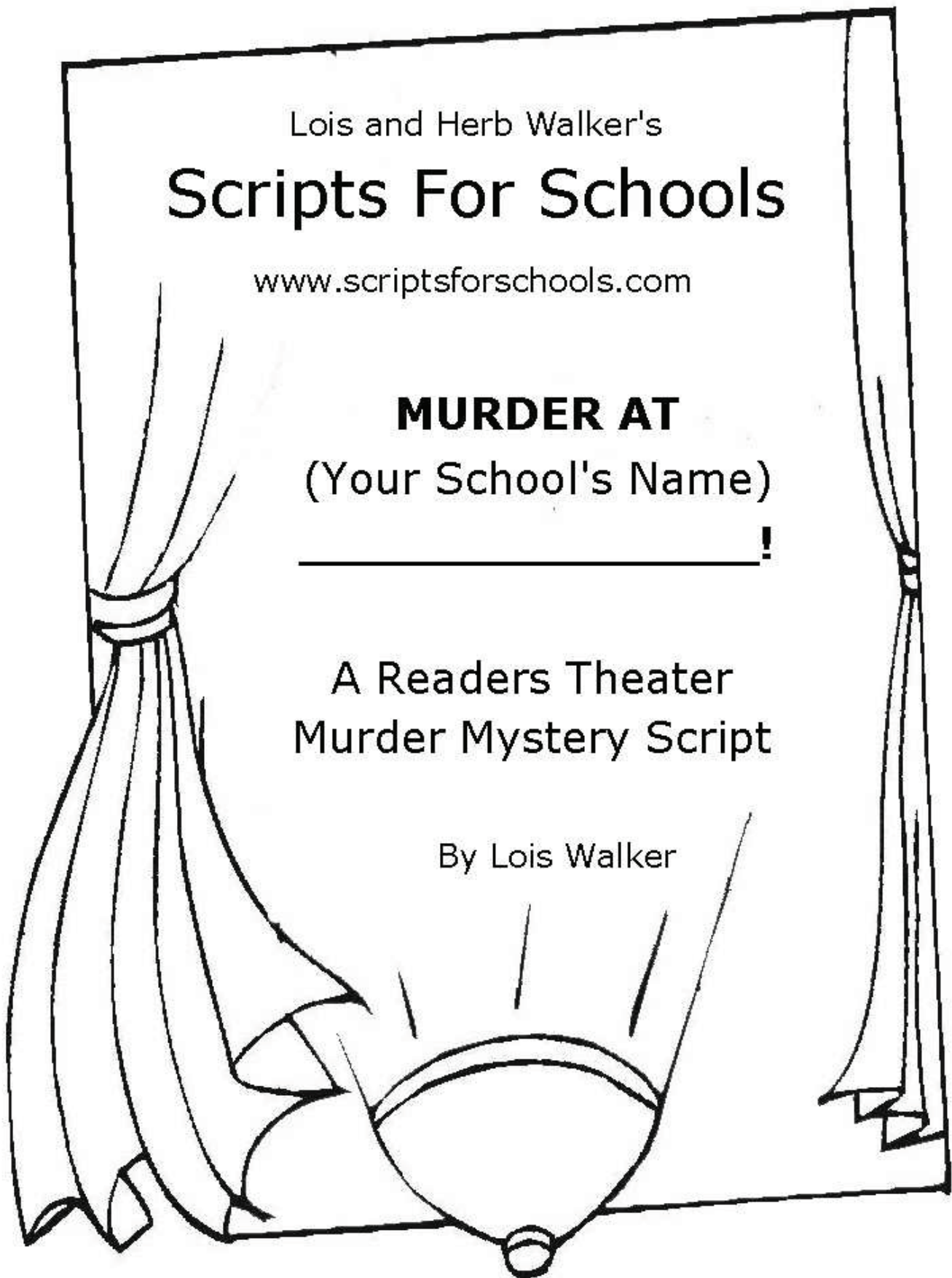
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MURDER AT (Your School's Name)

_____!

A Readers Theater
Murder Mystery Script

By Lois Walker



MURDER AT _____!

By Lois Walker

CAST OF 6: READER 1, Head Librarian (Hostess)
 READER 2, Music Teacher
 READER 3, Science Teacher
 READER 4, School Counselor
 GRETA DESMOND, Drama Teacher/Theater Director from a rival
 school.
 SELMA, GRETA DESMOND'S Assistant Director

(READERS 1,2,3,4 enter reading area and take their places behind 4 music stands. The stands are arranged with 2 stands on one side of the performance area, and 2 more on the other. A space is left in the center of these stands where GRETA DESMOND and SELMA will stand later. READER 1 is positioned far stage left. READER 2 is next and closer to center stage. READER 4 is positioned far stage right. READER 3 is next and closer to center stage. SELMA'S chair is positioned far stage left. A table with coffee, tea, etc. is set stage right. A prop water pitcher and glass are also set on this table. READERS 1,2,3,4 enter, and stand with backs to audience (BTA) at the beginning of the reading. When all is quiet, READER 1 turns to face the audience and begins).

READER 1

_____ : Welcome, everyone! Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is _____ and I'm the Head Librarian at _____ (your school's name). A few of my colleagues are here today to help present a short demonstration of **Readers Theater** and suggest how this read-aloud method might be used in our classrooms or student activities in our community.

(READER 2 turns to face audience).

READER 2

_____ : Hello! My name is _____ and I'm the Music Teacher at this school. So, as you can see, _____, _____, _____, (readers' names) and I are standing here behind music stands we borrowed from my music room. On the stands are matching ring binders containing our Readers Theater scripts. The ring binders make page-turning easy.

(READER 2 flips a page back and forth to demonstrate).

Oh, and while you're all here and I have a captive audience, I'd like to remind you about our band and chorus concert scheduled for tomorrow night. All proceeds from ticket sales go directly to the Amphibian Arc Program, a national program formed to save endangered amphibians. It's a worthy cause and one of special interest to me. Tickets are going fast and I'm told we're almost sold out. So, hope to see you there...

(READER 3 turns to face audience).

READER 3

_____ : I'm _____ (name). As the school's Science Teacher, I've become very interested in Readers Theater and ways to use it in my Science classroom to introduce students to stories about famous scientists like Walter Reed or Alexander Gettler and authors of well-known science books like Louis Casarett, and John Doull.

Look carefully. You'll see that we are **reading** from these scripts. We're making eye contact with you and looking up as much as possible, but we are still reading. None of our readers has memorized the reading parts. Instead, our job is to relax and read with expression!

(READER 4 turns to face audience).

READER 4

_____ : And I just entered the room! I'm the School Counselor and my name is _____. You'll have to imagine that when my back was turned I wasn't here at all. Now that I've turned around, I'm on stage and in the spotlight. That's one of the ways Readers Theater works.

READER 3

_____ : OK, OK, then. I'm leaving. I've got some papers to grade in my lab.

(READER 3 turns BTA and either sits on a chair/stool or freezes in position).

READER 2

_____ : Well, that was quick. I hardly saw her/him go. Is she/he coming back?

READER 1

_____ : Probably...

(At this moment GRETA DESMOND and ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (SELMA) barge into the room from the main door. GRETA DESMOND leads the way and is clearly in command. SELMA follows behind trying to hold loose script pages and juggle a number of props. She awkwardly scurries along behind GRETA DESMOND. The following lines should be memorized. Greta goes into "Readers Theater mode" on the next page and can read her lines from that point on).

GRETA: Stop! Stop this silly demonstration immediately! Cease and desist! I have a few things to say about this **Readers Theater** business. Stand aside, stand aside. We live in a democracy, I have a right to speak, and I demand attention!!! (etc.)

(As actors approach reading area, READERS 1,2,4 ad lib to each other in dismay. "What's going on?" Who's this? etc.).

(GRETA DESMOND takes place Center Stage, glaring at both the audience and readers).

GRETA: Selma!!! Seeeeelllll-ma! Where are you and where is my script? This is just a first rehearsal and I still need my script!!!! *Get the lead out!* Seeelll-ma...

(SELMA finally drops everything she is carrying on floor at GRETA DESMOND 'S feet, adjusts her glasses, dramatically pokes a large pencil behind her ear, and starts to sort through the mess, mumbling unhappily as she does this).

SELMA: Now, where is that blasted script? Here's your dry cleaning receipt, and your electricity bill, and your library card – oh dear – what a mess!

(GRETA makes no move to help. She considers the mess to be SELMA'S problem).

READER 4

_____ : Here, let me help you with those. (READER 4 comes forward and takes the receipt, bill and card back to his/her own music stand).

SELMA: Thank you, thank you so much. OK, and here's an old theater ticket, a speeding ticket, a lottery ticket, and a ticket to the music concert tomorrow night. (SELMA waves the tickets in the air for all to see).

READER 2

_____ : (Immediately) I can help too. Hand those up here to me...

GRETA: (With great authority) **Stop right there!** I'll take care of them myself. Give them to me.

(SELMA hands tickets to GRETA. GRETA puts all of the tickets into her pocket or purse, making sure they are secure. SELMA finally spots the script).

SELMA: Oh, there's the script. Here is it, GRETA...

(SELMA presents the script to GRETA).

GRETA: Thank you! (Curtly). And may I say – it's about time...

SELMA: (Looking around) I-I-I can't find my own script. Is there any chance you and I could, uh - sort of share that one?

GRETA: If there's one thing you can "take to the bank" SELMA my dear, it is – I never **share** anything! Go!!!!

(SELMA begins to slump off stage left to edge of performance area, but GRETA stops her with the following):

GRETA: And SELMA --- where is **my** music stand?

(SELMA sees an extra music stand off to the side, stomps over to get it, and places it in front of GRETA. She then falls into her chair, exhausted).

(GRETA DESMOND smiles broadly, places script on stand, consults the script and goes into Readers Theater mode by reading her lines with expression – just like the rest).

GRETA: Now, let's get one thing straight. My mission is to STAMP OUT READERS THEATER wherever I find it – and I've found it **here** at _____ (school name).

(READER 3 turns to face audience).

READER 3

_____: What in the world is going on here. I heard shouting from way down the hall. (Notices GRETA DESMOND). Well, who are you?

GRETA: I'm GRETA DESMOND, Head Drama Teacher from _____ (rival school's name).

READER 4

_____: GRETA DESMOND? I've heard that name somewhere before. (Looks at READER 2). _____ (rival school's name)! Isn't that where you used to work before you came to our school?

READER 2

_____ : (Uninterested). Yes.

GRETA: Well, I heard you were trying to sneak some *Readers Theater* into _____ (your school's name) and I am here to put a stop to it! My pathetic Assistant Director, SELMA- over there - is here to assist me in doing ***just that***.

(SELMA groans from her chair).

READER 1

_____ : Ah, excuse me, I don't mean to be rude but - this is just a demonstration.

READER 2

_____ : Look, we're trying to present another way to tell a story, perform a play, have fun with a poem, or encourage our students to read.

READER 3

_____ : We're not trying to offend anybody.

READER 4

_____ : GRETA, we're just trying to offer another option. (Smiles broadly).

GRETA: Another option – my foot! As some of you already know, I'm a gambling kind of woman and I'd be willing to wager that this is *tyranny*. As Shakespeare wrote, "In pleasing smiles such murderous tyranny"...

(SELMA has found her script and has been consulting her notes. She leaps up, pulls pencil from behind her ear and uses it to accentuate the following line by jabbing it in the air).

SELMA: Tamora said that very thing in Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, Act 2, Scene 3!

GRETA: Oh, *put a sock in it* SELMA!

(SELMA dramatically sticks the pencil back behind her ear and sits dejectedly).

READER 1

_____ : Oh, I think I understand what's going on. You're a Drama Teacher and you live in the world of sets, lights, make up, and costumes..

READER 2

_____ : I know you - you're trained to memorize every word in your script.

SELMA: (Stands) That is - except at first rehearsals! (Sarcastically. She sits).

READER 3

_____ : You always want to put on a *BIG* show.

READER 4

_____ : You probably specialize in Broadway musical productions.

GRETA: You got that right, sister (brother).

READER 1

_____ : But Readers Theater isn't meant to take the *place* of theater. We still love to put on a big show when we can. Like we said before, Readers Theater is just another option.

READER 2

_____ : Just another way of telling a tale.

GRETA: Hogwash! You're not talking about *telling* a tale. You're talking about *reading* it. What a stupid incompetent nitwit you are. Always were, always will be.

READER 2

_____ : Well, just like you, I'm a gambling kind of woman (man) myself and I bet you'd be **wrong** about that! (READER 2 is angry).

GRETA: And I bet I'd be **right**. GRETA DESMON is always right. Whatever Greta wants – Greta gets - you fool.

READER 3

_____ : Calm down, you two.

GRETA: I've been talking so much that my mouth is dry. Does anybody have any chewing gum? Sugarless Trident is my favorite, but anything else will do, I guess.

READER 3

_____ : (Takes gum out of pocket and passes it to GRETA DESMOND). Here. You'll have a adjust to Juicy Fruit this time around.

(As GRETA DESMOND unwraps gum and pops it into her mouth, READER 4 is shaking her/his head and finally speaks):

READER 4

_____ : (Looking at GRETA DESMOND). You know, you're exhibiting the behavior of a bully. I'm the School Counselor here and we have **zero tolerance** for bullying at this school.

GRETA: Oh, "**Zero Tolerance**" - what a cloyingly clever way to put it. Selma, pass me a pencil so I can write that one down. *Zero Tolerance, Zero Tolerance!* Selll-ma, where is that pencil? I have **Zero Tolerance** for dull, dazed, dumb, dense, dimwitted assistants. Hop to it! *Get the lead out...*

Selma has jumped up and is taking the pencil from behind her ear. She passes it to READER 1. READER 1 passes it to READER 2. Just as READER 2 receives the pencil, GRETA DESMOND speaks again).

GRETA: And Selma, bring me a glass of water. I'm parched up here. Quickly woman, quickly!! Hustle, hustle. *Will you get the lead out?*

SELMA: (Looking around frantically). I can't do it. There's no water over here!

READER 4

_____ : Wait a minute, there's a water pitcher over here on this side. It's on the coffee table.

(As READER 4 goes to pour a glass of water, READER 2 drops the pencil to the floor, then kneels down to retrieve it. READER 2 then passes the pencil to GRETA DESMOND. GRETA DESMOND sticks the pencil behind her ear in time to accept the glass of water from READER 4.

(GRETA DESMOND accepts glass, drinks one sip, then calls out:

GRETA: Selma!

(Selma rushes over to collect the glass. There is still some water in it. She puts the glass on the floor near her chair and sits again).

(As this is happening, GRETA DESMOND takes the pencil from behind her ear and tries to write "Zero Tolerance" on her script. The lead in the pencil doesn't work. She wets the lead point by touching it to her tongue, tries to write again, and is successful

this time. GRETA DESMOND mutters as she does all of the above: "Zero Tolerance". Ha, ha, ha. That's sweet. I've got to write that down. How irritating - this pencil doesn't work," "Oh, there, that's better, etc." When finished, GRETA DESMOND sticks pencil back behind her ear with a flourish. During all of this, READER 3 is watching carefully).

READER 3

_____ : (To GRETA DESMOND) You know the more I look at you, the more I think I've seen you someplace before.

GRETA: Well, finally! I wondered if you were either being your normally stupid self or being deliberately obtuse.

READER 3

_____ : Yes, it was spring break last year. You were on that Teacher's cruise to South America. I remember seeing you in the casino, yelling at the attendants and staff.

GRETA: We were also on a land tour together. Remember the native guide in Columbia telling us about the famous Golden Frog and showing us around the Amphibian Preserve? What a bore that was!

READER 3

_____ : It's all coming back to me now. I was so fascinated conducting research on the Golden Frog that I happily forgot all about you.

GRETA: Filthy frogs! What vile creatures. I wish I'd stayed on board.
(Getting more upset) Filthy, filthy frogs!!!! Oh, all this talk has
given me a headache. (Hand on head) Selma, bring me an
aspirin!

(SELMA grabs the aspirin bottle from her props, grabs the water
glass, rushes over and hands the bottle to GRETA DESMOND.
GRETA DESMOND opens bottle and pops an aspirin in her
mouth. SELMA offers the water glass).

GRETA: (With a scathing look at SELMA). These are chew-able aspirins,
idiot!

(SELMA slinks back to chair with bottle and glass, and sits
dejectedly).

READER 1

_____ : You know, I think we've all had just about enough of this...

GRETA: Who cares? I haven't said everything I came here to say. As I
mentioned earlier, I am here to help stamp out *Readers
Theater*. (Checks script). What's this it says here in the script?
It says (Suddenly looks surprised) – It says, I – uh, oh --- It
says I don't feel so well. (Sways from side to side) I don't feel
well at all...

READER 3

_____ : What's the problem?

GRETA: I think, I think – (Clutches stomach and gasps) - I think I'm really really sick!

ALL: NO!

GRETA: The drink, the drink! I am poison'd...

SELMA: (Jumps up) Queen Gertrude said those exact words in Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act 5, Scene 2! (Sits)

GRETA: (Rolls eyes and staggers from side to side. She stops suddenly). So, what do I do now? (To audience, eyes wide).

READER 4

_____ : This is Readers Theater. Just turn your back to the audience and you'll be offstage.

GRETA: (GRETA DESMOND turns back to audience, swaying back and forth. There is a pause). I'm still heeeeeeeeeere – and I'm still dyyyyyyying!

READER 1

_____ : OK, maybe you'd better just exit the way they do it in traditional theater.

GRETA: (Turns and stumbles out the way she entered, moaning).

SELMA: Oh dear!!! (SELMA jumps up, tries to hurriedly gather up some of her things, but scatters them all over the floor again. Finally she rushes after GRETA DESMOND and slams the door shut. A scream is heard from the other side of the door. SELMA re-enters and speaks from just inside the door). She's *dead!* The great GRETA DESMOND is *dead!!!!*

READER 2

_____ : Oh no, oh no! I'm going to faint. I need some water. (READER 2 motions toward the water pitcher and glasses on coffee table).

READER 1

_____ : (Holds hand up to stop the action. Everyone freezes in position on the word "Stop". **Stop!** Nobody touches that water. We don't know what killed GRETA DESMOND. That water could be *poisoned*.

(READERS break freeze together).

READER 3

_____ : That's crazy! She got herself all worked up over nothing and had a heart attack. Someone call the doctor!

SELMA: (Speaks as she walks from the door into the performance area, and steps behind music stand and into the space vacated by the GRETA DESMOND, facing the audience). No, someone call the police. It's too late for a doctor. If you don't believe me, check it out yourselves.

READER 1

_____ : I'll do that right now.

ALL READERS: Wait, we'll come with you!

READER 1

_____ : No! All of you stay right where you are. (READER 1 marches to the door, opens it, steps outside, waits 4 beats, then steps directly back inside. The door is then shut again). SELMA'S right. GRETA DESMOND is out there slowly turning stiff. She's also out there slowly turning a strange shade of yellow.

This calls for drastic action and organization – and nobody is as organized as a Head School Librarian. Not one person leaves this room until the police get here! I won't leave either. I'll call the police on my cell phone.

It's time for an unexpected intermission. All of you, please feel free to sample the coffee and tea on the coffee table over there - but whatever you do, stay away from that water pitcher!

(Short Intermission Here. It should be a minimum of 5-10 minutes. Audience members have refreshments and talk about this unexpected turn of events. READERS stay in character and mingle with audience members. READERS mingle, play along and give out minimal information, if asked for more details. Throughout most of this time, READER 1 is off in a corner busily miming conversations on her cell phone).

(READER 1 reconvenes group with this announcement):

READER 1

_____ : Attention everyone! I'm so sorry for the inconvenience. It looks as though we got much more than we bargained for when we started this little Readers Theater demonstration. Please take your places and I'll fill you in on what's been happening.

(Audience takes seats. READERS take original positions. SELMA stands center stage, behind music stand).

READER 2

_____ : So, what's the scoop? What did the police say?

READER 1

_____ : The bad news is that they won't be here for at least a half an hour.

ALL: WHAT?

READER 1

_____ : Seems there's a major bank robbery happening at the _____ (local bank) and all the local police are tied up there at the moment. No problem. We'll just stay here and wait for them to appear.

READER 4

_____ : That's crazy! There's a murderer in this room. I have *zero tolerance* for murderers! I refuse to stay in the same room with one.

READER 2

_____ : Hey, for all we know, **you** are the murderer. If I remember correctly, zero tolerance means ---- *ZERO!* And you served her the water. None of us even touched the glass.

READER 4

_____ : SELMA touched the glass!

READER 2

_____ : ...But not until *after* GRETA DESMOND had taken a drink.

READER 4

_____ : Well SELMA gave her the aspirin. It could have been poisoned. Ah, and, there's something suspicious about *you* too. As far as we know, you're the only other staff member from this school who actually knew the victim beforehand.

READER 1

_____ : No, READER 3 _____ (name) knew her from the cruise ship.

READER 3

_____ : Yes, I did. And that leads me to another thought.
(To READER 1): Did you say GRETA DESMOND is out there in the hallway turning yellow? What do you mean by "yellow" exactly?

READER 1

_____ : Uh, well maybe "gold" would be a better way to describe what I saw. The color reminded me of that unfortunate young lady in that old James Bond movie, Goldfinger!

READER 3

_____ : Just as I suspected! This definitely looks like a poisoning and, if I remember the symptoms correctly, she may have been poisoned from an extract made from the skin glands of a Golden Poison Frog. This amphibian is considered the most poisonous vertebrate in the world. When exposed to the toxin, death is certain and happens fairly quickly. Well, we all saw how quickly it happened – didn't we? And, once dead, the victim turns a lovely shade of gold.

READER 1

_____ : What exactly do you mean by "exposed to the toxin"?

READER 2

_____ : How much would she have to swallow to make the toxin lethal?

SELMA: Maybe she didn't have to swallow it at all. Maybe she just --- she just – (very dramatically) breathed it in through the air!!!!!!!

READER 3

_____ : Well, she couldn't breathe it in through the air, but this toxin is so strong that touching the Golden frog means certain death. In toxicology studies, chickens and dogs have died from contact with a paper towel on which a frog had walked!

SELMA: Well, now I'm glad she **didn't** share her script with me!