

The Hundred Dresses Reader's Theater

List of Characters

Maddi

Peggy

Wanda

Miss Mason

The Hundred Dresses Reader's Theater

Peggy: Petronski.....Petronski.....What kind of a name is Petronski? Petronski—Onski, that's what we would call her. I know, I know, her name was Wanda. Wanda Petronski. She was so quiet, almost different. She never smiled unless it was a really weird crooked smile. She lived way up in Boggins Heights. And Boggins Heights was no place to live. Nobody who was anybody lived there. Unless it was someone like old man Swenson who lived alone except for his cat and dog. His house was dirty, never painted, and his yard was littered with rusty tin cans and even an old straw hat.

Wanda's house was probably just as bad and that is another reason why she was quiet, weird. She always stood alone in the school yard. Her shoes, from walking all the way from Boggins Heights were muddy and she sat back in the corner of the classroom with all the other students—mostly the rowdy boys—and never participated in the classroom discussions. But most of all, she wore the same dress every day! Oh yeah, it was clean, but it was a rumpled, faded blue and....everyday, without fail, the same dress! Yet, Wanda insisted that at home she had 100 dresses all lined up in her closet! She even said she had 60 pairs of shoes all lined up too! Even my friend Maddi thinks she is strange. Just ask her.....

Maddi: Yes.....Wanda was different. But I was afraid to disagree with Peggy about her. I was poor too. My dresses were usually hand-me-downs that my mother would repair and add little trims to make them look different than when they were given to me, but I wasn't as poor as Wanda. At least my forehead didn't shine like Wanda's did! I kept telling myself that Peggy wasn't really cruel. She was always

kind to animals. If we would have suggested to Peggy that calling Wanda names and making fun of her dress was cruel, she would have been surprised. How did this whole thing get started?

Oh yes.....I remember.....We were all standing on the corner one bright beautiful blue October morning. We were all admiring Cecile's new dress. It was red and it sparkled in the bright morning air. Cecile was always wearing a new dress. She was a dancer and that day she carried her satin ballet shoes over her shoulder. It was easy to admire Cecile. Suddenly, Wanda appeared at the fringe of our circle.

It was such a beautiful day that even Wanda looked pretty in the light. She approached the group ever so carefully, shyly. Everyone was talking about Cecile's new dress and how they too were going to get a new dress. Nobody even noticed that Wanda was just standing there. Nobody until Wanda spoke softly,

Wanda: I got a hundred dresses home.

Peggy: What did you say?

Wanda: I got a hundred dresses home.

Peggy: That's what I thought you said. A hundred dresses. A hundred! Hey, kids, this girl's got a hundred dresses!

Maddi: We all just stared at Wanda. Nobody could have a hundred dresses.

Wanda: I have though. In my closet....all kinds of dresses....all lined up in my closet. And 60 pairs of shoes too!

Peggy: Oh, I see. The child has a hundred dresses, but all we ever see in the one blue dress.

Maddi: I was so relieved when the school bell rang and we could all run for our classes. I felt sorry for Wanda, but didn't know what I could do to make a difference. Why did she have to say that she had a hundred dresses anyway? Peggy and I sat close to each other in class where we could laugh and talk together between lessons. We were such good friends. I liked her so much and didn't want to risk our friendship by saying anything nice about Wanda. Wanda was way in the

dirty, noisy corner of the room. She could barely read and stood embarrassed in front of the classroom when it was her time to read. Was she dumb, or what? We all just snickered a little under our breath when she or one of the other dirty, noisy boys stood to read.

After that bright October day, Peggy would find ways to bring up the hundred dresses whenever we saw Wanda—on the way to school or on the playground. It was like a game to her, and we would all fall right in, so much so that even if you felt uncomfortable as I was, there wasn't anything you could do about it. She would ask in a teasing way about the hundred dresses. And always, Wanda insisted that she did too have a hundred dresses. She even described them in vivid detail—rich shades of green and red, blue, lavish designs with shoes to match!

Peggy: I just felt that a day was lost if I could not find a way to ask Wanda about her 100 dresses. I took a sort of delight in making her squirm a little bit. I even asked her if she really had the hundred dresses, why didn't she wear one of them to school. She looked uncomfortable, waited in silence and then said...

Wanda: (Nodding) A hundred of them. All lined up in my closet.

Peggy: Time passed and one day our teacher, Miss Mason, announced a drawing contest in our class. Boys would draw designs of motorboats. Girls would design and draw dresses. Now, if there was one thing I could do well, it was to draw! I was going to win that contest! Finally, the day of the contest judgement arrived. Maddi and I hurried to our classroom to see all of the pictures that the girls in the classroom had drawn. We were amazed as we looked all around the room. There were so many, many pictures of beautiful dresses in rich shades of green and red and blue—lavish designs! There were probably 100 pictures just hanging there! Absolutely beautiful! Who had drawn all of these pictures? I thought I was a good artist, but these.....! When we had all gathered in the room, Miss Mason stood and announced that the winner of the girls' contest was none other than.....Wanda Petronski! Wanda Petronski?!?

Peggy and Maddi: (Looking at each other nodding in disbelief)

And Wanda had not even been in school for days! One day she just stopped coming to school and so had her big brother Jake. They were gone and yet Wanda had won the drawing contest! Nobody knew where Wanda and Jake had gone. While we

were circling the room and marveling at the beauty of the hundred dresses, the principal brought a note to Miss Mason.

Miss Mason: It was a letter from Wanda's father:

“Dear teacher: My Wanda will not come to your school anymore. Jake also. Now we move away to big city. Mo more holler Polack. No more ask why funny name. Plenty of funny names in the big city.

Yours truly, Jan Petronski”

Wiping her glasses on her soft white handkerchief, and then putting them on again:

I am sure none of my boys and girls would purposely and deliberately hurt anyone's feelings because his name happened to be a long, unfamiliar one. I prefer to think that what was said was said in thoughtlessness. I know that all of you feel the way I do, that this is a very unfortunate thing to have happen. Unfortunate and sad, both. And I want you to think about it.

Maddi: After Miss Mason spoke to us, I had a sick feeling in my stomach. True, I had listened while Peggy continually bombarded Wanda with questions about her 100 dresses, but I said nothing! I had just stood there! I had helped someone to be so unhappy that they had to move away from town. Oh.....what could I do? If only I could tell Wanda that I hadn't meant to hurt her feelings. I know.....I could write her a letter of apology.

Peggy: I felt sad too although I was really embarrassed to talk about it much. So I just suggested that Maddi and I could go and see if Wanda had really moved or not. Sure enough, she had moved away and her shabby little house was empty.
(Looking at Maddi): What could we do?

Maddi: That's when we decided to write Wanda a letter and hope that the Post Office would forward it to her new address, wherever that was. It was just a friendly letter telling her that she had won the drawing contest. We also told her that drawings were very pretty, that we liked them very much. We told her about other things in our class and asked her how she liked her new school. We really did meant to tell her how sorry we were, but the letter ended up to be just a friendly one—you know, the kind of letter you would write to any good friend. We signed it with lots of X's for love.

Peggy: We mailed the letter hoping that somehow it would reach Wanda at her new home. Maddi and I kept thinking about her. We realized that she didn't have a mother, that she probably had to do her own washing and ironing. With only one blue dress she maybe had to wash it and hang it to dry for overnight. Maybe even it was still damp in the morning when she went to wear it. Even with all of that, we thought, the dress was always clean. Days, then weeks went by. Christmas was coming, then one day—

Miss Mason: I have a surprise. (holding up a letter) Guess who this is from? You remember Wanda Petronski? Let me read it to you.

Dear Miss Mason,
How are you and Room 13? Please tell the girls they can keep those hundred dresses because in my new house I have a hundred new ones all lined up in my closet. I'd like that girl Peggy to have the drawing of the green dress with the red trimming and her friend Maddie to have the blue one. For Christmas, I miss that school and my new teacher does not equalize with you. Merry Christmas to you and everybody.

Yours truly, Wanda Petronski

Maddie: Peggy and I were so happy! On our way home, after we had stayed at school to help clean up, the Christmas lights were sparkling on the snow. Their colors reminded us of all the colors of Wanda's 100 dresses. Peggy was happy to think that Wanda liked us after all. I sure hoped so. I wanted so much to be able to make things right with Wanda. I put Wanda's drawing on my bedroom wall. I studied it and soon began to realize that this was a picture of me! It looked just like me! The next day I hurried to Peggy's house. I asked to see the picture that Wanda had drawn of her. It looked just like Peggy! It really did!

Peggy: I knew it! She must have liked us anyway!

Maddie: Yes, she must have.....Every time I think of Wanda now, I wipe away tears as I think about her standing all alone in the school year, looking longingly back at the group of laughing girls as she walked off, after she had said, "Sure, a hundred of them—all lined up...."