

Sample of “The Breakout Room and Other Tales” by John and Sarah Haman

This is the first scene in any production scenario of the play, which can range from 37 to 72 minutes in length, based on the scenes chosen.

Breakout Room

Angel: Female, high-school student, pleaser.
 Lane: Female, high-school student, disconnected.
 Montana: Female, high-school student, rebel.
 Miss Thangle: Female, high-school Junior English teacher in her 40s. Mid-career.

The virtual classroom of high-school English teacher MISS THANGLE. Wearing glasses and acting stressed -- trying to sort something on her desk, on a separate device, and attempting too much at once -- she starts in speaker view, the only person on screen.

Thangle:

Alright please ... (*fumbling with something and getting frustrated*) listen up. We’ve all read “The Glass Menagerie” now, haven’t we? And it’s time for deep discussion.

There is some grumbling on the video meeting.

Thangle:

Love you, mean it. I’m going to randomly assign you to a breakout group with 3-4 classmates. There’s a list of questions on the Google doc I’d like you to address. Your group number is the question number you pick. You’ll have five minutes, I will check in to snoop on you ... and ... go ...

The screen goes dark and “Group 3” pops up, consisting of ANGEL, MONTANA and LANE. There is a strong and instant contrast between the girls. ANGEL is prim and eager, staring straight into the screen, with a fake little smile, and an intense, slightly cross-eyed look. She is dressed and made up too perfectly for a video meeting. MONTANA seems ready to disagree with something. Her hair, her clothing, reek of rebellion, and she wears no makeup, and makes no pretense. LANE is childlike, wearing sparkly, shimmery non-realistic makeup that makes her look like some kind of fairy. She has various little-girl toys on the desk with her, such as a unicorn with colored mane, or a My Little Pony. She is disconnected from the video meeting, and when we discover her she is watching fake snow fall in a snow globe she holds in her hands. There is a moment where they observe each other on screen, except for LANE, who is clueless.

Angel:

Eager to take control.

Alright guys, the question is, “How does Tom the *narrator* differ from Tom the *character*?”
Wanna take a shot or should I just ... ?

Montana:

Angel, I think this time ... we should take a different approach.

Angel:

Doubtful.

Oh. Okay Montana. Are *you* going to lead?

Montana:

Well, this is a breakout room, right?

Lane:

It soooo is.

LANE turns the snow globe over again and blisses out, her eyes getting huge.

Montana:

So let's do it. Let's really ...

MONTANA makes as swirly, elaborate, egg-beater-like, figure-eight hand motion.

... break out.

Pause.

Angel:

Excuse me?

Montana:

What if ... What if we *refused to play these roles anymore*. These ... *types* we've been assigned.

ANGEL's eyes move nervously. LANE peers over the top of the snow globe, as if she has just discovered a new world and it's on her screen.

Lane:

Seeing her own makeup and look.

Oh wow. Wowwwww ...

Angel:

In almost robotic monotone she goes on with the assignment.

Tom the narrator ... stands outside the play ... after the fact, because really, all of this has--

Montana:

--Forget Tom, Angel. Forget this play. What is holding us back? What is keeping us in a rut?

Angel:

Can we just ... do ... the assignment?

Montana:

Angel, you're a pleaser!

Angel:

Uh ...

Montana:

Well, you are!

Lane:

Waking up to it. Looking up and around her space. Discovering the world.

You reaaaalllly are ...

Montana:

What if ... stay with me for a minute ... what if you broke out of that mold, and just ... refused to please?

Angel:

What ... what would that look like?

Montana:

Like not doing this assignment.

Pause. ANGEL's eyes get huge.

Angel:

You see, but ... what kind of grade would that get me?

Montana:

That's THE MAN talking, Angel.

Lane:

Trying to stay woke while still playing with the unicorn.

Yeah, down with the man ...

Angel:

I am NOT beholden to THE MAN!

Montana:

Then prove it. ("*Gesture*") *Break out.*

MONTANA turns to LANE.

Montana:

Lane?

Lane:

Stroking her hair.

Hmm?

Montana:

You're ... a slacker --

LANE has a *sharp intake of breath as she discovers a new universe in the palm of her hand.*

Montana:

And I'm sorry, but you're kind of a space cadet.

Lane:

Confronting multiple dimensions.

I mean, If you say so ...

Angel:

It's accurate. I've been on three group projects with you.

Lane:

Looking a little lost.

Then what do I need to do?

Montana:

(Small version of gesture) Break out! Out of ... indifference, fantasy ...

Angel:

Childishness.

Lane:

Physically embodying all three criticisms at once.

Eh, I don't know ... ?

Montana:

Live for the moment and lead, Lane. Share your thoughts confidently without dumbing them down.

Angel:

Stop twiddling your hair and look people in the eye!

Lane:

Mentally moving through the dimensions, piercing the veil, seeing clearly.

Okay ... Alright, alright ... *alright!* I ... CAN DO THIS!

Montana:
Of course you can!

Angel:
But what about ... you, Montana? What about *your* blind spot?

Pause.

Montana:
That's just it, Angel; I can't see it for myself. You guys ... have to show it to me.

LANE and Angel look at each other. MONTANA closes her eyes to prepare.

Lane:
Montana you ... (*now confidently*) rebel against everything.

Montana:
Dang, Lane!

Angel:
No matter what it is.

Montana:
Wow!

Lane:
You're the token philistine...

Angel:
The rabble-rouser ...

Lane:
The hypercritical thinker.

Montana:
Man! Yeah. I guess I am.

Angel:

You mean *you were*. But you can ... break out.

In unison, after the words, Angel and LANE do a quick, funnier version of MONTANA's breakout gesture.

Montana

But how?

Lane:

By falling in. Let yourself be accepted into a group, into the norm. Gain some empathy for the lonely kids in the middle who just need community, and the strength of numbers.

Montana:

Yeah, yeah ... I like it! I think I can do this!

THANGLE suddenly appears in the breakout room, smiling.

Thangle:

Alright group 3. I'm excited to hear what you've come up with. So Angel, what did you three decide about Tom's contrasting roles?

Angel:

(Disconnected, dull) Yeah, we really just ... um ... didn't?

Thangle:

Huh?

Angel:

I mean if we even talked about it, I wasn't paying attention. I was too busy *(yawns)* breaking out ...

MONTANA and LANE do a very subtle "gesture" with only their fingers.

Thangle:

That's ... surprising.

Lane:

I think I can speak for all of us, Miss Thangle.

Thangle:
You can?

Lane:
Tom has a conflict of interest.

Thangle:
Go on ...

Lane:
As a narrator, he's out there on the fire escape, alone, telling us what to see, justifying his leaving the family. He looks like he's outside the box, you see. But it turns out, Miss Thangle ... that he *made that box*.

Thangle:
Uh huh ...

Lane:
The character version of Tom is inside the box, determining the family's fate, to some extent, with poor decisions.

Thangle:
He makes poor--

Lane:
--Writing poems at the factory? Getting drunk late nights during the work week? Yeah, it's all self-jeopardizing behavior. And trust me, I know how that works. There's a battle between the Toms: One of them wants to tell, and the other wants to show ...

Thangle:
I don't ... know what to say, Lane.. I haven't heard you talk that way before.

Lane:
Yeah, Miss Thangle. (*Shrugs*) I'm breaking out.

At once, all the three girls do the breakout gesture.

Thangle:

(Smiling at them) You are, indeed. *(Shifting her focus)* Montana, I'm sure you'll argue against this point.

Montana:

Actually, I'm good with it, Miss Thangle.

Thangle:

You are?

Montana:

I've enjoyed learning from this group. Lane is pretty dang smart, isn't she? I'm comfy just being along for the ride. And yeah, I'm ... *(cool, spacy version of the gesture)* breaking out ...

Thangle searches for words.

Lane:

But how about you, Miss Thangle?

Montana:

Wanna try it?

Thangle:

You mean ...

Angel:

Dramatically breathy.

Break out.

Gesture. Pause.

Thangle:

H-how ... does it work?

Lane:

You just ... open yourself ...

Angel:

Let go ...

Montana:

And your secrets stay in this room.

Thangle:

Nervously looking around.

Yes. Yes, I want to ... break out. But ... I only have a minute? Can we do it in that?

Lane:

(Laughing) You carry a crazy amount of stress.

Angel:

You worry way too much.

Montana:

Yeah, what they said.

Thangle:

I know that's true. But how could I possibly change that?

Lane:

For a start, you could take the school email off your phone.

Thangle:

Oh. Oh!

Montana:

At night, close the laptop and leave it downstairs.

Angel:

Allow yourself to believe you're a great teacher.

Thangle looks off screen, emotionally, avoiding eye contact for a moment.

Lane:

To know that you are loved.

Montana:
And that you're not an imposter.

Pause. THANGLE takes off her glasses and delicately dabs the corner of one eye.

Thangle:
Girls ...

Lane:
Yes?

Thangle:
This scene ... was supposed to be a comedy.

Lane:
Mm hmm. That's what happens when you break out!

Everyone laughs and "breaks out," again, and again. Even THANGLE tries it, hilariously.