

Soundscapes

By Claudia Haas and Sarah Kraning

Claudia's email: claudiahaas12@gmail.com

Sarah's email: Sarah@SeeingSoundsArt.com

My skin is sort of brownish
Pinkish yellowish white.
My eyes are greyish blueish green,
But I'm told they look orange in the night.
My hair is reddish blondish brown,
But it's silver when it's wet.
And all the colors I am inside
Have not been invented yet. – Colors, Shel Silverstein

Soundscapes

SYNOPSIS: Iris has synesthesia. She has no idea. She simply thinks that everyone sees colors and shapes when music plays. As she becomes a tween, she learns that not only is that not true but others think it weird or to put it more kindly – “wildly imaginative.” As Iris tries to downplay this trait, she increasingly finds herself at war with herself over what is natural to her.

CAST: 6-15; extras very possible

CAST OF SIX: Note: This is for purposes of a reading. In production, the playwrights prefer that the only doubling could be adding AIDEN and LITTLE IRIS into the COLOR CHORUS.

Iris O’Grady (female); ages 13-14
 Mother/(female)/Monet/Color Chorus
 Aiden (male)/Father/Color Chorus
 Mariel//Color Chorus
 Little Iris/Jessica/Color Chorus
 Tony

Divide various “Voices” and “Announcer” among the cast

CAST OF 13-33 (including minimum of 4 for Color Chorus – welcome to expand)

Little Iris (female) age 6-7; sees colors which delights her
 Iris O’Grady/Cosmic Stella (female) age 13-14; sees colors which confuses her
 Mother (female) adult; well-meaning but so confused by her daughter
 Father (male) adult; also well-meaning; leaves parenting to the mother
 Mariel (female) age-13-14; Iris’s friend from forever who desperately needs to fit in
 Jessica (female) age-13-14; Iris’s “convenient” friend who will jump hoops to be popular
 Aiden (male or female) age 13-14; content to be who they are
 Monet (female or male) young adult 21-22; new to teaching; a bit rigid in outlook
 Tony (male) age 13-14; finds surprising common ground in friendship with Iris although approaches his synesthesia differently
 Color Chorus: Minimum of 4 (any gender) can easily balloon to 20+.

THE COLOR CHORUS acts as IRIS’S perception of how the world views her.

SETTING: Iris’s bedroom, various classrooms, street

TIME: Iris’s childhood and now

MUSIC: Music plays an integral part of the play. Public domain recordings exist for all of the music suggested. Alternatively, you could use musicians or even just a series of flute players. You are welcome to change the music as long as it fits the theme.

SOUNDSCAPES

PROLOGUE

In blackout, we hear Holst's "Jupiter." Lights up on IRIS in the center bathed in a blue light. She smiles and turns in the center light – seeing blue skies, blue stars and all things of a comforting blue. She is immersed in the beauty of what she sees.

In the background a siren is heard. It gets louder and louder until the blue visuals disappear and Iris now sees flashing lights. IRIS covers her ears and crumples.

"Jupiter" has faded out and the sirens remain increasing in volume.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 1

"Such an imagination!"

Children's music (classical, nursery rhymes) is heard. LITTLE IRIS (anywhere from age 6-7) is seated at a desk – with markers and drawing papers and is busy fashioning a book. She is dressed in a vivid mish-mosh of color. Everything about her is in living color – her leggings, her top, a pinafore, socks, ribbons in her hair – whatever is fun and sweet. Her manner of dress may seem a throwback to an earlier, innocent time. Her drawings are a mish-mosh of colors – maybe stars, maybe fireworks – whatever a young child with a strong color sense would come up with. A gaily-dressed doll (Miss Ellisandra) is next to her.

There is an easel with a drawing. Colored markers are also there. It contains not-quite finished shapes and it may look like scribbles but there is a sense of color that already works.

LITTLE IRIS is immersed in the music and the drawing. They are one. In the background, the COLOR CHORUS. They are a palette of all the colors IRIS is seeing. Maybe they surround her. They give her strength.

MOTHER walks in and turns off the music. LITTLE IRIS is jolted into reality. The COLOR CHORUS retreats into the background.

MOTHER

Never mind me. Just checking up on you. (Beat.) Oh my. You've been busy.

LITTLE IRIS

Do you like it? It's my book! It's called *The Star Child*.

MOTHER

Really? Look at all those colors.

LITTLE IRIS

Those are the stars in the sky. The big blue one is a star child.

MOTHER

Very original. Most children would paint a kitty cat or their favorite doll. Why don't you paint Miss Ellisandra?

LITTLE IRIS

She won't pose. She's shy.

MOTHER

She doesn't look shy.

LITTLE IRIS

She is. She told me.

MOTHER

She talked to you?

LITTLE IRIS

She whispers. Because she's shy. I already told you that!

MOTHER

Why do your stuffed animals have band-aids on them?

LITTLE IRIS

They were in a fight. But they're fine now. The Star Child helped them.

MOTHER

Such an imagination! Tell me more about your book.

LITTLE IRIS

It's about a star that fell to the earth and becomes a little kid. She has magical powers because she comes from a star.

MOTHER

What are those two big purple circles?

LITTLE IRIS

Those are her eyes. They glow in the dark like stars.

MOTHER

Oh! Scary! Where did you get that idea?

LITTLE IRIS

From the music.

MOTHER

Who's that funny fellow?

LITTLE IRIS

He's not funny! He's "Pointy Star!" He has five points and the points throw lightning stuff at you. He's bad and wants to be the ruler on earth. Star Child wants to help people and Pointy Star wants to hurt them.

MOTHER

In-ter-esting.

LITTLE IRIS

Do you really, really like it?

MOTHER

I like the ideas – so imaginative. And... all the different blues.

LITTLE IRIS

I just *love* blue. It's a smiley color.

MOTHER

Never thought about it that way. You're a funny one. Dinner in a few minutes. I don't have any blues on the table – but I have lots of greens.

LITTLE IRIS

Greens are yummy.

MOTHER

Maybe you should paint that.

LITTLE IRIS

I will. When I see green. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.

MOTHER

You are a funny one. Wash off your colored fingers before dinner.

(MOTHER exits. LITTLE IRIS hugs Miss Ellisandra. The COLOR CHORUS surrounds her. LITTLE IRIS is at home with them.)

LITTLE IRIS

I wish she saw the colors like I do. Not just on fingers.

(IRIS who may have been watching from the side comes forward and stands in back of LITTLE IRIS. IRIS is dressed similarly to LITTLE IRIS – lots of flair and color – but in a more “teen” style. LITTLE IRIS picks up Miss Ellisandra and reads to her, turning the pages of her book. There could be misspellings, etc. but the drawings should be vivid.

The COLOR CHORUS could act the following out in pantomime. Or just approve of the story.)

LITTLE IRIS

Once there was a star who fell from the sky. She landed in a forest. It was night. But she could see because her eyes glowed. She had star superpowers. She would always be a good star. She would not use her powers to do bad things. She was followed to earth by a bad star. Who wanted her powers. But she wasn't afraid of him. She wasn't afraid of anyone.

(LITTLE IRIS turns on music. She sees stars and dances with her book. The COLOR CHORUS could mimic moves in the background. IRIS enters and dances with LITTLE IRIS. By the end of the dance LITTLE IRIS is now IRIS at thirteen. She's dressed similarly to LITTLE IRIS but of course in a less “little girl” fashion. LITTLE IRIS gives IRIS her book and dances off.

From the COLOR CHORUS, “POINTY STAR” appears. There is a fight. IRIS uses her stuffed animals to ward POIINTY STAR off. It works! The COLOR CHORUS fades away. IRIS turns off the music.)

IRIS

Star-Child would make many friends. They would love her forever because she gave them light from the stars.

(IRIS turns on Holst's “Jupiter.” MARIEL enters with a makeshift crown. Both IRIS and MARIEL are working on crowns for a play based on the music we hear. IRIS is trying to explain the music to her. IRIS clearly sees everything. Use the COLOR CHORUS in the background as a visual for what IRIS sees.)

IRIS

So, after Stella gets rid of Pointy Star and his gang, there is a celebration. the violins – kind of flow, you know? Like long scarves. They flutter in the air. Then – listen to when the French horns enter. It's like bursts of light. Until it gets so light – we can't see the scarves anymore. And as we get into the music – well there're just mini stars everywhere – coming and going. Can you see it?

MARIEL

I never know what you mean about seeing stuff. It's music. You hear it.

IRIS

You're just not listening! Now, you're going to enter – as a Star Princess. And then the elephants.

MARIEL

Who's going to be an elephant?

IRIS

Jessica!

MARIEL

Never happen.

IRIS

I know. Anyway – then everyone dances and that's the end of the play. Better hurry up with your crown. Jess and Aiden will be here soon.

MARIEL

I don't want a crown. I want wings. I want to be a flying princess.

IRIS

You are supposed to be a helper from the stars.

MARIEL

I am sure star helpers have wings. Don't you have some – from when you were Tinkerbell for Halloween?

IRIS

Butterfly. I was a butterfly. Two years ago.

MARIEL

Whatever. I bet you have them. You keep everything.

(IRIS goes to closet or a box and pulls out some wings. MARIEL puts them on. They are rumped.)

MARIEL (cont'd)

And long hair. Flying star princesses need long hair.

IRIS

Who's the director?

MARIEL

We're all the directors, remember?

IRIS

Too many directors.

(IRIS retrieves a pair of gaily covered leggings and puts them on MARIEL'S head.)

IRIS

There! Are you happy?

MARIEL

Yes. Thanks for asking.

IRIS

All right Princess Lucinda, you should kneel to me. Cause I saved you.

MARIEL

I don't kneel. I dance. And fly.

(And to the music, MARIEL dances around IRIS and takes a giant leap off of something as if she is flying. IRIS is not amused and turns off the music.)

MARIEL

Stop with your chicken-lips. It's just make-believe.

IRIS

Make-believe is serious. And for all you know – maybe I did come from a star.

MARIEL

Yeah yeah yeah. That worked on me when I was a little kid. Now, I just know you're crazy.

IRIS

You're the one dancing around with leggings on your head. Some people really do come from stars. I can show you proof from google. And if they think real hard, they remember being in the

night sky and dancing in the milky way. They bounce off of Saturn's rings and jump to Jupiter's moon. Listen.

(IRIS turns on music – possibly Holst's "Mercury.")

Close your eyes and see the night sky. The stars are twinkling.

MARIEL

Twinkle twinkle little –

IRIS

SHHH! Can you see how happy the stars are? Sometimes I see myself back up there. And don't laugh – but sometimes I think I see you – bouncing off moons and then sliding on Saturn's rings. You're not wearing leggings on your head. You have long hair down to your butt and you're beautiful.

MARIEL

Really?

IRIS

I would never lie to you.

MARIEL

My mom says sometimes you seem to be in another world.

IRIS

I'm going to tell you a secret and you can never, ever tell anyone – promise?

MARIEL

Promise.

IRIS

Cross your heart and hope to die?

MARIEL

Stick a needle in my eye.

IRIS

Sometimes I go to my Sky-World. I fly for reals and hitch rides on comets. And sometimes – you're there dancing on Saturn's rings. And you glow. You're all electrified and beautiful. Look out there, Mariel. See yourself in the stars. Can you see them?

MARIEL

No.

IRIS

You're having the best time. Now – you're sliding on Saturn's rings! Look! See yourself! The rings are glowing purple, then blue and then white. And now you're jumping! See it! SEE IT!

MARIEL

I do!

IRIS

Whoops! It's gone.

MARIEL

Bring it back!

IRIS

I can't. My magic isn't that strong anymore.

MARIEL

You made that up.

IRIS

Nope. We come from the stars. It's a fact. We're made of stardust.

MARIEL

For reals?

IRIS

Don't you read?

(Offstage we hear JESSICA and AIDEN.)

JESSICA (O.S.)

Iris! IRIS! (Enters.) We are here!

(JESSICA enters dressed as a trendy teen – meaning her outfit is probably straight from a mannequin at a local mall. AIDEN is very subdued – all navy blue and black.)

IRIS

Great. I'm ready for you. Listen to this.

(IRIS turns on the music.)

IRIS

This is where Stella brings the “light of goodness” to the people.

JESSICA

Mariel! What's that on your head?

MARIEL

My "star" hair.

IRIS

Shh! This is the procession. Can you feel it?

JESSICA

Take it off. You look ridiculous.

(MARIEL begrudgingly removes the tights from her head.)

AIDEN

Did you put in a dragon for me? Remember – I asked for a dragon.

IRIS

Sorry, Aiden. I just didn't see a dragon. Only the nasty-pointy-stars.

AIDEN

But I wanted to slay the dragon and make an offering to you! That's what they would have done in the olden days.

IRIS

But this is future days.

JESSICA

Why do you have wings?

MARIEL

Because I come from the stars. Duh.

IRIS

Is anyone listening? We're supposed to present this in a week!

JESSICA

This was – you know – okay fun. And I really liked making up the battles in the forest. Even if you wouldn't let me have a sword. But there is no-way, no-how, I am going to do this in front of anyone. Sheesh! I'm going to be fourteen in October. What will people think?

IRIS

That we're all amazingly creative people who should go to Hollywood and do Disney stuff??

AIDEN

No, Pixar!

IRIS

Whatever.

JESSICA

No people will think that we are royal nerds and our only future is in the Lego club.

AIDEN

I'm in the Lego club.

JESSICA

Which so works for you, Aiden. Anyways, volleyball tryouts are tonight and if I make the team, which I will because I always do, I won't have any time left.

(IRIS turns off the music.)

MARIEL

Wait! You didn't get to the part where Jess comes on as an elephant.

AIDEN

Now that's a good idea.

JESSICA

What?

IRIS

You don't want to do this anymore?

JESSICA

The days of us being Disney Princesses are dead. Kaput. Rest in peace.

IRIS

We are *not* Disney Princesses! We're royalty from the stars!

MARIEL

And I fly.

AIDEN

I was thinking we were more like a zombie royal family. But with dragons.

IRIS

We're not any of that! I'm a star princess and I bring the light from the stars to you!!

JESSICA

All that stuff about “saving the forest animals” – it’s baby stuff. And get rid of the band-aids on the stuffed animals. They keep falling off anyway. Nothing is believable. School starts soon. I need a haircut, clothes, a new backpack – important stuff. I just don’t have time for the little-kid stuff anymore.

AIDEN

We can do it without her.

IRIS

But I saw it with all of us. It’s in the music. We need to be in twos. Mariel presents me to you guys.

AIDEN

I can be two characters!

(And AIDEN rushes around as two people in a promenade. AIDEN holds out a hand and takes it with the other hand.)

AIDEN (cont’d)

(As number 1) “That Star Princess saved us from the dragon!”

IRIS

There is no dragon!

AIDEN

(As number 1 ... again.) The Star Princess saved us from the Star-Dragon.

(As number 2) “**ALL HAIL STAR PRINCESS!**”

(As number 1) “Tinkerbell helped us.”

(As number 2 in a whisper) “All hail Tinkerbell.”

IRIS

They’re butterfly wings!

JESSICA

They’re lame. Anyway, I have to get ready for tryout. Mariel, you trying out?

MARIEL

I guess.

JESSICA

Lose the wings.

(MARIEL does so.)

JESSICA

You two are welcome to tryout – or you could support me by being a booster. All boosters do are scream when we score. You know like – **“GOOOO TIGERS! YAY!”**

(IRIS visibly crumples.)

MARIEL

Jess! You know Iris has a hard time with loud noises.

JESSICA

Really? I had no idea. Sorry Iris. To make it up to you – let me give you some advice - drop the “JoJo Siwa look.” You’ll fit in more.

IRIS

Who’s that?

MARIEL

She thinks you dress like Pippi Longstocking.

JESSICA

Who’s that?

(MARIEL and JESSICA exit. IRIS and AIDEN look at each other.)

IRIS

Do you think I dress like YoLo?

AIDEN

JoJo.

IRIS

Do I?

AIDEN

... sometimes you look like a crayon box. (Beat.) Of sixty-four colors. (Beat.) You want ... to show me what you had planned for us?

IRIS

You really want to know?

AIDEN

Sure. And maybe we can figure out when the dragon would have entered...

IRIS

I'll play the ending music. You know where it says, "Star-Child would make many friends. They would love her forever because she gave them light from the stars." (Beat. Looks at Aiden.) Maybe I should change the ending.

(IRIS turns on the music and starts to act out the procession as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 2

"Draw an apple."

(IRIS is seated at her desk in school. She is still colorful but not as "out there." She is nervous and excited.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Welcome back to Oakwood Middle School. I'd like to give a warm welcome to our new Sixth Graders. Remember, kindness is our motto. So Seventh and Eighth Graders, greet them with a smile. Today's lunch is chicken nuggets. There is volleyball practice after school. Sign-ups for the Lego Club, Chess Club, Speech and Drama are in the cafeteria. Show your school spirit and join an activity! And the volleyball team's first game is Friday, so go Tigers. Let's make it a great first day!

(School Buzzer rings. IRIS jumps. A makeshift "art class" is formed around her. All classmates have paper, pencils, an apple, and red paint. TONY will be in this class.)

MONET

Welcome to Art Basics.. I am your teacher, Mayra Monet. I am new here and excited to get started. You may have heard this class is your "easy A." And it might be – *if* you complete all assignments in a timely manner, follow directions, and are respectful.

What you can expect over the next few weeks:

MONET (cont'd)

- You will learn to draw realistically. Today's apple should look like an apple.
- You will learn proper shading to make your drawings three-dimensional.
- Finally, we will end with a collage. More about that later

I like to work with music to keep your mind clear. You may talk to each other for support – but in whispers. There is an apple on your desk – so appropriate for the first day of school. Today's assignment is simply to paint what you see. It will help me assess where you are in your art journey.

(MONET puts on some soothing music – maybe Mozart.)

You may begin.

(And they do. Both TONY and IRIS are listening intently to the music. Others start to draw immediately. Finally, TONY starts to draw. IRIS pick up her apple and moves it around to the music. She places it in different spots on her desk. TONY stops drawing and watches IRIS. IRIS raises her hand. MONET nods.)

IRIS

Can you turn off the music?

MONET

You don't like it?

IRIS

I do. But it doesn't go with the apple.

MONET

...

IRIS

The apple is red and kind of flashy but the music has deep blue waves.

MONET

Let's compromise. I'll lower the volume.

(MONET does so and everyone goes back to work. MONET raises her hand again. Everyone watches.)

MONET

Yes.

IRIS

I only have one color.

MONET

Red is all you need for the assignment.

IRIS

But I see different colors.

MONET

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Just paint the red.

(IRIS draws. The class works. MONET walks around the room nodding in approval. TONY again watches IRIS.)

IRIS notices. Is he being creepy? IRIS shakes him off and looks out into space and finally begins to paint. MONET reaches TONY.)

MONET

Fascinating. Why did you make the choice to make your apple – lopsided?

TONY

It has a few bumps here and there and I just – expanded on it. You know, like how Van Gogh would take something realistic and then exaggerate ... stuff.

MONET

Maybe we should work on our basic skills and when you've mastered that, you can try adding your own brand of genius to the paper. Later. The time for genius comes later.

TONY

Usually after you're dead. I hear that's what happens to geniuses.

MONET

Try just a plain, red apple – humor the teacher and do the assignment.

(MONET again “works” the room. The COLOR CHORUS could be the broken apple that MONET sees. At IRIS'S desk.)

MONET (cont'd)

I don't see the apple.

IRIS

It's – in pieces. Sort of as if it was hit by a bolt of lightning.

MONET

So ... applesauce? Not a whole apple? But the exercise was to draw the apple.

IRIS

I'm sorry. I thought the exercise was to draw what we saw when we looked at the apple. This is what I saw.

MONET

I will have to give more explicit instructions.

(Buzzer “rings.” IRIS is visibly startled.)

MONET

All right, class. We'll finish up tomorrow. And then we shall discuss which renderings worked the best and why.

(It gets busy changing classes.)

Hey! Wait up.
TONY

You were watching me.
IRIS

I was watching you draw.
TONY

Totally watching me.
IRIS

And how you reacted to the music.
TONY

Really watching me.
IRIS

It's just ...
TONY

IRIS
- We're going to be late for algebra.

It's next door.
TONY

I have to get my book from my locker.
IRIS

Maybe we –
TONY

IRIS
- Gotta go.

(Buzzer sounds. IRIS again is startled.)

I don't like that new buzzer.
IRIS

It's supposed to wake us up.
TONY

(And it gets busy and noisy as the class changes. Maybe all freeze and we have a few buzzer sounds to indicate the day is passing. Then, all is quiet. There is a light change to the street outside the school. IRIS is waiting for her friends. Two CLASSMATES could pass by. IRIS tentatively waves. The CLASSMATES sort of wave back, giggle and run off. JESS and MARIEL are in the background. JESSICA sees IRIS. MARIEL doesn't.)

JESSICA

You're going to be the best booster! Practice with me.

JESSICA and MARIEL

GO TIGERS! GO TIGERS! **GO TIGERS!**

JESSICA

LOUDER!

MARIEL

YAY TIGERS!

(MARIEL screams and IRIS drops her books.)

JESSICA

Oh. Hi, Iris. Didn't see you.

MARIEL

Sorry, Iris. Really.

(THEY exit back into the school.)

(AIDEN enters and helps IRIS with her books.)

IRIS

Thanks. Heading home?

AIDEN

I'm just hanging out till Speech Club begins. I'm going to try that. My mom says I'd be really good since I talk a lot. Are you joining anything?

IRIS

I'm sticking with costumes for the Drama Club. They let me do my own thing.

(AIDEN waves good-bye and goes back into the school as TONY comes out.)

Wait up!
TONY

My mom worries if I'm late.
IRIS

I'll walk with you.
TONY

Do you live this way?
IRIS

Nah. I live in the opposite direction.
TONY

Are you new?
IRIS

Not exactly. I've been here but there's the six inches that I grew over the summer that's new.
TONY

Tiny Tony!
IRIS

Henceforth, I shall be known as Tiny Tall Tony! It was easy to get ignored when I was short. Nobody saw me. I have to get used to being seen.
TONY

(THEY walk.)

Want to talk about it?
TONY (cont'd)

It?
IRIS

Art.
TONY

No.
IRIS

(Beat.)

TONY
How come you don't like the school buzzer?

IRIS
It's ... louder than last year..

(Beat.)

TONY
It makes me see bright, red X's.

(They stop walking. A moment. IRIS stares.)

You?

(Iris is unsure if she should answer. Who is this guy?)

IRIS
... yellow blinking lights.

TONY
What about sirens?

IRIS
Yellow and red lightening strikes. You?

TONY
Red and orange suns. Mozart? Like we heard today?

IRIS
Soft blue waves that break apart at shore and sparkle.

TONY
So you broke your apple.

IRIS
Eavesdropper!

TONY
My radar kind of went up when you asked all those questions. I was seeing flower petals. It was hard to squeeze a boring apple in-between them.

(A moment of clarity.)

IRIS

What do people say when you tell them what you see?

TONY

Tell people? You must be kidding. I was in third grade when I learned not to tell anyone. If you're "Tiny Tony" and "see stuff," it's a double whammy. It's like saying, "please throw me off the jungle gym." Do you tell people?

IRIS

Not anymore. I used to think everyone saw colors all the time. But no. Just me. I'm weird.

TONY

How do you do? I'm "Weird Tony."

IRIS

"Weird Iris." Nice to meet you. Officially.

(A beat, maybe a mock handshake and IRIS finally says what she has been worrying about for years.)

Do you think it's some kind of disease?

TONY

No! I think it's like – some people can play piano by ear, you know? And some people can walk on their hands. And we – well – we see things.

IRIS

So you think it's sort of a "talent?"

TONY

Sort of. But I'm still not telling anyone.

IRIS

Neither am I. (Beat.) Why didn't you freak out over the new buzzer?

TONY

I kind of practiced – blacking out the lights. They don't go away but I can move them to one side.

IRIS

I tried to get rid of the colors once, But the truth is - I like them.

TONY

I try to control some of what I don't want to see. I'm kind of a control-freak.

IRIS

So am I. (Beat.) I turn here.

TONY

And I should get going. (Beat.) Maybe ... we can arrange a “drawing date” sometime. Like – not a date-date –

IRIS

Definitely not a date-date –

TONY

No! A... drawing hour. Yeah. A drawing hour. We can put on different music and just be free to draw what we see.

IRIS

May-be.

TONY

I never met anyone like me. It’s been –

(Beat.)

- you know....

IRIS

- yeah.

(They part. IRIS walks and turns into her home and goes to her room. She takes out her book. MOTHER enters.)

MOTHER

I thought I heard you come in. How was the first day?

IRIS

A mixture.

MOTHER

Any problems?

IRIS

Not really.

MOTHER

Maribel’s mom called.

IRIS

And...

MOTHER

Her mom said that she was having some trouble with Mariel. Mariel seems to feel that she doesn't need to listen to her parents anymore because she is royalty and she comes from .. somewhere else.

IRIS

The stars.

MOTHER

Yes. Mariel said you explained it all to her.

IRIS

It's make-believe.

MOTHER

That you saw her on Saturn's rings.

IRIS

It's just fun.

MOTHER

It's not true. You fed your friend a bunch of silliness and now she is causing trouble with her parents.

IRIS

She wasn't supposed to say anything. I should stick a needle in her eye! I mean - It's just play. Nothing evil. It's fun..

MOTHER

Keeping secrets from your parents is a form of lying.

IRIS

It's just like – creating a painting. You work hard on it and then you believe in what you created.

MOTHER

You're getting too old for this kind of fun.

IRIS

So, I'm no longer a child?

MOTHER

You're a child who is ... evolving into an adult. I'd like to see you act more mature. All of your make-believe, your art – it's ... young for a thirteen-year-old.

IRIS

I'll look into finding something ... old to do.

(Beat.)

IRIS (cont'd)

I ... have to get going on algebra. Can you believe it's the first day of school and already I have three pages of algebra to do?

(IRIS takes out her algebra.)

MOTHER

I'll leave you to it.

(MOTHER exits. IRIS takes out her book. She holds her Miss Ellisandra doll. She puts on her crown.)

IRIS

"Star-Child would make many friends. They would love her forever because she gave them light from the stars." (Beat.) Wouldn't you like starlight in your life, Miss Ellisandra?

JESSICA'S VOICE

You could dress more "normal."

MOTHER'S VOICE

You're getting too old for this.

(IRIS takes off her crown and throws it across the room.)

(Lights change. Buzzer sounds. IRIS and TONY are in art class. MONET is with TONY.)

MONET

You are wildly creative but it still is a little busy. We just want some shading. There are too many shadows and it is too much for the eye to focus. See if you can simplify the landscape. Over here is quite good. Do you see the difference?

TONY

Yes.

MONET

Good. Work on it.

(MONET moves on to IRIS.)

MONET

I'm not sure what you are doing here. You aren't making any concrete choices.

IRIS

I did make a choice! And this is what I chose.

MONET

I'm not seeing it. Sometimes it seems as if you just throw everything on to the paper to see what sticks. You seem to have a hard time focusing on any one thing.

(IRIS and TONY exchange a look. Buzzer sounds.)
IRIS reacts as usual. IRIS and TONY turn around.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Today's lunch is grilled cheese. Have a great day.

(It is a new day. Without a costume change, there is a slight difference in their dress. Buzzer sounds again. A truck backfires or geese honk – IRIS reacts to all sounds. They take her out of the moment. They are back in art class. MONET is with TONY.)

MONET

The proportions of the trees are good. Your leaves are wildly exaggerated – remember we are trying to keep your “genius” at bay as you learn the basics.

(MONET moves on to IRIS.)

Iris, I know that you know branches are attached to trees and leaves are attached to branches. Why don't you just try to paint a tree as it grows in nature?

IRIS

It's just that sometimes –

MONET

- I know. You “see them that way.” I am asking you to paint them as everyone else sees them. Can you do that?

(Buzzer rings. IRIS jumps. Lights change.
Music from “The Planets” is heard. TONY and IRIS enter into her bedroom. They get ready to draw/paint.)

IRIS (mimicking Monet.)

“Why can't you paint them as everyone else sees them?” I guess what I see doesn't count.

TONY

You don't play the game.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Iris! Is your door open?

IRIS

Yes, Mom.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Because Tony's a boy. You should always have the door open when there's a boy in there.

IRIS

Got it! (Beat.) Sorry.

TONY

I am a boy!

IRIS

She wanted us in the living room but I'm not allowed to paint in the living room.

(Beat.)

IRIS (cont'd)

What "game?"

TONY

Teachers don't like what they don't know. An abstract drawing confuses them. Draw what you see and then turn it into something that a person can recognize.

IRIS

I don't know how to do that.

TONY

Sure you do.

(TONY sees the crown on the floor.)

Perfect! Put this on.

IRIS

It's babyish.

TONY

It's a symbol of power. It will help you take charge.

(IRIS puts the crown on. It does give her a feeling of taking charge.)

TONY (cont'd)

Paint what you see. And then stare and stare at it until you can find a way to turn it into something the teacher wants. Do they want a cat? Turn your zig-zags into a cat with a crazy, curled tail.

IRIS

That's cheating.

TONY

That's using your imagination – which you have plenty of.

IRIS

Okay, smarty-pants. What do I turn this into?

TONY

All those random lines and circles –

IRIS

- Not random –

TONY

- Shh. I'm helping you. I'd – extend these lines. Look! A turret! You have the makings of a castle. Or a telescope.

IRIS

- If I do this – it looks like “Mr. Pointy Star” to me.

TONY

Who?

IRIS

Mr. Pointy – nothing.

TONY

I like the spookiness of the eyes. And I want to know more about Mr. Pointy Star. Later. What can we do with those eyes? The Cheshire Cat?

IRIS

But I didn't draw a Cheshire Cat!

TONY

That's not the point. The point is, what can someone with no imagination like Monet see when she sees your drawing?

IRIS

I know what Monet would say to you - "Oh Tony! Such a good idea. Save it for another time." Then she'd turn to me and say, "I don't see what this has to do with anything."

TONY

You're being silly.

IRIS

Realistic. *You* get away with more.

TONY

And I'm trying to show you how can, too!

IRIS

What if she says, "draw a rabbit?"

TONY (Again, can be projected.)

Circles are rabbits, right? (He draws a circular rabbit.) Oblongs are rabbits. (He draws.) Triangles and squares can be rabbits – think Picasso did that in his "cube" period. Or I'm

TONY (cont'd)

making it up. Let's get back to our trees. Turn off the music and let's draw something real. And then you can tell me about Mr. Pointy Star.

(IRIS gets her book.)

IRIS

It's all here. It's ... little kid stuff. Stuff I used to do.

TONY

Can I read it?

IRIS

Have at it.

TONY

Thanks. Now, let's draw some "real" trees. We're going to ace this course and surprise Monet. The secret to this course is to paint what Monet sees. Not what we see.

(THEY go to work. Lights change. BUZZER sounds. Kids go to class. Everyone is seated.)

ANNOUNCER

Today's lunch is fish sticks. Have a –

(Suddenly, there's the huge blaring of a FIRE ALARM. IRIS stands but is disoriented. Lights brighten. IRIS is blinded. We hear students but IRIS cannot see anyone.)

AIDEN'S VOICE

IRIS! You have to get out of class! Come on, IRIS!

TEACHER VOICE

Now! In an orderly fashion! Everyone out.

(IRIS tries to get out. The COLOR CHORUS blocks her and she can't move. She starts to crumple but TONY comes to her aid.)

TONY'S VOICE

Iris. Breathe. Breathe again. Now, try to put the flashing lights in a corner. You can do it. Move them aside. Breathe.... You'll be fine. I'll lead you out.

(And we see TONY take IRIS'S hand and slowly lead her to safety. The alarm continues for a moment and finally dies down. IRIS is left alone in the center.)

MOTHER'S VOICE

The homeroom teacher said Iris did not leave class during the fire drill. She said another student had to guide her out. This is danger both for her and the other student.

FATHER'S VOICE

We should have her hearing checked.

MOTHER'S VOICE

She said that she couldn't see.

FATHER'S VOICE

We should have her vision tested.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Her art teacher says she is easily distracted. I don't understand. She never had these problems before.

(THE COLOR CHORUS appears and surrounds her. Maybe they move closer and closer as the scene continues. Divide the voices among them.)

VOICE

What's the matter with Iris?

Noises bother her. VOICE

She can't focus. VOICE

She should be tested for ADD. VOICE

ADHD. VOICE

Dyslexia. VOICE

Dyspraxia. VOICE

Oppositional Defiant Disorder. VOICE

Anxiety. VOICE

Depression. VOICE

Aspergers. VOICE

Test her. VOICE

Test her. VOICE

Test her! VOICE

I always thought she was different. VOICE

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

“Lose your colors.”

(MARIEL is with IRIS in her room. The crown MARIEL had worked on has been transformed into a forest crown. It’s hanging on an easel or on a shelf.)

MARIEL

You still have the crown. Wow! It looks awesome.

IRIS

I added some sparkles. Can’t have too many sparkles! The drama club is using it this winter for Titania.

MARIEL

Who?

IRIS

The Queen of the Fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

MARIEL

Never heard of it.

IRIS

It’s a play. By Shakespeare. The guy who wrote *Romeo and Juliet*?

MARIEL

Oh that guy! Are you in it?

IRIS

I’m backstage. As usual. And I have to wear black when I’m backstage so it’s a challenge.

MARIEL

So, did they ever figure out what is wrong with you?

IRIS

Excuse me?

MARIEL

Come on. Everyone knows. You’ve been taken out of class for a gazillion tests.

IRIS

Just so you know – and you can spread the word – they were all negative.

MARIEL

Don't get puffy! That's what I tell people! I always say, "There's nothing wrong with Iris. She's just different."

(Beat.)

IRIS

I'm working on feeling grateful.

MARIEL

I really like you, Iris.

IRIS

You just don't want to be seen with me.

MARIEL

Jess says if I spend a lot of time with you, people will think I'm ... like ...

IRIS

Different, too.

MARIEL

Kind of. But I still like you! And I mean – you're the first one in our group to have a boyfriend – so that counts for something.

IRIS

Except I don't have a boyfriend.

MARIEL

You can tell me. We have all noticed Tony hanging around you.

IRIS

If you have been carefully noticing me then you would know he is so *not* a boyfriend.

(Beat.) I have stuff to do.

MARIEL

Me, too. I just wanted to clear up some stuff. I'm trying to help you. You could try, you know. You could – just put on jeans and some logo wear and fit in. Stop dressing like the color wheel. It's loud.

IRIS

(Proclaiming loudly!) I am not loud!

MARIEL

That's what's weird about you. You're quiet and loud at the same time. And put away Miss Ellisandra. The time for tea parties is over.

IRIS

You liked them!

MARIEL

Like – a year ago!

IRIS

And make-believe?

MARIEL

I used to think it was fun – when you told me all the things you were seeing. Like, “Wow, Iris is crazy with imagination.” But now – well sometimes I think maybe you're just crazy. (Beat.) I'm trying to be your friend.

IRIS

Not feeling it.

(MARIEL goes to the door. IRIS waves her away and holds Miss Ellisandra.)

IRIS

Do you think I'm crazy?

(IRIS undresses Miss Ellisandra. MOTHER enters.)

MOTHER

May I? I just want to hang up a few shirts.

IRIS

Have at it.

MOTHER

It's lovely to see Mariel again. I thought you weren't friends anymore.

IRIS

We're not.

MOTHER

Just because you have a boyfriend doesn't mean you should let your other friends go.

IRIS

Tony's not my boyfriend.

MOTHER

Why is Miss Ellisandra naked?

IRIS

She outgrew her clothes.

MOTHER

Still. She should be wearing something. It's – unseemly.

IRIS

She's a doll. It's not like she has any real private parts.

MOTHER

I'll just put these back on her. I remember when we picked out this fabric for her. And you told me exactly how her dress should look.

IRIS

They're too colorful.

MOTHER

You love color.

IRIS

I do. But Miss Ellisandra doesn't want to stand out anymore.

(MOTHER gets it. It's not about the doll.)

MOTHER

I see. Still, I'll find something for her. Dinner in fifteen.

(MOTHER exits. IRIS stands up and takes off a scarf or a headband or vest – something she is wearing that is colorful.)

The COLOR CHORUS surround her. IRIS hands the piece of clothing to one of the members. The COLOR CHORUS slowly take off any other colorful accessories – a belt, headband, vest, socks?

IRIS looks strangely muted. The COLOR CHORUS backs away and speaks.)

VOICE 1

Being popular is like the color red. A very specific red. Not like a tomato – more like a deep rose. People notice you but in a good way. You can't be too flashy. Then people talk.

VOICE 2

Being popular is like the color blue. You know how it is when the skies are blue and you don't have to worry about storms? That's being popular. There are no storms.

VOICE 3

Being popular is like the color yellow. All you have to do is be sunny and happy and greet people with a smile. It's that simple.

VOICE 4

Being popular is like the color orange. Pumpkin-orange. During the day, you're an elegant carriage- worthy of going to a royal ball. People talk to you. They want to dance with you. Nobody throws basketballs at your head on the playground. Nobody laughs at you. And then at home, you are quite content to be a pumpkin again.

VOICE 5

Being popular is like the color brown. It's all the colors combined. But you're not showy. You're not a peacock. You keep your body toned – you fit in with the earth. If you wear all the colors that go into brown you just look pathetic. But if they're combined into brown – it's so cool.

VOICE 1

Of course, it doesn't hurt to go viral on social media.

VOICE 2

Or be up-to-date on the latest dance videos.

VOICE 3

Or to be born with straight hair.

VOICE 4

Or throw boy-girl parties.

VOICE 5

Or to be athletic.

VOICE

Or not see stuff that isn't there.

(Lights change. We hear Holst's "Mars" in the background. TONY and IRIS are working on her book. IRIS is dressed in dark jeans and a colorful (tie-dyed?) sweatshirt. There are no more colorful accessories. As the lights come up, the music fades.)

TONY

It's the best battle music.

IRIS

I like the idea of taking the story to the stars. Stars are my favorite.

TONY

I know! Inter-stellar warfare! Star Wars revisited!

IRIS

No war!

(Beat. As TONY stares at her.)

IRIS

What?

TONY

I haven't gotten used to – the “new you.” I liked it when you were a rainbow.

IRIS

I needed a change - I'm trying to figure something out.

TONY

So you changed the way you dressed?

IRIS

Yes. *Can we continue?* Are there really stars that cover up other stars?

TONY

Yeah – there's a lot of weird stars up there. Some try to gobble each other up. Some try to outshine each other. It's crazy. So suppose your mean Pointy Star wanted to cover up the skies so that earthlings could not see the stars at night. Everything would be black. No moon. No Milky Way – just nothing. The only light would come from him.

IRIS

And all the people on earth would get depressed and mean Pointy Star would feel important because he controls the night sky. And then Stella tries to help the people -

TONY

- And - they fight!

IRIS

Stella's not a warrior.

TONY

How can Stella save the universe if she won't fight? We could a great ending where Stella brings back the night sky filled with color. Maybe there will be rainbow skies!

IRIS

Not at night. I want stars. Little white lights that chime like tiny bells.

TONY

Rainbow stars!

IRIS

Why are you obsessed with color all of a sudden?

TONY

Why are you obsessed with erasing color?

IRIS

I'm not. I'm trying to have it make sense.

TONY

It's a story – not a science project. Bring in all the colors. Every color that you have shed in the last few days. Don't be afraid of yourself.

IRIS

I'm not afraid of myself! I'm trying to figure myself out. I've never made concrete choices. I just go – with the crayon box and jumble it all up. I never used to think about the colors inside me. The colors that spurt out every time there is a noise or music or other sounds. They just spill over. Now, I want to control them. Like you control them. Like a grown-up. Grown-ups are in control. I want to be in control.

TONY

I don't control them. I just – move them around when they get to be too much.

IRIS

I can't do that! And it's just gotten worse this year. Sheesh! I thought if anyone would understand – it would be you.

TONY

I want to help.

IRIS

That seems to be everyone's job these days. "How can I fix Iris?" Can we fix Iris? I don't know! Maybe – *Iris doesn't want to be fixed!*

TONY

I don't want –

IRIS

- Yeah, you do. I'm experimenting. What's wrong with that?

TONY

I just don't want you to disappear.

IRIS

Maybe I'm new and improved! Maybe controlling the colors is good for Tony but not good for Iris. Maybe - you should leave.

TONY

Is that what you –

IRIS

- I'm not feeling any of this. I don't love the "Mars" portion of "The Planets." It's too busy.

TONY

I like it.

IRIS

I don't get guys and their wars. Why do you all love fighting?

TONY

I don't.

IRIS

Look at your paintings. You do.

TONY

For the record, I have spent my life avoiding fighting. (Beat.) We can pick some other music.
Later

(TONY packs up.)

IRIS

Later.

(TONY exits. IRIS puts on "Mercury" from Holst's "The Planets." She listens a minute and then begins to write.)

IRIS (cont'd)

Once upon a time there was a star child. No. Not a star-child. A celestial child. She was formed when a comet slammed into a star which slammed into a moon and gathered cosmic dust. And that is how Stella came to be. She was part star, part moon, part comet and part cosmic dust. She

didn't belong anywhere. She wanted to be part of a constellation but the star inside her didn't shine brightly enough. She tried to be a moon but she couldn't stay in an orbit. She wanted to be a comet but she wasn't fast enough. She realized she would always just be cosmic dust. It made her sad because nobody wanted to be friends with cosmic dust.

(IRIS goes to her easel and begins to paint/draw as the lights fade to black.)

(Possible intermission.)

SCENE 4

"I see blue."

(Lights up in Art Class.)

MONET

We're moving to my favorite project and one you will like. It's the collage. You will draw a silhouette of your head – and Iris – you are welcome to exaggerate features.

(IRIS is stunned to be called out in class for something she has not done... yet. EVERYONE looks and IRIS avoids "everyone.")

The silhouette will be filled with what you are made of – your dreams, your favorite candy bar – whatever says "this is me." "This is what my five senses tell me about myself." Examples of silhouettes are in this folder. Looks closely at yourself in the mirror. Is your nose bumpy? Does your chin jut out? How thin or bushy are your eyebrows? Be very specific. We'll start the outline in pencil so we can adjust along the way.

Today's music will be Holst's "Venus."

(Music starts. IRIS is into the music. Students draw. IRIS looks into the distance. She sees soothing blues and greens. The COLOR CHORUS may surround her in soothing colors. IRIS just watches happily lost in her color-world.)

MONET

Iris, are you having trouble with the assignment?

IRIS

It's just so beautiful.

MONET

It's one of my favorite pieces of music.

IRIS

No, it's the streamers.

MONET

And where are they?

IRIS

Falling gracefully around me. When the flutes play - I wish you could see their hues. First the blues and then they morph into green – and there are those tiny spirals of yellow but they're so subtle you can barely see them change – but they do.

MONET

Your imagination does get a workout.

IRIS

(Beat. Decision time.) It's ...not in my mind. They're here. Right in front of me.

(She holds out her hands and lets her arms dance as the streamers. TONY watches and slowly others do, But IRIS is lost in the beauty and finally doesn't care.)

Let me try to show you.

(IRIS will gesture very specifically. SHE knows exactly where the streamers are at all times and when they change hues. IRIS could interact with the COLOR CHORUS. She could also paint this with the painting facing the audience.)

IRIS

The blues start out on top. Like this. They're a little dark but then they lighten – almost to an aqua color. I can't get the color right but you get the picture. And as they float down they turn to a light green – right around here – the color is something like this. And then as they get near to the bottom they are a deep green. They sail away into the bottom and that's when new streamers start at the top. It's like watching the greens and blues of the earth from the sky. But earth isn't a planet – it's ribbons. Ribbons of earth floating through time. Bringing peace.

(MONET watches as IRIS is lost in her world. The class starts to whisper. The buzzer sounds. IRIS is jolted. MONET really notices. The lights change.)

(Outside the school, TONY is waiting.)

TONY

Iris! Sorry about you know – everything. I get that you want to change and I’m not good with change. It’s my problem. Not yours. I’m returning your book. It’s your story. Not mine.

IRIS

I don’t know my story. That’s what I’m looking for. I’m trying to find – why this stuff happens to me. I’ve had years of:

- You should dress like this
- You should watch youtube
- You should join one of the cooler clubs
- You should – you should – you should!

But I don’t.

TONY

Because you don’t want to.

IRIS

I don’t know what I want. Aiden knows he (she) is a combination of Legos and dragons. Jess knows the rules of the “populars” and loves the game. Mariel loves to follow the next craze. What does Iris know? Iris knows that music and colors make her happy but makes everyone around her miserable.

TONY

You don’t make me miserable.

IRIS

I think lately – just a little.

(JESSICA enters.)

JESSICA

Hey Iris. Tony. I’m doing a thing on Saturday if you’d like to come.

IRIS

... maybe. What will we be doing?

JESSICA

We don’t “do” anything. Just some music and fun. But I get it if your “thing” is not my “thing.” Just throwing it out there. It’s open to everyone in the eighth grade. (Beat.) Mom’s rules.

TONY

Thanks. But I’m allergic to “things.”

Suit yourself. Bye.

JESSICA

(JESSICA exits.)

Going?

TONY

I'm a little curious to see how the other half lives.

IRIS

(Showing the book again.)

Keep the book. Or throw it out.

You're giving up on it?

TONY

I'm going in a new direction.

IRIS

(A truck backfires. IRIS jumps.)

The noises really get to you.

TONY

The lights blare more. I don't know why. I tried what you said. But the lights don't cooperate. They won't move to the side.

IRIS

Maybe they know you're trying to get rid of them and they won't give up without a fight.

TONY

Are you saying I'm at war with myself?

IRIS

Not touching that subject.

TONY

(THEY separate. IRIS goes home. She puts on "Jupiter."
(About three minutes in when the cellos begin and all is mellow.) She sits with Miss Ellisandra.)

"What is Iris?"

IRIS

The COLOR CHORUS is in the background.)

A rainbow.

VOICE

(A typical rainbow is put on the easel.)

Maybe. But with my choice of colors.

IRIS

(SHE puts a photo on her easel of a more subdued rainbow.)

A star.

VOICE

(A star is placed on the easel.)

An earthling.

IRIS

(A girl/IRIS is placed on the easel.)

Rain.

VOICE

(Photo of rain on easel.)

Ice.

IRIS

(Photo of ice on easel.)

Genes from her parents.

VOICE

(A parent photo is placed.)

Mixed with cosmic dust.

IRIS

(A universe photo is placed. It is the last one. IRIS packs up her photos and takes them to art class.)

SCENE 5

Testing. Again.

(Lights up in the art class. MONET is speaking with IRIS.)

MONET

How are you finding the assignment?

IRIS

Challenging. I don't know who I am.

MONET

Nobody does. That's the great unsolved mystery.

IRIS

How can you grade this? It's not like recreating an apple.

MONET

Do you care?

IRIS

My parents do.

MONET

But do you?

IRIS

I'm torn between wanting to please the teacher and wanting to figure myself out.

MONET

Suppose what pleases the teacher also helps you figure things out?

IRIS

That would be a first.

MONET

Suppose I told you that I may have a way for you to figure yourself out that would please the teacher?

IRIS

Listening.

MONET

There's a test –

IRIS

- No. Thank-you.

MONET

- But it's –

No!

IRIS

(Buzzer blares. IRIS jumps but is handling it a little bit better.)

(IRIS picks up her photos and exits. Lights change.)

(IRIS and TONY enter IRIS'S room. They have a folder of the stock photos for the assignment. IRIS hands TONY a photo of a peace sign.)

Here you go.

IRIS

Explain.

TONY

I was wrong. You are not a fighter.

IRIS

I have had delusions of fighting off playground enemies with a light saber.

TONY

(Grabs a makeshift prop as a saber.)

“Behold playground enemies, I shall smite thee!”

Smite? Not “annihilate?” So not a fighter.

IRIS

I wouldn't mind being able to freeze some people in place. Especially Alex. He made fun of me for years when I told him that when our Glee Club sang “Over There,” I saw giant penguins marching around the North Pole.

TONY

I would love to have a giant penguin visual!

IRIS

Those beaks can do a lot of damage. Be happy you've never seen one come after you.

TONY

I wish people thought it was “cool” that we stuff and not “weird.”

IRIS

(Beat.)
IRIS
Monet wants to give me a test.

TONY
Me, too.

IRIS
I said “no.”

TONY
I said “maybe.”

(Beat.)
She said it could be helpful.

IRIS
Suppose it does the opposite?

TONY
I’m tired of fighting it.

IRIS
You haven’t gone through as many tests as me.

(Lights change. IRIS and TONY are in an empty class - separated. MONET is administering a test. IRIS and TONY wear earbuds attached to a computer. They have paper and pencils for both writing and drawing. The COLOR CHORUS is present.)

VOICE
Iris is being tested again.

VOICE
I hear she sees things.

VOICE
I hear she sees things.

VOICE
Things that aren’t there.