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# UNIT 4 REFUND

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## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, our aim is to make you familiar with the farcical one-act play, **Refund**. We will provide you with a glossary of difficult words, and give you simple comprehension exercises to test your understanding of the play. After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand how the plot of the prescribed play is organised, recognise the elements of a well-structured play, understand the dialogues and appreciate other one act plays of a similar kind.

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## 4.1 TEXT OF 'REFUND'

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### REFUND

*Fritz Karinthy*

*Adapted by Percival Wilde*

### CHARACTERS

The Principal

The Mathematics Master

The Geography Master

The History Master

A Servant

Wasserkopf

### REFUND

#### Unit 1

*The Principal is seated at his flat-topped desk in his office in a high school. Enter a servant.*

The Principal : Well, what is it ?

The Servant : A man, sir. Outside. He wants to see you.

The Principal [*leaning back and stretching*] : I receive parents only during office hours. The particular office hours are posted on the notice-board. Tell him that.

The Servant : Yes, sir. Yes, sir. But it isn't a parent, sir.

The Principal : A pupil ?

The Servant : I don't think so. He has a beard.

The Principal [*disquieted*] : Not a parent and not a pupil? Then what is he?

The Servant : He told me I should just say 'Wasserkopf'.

The Principal [*much disquieted*] : What does he look like? Stupid? Intelligent?

The Servant : Fairly intelligent, I'd say, sir.

The Principal [*reassured*] : Good! Then he's not a school inspector. Show him in.

The Servant : Yes, sir.

[*He goes off. An instant later the door reopens to admit a bearded man, carelessly dressed, somewhat under forty. He is energetic and decided.*]

Wasserkopf : How do you do? [*He remains standing.*]

The Principal [*rising*]: What can I do for you?

Wasserkopf : I'm Wasserkopf. [*He pauses.*] Don't you remember me?

The Principal [*shaking his head*] : No.

Wasserkopf : It's possible I've changed. What the hell...! Your class records will show I've got a right to come here.

The Principal : The class records? How so?

Wasserkopf : Mr. Principal, if you please, I'm Wasserkopf.

The Principal : Doubtless, doubtless — but what has that to do with it?

Wasserkopf : You mean to say you don't even remember my name? [*He thinks it over.*] No, I imagine you wouldn't. You were probably glad to forget me. Well, Mr. Principal, I was a student in this school eighteen years ago.

The Principal [*without enthusiasm*] : Oh, were you? Well, what do you want now? A certificate?

Wasserkopf [*doubtfully*] : Since I'm bringing back the leaving certificate you gave me I suppose I can get along without another one. No, that isn't why I came here.

The Principal : Well?

Wasserkopf [*clearing his throat; firmly*] : As a former pupil of this school I want you to refund the tuition fees which were paid you for my education eighteen years ago.

The Principal [*incredulously*] : You want me to refund your tuition fees?

Wasserkopf : Exactly : the tuition fees. If I were a rich man I'd tell you to keep them so far as I'm concerned. What the hell...! But I'm not a rich man and I need the money.

The Principal : I'm not sure I understand.

Wasserkopf : Dammit, I want my tuition fees back! Is that plain enough?

The Principal : Why do you want it back?

Wasserkopf : Because I didn't get my money's worth, that's why! This certificate here says I got an education. Well, I didn't. I didn't learn anything. I want my money back.

The Principal : But look here, look here! I don't understand it at all! I've never heard of anything like it! What an absurd idea!

Wasserkopf : Absurd, is it? It's a good idea. It's such a good idea that I didn't get it out of my own head, thanks to the education I got here, which made nothing but an incompetent ass out of me. My old classmate Leaderer gave me the idea not half an hour ago.

The Principal : Gave it to you?

Wasserkopf [*nodding violently*]: Like that. Here I was, walking along the street, fired

from my last job; and wondering how I could get hold of some cash, because I was quite broke. I met Leaderer. I said, 'How goes it, Leaderer?' 'Fine!' he says. 'I've got to hurry to the broker's to collect the money I made speculating in foreign exchange.' I said, 'What's foreign exchange?' He says, 'I haven't got the time to tell you now, but, according to the paper, Hungarian money is down seventy points, and I've made the difference. Do you understand?' Well, I didn't understand. I said, 'How can you make money if money goes down?' and he says, 'Wasserkopf, if you don't know that you don't know a damn thing. Go to the school and get your tuition fees back.' Then he hurried away and left me standing there, and I said to myself, 'Why shouldn't I do that?' He's right, now that I've thought it over. So I came here as fast as I could be. I shall be much obliged if you give me back my tuition fees, because they amount to a lot of money, and I didn't get anything for them.

The Principal [*at a loss for words*]: Really ... But now ... See here, we've never had a request like yours before. Leaderer told you —

Wasserkopf: He's a good friend, Leaderer. He told me, and when I get my money back I'm going to buy him a present.

The Principal: You — you're not really serious, are you?

Wasserkopf: I was never more serious in my life. Treat me wrong here and I'll go straight to the Ministry of Education and complain about you! You took my money, and you taught me nothing. Now I'm no good for anything, and I can't do the things I should have learned in school.

The Principal: You're mad! [*He breaks off, to continue in a more conciliatory tone.*] My dear sir, Herr—er—Wasserkopf, please go away quietly. I'll think the matter over after you've gone.

Wasserkopf [*sitting*]: No, no! You don't get rid of me so easy. I'll go when everything's been settled. I was given instruction herein exchange for money, so that I might be able to do something; but I can't do anything because I was taught so badly, and anybody can see I ought to have my money back.

## Unit 2

The Principal [*trying to gain time*]: What makes you think you can't do anything?

Wasserkopf: Everybody thinks so. If I get a job I can't keep it. Give me an examination and tell me what I ought to do. Call in the masters and let them say.

The Principal: What a distressing business! How unfortunate! You really want to take another examination?

Wasserkopf: Yes, I've the right to take one.

The Principal: What an unusual case! [*He scratches his head.*] I never heard of anything like it before. Er—I shall have to consult the staff. I shall have to call a conference ... Er—will you wait in the waiting-room and give me a few minutes?

Wasserkopf [*rising*]: Yes; but be quick. I've got no time to waste. [*He saunters out in leisurely fashion.*]

The Principal [*rings; the servant enters*]: Ask the staff to come here at once. A most extraordinary conference!

The Servant: Yes, sîr. [*He goes out.*]

The Principal [*trying out his speech*]: Gentlemen, I have asked you to come here on account of a most unusual state of affairs. It is unprecedented. In the thirty years that I have been a schoolmaster I have never heard of anything like it. Never, so long as I live, shall I expect to hear of anything like it again. Never! God forbid! [*The masters enter. They are characteristic figures whose eccentricities are exaggerated.*]

Gentlemen, I have asked you to come here on account of a most unusual state of affairs. Sit down, gentlemen. I shall open the conference. It is unprecedented, incredible, fantastic! A former pupil has just come to see me—er—an individual named Wasserkopf. He brought up a question which I have never encountered in my many years of experience. [*He explodes.*] I never heard of anything like it!

The Mathematics Master : Tell us about it.

The Mathematics Master : Why?

The Principal : Because he's lost his job. Because he's broke. Because he's an ass. I should be glad to have you express your views on this unparalleled case.

The Physics Master : Gentlemen, the case is natural. The law of the conservation of energy proves that any given pupil will lose, in any given period, as much knowledge as a teacher can drill into his head in another period of like duration.

The History Master : There is nothing like it in the history of civilization. It is said the Bourbons learned nothing and forgot nothing. If that is true —

The Physics Master : The law of the conservation of energy — [*The two argue.*]

The Mathematics Master : The question is, does he want the amount with simple or compound interest, because in the latter event —

The Geography Master : Where is the fellow, anyhow?

The Principal : He's waiting outside. He wants to be re-examined. He says he learned nothing. He says a re-examination will prove it. I'd like to know what you gentlemen think about it.

The Mathematics Master [*chuckling*] : A re-examination? Gentlemen, it is my conviction that we shall lose nothing by re-examining Wasserkopf. If he fails he will place us in an awkward position; therefore he must not fail. He has — shall I say? — pursued advanced studies in the school of life. We will not make our questions too difficult — agreed, gentlemen? We are dealing with a sly, crafty individual, who will try to get the better of us — and his money back — by hook or crook. We must checkmate him.

The Physics Master : How?

The Mathematics Master : By sticking together. The object is to prevent him from failing, because if he fails he succeeds. That we must stop. If he fails, tomorrow there will be two more former pupils, and the next day a dozen. We must back each other up, gentlemen, so that this painful affair does not become a pedagogical scandal. We will ask him questions. Whatever his answers, we agree beforehand that they are correct.

The History Master : Who will decide?

The Mathematics Master : I, if you will permit me. Mr. Principal, let us proceed with the examination. We will show the former pupil that we too can be shrewd!

The Principal [*ringing; uneasily*] : Isn't there a chance of something going wrong? Suppose it gets into the newspapers —

The Mathematics Master : Leave it to us.

The Principal [*to the servant, who has appeared*] : Show in Herr Wasserkopf.

### Unit 3

[*He enters, without waiting to be shown in. He is most truculent. His hat is over one ear; he greets nobody; he keeps his hands thrust into his pockets and stares insolently.*]

The Staff [*bowing, heartily*] : How do you do?

Wasserkopf : Who the hell are you? Sit down, you loafers! [*He grins, waiting to be thrown out.*]

The Principal : How dare you —

The Mathematics Master [*interrupting*] : Please! [*He turns to the others.*] Sit down, you loafers! [*They sit, greatly astonished. He turns to Wasserkopf.*] My dear sir, the greeting you have just given us shows that you understand the patriarchal manners

which we impress upon everybody in this institution. Exactly as in the days of the medieval humanists, teachers and pupils meet here on a footing of perfect equality. You have shown us, in the most tactful way, that you approve of our customs. That is good of you, and I am sure my colleagues will agree that the pupil Wasserkopf, who appears before us for re-examination, need not be examined in what appertains to gentlemanliness. Instead we waive examination in that subject, and mark him 'Excellent.'

The Principal [*understanding at once*] : Quite right ! Quite right ! [*He writes.*]  
'Manners : Excellent.'

The Staff : Agreed ! Agreed !

Wasserkopf [*puzzled, then shrugging his shoulders*] : All right, if you say so. What the hell ... ! I don't give a damn for the lot of you. My being gentlemanly isn't going to pass this examination. Let me fail as quickly as possible, and give me my money. Everything else is just damned nonsense.

The Principal [*flatteringly*] : Speaking for the staff, we agree with you. Your exquisite courtesy will not affect us one way or the other. We will examine you, and will be guided entirely by your replies to our questions. Take notice of that.

Wasserkopf : All right; carry on ! Let's hear the questions. I need money. [*He takes off his coat and hitches up his sleevebands.*] Go to it ! Ask me questions, professors — I mean, long-eared asses ! I'd like to see you get a single correct answer out of me.

The Principal : The examination will begin. History. Herr Schwefler ?

The History Master [*moving to the centre of the table and indicating a chair facing it*] : Herr Wasserkopf, won't you be seated ?

Wasserkopf [*staring at him insolently, arms akimbo*] : To hell with a seat ! I'll stand.

[*The History Master is disconcerted, and shows it, but the Mathematics Master leaps into the breach.*]

The Mathematics Master : Bravo ! Excellent ! Herr Wasserkopf wishes us to understand two things. He will dispense with a formal written examination and will answer orally. Good ! He will not be seated; he will stand. Also good. It follows that his physical condition is splendid, and I take it upon myself to award him an 'Excellent' in physical culture. I ask the Principal, who teaches that subject, to concur.

The Principal : Quite right. [*He writes.*] 'Physical Culture : Excellent.'

The Staff : Agreed ! Agreed !

Wasserkopf [*energetically*] : No ! [*He sits; he grins.*] You caught me once, didn't you ? Well, you won't do it again. From now on I'll have my ears open.

The Principal [*writing*] : 'Alertness : Very Good.'

The History Master : 'Perseverance : Unusual.'

The Mathematics Master : 'Logic : Excellent.'

Wasserkopf : Get on with your questions !

The Mathematics Master [*to the Principal*] : 'Ambition : Boundless.' [*The Principal nods and writes.*]

The History Master [*scratching his head*] : Yes, yes, just a minute. [*The other masters look at him with concern.*]

Wasserkopf : What's the matter, Schwefler ? Aren't you prepared ?

The History Master : A moment !

Wasserkopf : Oh, you can't think of a question that's easy enough ? You were always a numskull.

The History Master [*the idea arrives : triumphantly*] : Candidate, answer this question : How long did the Thirty Years' War last ?

Wasserkopf : Thirt—[*He interrupts himself.*] I mean to say, I don't know.

The History Master : Please answer my questions ! I am sure you know ! Give me an answer ! [Wasserkopf *thinks with eyebrows drawn together.* The Physics Master *tiptoes to him and whispers loudly, 'Thirty years.'* The Geography Master *winks at him and holds up ten fingers three times.*] Well, well ?

Wasserkopf : Mr. Principal, this is no way to run an examination. [*He indicates the Physics Master.*] That fellow is trying to make me cheat.

The Principal : I shall deal with this decisively. [*To the Physics Master*] Go away !

[*The Physics Master slinks back to his place.*]

Wasserkopf [*after much thought*] : How long did the Thirty Years' War last ? Was that the question ?

The History Master : Yes, yes !

Wasserkopf [*grinning*] : I know ! Exactly seven metres ! [*They are paralysed. He looks about in triumph.*] He, ha ! Seven metres ! I know it lasted that long. It's possible I'm wrong, and if I am I fail. Seven metres ! Ha, ha ! Seven metres long ! Seven metres ! Please give me back my tuition fees.

[*The Masters look at each other, at their wits' ends.*]

The History Master [*decisively*] : Seven metres ? Right ! Your answer is excellent.

Wasserkopf [*incredulously*] : What ? What did you say ?

The History Master [*swallowing manfully and watching the Principal out of the corner of his eye*] : The answer is correct, as a matter of fact. The candidate has shown us that his thought processes are not merely superficial, and that he has investigated the subject in accordance with modern researches based on — based on — based on —

The Mathematics Master : Relativity, of course. The quantum theory. Planck. Einstein. It's all very simple. [*To the History Master*] Don't say another word. We understand perfectly. Einstein has taught us that time is as real as space and matter. It consists of atoms, may be synthesized into a unified whole, and may be measured like anything else. Reduce the mass-system to a unit and a year may be represented by a metre, or seven years by seven metres. We may even assert that the Thirty Years' War lasted seven years only because — because — because —

The History Master : Because actual warfare took place only during half of each day — that is to say, twelve hours out of the twenty-four — and the thirty years at once become fifteen . But not even fifteen years were given up to incessant fighting, for the combatants had to eat — three hours a day, reducing our fifteen years to twelve. And if from this we deduct the hours given up to noonday siestas, to peaceful diversions, to non-warlike activities — [*He wipes his brow.*]

The Mathematics Master : To social distractions, we have left only the time which the candidate has represented by the Einsteinian equivalent of seven metres. Correct ! I take it upon myself, gentlemen, to propose a grading of 'Very Good' in history. Oof ! [*He too wipes his brow.*]

The Staff : Bravo ! Excellent ! He has passed !  
[*They congratulate Wasserkopf.*]

Wasserkopf [*objecting*] : But I don't see —

The Principal : That ends the examination in history. [*Writing*] 'History : Very Good. [*the Staff surround the History Master and congratulate him.*] Now the examination in physics.

[*The Physics Master takes the place of the History Master.*]

Wasserkopf : Now we'll see something, you tricksters !

The Physics Master [*energetically*] : Come, come !

Wasserkopf [*defiantly*] : Well, what's going to happen? Ask your questions, or don't. I haven't got any more time to waste. [*He stares at the Physics Master.*] Oh, now I remember you. Do you know what we used to call you behind your back? [*The Physics Master smiles in agony.*] We called you the cannibal, because you were always chewing your thumbs, just as you're doing now ! [*The Master removes his thumb hastily. The rest of the Staff smile.*] That's what we called you ! Oh, by the way, do you remember the day you tripped and fell flat in the aisle? Do you know who tied a string across from desk to desk, so you'd do that? I did it !

The Physics Master [*furiously*] : You ?

Wasserkopf : Don't get excited, little man. Ask me a hard question instead. Plough me.

The Physics Master [*controls himself, well aware that Wasserkopf is trying to irritate him. Very sweetly*] : Kind of you — very kind of you. And now, tell me, Herr Wasserkopf, do clocks in church steeples really become smaller as you walk away from them, or do they merely appear to become smaller because of an optical illusion ?

Wasserkopf : What absolute rot? How should I know? Whenever I walk away from clocks they get larger ! Invariably ! If I want them to get smaller I turn round, and walk right up to them, and then they're not small at all.

The Physics Master : In a word, therefore, in a word —

Wasserkopf : In a word, therefore, you give me a pain in the neck. You're an ass ! That's my answer.

The Physics Master [*furiously*] : Is that your answer ?  
 [*He controls himself.*] Good ! It is correct. [*Turning to the Staff*] A difficult answer, but a most brilliant one. I'll explain — that is to say, I'll explain. [*With a sigh, he gets on with it.*] When we talk of the ass we always notice — we always notice —

The Staff [*anxiously*] : Yes? Yes?

The Physics Master : — that his look is sad. Therefore — [*He thinks. Suddenly triumphant.*] I've got it !

Wasserkopf [*worried*] : What have you got, you whiskered baboon ?

The Physics Master : I've got it, and the answer is right. Why is the look of the ass so sad? Why, in general, are all of us usually so sad? Because we are all the victims of illusion. But what illusions can affect the extremely primitive apperceptive powers of an ass? Obviously the illusions of the senses, for the ass lacks imagination; and these must be none other than optical illusions, since the ass, like us, observes that objects appear to become smaller as he moves away from them. The candidate has given us a most excellent answer in calling our attention to an animal whose expression is melancholy because its senses are deceptive; or, to put it in another way, because the apparent decrease in size of an object, in this case a clock, is to be ascribed to optical illusion. The answer was correct. I certify, therefore, that the candidate may be given 'Very Good' in physics.

The Principal [*writing*] : 'Physics : Very Good.'

The Staff : Bravo !

[*They surround the Physics Master, slapping him on the back and shaking his hands, while he sinks into his chair, completely exhausted.*]

Wasserkopf : I protest !

The Principal [*silencing him with a gesture*] : The examination in geography.  
 [*The Geography Master takes the place facing Wasserkopf.*]

Wasserkopf : Just look at him ! The old hypocrite ! How are you, anyhow, nitwit ?

The Geography Master : I beg your pardon ?

Wasserkopf : My name used to be in your class-book, didn't it ? You old reprobate ! You just wait ! I'll fix you all right !

The Geography Master : Tell me, candidate —

Wasserkopf : I'll tell you ! I'll tell you ! Oh, how I used to hate you eighteen years ago !

The Geography Master [*imperturbably*] : Please tell me what city of the same name is the capital of the German province of Brunswick ?

Wasserkopf : What dumb question ! The answer's part of the question.

The Geography Master [*pleased*] : Isn't it ? And the answer — what is it ?

Wasserkopf : 'Same', of course. That's the answer. If the name of the city is the same, then the name of the city is 'Same.' Right ? If it isn't I fail, and you refund my tuition fees.

The Geography Master : The answer is correct. The name of the city is 'Same.' Gentlemen, the candidate shows exceptional knowledge of the history of the city of Brunswick. There is a legend that once, as the Emperor Barbarossa was riding into the city, he met a young peasant girl who was munching a bun, and whose mouth was full. He called out to her, 'God bless you. What's the name of this city?' and the peasant girl answered, 'Same to you, sir.' Then she stopped, because her mouth was full, and the Emperor laughed, and said 'Ho, ho ! So the name of the city is "Same"?' And for many years, thereafter, he never referred to Brunswick except by that title. [*He turns, to wink solemnly at his colleagues.*] The answer is excellent. The candidate is entitled to a grade of 'Excellent' in geography. [*He returns to his place, to be showered with congratulations.*]

The Principal [*writing*] : 'Geography : Excellent.' Thus far the candidate has come through with flying colours. Only the examination in mathematics is left. Should he pass that he will have passed the entire examination.

Wasserkopf [*nervously*] : I'm going to be more careful now. [*The Mathematics Master takes his place facing Wasserkopf. The other Masters are much worried, but the Mathematics Master assures them with a gesture that they may depend on him.*] So here you are, old stick-in-the-mud ! Do you know we used to call you 'old stick-in-the-mud' behind your back ? You'd better brush up your wits if you think you're going to put one over on me. I'll start off by telling you a few things about mathematics : two times two is five, and I make up my own multiplication tables as I go along. And if you add eight apples and two pears the answer is twenty-seven apricots. That's my system, and you'll see me use it. To hell with mathematics ! 'Answer excellent' ? 'Answer very good' ? 'Answer correct' ? Not this time. It will be simpler if you say you aren't prepared, and let me fail.

The Mathematics Master [*forcibly*] : You must not joke about a serious examination. I'm going to ask you two questions. One of them is easy; the other is hard.

Wasserkopf [*imitating him*] : One of them is easy; the other is hard. The same old stick-in-the-mud that you always were ! I remember the pictures of you we used to draw on the board —

The Mathematics Master [*interrupting*] : If this were an examination in art you would be marked excellent. [*He pauses, and Wasserkopf is suddenly silent.*] But we are dealing with mathematics. The easy question : If we represent the speed of light by  $x$ , and the distance of the star Sirius from the sun by  $y$ , what is the circumference of a one-hundred-and-nine-sided regular polyhedron whose surface area coincides with that of the hip-pocket of a State railway employee whose wife has been deceiving him for two years and eleven months with a regimental sergeant-major of hussars ?

The Staff [*much upset*] : But look here, Professor ! Professor !



The Principal : Professor !

Wasserkopf : Don't interfere with him ! [To the Mathematics Master] Will you repeat the question ?

The Mathematics Master : No. Either you paid attention, or you did not. Either you know the answer, or you don't. Tell me the answer, because if you don't know it —

Wasserkopf : Of course I know it ! Naturally I know it ! I'll tell you : two thousand six hundred and twenty-nine litres. Exact. No fractions. And now did I give you the correct answer ? [He chuckles.] I've given you an answer which is too good !

The Mathematics Master : No. The answer is wrong. The correct answer is two thousand six hundred and twenty-eight litres, and not twenty-nine. [He turns to the Principal.] I refuse to pass the candidate. Mark him 'Failure.'

Wasserkopf [bounding] : I told you so ! I told you so !

The Principal [thunderstruck] : Professor ! Professor !

The Mathematics Master : I'm sorry. It is true that his error amounted to less than a tenth of a per cent, in the total, but it was an error. He fails.

Wasserkopf : My tuition fees ! My tuition fees !

The Mathematics Master : In my opinion the candidate's request is reasonable. Now that I have satisfied myself he cannot pass our examination it is his right to recover the monies which were paid us.

Wasserkopf : That's so ! That's right ! Give me the money ! [The Staff stare as if the heavens had fallen.]

The Principal [furiously, to the Mathematics Master] : Is that what you think ?

The Mathematics Master : Absolutely. This is a good school. It is our duty to see that nothing ever injures its reputation. How much do we owe you, Herr Wasserkopf ?

Wasserkopf [greedily, forgetting everything else] : I'll tell you exactly. I attended this school for six years in all. During the first three years the fee was 150 crowns quarterly. Total for three years 1,800. During the second three years the fee was 400 crowns semi-annually. Total : 2,400 and 1,800 is 4,200. Examinations fees, 240 crowns 95 heller. Certificates, documents, books, stamp taxes, 1,241 crowns 43 heller. Total : 5,682 crowns 38 heller. Incidentals, stationery, notebooks, 768 crowns 12 heller. Grand total : 6,450 crowns 50 heller. Knock off the heller and call it crowns.

The Mathematics Master [checking with paper and pencil as Wasserkopf calls out the amounts] : Exactly !

Wasserkopf : Exactly ! You can rely on it.

The Mathematics Master : It's right. There's no question of it. It's right to the smallest detail. [He offers Wasserkopf his hand.] I congratulate you ! That was my difficult question !

Wasserkopf [not understanding] : What ?

The Mathematics Master [to the Principal] : I certify that the candidate passes in mathematics. His answer to the easy question was a very little out of the way; but his answer to the difficult question — how much the refund should be — was exactly correct. Herr Wasserkopf is really a mathematical genius.

Wasserkopf [striking his forehead] : So you did put one over on me !

#### Unit 4

The Principal [rising] : I present the results of the examination. Herr Wasserkopf has passed with distinction in every subject, and has again shown that he is entitled to

the certificate we awarded him on his graduation. Herr Wasserkopf, we offer our congratulations — accepting a large share of them for ourselves for having taught you so excellently. And now that we have verified your knowledge and your abilities —[*he makes an eloquent gesture*] get out before I have you thrown out!  
 [*He rings for the servant. The following speeches are nearly spoken simultaneously.*]

The History Master : So I'm numskull, am I? Say it again and I'll show you what's what!

The Physics Master : I'm a cannibal? What? And you were the one who tied a string across the aisle —

The Geography Master : Hypocrite? Nitwit? Ass? Me?

The Mathematics Master : Old stick-in-the-mud?

The Servant [*entering*] : Yes, sir?

The Principal [*indicating Wasserkopf*] : Remove that object! [The Servant *seizes Wasserkopf by the collar and the seat of his trousers and rushes him off. The Principal turns to the Staff and beams.*] Thank you, gentlemen, for your magnificent co-operation. In the future it will be our proudest boast that in this school a pupil simply cannot fail!  
 [*They shake hands and slap each other's back.*]

Curtain

#### 4.1.1 Study Guide

In the earlier units (2&3) you have read **The Bishop's Candlesticks** and in Unit 6 you will read **The Monkey's Paw**. The former is a morality play and the latter is of the horror kind. But both contain very little humour. But **Refund** is a play with the predominating element of humour in it. We call the kind of play a farce, which is a comedy of extravagant humour and improbable situations. It also holds up to ridicule the modern educational set-up and this is done by the use of irony, sarcasm and humour.

The plot of the play is simple and is developed without any deviation from the single story line. The play takes about 30 minutes to perform. The entire action takes place inside the Principal's office. Read the play once to understand the story. Read it again with the help of the glossary to understand the dialogues and the development of the story. Read it a third time so that you become familiar with the sequence of events, action and the dialogues of the play.

#### 4.1.2 Note on the Author

Pritz Karinthy (1887-1938) : Novelist, poet and playwright, was a Hungarian satirical writer. He studies to be a teacher but became a journalist. He was primarily concerned with the quality of human life.

**Refund** is a light, rollicking play which satirizes the English anomalies of the modern educational system. The play is in translation from the original Hungarian.

#### 4.1.3 Glossary

<b>posted</b>	: Displayed
<b>broke</b>	: (slang) penniless
<b>Herr</b>	: Mister (German)
<b>school of life</b>	: from actual experience of life
<b>by hook &amp; crook</b>	: by any means, fair or foul
<b>Pedagogical Scandal</b>	: cause shock in academic circles.
<b>medieval humanists</b>	: 12th to 15th century philosophers who emphasize the importance of human needs.
<b>leaps into the breach</b>	: comes to his assistance

<b>quantum theory</b>	: the theory based on Planck's radiation law that the emission and absorption of energy and the change of energy in atoms and molecules occur only in definite units called quanta.
<b>Planck</b>	: Max Planck (1858-1947), German physicist, whose investigation into radiation of energy won him the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1918.
<b>Einstein</b>	: Albert Einstein (1879-1955), famous scientist who formulated the Theory of Relativity. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1921.
<b>plough me</b>	: (slang) fail me.
<b>to put one over me</b>	: cheat me.
<b>polyhedron</b>	: a solid figure with several plane surfaces, usually more than six sided.
<b>hussars</b>	: light-armed cavalry, originally Hungarian.
<b>heller</b>	: a Hungarian coin of small value.

#### 4.1.4 Chronological Sequence of Events

- i) The play begins with the dialogue between the servant and the principal.
- ii) Wasserkopf's entry and the dialogue between him and the principal.
- iii) Wasserkopf's exit, followed by the entry of the masters and the dialogue between them and the principal.
- iv) Wasserkopf enters and the conversations among the Principal, Masters and Wasserkopf. Wasserkopf seeks a re-examination. His intention is to fail and thereby seek a refund of his school tuition fees.
- v) The re-examination begins and Wasserkopf is questioned by the History Master.
- vi) The turn of the Physics Master to examine Wasserkopf.
- vii) Then the Examination in Geography.
- viii) The examination in Mathematics : Wasserkopf is first set an easy question and then a difficult one. The latter relates to the complicated calculation of the fees to be refunded. Wasserkopf is tricked into giving the right answer.
- ix) Conversation between the Principal and the Masters in which Wasserkopf is declared to have passed and consequently is thrown out.

From the above sequences you can see that the entire action of the play takes place in the Principal's office. There is no change of scene. You are aware that in a one-act play there is very little time for change of stage scenery. So unity of place is mostly adhered to. Though characters enter and exit the location for all action remains the same.

All the events take place during the normal working hours of a school day. In other words the action of the play covers only a few hours. Recall that you had read about one-act plays. Since it has limited stage time, it can present a situation or event within a limited time frame. We also learn that unity of action, in terms of dealing with a single situation is another important characteristic of a one-act play. **Refund** deals with the humorous situation of a student demanding a refund of his tuition fees from his school on grounds of useless and normless education given to him. The manner in which the Principal and the Masters out-wit him on his preposterous demand constitutes the action of the play.

Thus **Refund** has unity of place, time and action which gives the play a well-knit structure, moving it steadily from beginning to end.

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## 4.2 STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

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In Unit 1 you have read about the structure of a one-act play. A play of this kind is basically structured on the lines of an exposition, complication, climax and

denouement. A play begins at a certain point of time and the action moves it steadily forward in time into the future. In a well-constructed play each of these four parts develops logically from the preceding one i.e. the complication will develop from the exposition, the climax from the complication and so on. This logical development is extremely important in a play because a play is essentially meant to be enacted and not read. The spectator watching a play cannot move backwards in time to pick up the thread of the action. There should be continuity of action so that the links are forged throughout the play. To put it in a slightly modified way, we can say that consistent and logical development of action is essential if the play is to be easily followed and understood in its sequential profession.

Let us turn once again to the chronological sequence in 4.1.4. You can now appreciate how important it is in a short play to follow the chronological sequence of events so that you do not miss any link in the development of the story.

Recall what you had read about the four parts of the structure of a play (i.e., the exposition, complication, climax and denouement). Can you now identify the sequences from (i) to (ix) in **Refund** along these categories? This simple exercise will enable you to recognise how the plot of a play is structured and how each sequence is important in itself and in its contribution to the sequences following it.

Analysis :

Exposition	: (i), (ii) and part of (iii)
Complication	: part of (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii)
Climax	: (viii)
Denouement	: (ix)

### 4.2.1 Exposition

In the previous units, you learnt that the opening section in **one-act plays** gives us all the information we require to understand the action that follows. Try to sort out the necessary information that gives direction to the play. Check your observations with what we have given. It provides (1) the background, (2) introduces the main characters and (3) gives us some idea about their temperament and behaviour.

Let us now analyse the sequences. In sequence (i) the **servant** announces the arrival of **Wasserkopf** at his old school. We learn that he is neither a student nor a parent and



that he is about 40 years old. We are also introduced to the Principal. He shows himself as having no genuine interest in the students. He adopts an indifferent and casual attitude as soon as he learns that Wasserkopf is *only* an old student. He becomes animated only when Wasserkopf reveals his intention of demanding a refund and embarrassing the school authorities.

Sequence (ii) reveals the purpose of his visit. He has come to demand a refund of the tuition fees paid by him eighteen years ago. We are told of his reason for doing so and how he got the idea. A casual remark by his old classmate, Leaderer who sarcastically told him that he had learned nothing from school and should therefore seek a refund of his tuition fees leads him to visit the school. In the course of his talk with the Principal Wasserkopf adopts an attitude of insolence and impudence. He is seen to have a fairly agile mind which has worked out a plan to embarrass the school authorities to force them to return his fees. This sequence tells us of what had happened before the play sequences began. We are told that Wasserkopf has not made good in life. He has been dismissed from his last job and is looking around for a way to get hold of some cash as he is penniless. He claims he is 'an incompetent ass' and is incapable of getting a single good idea on his own. The Principal is initially complacent until he senses the embarrassment that Wasserkopf's request might create for him.

Aghast at the implications of this unprecedented situation, in sequence (iii) he is seen in conversation with the staff. He informs the teachers about the unusual request and Wasserkopf's readiness to undergo a re-examination to prove that he has learnt nothing. In the course of this conversation the eccentricities of each of the Masters is revealed. If you refer to sequence (iii) you will observe that the author indicates by his use of the word 'eccentricities' that he imagines the Masters as having distinct peculiarities of speech, manner or gesture. If you were the director of the play what individual characteristics of this kind would you give to each of the teachers and what effect would this produce? Of the Masters introduced in this sequence which one of them strikes you as being the most significant as a character and as regards the development of the plot?

The first 3 sequences have thus fulfilled the needs of the exposition, setting the stage for the complication.

#### 4.2.2 Complication

Wasserkopf's eagerness to get back his money by hook or by crook **conflicts** with the determination of the Principal and the Masters to foil his intention and outwit him. It is from this conflict that the complication arises.

At the end of sequence (iii) the Mathematics Master emerges as the master mind behind the scheme to checkmate Wasserkopf. This prepares us for the controlling part he plays throughout the remaining sequences. He is shown as a shrewd individual who at once understands the implications behind Wasserkopf's demand and **explains** to the other masters the need to ensure that Wasserkopf does not fail the re-examination. He outlines the strategy they are to follow. They will ask simple questions, and working together credit Wasserkopf with a pass certificate.

Wasserkopf is determined to prove himself to be a failure, one who has learnt nothing from the school, including reasonable behaviour befitting a gentleman. He has a crafty scheming mind and has a cunning that can match the brains of his former masters. He is, however, caught off-guard by the surprisingly conciliatory behaviour of the Principal and Mathematics Master. Before he can gather his wits he is graded 'excellent' in manners and physical culture.

The re-examination begins. — The battle of wits between Wasserkopf and his examiners is at the centre of sequences (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii). The Masters of History, Physics and Geography conduct the oral examination asking absurdly simple questions. Wasserkopf is rude and abusive towards each. He gives patently ridiculous answers and waits complacently to be told that he has failed. He is smugly sure that he will outsmart the masters in their game and so become eligible to get his money back. Can you recognise the *irony* in the play at this point? Wasserkopf is seen to be arrogant and impudent having little respect for his teachers. His abusive remarks are calculated to humiliate the Masters and they also reflect the callous behaviour of the

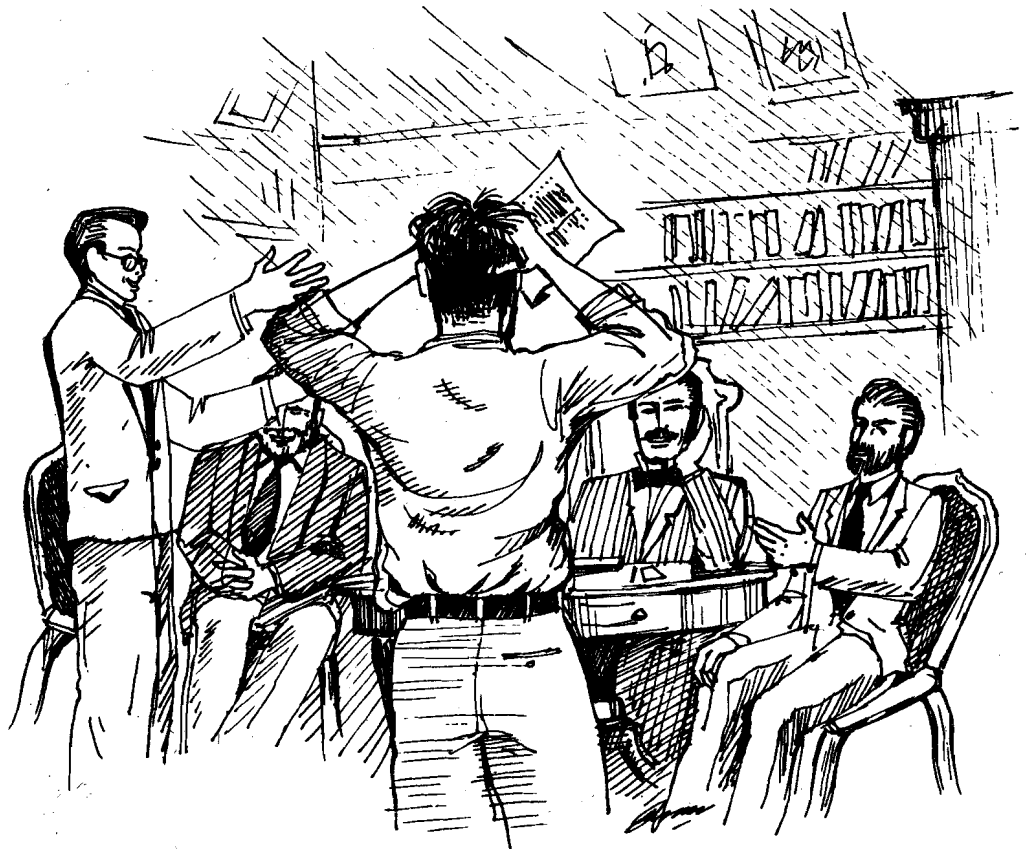
Masters in his school days. So he matches the masters' strategy of not failing him by his own clever strategy. The irony is in the fact that Wasserkopf deserves to be passed for his sharpness despite his absurd answers that entitle him to be a failure. Yet it is these very answers that win him a pass.

The Mathematics Master is quick to recognise his cleverness and intentions. He intervenes whenever his colleagues falter, to make sense out of Wasserkopf's nonsensical answers. He is able to give absurdly ingenious explanations in defence of Wasserkopf's brilliance and help his colleagues to declare him passed in all subjects.

The situation has become a complex one with Wasserkopf and the Mathematics Master, trying to score over each other. Do you find the play funny? If so, analyse the functions of humour and irony in the development of this complex situation. You would appreciate that much of the humour arises out of the incongruity and preposterousness of the situation. The roles have been reversed, as it were, with the masters ridiculously eager to please and accommodate Wasserkopf while the ex-student is determined to be as offensive as possible. Humour is also generated by the deliberately puerile questions and Wasserkopf's blatantly absurd answers and the ingenuity and effort that has gone into the framing of both.

### 4.2.3 Climax

Sequence (viii) shows the Mathematics Master setting the final 'trap' for Wasserkopf. This consists of his asking one easy question, to which Wasserkopf responds intentionally with a ridiculous answer. Hoodwinked by the Mathematics Master's declaration that this answer is wrong and he has failed, and therefore become eligible for his refund, Wasserkopf is ready to oblige the Master's instruction to calculate the amount due to him. He is right to the smallest detail. The real climax occurs when the tables are finally turned on Wasserkopf with the shrewd Mathematics Master congratulating Wasserkopf for his accurate calculation as he declares "That was my difficult question". We notice the **paradox** in the final outcome of the re-examination. Wasserkopf has failed the real test that demanded alertness and quick-wittedness on his part. He is passed for his ability to do arithmetical calculation. But he fails to calculate the Master's mind and he trips. This is the real indictment of the modern educational system which turns students into mechanical calculators with no



development of essential faculties to succeed in life. He is passed for what he does not possess—commonsense and alertness. He fails because he is good at calculation.

**4.2.4 Denouement**

In the last of the sequences (ix) Wasserkopf’s result is declared and he is unceremoniously dismissed. The Principal and Masters show their utter contempt for him. They congratulate themselves on their shrewdness and boast that “In this school a pupil simply cannot fail”. In the light of our observations, try to analyse the irony and sarcasm in this last statement. The irony and bitterness of the remark lies in the completely distorted values that it reveals. The teachers are not at all concerned with the quality of education they impart. They are totally uncritical of the value of what they teach and whether it really serves the students to face life. This remark shows the superficiality of their aims which consists in simply maintaining the apparently excellent record of all students passing all examinations. The true quality of students and teachers, examinations, questions and answers\* has already been exposed and ridiculed by the action of the play (\*that is, of the whole educational system). This concluding remark, therefore, underlines the hollowness of the entire system where the ability to outsmart others has replaced any meaningful functioning.

Initially Wasserkopf is an example of what a deficient educational system does to the young student. The play is a satirical exposure of the inadequacies of the school system. Wasserkopf at the end is seen once more a victim of the same institutional set up as in the past. The teachers do not emerge as the guardians of sound academic values. Ignoring the shortcomings in themselves and the educational system they are only interested in outsmarting their opponent. The final irony of the play is that while Wasserkopf is humiliated, we feel no satisfaction in the victory of the teachers, either.

We had noted that this short play comes under the category of farcical comedy. What are the farcical elements you found in the play? Can you define a farce in the light of your understanding of the play?

A farce 1) demonstrates the proximity between the logical and the illogical. 2) It explores a static or complacent world where any attempt to change is looked upon with fear and mistrust. 3) The play accepts an outmoded system of education which in its efforts to hold on to it undermines any pretensions to a change for the better. 4) The play borders on comedy of cruelty that assaults the complacency of the audience. 5) It forces us to re-think our concept of the normal and the abnormal.

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**4.3 SUGGESTED READING**

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A one-act play having similar farcical elements :  
 Anton Chekov: **The Marriage Proposal**

**Self-check Exercise 1**

Answer the following questions briefly :

- i) What information about Wasserkopf does the servant give?  
 .....
- ii) How did Wasserkopf get the idea of asking for a return of his fees?  
 .....
- iii) What reasons does Wasserkopf give to claim that he is incompetent?  
 .....
- v) Why does Wasserkopf want another examination?  
 .....

v) Why does the Mathematics Master insist that Wasserkopf should not fail?

.....  
 .....

vi) How do the teachers decide to prevent this?

.....  
 .....

vii) How does Wasserkopf answer the difficult question of the Mathematics Master and why?

.....  
 .....

viii) What is the result of the examination?

.....  
 .....

ix) Who deserves credit for this result?

.....  
 .....

x) How is Wasserkopf dismissed at the end?

.....  
 .....

**Self-check Exercise 2**

- i) What are Wasserkopf's reasons for demanding a refund?
- ii) Does Wasserkopf really think school has made him an 'incompetent ass'?
- iii) Describe the strategy of the teachers during the re-examination.
- iv) How is Wasserkopf finally outwitted by the Mathematics Master?

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**4.4 SUMMING UP**

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From the study of the play and the analysis given in these sections, you will recognise the structure of the play, **Refund**. You are now familiar with the chronological sequence and can recognise the four parts into which the play can be divided. With the help of the glossary you will have a better appreciation of the play. Above all you have learnt about **farce**, a sub-species of the comic genre.

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**4.5 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES**

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**Self-check Exercise 1**

- i) The servant informs the Principal about a visitor who looks quite intelligent but does not seem to be either a parent or a student.
- ii) Wasserkopf got the idea from his old classmate, Leaderer who sarcastically told him that he had learned nothing from school and should, therefore, seek a refund of his tuition fees.
- iii) He cannot do any of the things he had learned at school. He cannot get any good ideas. He has also been dismissed from his last job and he is penniless.
- iv) So that he can fail and thereby get his refund.
- v) It will put them in an awkward position as this may encourage many former pupils to make a similar demand. It may also expose the inadequacy of their teaching methods and system.
- vi) The teachers plan that they will make their questions simple, that they will co-operate with one another and however absurd his answers they will make them out to be correct so that Wasserkopf cannot fail.



- vii) His answer is correct to the last detail because he has carefully calculated the amount due to him and which he is very eager to get back.
- viii) Wasserkopf is decided to have passed with distinction in all subjects and deserves the certificate he earned at school.
- ix) The Mathematics Master who tricks Wasserkopf into giving the 'right' answer.
- x) Wasserkopf is thrown out in disgrace as if he was an object.

**Self-check Exercise 2**

Hints for (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv)

Read the text and the Unit thoroughly so that you can write the answers briefly.