



Refund by Fritz Karinthy

Introduction to Fritz Karinthy & the Play



The Playwright

Hungarian satirist Fritz Karinthy (1887–1938), renowned for his sharp wit, clever parody, and biting social commentary



The Work

Refund (1938): a brilliant one-act satirical play later adapted by Percival Wilde for international audiences



The Theme

Explores the absurdity and failures of traditional education systems through humor, irony, and clever wordplay



Plot Summary: The Demand for a Refund

Wasserkopf, a 40-year-old unemployed former student, makes an unexpected return to his old school with an outrageous demand. He claims the education he received 18 years ago was utterly useless and demands a full refund of his tuition fees.

His argument? Everything he learned has proven worthless in real life, leaving him jobless and frustrated. He threatens to file a formal complaint with the education minister if the school refuses his demand.



The School's Dilemma & Teachers' Strategy

0

1 Principal's Panic

The principal is shocked by Wasserkopf's audacious demand and immediately calls an emergency meeting with all the teachers

0

3 A Clever Counterplan

Teachers devise a brilliant strategy: declare every answer correct, no matter how absurd or ridiculous, ensuring he passes

0

2 Teachers Suspect a Trap

The faculty quickly realizes Wasserkopf's true intention: he wants to fail the re-examination to justify his refund claim



The Examination Begins

Absurd Answers & Creative Justifications

1

History Question

"How long was the Thirty Years' War?"

Wasserkopf confidently answers: "**Seven meters**"

The Mathematics master cleverly invokes Einstein's theory of relativity to justify this nonsensical answer as theoretically valid

2

Physics Question

Asked about optical illusions

Wasserkopf responds with **insults and dismissive remarks**

Teachers stretch logic to accept his response as a metaphorical truth about the subjective nature of perception

More Ridiculous Answers

Teacher Collaboration Intensifies

Geography Absurdity

Question: "What is the capital of Brunswick?"

Answer: "Same"

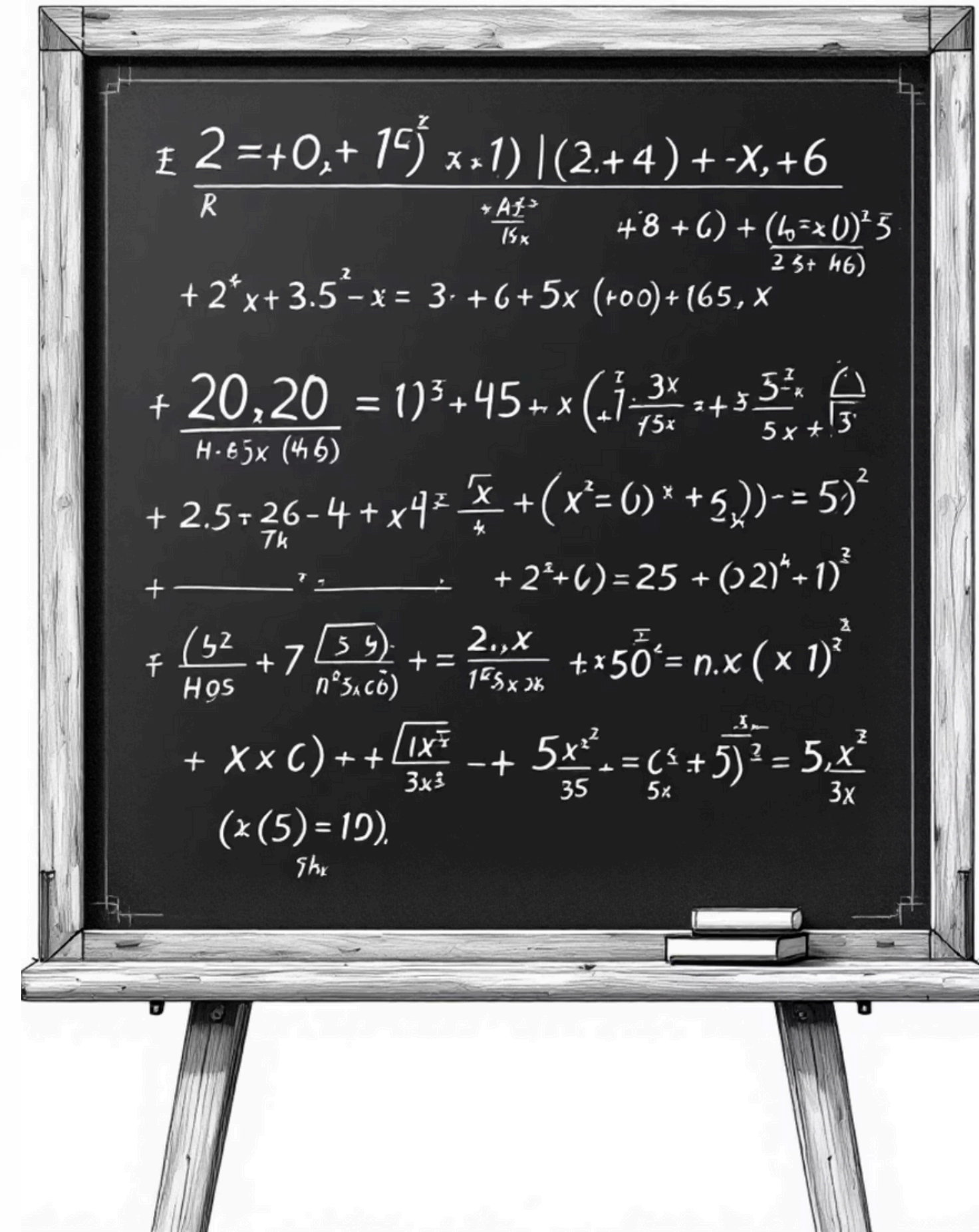
Teachers quickly invent an elaborate legend about a medieval town called "Same" to validate his bizarre response

Mathematics Chaos

Question: Complex calculation with meaningless data

Answer: Completely nonsensical figures

Teachers grow frustrated but maintain their commitment to the plan, forcing themselves to accept the answer



Character Map: Key Players



Wasserkopf

The protagonist: a jobless, bitter 40-year-old former student demanding refund for "useless" education



Principal

School leader initially shocked by the demand, tries desperately to manage the crisis and protect reputation



Mathematics Master

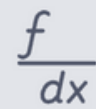
The mastermind: clever and strategic, leads the teachers' ingenious plan to outsmart Wasserkopf



Other Masters

History, Physics, and Geography teachers—united in protecting the school's reputation through absurd logic

Climax: The Mathematics Master's Trap

A stylized icon representing a calculus derivative, showing the letter 'f' over a horizontal line with 'dx' below it.

The Final Question

Wasserkopf is asked to calculate the exact refund amount he's demanding



Confident Response

He immediately provides a precise, accurate figure without hesitation

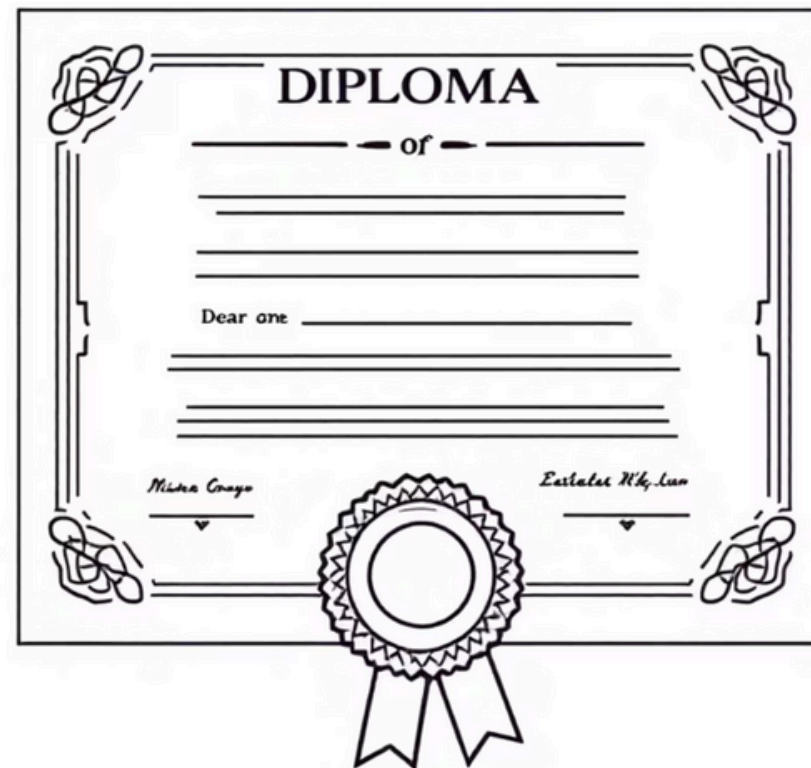


The Revelation

Mathematics master reveals this was actually a test question—Wasserkopf has proven his genius!

📌 **The Perfect Trap:** Wasserkopf unknowingly demonstrates his mathematical abilities, completely undermining his entire argument that he learned nothing.

Resolution & Irony



Wasserkopf's Plan Backfires Spectacularly

The teachers officially declare Wasserkopf an **excellent student** who clearly retained his education. They certify him as having passed with distinction.

In a final twist of irony, they **expel him from the school**—not for failing, but for being too brilliant to require further examination.

The play ends with triumphant humor and sharp satire, exposing both education's flaws and human folly in equal measure.



Themes & Takeaways

Satire of Education

Karinthy brilliantly critiques outdated education systems that prioritize rote learning over practical knowledge and critical thinking

Human Nature & Pride

The play highlights human folly, pride, and the absurdity we create when protecting our egos and reputations

Bureaucratic Absurdity

Sharp commentary on how institutions use convoluted logic to preserve their authority and avoid accountability

Refund remains a timeless comedic masterpiece—a clever, laugh-out-loud critique of learning, societal expectations, and the theater of the absurd we call modern education.