

FOOTLOOSE Character Descriptions & Plot Summary

The major characters in FOOTLOOSE have one trait in common: they are all survivors. This is a story of a man who's lost his son, a boy who's lost his father, and how those two help each other heal. It is a journey of forgiveness and redemption, of healing and uplifting. The circumstances of the characters, no matter how tragic, have not defeated them. As a consequence, the audience finds them likable, sympathetic, and human.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

REN MCCORMACK = A teenage boy from Chicago. Ren is a joker who enjoys a good time - though he is also trying too hard to convince the world, and himself, that his father's desertion hasn't wounded him as deeply as it has. Ren's emotional journey starts with his being feisty and flippant in Act 1, continues through his thoughtful argument to the Town Council, and ends with his emotional final confrontation with Shaw. A journey from boyhood to maturity. Sings "I Can't Stand Still," "I'm Free," "Almost Paradise," etc.

ARIEL MOORE = Rev. Shaw and Vi's daughter. Ariel is smart; she understands the rules of the different worlds she moves between, and she plays her part brilliantly in each situation. Ariel loves to laugh - with Chuck, her friends, and eventually, with Ren. All of this is her attempt to keep a lid on the grief she feels about her brother's death and the loss of her once loving relationship with her father. Sings "I'm Holding Out For A Hero," "Almost Paradise," etc.

REV. SHAW MOORE = The minister of Bomont County, husband to Vi, and father of Ariel. He is charismatic and even a little charming. Shaw has a quick mind, a loving heart, and a sense of humor which endear him to his congregation. While trying to be strong for so many people, he continues to mourn the death of his son - the one person he could not save. Only Ariel and Vi, and eventually Ren, get a glimpse of this private anguish and the flashes of frustration and temper that arise from that. Sings "Heaven Help Me," "Can You Find It In Your Heart Reprise," etc.

WILLARD = Ren's friend, a country boy with a southern accent. Willard is not dumb; he is a gentle soul with quick fists, which are his defense against a world that he often has trouble comprehending. Willard's humor derives from his innocent and giddy discovery of the new worlds that Ren opens up to him. Sings "Mama Says," etc.

RUSTY = Ariel's best friend. Rusty may come off as sassy and self-assured, but in many ways she is the most romantic character in the story. She truly believes that she and Willard were meant to be together. However, they are both so inept about expressing themselves, that it takes Ren, and a little time on the dance floor, to ultimately bring that about. Sings "Let's Hear It For The Boy," "Somebody's Eyes," etc.

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URLEEN and WENDY JO = Ariel's friends, who go everywhere with Ariel and Rusty. Sing in "Somebody Eyes," "Holding Out For a Hero," etc.

VI MOORE = Rev. Shaw's wife, and Ariel's mother. Despite the loss of her son and the strained relationship with her husband, Vi fully understands what kind of good humor she must display in order to keep her household, and her husband's congregation, running smoothly. With her plucky irreverence, she gives us a glimpse of what life with Shaw was like before the tragedy, when theirs was a marriage both passionate and playful. Sings "Learning To Be Silent," "Can You Find It In Your Heart," etc.

ETHEL MCCORMACK = Ren's mother. She is where Ren get his intelligence, his resilience, and his sense of humor. It's hard for Ethel to be living in her sister's home and abiding by her brother-in-law's rules. However, she never succumbs to the pathos of her situation; she has to be strong for Ren. Their mutual loss (the walking-out of her husband/Ren's father) has brought them closer together. They share a teasing, good-natured relationship. Sings "Learning to Be Silent," etc.

CHUCK = Ariel's boyfriend. This character is the one "villain" in the show. Ariel gravitates toward Chuck because he represents everything her father is against. The character is bit of a bully and is also unpredictable.

JETER, BICKLE, and GARVIN = Friends of Willard and Ren. Sing in "Mama Says," etc.

LYLE and TRAVIS = Chuck's buddies.

WES and LULU WARNICKER = Ren's aunt and uncle, Ethel's sister and brother-in-law. Ethel and Ren live in their home when they move to Bomont.

COACH and ELEANOR DUNBAR = The high school gym teacher and his wife.

PRINCIPAL CLARK = Principal of the high school.

COWBOY BOB = Lead vocalist at the Bar-B-Que restaurant and dance club. Sings "Still Rockin'".

BETTY BLAST = Owner of The Burger Blast restaurant.

ENSEMBLE and DANCE ROLES = Student of Bomont High School, Church Choir, Bomont Parents/Townpeople, Bar-B-Que Cowboys/Cowgirls, etc!

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PLOT SUMMARY

ACT 1

The show opens in Chicago – on any workday of any week. Young people unwind at their favorite dance club where, tonight, they say goodbye to Ren McCormack (“Footloose/On Any Sunday”). Because Ren's father deserted him and his mother, Ethel, they are being forced to move in with her sister's family in some small town nobody has ever heard of, Bomont, where the spiritual life of the community is overseen by the local minister, the Reverend Shaw Moore.

Ren quickly finds himself at odds with the stifling atmosphere in Bomont. The only person seemingly unfazed by Rev. Moore is his own daughter, Ariel; she runs around with the local bully, Chuck Cranston.

At school, Ren discovers an unlikely friend in Willard, somewhat the country yokel, who is unnerved by Ren's restless energy (“I Can't Stand Still”). When Ren discovers that "no dancing of any kind is allowed at any time anywhere within the town limits of Bomont," Ariel's best friends - Rusty, Urleen, and Wendy Jo - pull him aside to explain that this law dates back to a car accident that claimed the lives of four Bomont teenagers. In the flood of grief and guilt that followed that tragedy, Rev. Moore convinced the Town Council to ban dancing (“Somebody's Eyes”).

When Rev. Moore's wife, Vi, tries to ease ongoing tensions between her daughter and her husband, Shaw resists. Vi, Ethel, and Ariel reflect on their own frustrations at having to bite their tongues and bide their time (“Learning To Be Silent”).

At the local diner, Ariel and her friends bemoan the lack of exciting boys in their lives (“Holding Out For A Hero”). When Chuck storms in and threatens Ariel, Ren leaps to her defense. In appreciation, Ariel lets Ren in on her private ritual - running through the fields of Bomont, yelling after the trains that will one day, she vows, carry her far away from here. Ren and Ariel find it surprisingly easy to talk but, after Ren walks Ariel home, Shaw demands that she never see Ren again, leading to even further strain within the family (“Heaven Help Me”).

On his way home that same night, Ren is beaten up by a jealous Chuck and his cronies, Travis and Lyle, and the next day, in gym class, when his injuries don't get any sympathy from his coach, Ren's exasperation explodes; he vows to "take on this town" by throwing a dance. His campaign immediately catches the attention of Rev. Moore and sets the stage for even more conflict to come (“I'm Free/Heaven Help Me”).

ACT 2

Ren drives Ariel, Rusty, and Willard a hundred miles outside of Bomont to a Bar-B-Que restaurant where Cowboy Bob keeps things moving (“Still Rockin'”). There, Willard confesses to Ren that he can't dance; the news devastates Rusty. So, while Willard gets his first dance

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lesson, Rusty explains just what it is she finds appealing about this guy with two left feet (“Let’s Hear It For the Boy”).

When Ariel arrives home, her defiance provokes Shaw. Shaw refuses to acknowledge to Vi that his relationship with Ariel has grown distant since the death of their son, who, as it turns out, was one of the four teens killed in that fateful car accident. Vi pleads her daughter's case, but Shaw walks away from their confrontation (“Can You Find It In Your Heart”).

Meanwhile, Willard and his friends Bickle, Garvin, and Jeter try to prepare Ren for his upcoming confrontation with the Town Council where he'll challenge the local ordinance which bans dancing. When Ren gets discouraged and threatens to abandon the entire campaign, Willard focuses Ren's efforts with the somewhat loopy wisdom that Willard's mother is known for (“Mama Says”).

Ariel arrives, angry and bruised after a fight with Chuck. She leads Ren to her private hideaway, a spot below the railroad tracks and above the river in which her brother, Bobby, drowned. There, high above the world's problems, they are surprised to discover that their friendship has turned to love (“Almost Paradise”).

At the long-awaited Town Council meeting, Ren makes his case by quoting passages from a Bible which Ariel has marked for him. When Ren's motion is defeated, he is devastated. His mother convinces him that Shaw "fixed" the vote, and she urges him to go speak to the minister.

Ren finds Shaw and admits to the Reverend that, perhaps, his campaign for a dance had less to do with throwing a party and more to do with finding a renewed sense of purpose in the aftermath of his father's departure. When he turns the discussion to Shaw's son, Bobby, though, the Reverend throws Ren out. Only then does Shaw realize how much the pain of Bobby's death has overshadowed his life - and the lives of everyone in Bomont - and, after a struggle with his conscience, he announces to his parishioners that he has had a change of heart; that, in fact, a dance might be a good idea.

After church, Shaw's new found peace of mind allows him to reaffirm his love for Vi (“Can You Find It In Your Heart Reprise”). And so, for the first time in years, the young people of Bomont are able to dress up and "tear up this town" (“Footloose”); and when Rev. Moore enters with Vi and all the other adults in town, the evening finally becomes not only a celebration, but also an ecstatic expression of healing.