

TOTO KERBLAMMO! THEMES

This is a tender story which focuses on Effy, her beloved pet Toto and her friend Noah. It is also a play about listening. Half of the story we see onstage and half we hear through headphones.

Effy, Toto and Noah are the central characters and the only characters we see on stage, what we see is often gentle and full of care. Effy's life is tough however, there are challenging relationships with her family, and an accident which leaves her in hospital – we hear most of this through the headphones.

Theatre can be a brilliant place to explore complex themes, and this production holds the story within a stunning design world of light and sound. We outline some of these themes in more detail here, following consultation with a teacher and child psychotherapist. If you have any pupils who may be affected or would like to find out more please let us know.

ROAD SAFETY & PERSONAL SAFETY

The play starts with an accident, we hear a car breaking and learn that Effy and Toto (her dog) have been run over. The accident leaves Effy in intensive care and Toto loses his life because he runs in front of the car to protect Effy. Some of the story we hear through people talking to Effy in hospital, and some is Effy talking to Toto while she's in the world of her coma. The accident takes place because Effy is running away and there is a suggestion from Toto that she didn't care about running in front of the car. The characters discuss the incident with sensitivity and encourage reflection.

LOSS, BEREAVEMENT, GUILT

At the heart of the play is Effy's relationship with her dog, Toto. As the story evolves we understand that Effy is in a coma and it later becomes clear that she's able to communicate with Toto because he was killed in the accident. This is held tenderly but Effy's grief and heartbreak is clear. We also hear her guilt "I killed him... I didn't get out of the way... he saved me", which is held carefully by her friend Noah. This part of the story is portrayed truthfully, and is sad. Toto's role as Effy's 'safety character' makes this loss even more hard hitting. It also shows how we can process and overcome such difficult emotions.

EMOTIONS

The play addresses a wide range of emotions. Characters speak about navigating love, hatred, anger, guilt, loneliness. There's a repeated sequence in which Toto talks about how feelings sound, and we hear those sounds in the headphones. The reality of complex human emotions are right on the surface of this play and it provides an opportunity for children to deepen their understanding.

A beautiful sound begins.

"There. Hear that. Love. That's what love sounds like. That's love, that is.

When someone stands up for you for no reason. When someone sees through all your worst bits. When someone feels like they're your home. When all the bad thoughts stop."

The sound blossoms and grows.

"Listen. It's the best sound. The best sound."

HOPE

There is a sense of hope throughout the play. Hope that Effy will recover, hope that a friendship will blossom, and hope that her home life will settle.

Despite how tough her world sometimes feels there is always a glimmer of light, and characters that represent hope.

NEGLECT, EMOTIONAL ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH

Early in the story we learn that Effy has had to move in with her Aunt and Uncle, that her dad is not around and that her mum “in a special unit – like a hospital but with bars on the windows”. Later on we learn that there was a fire, potentially started by Effy’s mum while they were both at home. We see Effy’s struggle as she has to come to terms with these difficult relationships.

Effie loves her mum, but she’s unclear if her mum loves her, she’s told she’s useless. We also hear Effy’s mum talking to her in the hospital, “I love you. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you, Ef. I’ve been a rubbish mum. Rubbish. I never knew how. No one ever taught me. This will never happen again, will it?”

Whilst these relationships are incredibly complex, there is also hope that they can develop into something better for Effy. Children with complex family relationships may find this part of the story challenging. It might also be positive to see this reflected on stage and create opportunities for dialogue. We would recommend that someone checks in with any children who identify with this storyline after the show.



FRIENDSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of relationships is central to this story. What is required for them to work, what happens when they don’t work. Effy’s relationship with her dog Toto is at the heart of the play, the powerful connection between humans and their pets, he is her support throughout all of her challenges. As Effy’s relationship with Toto inevitably fades, we see her friendship with Noah grow – played by the same actor there are resemblances between the boy and the dog. We see Effy discovering the importance of friendship.

We also experience the challenging relationships Effy has with her mum, who is currently in a psychiatric unit, her aunt and uncle who are caring for her and her absent dad. Effy is able to articulate some of her feelings about these relationships through her growing friendship with Noah.

IF CHILDREN NEED EXTRA SUPPORT

We have developed this play in consultation with children aged 9-13 and suspect the majority of your pupils will not require additional support. You might have some children you are aware of and will look out for based on the themes of this play. Please follow your school wellbeing guidelines and safeguarding policy.

Our simple post-show resource includes group reflection questions and creative ‘check-out’ activities. Both of these are a useful tool to assess how your class are feeling.

Other places for wellbeing support:

Your first step will always be your school Designated Safeguarding Officer. You may also find useful information here:

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.place2be.org.uk/our-services - or your school’s talk or arts therapy services

www.kooth.com - an online mental health community for young people