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### Why Darkness Seems so Light

Heidi Schiers

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Frost, Helen and Harvey Cocks. *Why Darkness Seems so Light*. Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., 1999. ISBN 27398711001. \$ Check with the publisher. 36 pp.

Reviewer: Heidi Schiers

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic; Plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Violence; Suicide; Gun Control

Theme: Violence is everywhere.

Production Requirements: Laser tag sound effects and guns onstage.

Acts: 1 Act; 9 scenes and 6 segues

Run Time: 50-60 minutes

Characters: 26 + extras

Cast: Preferably multi-racial. 12 women, 9 men, 5 variable. Preferably

Time Period: The spring of this year (present)

Tank, Johnny and Ginger go to a party where they get into a fight with some other kids. During the scuffle, Johnny is shot and killed. In the following days, Ginger and Tank try to deal with their feelings of guilt and loss, while their friends are caught in other violent situations. The youth and their families examine violence and its consequences.

"Why Darkness Seems So Light" has a rather intriguing title which is never really addressed through the course of the play. The play adequately tackles the issue of violence and its darkness, but there is little light in the displayed violence which would attract youth. Since the play is based on the writings of high school students in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and grew out of true stories, it deals with issues that are relevant to teenagers. Youth in this play like Rory, Tank, Marcus and Nathan describe a feeling of entrapment. Nathan is disillusioned and Tank has grown numb from watching his friends get killed. Neither has very much hope, and they wonder if there is any point in trying to go on. Ginger is torn between speaking to the police about Johnny's death and protecting herself, while Rory is trying to decide whether or not to kill the kids at the party who witnessed the murder or turn himself in. Marcus and Nathan discuss what action they would take if they were to get a girl pregnant, and Tank mentions the two year old sons of his dead friends, who will grow up without fathers. In these instances, the play also addresses issues of courage and responsibility. The play is at times melodramatic and implausible. For example, at a party one would expect to see drug deals going down, but instead Rory is packing heat and attempting to sell firearms to Tank, in front of many other partygoers. Nathan's stepfather kills Nathan's dog without provocation, and this is what incites Nathan to commit suicide. In contrast, the play is successful in addressing different forms of violence. The kids encounter school fights, domestic violence, and sexual violence. An insightful segue connects overt acts of violence to the more acceptable kind, such as teasing kids at school who are different or smell bad. The play is also successful in refraining from stereotyping characters. For example, in the instance of sexual violence between Marcus and Whitney, one might assume that Marcus is bad, brutish, or at least a "tough guy." But Marcus is really a good kid. He helps out those who are weaker than he is and be an example to his brother. He, like other characters get caught up in the situation.

Scenic and costuming requirements are few. The play calls for a generic set, and costume needs can be met with regular street clothing. There are many brief scenes, sometimes only consisting of a monologue or poem, which can be choppy if the scenes do not have smooth or clever transitions. The script is slightly dated, but it encourages updating slang and other references. At times it can be overly moralizing, but it does make a strong point against violence. Violence is everywhere, not just in the city, but in small towns, at school, at the mall, next door, perhaps even in one's own home. Victims are random; it can strike anyone from all races and classes. Violence in response to violence solves nothing, but awareness of its futility will perhaps curb its prevalence. "Can we lift the darkness and let our light shine in?" The characters learn that it is love that lifts the darkness and calls the despondent back.