The Book of Everything

Rebeca Wallin
Play Review

Title: The Book of Everything  
Author: Richard Tulloch  
Reviewer: Rebeca Wallin  
Publisher: Plays for Young Audiences  
Publication Year: 2010  
Number of Pages: 106  
Production Requirements: Several outdoor and indoor settings, period costumes, realistic props  
Estimated Run Time: 2 hours  
Number of Acts: 2  
Number of Characters: 9  
Cast Requirements: 3 men, 5 women  
Time Period: 1951  
Reading/Interest Level: Intermediate, Young Adult  
Rating: Excellent

Review

When Thomas grows up he wants to be – happy. This admirable goal does not quite seem achievable in the opening act of the play. Based on the book of the same name by Guus Kuijer, this play shows Thomas living in post WWII Amsterdam with his loving mother and domineering, violent father. The family is expected to adhere to the strict rules of their father’s Christian faith and rule breaking or mistakes are severely punished. This punishment extends to the abuse of Thomas’s mother. Despite the grim circumstances that he lives in Thomas takes comfort in his mother’s love and the wild imaginative flights of fancy he is prone to. Thomas, his mother and his older sister, aided by a friendly neighbor, are finally able to stand up to father’s bullying and create a new life for themselves that may lead to happiness. This play won the AATE (American Alliance for Theatre and Education) Distinguished Play Award for 2015.

The story is beautifully adapted with strong, sometimes poetic dialogue and interesting, well-developed characters (with the exception of the rather one-note father character). The play provides audience members a powerful experience that will tug at heartstrings and invoke deep, critical thought. The heavy subject matter calls for an older “young” audience and might best be viewed with parents ready to engage in a post-show discussion. Controversial subject matter should be noted including beatings, domestic abuse and the vilifying of organized religion. The character of Jesus who appears throughout as a character visible only to Thomas should be noted as he is portrayed as a friendly but somewhat powerless man without a connection to God. This play contains mild language and moderate violence.