

the yellow boat

The Mysteries Of Life And Death Are Witnessed Through A Child's Eyes In This Year's YHS One-Act Play

BY SHAUNA MARLETTE
shauna.marlette@yankton.net

For many high school students, the idea of death is an abstract thought.

But the students involved in this year's one-act play at Yankton High School (YSD) "The Yellow Boat" are learning that coping with dying doesn't have to be a horrific experience.

According to assistant director Pam Kallis, "The Yellow Boat" is a loving memoir by playwright David Saar about his son Benjamin, a uniquely gifted artist who was born with congenital hemophilia and died of AIDS at age 8.

Throughout the play, Benjamin (Robert Schmidt) uses his crayons to express his joy, pain and fear. He is surrounded by loving parents (Maddie Mines and Jase Likness) that nurture his artistic expression and deal with the medical needs of their son, Kallis explained.

During the show, the audience will see Benjamin born, grow, start school, learn to deal with hemophilia and, eventually, succumb to AIDS.

"In a time when so much of a child's learning is measured by standardized testing, it is inspiring to have Benjamin demonstrate his learning to the audience through his use of art," Kallis said. "In a delightful scene, the young boy takes crayons to an X-ray and leads doctors on a 'journey to the center of my guts.' (When asked to tell the doctors where it hurts), he replies, 'It doesn't have words, it just feels!'"

Director Keith Goeden said the cast members don't realize how hard of a show this is, and that they are doing a fantastic job with it.

"Just the cast as a whole is tackling a very tough show and doing it very well," he said. "From the get-go, we have had kids crying on stage because there are some very moving moments. Ultimately, even though it is a sad story, it is uplifting because kids say the truth no matter what, and the older we get, the more defensive we get. This kid comes to grips with, 'Hey I am going to die. I can go out saying woe-is-me and suffer, or I can look at it as an adventure.'"

Because Smith is portraying an 8-year old child, Goeden said the risk of the character becoming a caricature was huge.

"Robert Smith has done a fabulous job in portraying a very young person," Goeden said. "There are lots of light moments, so you get to see the wonder of the world through the kid's eyes even though he is going through all of this horrible stuff. He sees it as an adventure."

Kallis said that sense of discovery is what theatre should be. "It should be an opportunity for



Set in the 1980s, Yankton High School's one-act play entry, "The Yellow Boat," tells the tale of an 8-year-old boy who suffers from hemophilia and contracts AIDS through a blood transfusion. LEFT: The boy, Benjamin (center, played by Robert Schmidt), is seen with his parents (Jase Likness and Madison Mines) during happier times before the boy shows symptoms of illness. The play explores the early mystery behind the disease and the stigmas that went with it. BELOW LEFT: Benjamin's mother worries while waiting for a diagnosis while the chorus begins collapsing one by one, signifying the spread of the disease across the nation. ABOVE: While many of Benjamin's friends have been forced to stay away from him by their parents, his best friend, Addy (Ashley Rowell) sneaks into the hospital for a visit. The YHS play will be performed at the State One-Act Play Festival in Aberdeen next week, and will be presented to the local audience Feb. 6 at the YHS/Summit Activities Center theatre. To see or purchase images from this production, visit spotted.yankton.net. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)



actors and the audience to come together and share an experience," she said. "In this case, it is a tragic experience and we share a sense of loss. But it is a loss that has been turned into a positive."

In the show, the cast uses a medical teaching doll to coax Benjamin into sharing. Kallis said when the cast and crew learned of the dolls use, they wanted to share.

"Fabric and poly-fill have been donated by a source outside of school, and the students are working during free time to create the dolls, which will be donated to Avera Sacred Heart Hospital in Yankton," Kallis said. "We hope to present (the hospital) with at least 20 completed dolls, with more to come in the future."

"The Yellow Boat" is a relatively new play, first adapted in 2002. Because of that, Goeden said it has opened up great interaction with the cast in developing the show.

"I like shows where we can take

it whatever direction we want it to go," he explained. "You do 'Annie,' you expect her to have red hair and a dog. This play is incredibly wide open. There have been a lot of things I have demanded from the kids. This is our show, not my show, and I have demanded their input. They had to take ownership."

Originally written as a play with four leads and a four-person chorus, Goeden expanded the chorus to include anyone who tried out for the show.

"I really like the theatricality of it," he said. "It uses heavy amounts of chorus stuff going on, which let me put a lot of kids into the show, I cast everybody. There is a lot of choreography and dance. The chorus is almost like a Greek chorus that helps to push the play along, fills in some of the information."

"The play itself was written for

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Auditions Announced For Inaugural State Shakespeare Festival In Vermillion

VERMILLION — The South Dakota Shakespeare Festival, which is set for Vermillion this year, will hold auditions on Monday, Feb. 13-14 in Vermillion and Sioux Falls.

This year's inaugural production will be "As You Like It," which will be presented June 8-10 at Prentis Park in Vermillion.

The South Dakota Shakespeare Festival seeks non-equity performers for its inaugural outdoor season of free Shakespeare. The festival seeks professional actors, actor/musicians and teaching artists from the Great Plains region to form an ensemble-based Shakespeare company for a four-week contract in Vermillion, South Dakota. All positions are paid.

The Feb. 13 auditions are at 6-9 p.m. at the Warren M. Lee Center on the campus of the University of South Dakota. Sign up on the callboard at USD Theatre or call (605) 622-0423 to schedule an ap-

pointment in Vermillion.

Auditions on Feb. 14 will be held at the Augustana College Theatre in Sioux Falls. Sign up on the callboard at Augustana Theatre or contact Dan Workman at dworkman@blackhillsplayhouse.com or (605) 274-5065 to schedule an appointment in Sioux Falls.

Both auditions will be combined with auditions with the Black Hills Playhouse.

Actors are asked to prepare two contrasting Shakespeare monologues. If you also wish to be considered for a role with Black Hills Playhouse, prepare one Shakespeare monologue and a song. Audition packages should last no longer than three minutes.

Callbacks for the Shakespeare festival will be scheduled as needed at USD on Wednesday, Feb. 15.

For more information, visit www.sdshakespearefestival.org.