

Thank You for Flushing My Head in the Toilet and other rarely used expressions

Production Notes • Updated January 2008

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I'm generally not a big fan of production/director's notes, as they're always about a production I wasn't at nor have much interest in reproducing. Thus, what I'd like to offer in these few paragraphs are some possibilities in the script when doing a production of ***Thank You for Flushing...*** rather than a prescription for how it should be done. That's what I like about Jon's script; there are some really strong possibilities with the staging and casting of the show.

Casting: What's so great about this show is all the freedom it gives to do some creative casting; allowing for a maximum number of students to be involved or, conversely, to do some creative doubling and cover all the roles with just a few actors. It's also a potential problem, given the ebb and flow of the show. Thus, I'd recommend casting your show to be clear about the allegiances of the groups. There are clearly the "picked on" kids and the "bullies." With a small cast there might be a temptation to intermingle these roles, having actors switch between one group to another to build up numbers or just to get more kids more stage time. Handled well, this could actually make an interesting statement about how kids can be a victim at one minute and a bully the next. However, that level of sophistication of blocking would need to be very carefully thought out and you'd need to pace things appropriately so the audience could follow it.

We weren't so ambitious with the premiere production, but instead went with making it clear through costuming (coordinated colors) of which kids were bullies and which were not. As well, I set a pretty tight set of kids for each group, really only letting the Bluebird student move in and out of groups. Further, I did a bit of stratifying of bullies: we had ones that were more like the "Shark" bully and another group of three "Mean" girls, including Ismene.

Staging: What's always attracted me to Jon's work is the "cinematic" approach he brings to story telling. ***Thank You for Flushing...*** is no exception. There are quick cuts and strong visual imagery throughout. Thus, it's important to think of staging his work with

that in mind. Treat scene changes fluidly, training your casts to move quickly from one scene to the next and block to take advantage of empty spaces as transition opportunities. Use black outs sparingly, ideally as a “pause” so the audience can catch up. I recommend a pause particularly after the Tragicomic Interlude. In the original production, we highlighted the pause by playing a muted version of the scene, on video, at the end of the speech. You’re welcome to a copy of our video or you may wish to make your own. The effect of slowing down this part of the show allows the audience to fully consider the implications of the story, particularly the unspoken violence and cruelty.

As well, I’d recommend looking for as many opportunities as possible to create an interesting variety of movement, varying pace, levels, and groupings. Of course, you don’t want movement just for the sake of movement. However, Jon provides ample opportunities to get creative with movement, particularly in scenes 3 and 4 when you have the bulk of the cast on stage.

Tech: We did the show on an essentially empty stage, as the script doesn’t call for any actual set or backdrop. However, I’d recommend that you create some sort of visual element that is established by the set. We choose to do this through the use of projections and video. In hindsight, I wish we’d have had the opportunity to do more with this – even building rear projection screens into a series of flats and projecting a variety of images to suggest different locations or supporting imagery. Of course, it’s entirely possible to create a whole set of furniture and walls, but I’m not sure that it would support the overall message of the play. It seems to me that the play is about how bullying makes people ultimately “feel” and not so much a documentary of bullying in our schools.

To achieve this “feel,” I relied a great deal on color and imagery, so lighting is really important. I would stress using a variety of lighting intensities, colors, and focus throughout the play and in support of the overall feel of each scene.

Finally, *Thank You for Flushing...*, like any play, works when it is directed with an eye to the entirety of the story. I would caution that it’s easy to stage the individual scenes (as they tend to stand on their own pretty well), but it’s really the arc of aggregate scenes

that create a successful production. As you direct, consider the big picture of the show and how it's playing as a whole. Ultimately, the lead up to the graphic ending of "bang bang" shouldn't come entirely as a surprise, but as a result of ultimately pushing a good kid over the edge.

If you'd care to correspond further about the show, check out some of the support video files, or just want to share what you're doing with the show, please feel free to contact me via email at mfisher@sps.lane.edu

Best to you for a great production.

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