

## **Before the Show: What to Expect**

- *Gwen in Purgatory* is a new Australian play written by playwright Tommy Murphy, and directed by Neil Armfield. Company B Belvoir commissioned it when Tommy Murphy won the Philip Parsons Award in 2007.
- It runs for approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes with no interval.
- It is set in the open plan living room of a new house, with unpacked moving boxes all around. The house is the first house in a new subdivision on the edge of Queanbeyan.
- The action takes place all in one afternoon, after Gwen's first night in her new house.
- There are five actors, each only playing one character. All of them except the priest Father Ezekiel represent three generations of the same family.
- Gwen is 90 and has just sold the family home after her husband's death. She has refused to move into aged care but on the advice of her family has bought this new house with all the modern technological trimmings.
- The play looks at the differences between the generations. For example the language used by Gwen is different to that her grandson uses. Examples of Gwen's old fashioned language include references to 'Fort Knox' & calling swearing 'an unseemly'.
- Because the play focuses on a family it is very accessible to students of all backgrounds. While this family's situation may be unique, there are points of access and connection for everyone - both with the characters, the relationship between the generations and the family secrets that get revealed over the course of the play.
- Gwen's family has been brought up within the traditions of the Catholic Church and on this day the parish priest has come to bless Gwen's new home. Some of the religious terms and phrases used might be unfamiliar to students.
- It may be worth discussing the concept of purgatory with your students. Originally a religious concept, purgatory was the place where a soul had to undergo a period of suffering before they were purified of sins and could enter Heaven. The term 'purgatory' is now used as a metaphor for a place of suffering.
- The character of Father Ezekiel has come from Nigeria, though Gwen mistakenly thinks he is from Kenya. Although well meant, some of the ways in which Gwen refers to Father Ezekiel (specifically references to the colour of his skin - she describes him as "black as your hat") indicate the values of the time period in which she grew up, not contemporary ways of referring to race or thinking about the differences between people.
- Throughout the play Father Ezekiel observes the family dynamics; his presence and unique perspective as an outsider offers the audience another way of viewing the family's interaction.
- There is one moment of violence in which the grandson Daniel grabs his uncle Laurie's face.
- The play features infrequent use of offensive language.
- The play finishes with a loud alarm ringing for approximately 5 minutes.
- Schools performance tickets are not sent out beforehand - don't worry if you haven't received your tickets; phone the box office on 9699 3444 if you need to check your booking.
- Students need to be briefed about appropriate theatre etiquette before seeing the play. This includes turning all mobile phones off completely for the entirety of the performance.
- Please remind students the performance is live and actors can see and hear them in the audience. Taking notes is distracting for actors and should never happen during a performance. Please also ask students not to talk or whisper. We encourage laughter and natural reactions.
- After each school matinee performance there is a Question and Answer session with the cast. Teacher's Notes include ideas on how to prepare students for this Q & A session.