

- *Tiny Beautiful Things* is based on a book written by Cheryl Strayed, adapted for the stage by Nia Vardalos.
- This Queensland Theatre production is directed by Lee Lewis.
- *Tiny Beautiful Things* runs for approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes with no interval.
- *Tiny Beautiful Things* is set in America in the present day. The actors in this production adopt American accents.
- There are four actors in *Tiny Beautiful Things*. Actor Mandy McElhinney plays the character of Sugar, an advice columnist, throughout the production. The three other actors each play various Letter Writers, each of whom is seeking advice from Sugar.
- *Tiny Beautiful Things* takes place over the course of one evening as Sugar tidies her home after her family have gone to bed.
- The set represents a family home. The kitchen, dining room, living room and front hallway are visible to the audience. We see the structure of the walls between rooms, but these are not solid.
- The style of *Tiny Beautiful Things* blends naturalism with non-naturalistic conventions. All actors address the audience directly during the production. The three Letter Writers speak the letter their character has written to Sugar. In turn, Sugar speaks her written reply to each letter.
- All four actors remain on stage for the duration of the production. The three actors playing the Letter Writers move about the space, sitting or standing in different locations when another Letter Writer is speaking. When the Letter Writers narrate their letters to Sugar, they occupy the space on the stage in Sugar's house as though they were in their own home.
- The play explores themes of grief, survival and love. Students may be emotionally impacted by hearing the events recounted in letters written to Sugar and narrated out loud by the actors on stage.
- The stories in *Tiny Beautiful Things* are narrated candidly. Accounts are frank, but not detailed. Difficult content is not acted out on the stage.
- In the context of asking Sugar for advice, the letters contain stories of difficult and distressing situations in the Letter Writers' life. The letters contain references to sexual and physical assault, coercive control, miscarriage, abortion, the death of a parent, the death of a child (at age 22) in a car accident, drug and alcohol abuse. There are also mentions of self-harm, suicide, disordered eating and addiction to pain medication.
- One Letter Writer tells the story of coming out as transgender and experiencing parental abandonment as a result.
- Sugar's replies draw on painful and difficult stories from her own past life to illuminate the heart of the problem the Letter Writer presents. Her replies are tough, compassionate and accepting. Her replies encourage the Letter Writers to reflect and forgive. Sugar's advice has been described as 'radical empathy'.
- In her replies to the letters, Sugar shares stories from her own past life, which includes heroin addiction, the death of her mother at an early age, and being unfaithful in her marriage. In one reply Sugar writes 'My father's father made me jack him off when I was three and four and five'.
- In her reply to one letter, Sugar recounts a story of having to smother an injured baby bird, found on the footpath having fallen from their nest.
- *Tiny Beautiful Things* uses moments of humour to balance the stories of Letter Writers.
- The production contains strong language and **sexual references**. In a quick-fire sequence of questions to Sugar, one letter writer asks, 'Can we ask you anything?' and when Sugar replies, 'Yes', the letter writer asks, 'Do you like it up the ass' – delivered for humour rather than provocation.

Some students may need to be briefed about theatre etiquette. Please turn mobile phones off completely and refrain from eating in the theatre. Students need to know that the performance is live and that the actors see and hear them in the audience. We encourage laughter and natural reactions. Taking notes shouldn't happen during performances.

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