

The Book of Everything

- *The Book of Everything* is a play adapted by Richard Tulloch from the children's novel of the same name. The novel was written by Guus Kuijer and first published in Dutch in 2004.
- This production is a co-production between Belvoir and Kim Carpenter's Theatre of Image. It was first performed at Belvoir in December 2009 and toured nationally and internationally from 2011 to 2013, including a season at the New Victory Theater in New York. The production is critically acclaimed and has won numerous theatre awards.
- The production is directed by Neil Armfield, with set and costume design by Kim Carpenter.
- *The Book of Everything* runs for approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes including one interval.
- *The Book of Everything* is set Amsterdam in 1951 and takes place over the course of several weeks.
- The central character is Thomas Klopper, who is 9 (nearly 10) who lives with his family: his religious, authoritarian and violent father; his mother and his 16-year-old sister Margot. The story is told from Thomas' perspective.
- The play explores themes of courage, fear, kindness and imagination. Thomas uses his imagination and his journal, 'the book of everything', to navigate his abusive family circumstances, find courage and seek happiness.
- The play is set in the Klopper family apartment and the apartment of their neighbour, Mrs van Amersfoort, as well as in the nearby streets and canals of Amsterdam and in a house where Mr Klopper conducts his church services.
- The style of the production is slightly heightened. The set is an open space with bright blue walls, wooden chairs and high circus-ring seats around the edges. A large 'Book of Everything' features prominently, with its illustrated pages providing the backdrop for each scene.
- The costumes reflect 1950s fashion, with a slightly exaggerated quality that contributes to the production's 'storybook' feel.
- There are eight actors in the production and one musician, who performs live during each performance and sometimes interacts with the cast. The actor who plays Mr Klopper also plays the Bumbiter, a ferocious dog who lives on Thomas's street. Other actors double as children from the street, angels or Mrs Van Amersfoort's cats. Actors sit around the edge of the stage watching the action of the play, sometimes playing percussion or creating sound effects as part of the sound design of the show.
- An actor plays the character of Jesus in *The Book of Everything*. Jesus is portrayed as a jovial conversationalist who appears only to Thomas. Jesus often comments 'God Almighty,' which has a humorous effect.
- During the production, characters break the fourth wall, speaking directly to the audience and deliberately draw attention to the elements of theatre at work.
- *The Book of Everything* uses warmth, humour and magical storytelling to explore difficult themes.
- The show contains representation of family violence. In one scene Thomas is physically punished with a wooden spoon for mispronouncing 'miserable sinners' as 'miserable singers' and 'transgressions' as 'tram sessions' in a prayer incantation. In another scene, Mr Klopper slaps his wife, and in a third scene he repeatedly strikes her. The physical actions are slightly stylised or played in slow-motion. Mr Klopper is also verbally controlling towards Mrs Klopper and is portrayed as someone who does not tolerate being contradicted.
- During the production, we see the character of Mrs Klopper being visibly afraid of her husband Mr Klopper. This is portrayed through her physical demeanour and the tone of her voice.
- *The Book of Everything* contains representation of Thomas feeling sad and helpless when faced with his mother's unhappiness. Thomas declares 'There is no God' as a response to his father hitting his mother.
- Later in the story, Margot threatens her father with a knife to prevent him from physically punishing Thomas again. This is accompanied by a loud verbal confrontation.

Schools performance tickets are not sent out beforehand, please collect your tickets from the Box Office in the foyer of the theatre upon arrival on the day.

Belvoir Education

Gadigal Country

18 Belvoir St

Surry Hills NSW 2010

education +61(2) 8396 6241

box office +61(2) 9699 3444

education@belvoir.com.au

belvoir.com.au/education

COMPANY B LIMITED

CAN 002 866 628

ABN 97 002 866 828

- The production also contains spoken references to family violence. In one scene Aunty Pie visits the Klopper family to tell Mr Klopper that her husband (Mr Klopper's younger brother) has hit her for wearing slacks. Mr Klopper responds by saying 'It is a man's duty to lead and guide his wife and children. If they won't listen to him what else can he do but be firm with them! That is what God has ordained. God has also ordained that women wear skirts and men wear trousers...' All other characters, including Jesus denounce this view and violence, with Aunty Pie saying, in reference to her husband, 'Has he got a screw loose or what?'
- *The Book of Everything* contains references to the Old Testament of the Bible, including the plagues of Egypt. Mr Klopper is portrayed as having rigid Christian beliefs, and we see him leading his own church services in a private home, reading to his family from the Bible and reciting prayers.
- World War II remains a vivid and recent memory for the adult characters in the play. The play contains references to the Dutch resistance and to the death of Mrs Van Amersfoort's husband, who was executed by a Nazi firing squad during the war because of his involvement in the resistance.
- *The Book of Everything* contains ableist language used in the 1950s including 'lame' and 'cripple'. Thomas is seen staring at Eliza's leather leg when he first meets her. This is presented in the context of Thomas being a nine-year-old child. Thomas is also seen staring at Eliza's hand, to which she responds, 'Yeah, I've got a funny hand too, haven't I?'
- **This production contains the use of flashing lights.** There is a sequence of flashing lights in the production, at the beginning of Act Two, which lasts for 45 seconds.
- [SPOILER] *The Book of Everything* includes moments when audience members are invited to participate. Audience members are asked to help create a plague of frogs by throwing green ping pong balls onto the stage. During the interval, actors enter the auditorium and distribute the ping pong balls, explaining when to throw them. The production concludes with some members of the audience being invited onto the stage to sit with the cast and join the Reading Out Loud Club.
- Please brief students on theatre etiquette before attending the performance. Mobile phones must be turned off and not used during the performance. Food and drinks, other than bottled water, are not permitted in the theatre.
- The Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir seats 340 people. Your students may be surprised by how close they are to the stage, particularly if they have not visited Belvoir before. They may also be more visible to other audience members and the actors than they expect. Please remind students that theatre is a live experience and that actors can see and hear the audience during the performance.

Schools performance tickets are not sent out beforehand, please collect your tickets from the Box Office in the foyer of the theatre upon arrival on the day.

Belvoir Education

Gadigal Country

18 Belvoir St

Surry Hills NSW 2010

education +61(2) 8396 6241

box office +61(2) 9699 3444

education@belvoir.com.au

belvoir.com.au/education

COMPANY B LIMITED

CAN 002 866 628

ABN 97 002 866 828