

College Production of 'The Giver' Offers Glimpse of Utopian Future

Community Families to Perform Play at Centralia College Beginning Thursday



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The Giver Play

- The cast of "The Giver," which is comprised of both the Osborne family and the Page family, prepare to rehearse a scene from the play at the Wickstrom Studio Theatre on Friday afternoon.

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College Production of 'The Giver' Offers Glimpse of Utopian Future By Kaylee Osowski / kosowski@chronline.com
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The gray, utilitarian button-down jackets with matching pants and shoes didn't match the kids' bubbly excitement during a costume fitting before afternoon rehearsal Wednesday, May 6.

However, their costumes did match half of the set in the Wickstrom Studio Theatre in Washington Hall at Centralia College. The other half of the set for "The Giver" had books and color.

In "The Giver," based on Lois Lowry's novel and adapted by Eric Coble in 2006, people live in a utopian future of sameness deprived of color, knowledge and memory of the world previously. The story focuses on choices and how the removal of decision-making and pain required the sacrifice of memories and love.

"(The play) is not about entertainment as much as it's about asking us to think a little bit about the world we live in, just like the book does," Director Brian Tyrrell said.

Tyrrell met Coble two summers ago while teaching in New York and read his scripts, including his adaptation for "The Giver."

"I was sold," he said. He has since then read the book.

Tyrrell basically hand-picked his eight-person cast for the play, including a local family who will be playing a family of four on stage.

The society does have one member who knows what life was like before sameness, the Receiver of Memory. Ten-year-old Allan Osborne will be playing Jonas, who is chosen to be the next Receiver in the story.

Allan's sister, Elizabeth Osborne, 6, will play his on-stage sister, Lilly, and their parents, Matt and Lissa Osborne, will play Jonas and Lilly's parents.

The Osbornes said it's fun acting with their children, but weird saying things on stage to their kids that they would never say in real life.

"It makes my son laugh," Lissa Osborne said.

While Matt Osborne hasn't read the book or seen the movie because he wants to only have the script to work from, his son Allan has read and enjoys the book.

Allan said he likes playing Jonas because he's a curious person.

Matt Osborne and Lucy Page, who plays the chief elder, were both former students of Tyrrell's. Page's kids, Lenora and Miles, are also in the play.

Working with a family and a group of people who all knew each other before rehearsals began allowed the cast to progress more quickly because the relationships that usually take weeks to build were already there.

"All that stuff that takes a long time to adapt, we didn't have to worry about that," he said.

Tyrrell said he thinks fans of the book will enjoy the play, but that it obviously has changes because it is adapted for children's theater.

"But (Coble) was very true to Jonas' story and what he learns about choosing and choices and how the opportunity to make choices shapes who we are," Tyrrell said.

One major difference Tyrrell made in casting is that The Giver, who is an elderly man in Lowry's book, is played by a woman, Jamie Baker, who is making her 15th appearance on the college's stage.

Tyrrell said he feels the change works well.

"I think what she provides is a stronger sense of nurturing and love ... we automatically get it from her," he said.

Tyrrell used to run a kids drama camp, but it has been a while since working with child actors.

"It's delightful," he said. "They are the epitome of a blank slate."