

## CAST LIST

ALETHEA

HER FRIENDS: SONIA

JANE OTHER GIRLS:

MARIE

RUTH BRIDGET ELSIE ALETHEA'S MUM

MISS MILLER, THEIR REGISTER TEACHER

SHOPKEEPER

MATHS TEACHER

OTHER PUPILS:

2ND YEAR GIRL 1

2ND YEAR GIRL 2

GIRL 1

GIRL

GIRL

GIRL

GIRL

The main cast are Alethea, Sonia, Jane, Elsie, Marie, Ruth and Bridget.

Other characters are small extra parts and can be doubled, sharing characters between five extra people preferably. If used for an examination piece, all main roles are examinable + with doubling, the parts of Miss Miller - with 1 other character; and Alethea's Mum, perhaps taking two other characters.

This makes for a Cast size of 12, 13 or 14 maximum. Further reductions are possible, if the extra pupils are reduced - though this loses the effect of the gossip spreading.

The cast is all female. There is no reason, though, why it could not work as a play, changing some names, for a mixed cast.

The play lasts about half an hour.

## PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

N.B. These notes are suggestions only. You may find them helpful to follow; or they may act as a springboard for your own ideas; or you can choose to ignore them entirely! INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION

The most obvious intention of the play is to make us think about the consequences of rumour/ gossip / the drawing of hasty conclusions. It is very easy to condemn someone, on the flimsiest of evidence - not so easy to repair the damage such condemnation causes. Alethea, wrongly suspected of pilfering from friends and others at school, finds her whole life has been blighted. Though cleared, though everyone says 'Sorry', there will never be mention of her name without there being a shadow of suspicion with it, a shadow of that scandal. The damage has not just been within the school environment but in the whole small community in which Alethea has spent her entire life.

The play leaves us powerfully aware of the consequences on Alethea, by using direct address to the audience. Her character is the only one that speaks to the audience in this way - making us see things from her point of view.

A secondary theme in the play is how peer pressure affects the lives of the school children. Under peer pressure, even Alethea's closest friends start to waver. Just when Alethea needs them the most, they fail to support her.

The play also takes a swipe at something that is not just applicable to the closed environment of a school - the horrible enjoyment people glean from scandal and the suffering of others. The girls' gossip is positively gleeful. Once the snowball of gossip

starts to roll, it gathers speed and starts to add on even the most far-fetched and ridiculous losses - blaming everything on Alethea. It quickly spreads to the community and Alethea finds herself becoming a social pariah, all the more hurtful because at first she does not understand why.

Although the play ends on an up-beat note, with her former friends apologising and trying to make it up to her, we are made aware, through Alethea's last monologue, that nothing will ever be quite the same again.

## CHARACTERS

The girls are all very 'normal' - friendly, happy, close to each other. There are no particular 'baddies' and 'goodies.' All seem very similar and the skill in production will be to try to differentiate between them. Care should be taken not to stereotype; the important thing in this play is to keep the characters and speech realistic.

MARIE is quicker than the others to cast suspicion. She seems to take more pleasure in casting aspersions and likes the gossip and interest this arouses. ELSIE, too, is quick to jump to conclusions - quicker than many of the others. Once the gossip starts rolling though, there isn't much to choose between the characters.

JANE and SONIA, Alethea's best friends, are the slowest to believe - they keep affirming her innocence, though, particularly in Jane's case, this becomes more hesitant as the play progresses. Jane is the first to believe in Alethea's guilt - but it is

Sonia whose betrayal is the hardest for Alethea - Sonia, who is the special friend. Much of the second half observes Sonia's progression into doubt of Alethea and her own guilt at such feelings. This adds interest to her character and must be emphasised by the actress. Her horror when she realises that it was all a mistake is not put into words. Jane is the one to put their guilt into words - because she is less deeply affected perhaps. Sonia is silent for some time at the news that Elsie has found her tenner and that it was all a mistake. The actress must put over her look of total shock, horror and guilt that she

should have betrayed her closest friend so. Her silence speaks louder than words could do. From now, Sonia's words drop like stones - words of self-condemnation and condemnation of all Alethea's supposed friends.

Other characters, too, are merely vehicles to show the theme of the play. They are not finely drawn, fleshed out people - but nonetheless, the style of playing should be as realistic as possible. None of these people are 'bad' people. In fact, since they are so 'normal', this should emphasise the theme more clearly: this kind of thing happens all the time and it can happen to anyone in any environment- even to you and to me. SETTING

Raised area at back for classroom - permanently set

Classroom - Two tables, six chairs, set up stage left, angled to face diagonally down towards down stage right. Teacher's desk to bottom of raised area, stage right. Chair behind it.

## FURNITURE MOVING CUES

### PAGE 4

Bottom of page. Cue - Bridget -'I suppose - 'Remove table front centre, with CD player. Or remove only CD player - Bridget take it off - others reset table as teacher's desk bottom of raised area, stage right.

### PAGE 14

Nearly halfway down page. Cue: Alethea -'But that was - before.' Assistant brings on light rack of goods for shop. Set in front of raised area, centre.

Bottom of page. Cue: Alethea opening bag. As lights dim, assistant takes rack off again.

### PAGE 15

Threequarters of way down page, Miss Miller comes on carrying her chair, to place it centre.

### PAGE 16

Miss Miller removes her chair again as she exits.

## LIGHTS

The lighting is pretty simple, though it is quite a 'busy' cue plot. No fancy colours are necessary. Warm interior lighting [straws and pinks] could give way to a harsher, bleaker whiter light as the play progresses - if desired, and there are enough lanterns available.

Area A - classroom and whole stage [Note that raised area and front of stage need to be on separate circuits.]

Area B - whole area in front of stage as corridor.

Area C - area in front of stage, reduced to central part - not the full width as in the corridor. Make sure there is some spill onto edge of front raised area, so that it can be used at times for one person to sit on.

In addition, you will need:

1. Front centre special spotlight for Alethea
2. Three pools of light, big enough for two or three people: edge of the raised area towards stage right; on table set in front of raised area center; downstage left, front of stage.

## LIGHTING CUES

### PAGE 2

Beginning of play. Bring up special spot front centre.

End of this first speech. Cue: Alethea - 'That was the worst thing about it...' Bring up stage lights, Area A whole stage - to bright.

Two thirds of way down page. Cue: Sonia - 'I'm bound to finish it tonight.' Lower stage lights to dim, leaving three pools of light centred on the three groups of students: Alethea, Sonia and Jane edge of the raised area, stage right; Marie and Ruth, sitting on table centre; Elsie and Bridget - sitting on floor down stage left.

Writer suggests brightening each area and dimming others when someone in an area is speaking - but this seems to me to be unnecessary, especially as it means a lighting change every line. The same effect will be gained by disciplined freezes of those in the light when not speaking.

### PAGE 3

Near top of page. Cue: Elsie - 'It's been stolen.' Wait a beat for the reaction to that word and then bring up whole stage, Area A lights to harsh bright.

### PAGE 4

Bottom of page. Cue - Bridget - 'I suppose - ' Lights fade gradually to dim as everyone exits. Hold till front table removed. Then bring back up to bright over whole Area A again.

### PAGE 6

Top of page. Cue: Miss Miller - 'Now, Sonia, about your homework...' Start to fade lights to dim on back raised area. Keep at half - so that characters remain visible - brighten front of stage, Area B, corridor.