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Hyper-Focus

Jim Knable

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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HYPER-FOCUS was first produced by the Playwrights Project in schools and community centers throughout San Diego, Orange and Los Angeles counties on October 24, 2004. The performance was directed by Robert May and D. Candis Paule, with sets by Beeb Salzer, costumes by Martha Phillips, sound by Rachel Le Vine, technical direction by Luke Skoug, and scenic painting by Torrey Hyman. The Production Stage Manager was Diep Huynh. The cast was as follows:

TJ. Tommy Friedman
MOM, ENSEMBLE. Barbara Cole
COUNSELOR, SALLY, ENSEMBLE Jeannine Marquie
DR. SIGMUND, MR. FRANKLIN,
DAD, TEACHER, ENSEMBLE John Nutten
TEACHER, ENSEMBLE Wanetah Walmsley

Playwrights Project produced *Hyper-Focus* as its WINS Tour (Writers In the Next Stage of their careers) performed at schools and community centers throughout San Diego, Orange County and Los Angeles in Fall 2004.

Playwrights Project is a San Diego based non-profit arts education organization, founded by Deborah Salzer in 1985. Its mission is to advance literacy, creativity, and communication by empowering individuals to voice their stories through playwriting programs and theatre productions. Programs include in-school playwriting workshops for grades 4-12; an annual statewide playwriting competition for writers under age 19; professional productions of Plays by Young Writers; touring productions; teacher training; dramaturgical work with young adult playwrights; and programs for special populations, including foster youth and seniors.

CHARACTERS

ACTOR 1 – **T.J.** His mother named him Thomas Jefferson. Plays ages 9-14.

ACTOR 2 – **MOM** (T.J.'s Mom), **LITERATURE TEACHER.**

ACTOR 3 – **TEACHER, GIRL, MATH TEACHER.**

ACTOR 4 – **PRINCIPAL, SIGMUND, SCIENCE TEACHER, MR. FRANKLIN, DAD.**

ACTOR 5 – **COUNSELOR, SALLY.**

THE DISTRACTIONS, THE SERATONES and THE DECLARATIONS.

HOW THE PLAY WAS WRITTEN

I decided to write a play about a boy with ADD because ADD is a common obstacle for kids and adults. I grew up with plenty of kids whom I am fairly certain were dealing with ADD, though I never heard anyone talk about it openly. I have close friends now who were diagnosed with ADD as kids and have strong feelings about how ADD is perceived and addressed. In writing this play, I spoke at length with them, along with counselors and psychiatrists. I wanted to make sure that I presented a realistic depiction of what it is like to have ADD.

It is very easy to empathize but hard to entirely understand how debilitating this condition truly is. We all know what it feels like to be distracted, to have a hard time focusing, to feel fidgety or even hyper-active. Experiencing these feelings occasionally does not mean that you have ADD. It is when these symptoms completely interfere with functioning in the world that ADD is usually diagnosed.

The treatment for ADD varies depending on the individual. Managing ADD with medication is a controversial issue. Although T.J.'s mom decides to give medication a try, the choice is difficult for her to make.

As a writer of plays and songs, I see my job as helping people to understand what others are going through. Theatre is a wonderful medium for this because it is a communal experience. While audience members relate to a play from their own perspectives, they can also talk about the play and get different takes on it. I hope *Hyper-Focus* gives you a lot to talk about.

-Jim Knable

(T.J. is on stage with his guitar, like he's working out a song.)

T.J.

AND I'M HYPER
AND I'M FOCUSED
AND I'M...HYPER-FOCUSED
THEN I COME BACK DOWN
AND THERE'S LOVE ALL AROUND
AND I REALIZE THERE'S NOTHING THAT'S HOPELESS...

(He looks up and takes in the audience, putting his guitar away and getting into the scene.)

I've always had a hard time concentrating. Especially in class. Ever since I started school, I would sit at my desk, the teacher would start talking...

*(Enter **TEACHER.**)*

TEACHER. Good morning, boys and girls, I'm your teacher Mrs. Schmickelpennick.

T.J. And she would keep talking, but what I was hearing and seeing in my head was...

*(The **DISTRACTIONS** enter, actors who act out various objects and beings in the following song. The song starts moderately, but gets crazier and crazier in tempo and intensity as the millions of distractions in T.J.'s world vie for his attention.)*

PAY ATTENTION TO ME,
I'M THE CLOCK ON THE WALL,
JUST A-SPINNIN' MY HANDS
IN A CIRCULAR BALL
PAY ATTENTION TO ME,
I'M A BIRD IN A TREE
JUST A-CHIRPIN' A TWEET
'CAUSE IT MAKES ME FEEL FREE

DISTRACTIONS. (*cont.*)

I'M THE PENCIL AND THE STENCIL AND THE CLOUD THAT'S
OUT THE WINDOW

I'M THE LACE THAT'S ON YOUR SHOE THAT'S LEFT UNTIED

I'M THE TEACHER, I'M YOUR T-SHIRT, I'M THE WRINKLES,

I'M THE CREASES

PAY ATTENTION OVER HERE I'LL CATCH YOUR EYE!

TEACHER. Thomas? Thomas Jeffereson.

(*The song continues.*)

DISTRACTIONS.

I'M THE FLUORESCENT LIGHTS

BLINKIN' FLICKERIN FAST

BUZZIN' OUT LIKE HUM

WHILE YOU SIT AT YOUR DESK

I'M THE CREAK OF YOUR CHAIR,

I'M THE SPRINKLERS OUTSIDE

I'M A FLY IN YOUR EAR

I'M THE GUY ON YOUR RIGHT

I'M THE END OF YOUR ERASER, I'M THE STAPLES IN THE
STAPLER

I'M THE CRACK THAT RUNS ALONG THE CLASSROOM
FLOOR

I'M THE FISH IN THE AQUARIUM THE SPLISH IN YOUR
SPLASHARIUM

LOOK OVER HERE, LOOK OVER HERE, LOOK OVER HERE
SOME MORE!

TEACHER. Thomas Jefferson!

(*The **DISTRACTIONS** scatter.*)

T.J. Here. (*to us*) Yes, my name is Thomas Jefferson. My last name's Jefferson and my mom named me Thomas because she said she had great expectations for me. I like to be called T.J.

TEACHER. Would you lead the class in the pledge of allegiance, Thomas?

T.J. Uh, okay. (*He stands at his desk.*) I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, one nation, invisible—

TEACHER. Indivisible.

T.J. Indivisible, and the Republic for which it stands. (*He stops.*) One nation, indivisible. Invisible. Invincible. What does that word mean?

TEACHER. What word?

T.J. Invincible. How do I know that word?

TEACHER. You're going backwards, Thomas. The republic for which it stands...

T.J. (*figuring it out*) It's invisible like the Invisible Man...

TEACHER. Indivisible! Come on, now, Thomas, you can finish it.

T.J. Invincible means strong, doesn't it?

TEACHER. Yes, but you already passed that part.

T.J. What part?

TEACHER. Indivisible! One Union...

T.J. Does indivisible mean one union?

TEACHER. It doesn't matter, just say it!

T.J. Why should I say it if I don't know what it means?

TEACHER. Do you want to go to the principal, Thomas?

T.J. What did I do? I didn't do anything.

TEACHER. Go to the principal, young man.

T.J. Why? That's not fair! What did I do?!

TEACHER. You know exactly what you did. Go!

(**TEACHER** exits.)

T.J. I was always getting sent to the principal.

(**PRINCIPAL** enters, a very silly-looking man.)

PRINCIPAL. Well, hello, Mr. Jefferson. First day of school, huh? (*looks at his watch*) First five minutes. I think that's a record.

T.J. I didn't do anything.

PRINCIPAL. Your teacher says you were disrupting the class.

T.J. That's not true.

PRINCIPAL. Are you calling Mrs. Schmickelpennick a liar?

TJ. No, I never said...

PRINCIPAL. I'm calling your mother.

TJ. *(to us)* No, please...

(PRINCIPAL pulls out a phone. MOM enters, on her phone.)

MOM. My son would never disrupt class on purpose. He's a good boy.

PRINCIPAL. He causes trouble. He did it all last year and now he's doing it before the first day's even half over.

MOM. He doesn't mean to cause trouble. He's just very smart and talks before he thinks...

PRINCIPAL. He's a discipline problem, ma'am.

TJ. Which is what he said all last year. I was a bad kid, that's what they all said.

PRINCIPAL. Your son is out of control. I'm recommending he see the school counselor.

TJ. And then Mom started crying. I could hear her over the phone. I was always making her cry. No matter what I did, I couldn't stop it from happening. I was bad. Even though I was always trying not to be. I was like a werewolf. Like in the old movie.

(MOM and PRINCIPAL exit.)

Like the man who turns into a werewolf who doesn't want to turn into a werewolf, but then the moon comes out—

(A moon appears. TJ. gets more and more worked up, turning into a werewolf.)

And he feels the little prickles under his skin. His teeth turn into fangs, his whole body turns hairy, he grows claws on his fingers, he runs outside into the woods and—

(MOM enters.)

MOM. Thomas.

(TJ. freezes in mid-attack pose.)

T.J. Yes.

MOM. What are you doing?

T.J. Turning into a werewolf.

MOM. Do you want to talk about what happened in class today?

(T.J. straightens up and faces his mother.)

T.J. She isn't fair. I hate her.

MOM. Who?

T.J. The teacher. I was just asking questions.

MOM. And then...

T.J. And then she got frustrated and the class started laughing and she couldn't make them stop, so she sent me to the principal.

MOM. You might have been talking to her in a way that hurt her feelings.

T.J. I wasn't.

MOM. Listen to me, Thomas. The principal thinks it's a good idea if you talk to a very nice woman at your school who likes to help kids solve their problems.

T.J. I don't have any problems.

(MOM looks like she might cry again.)

Okay, Mom, I'll talk to her. I'll talk to anyone. It's okay.

MOM. I love you more than anything, Thomas.

(She goes to him and hugs him.)

T.J. I love you, too, Mom. Can I watch T.V. now?

MOM. Did you do your homework?

T.J. I did it at the After-School Program. When you were late picking me up.

MOM. Okay, you can watch T.V. But nothing violent.

(MOM kisses T.J.'s head and then exits.)

T.J. Later that week, I met with the school counselor.

(COUNSELOR enters, a friendly woman with big glasses.)

COUNSELOR. Hello, Thomas.

T.J. Hello.

COUNSELOR. Do you like to be called Thomas?

T.J. I like to be called T.J.

COUNSELOR. T.J. How are you feeling today?

T.J. Fine.

COUNSELOR. Do you know why you're talking to me?

T.J. I'm a discipline problem.

COUNSELOR. *(laughs)* Who said that?

T.J. Everyone. I don't try to cause trouble, it just happens and I get blamed for it. It's not fair.

COUNSELOR. Do you have a hard time paying attention to things in class?

T.J. Sometimes I get bored.

COUNSELOR. And your mind wanders. You think about a lot of other things. Sometimes you just have to get up and start walking around in the middle of class.

T.J. Sometimes.

COUNSELOR. And then you get in trouble?

T.J. Yeah, but it's not my fault.

COUNSELOR. I understand.

(pause)

T.J. You do?

COUNSELOR. I'm going to talk to your teacher and try to explain things to her.

T.J. You're going to talk to her?

COUNSELOR. Yes. And then you and I will meet again in a little while. How does that sound?

T.J. Good.

(turns to us, COUNSELOR exits)

She wasn't even mad at me. She seemed to understand. And Mrs. Schmickelpennick was nicer to me. Until one day when everything went wrong:

(T.J. takes his seat at a desk. TEACHER enters. T.J. fidgets while she talks.)

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