

THINK BEFORE YOU VOTE

by Shannan Browne

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CHARACTERS

Joyce - Intelligent, argumentative, Grade 11

Natalie - A peacemaker, who is interested in hearing everyone's opinions, and seeing the good in people, Grade 11

Melanie - Is concerned with her appearance, not very intelligent, Grade 11

Happiness - Not very bright, black girl who enjoys teasing her friends, generally sleeps through class, Grade 11

Nomfundo – arrogant, thinks she is the best at everything, Grade 11

Gabi – Grade 11

2 Prefects who are about to go in to Grade 12

2 Grade 8 delinquents

Play is set on the school break field. Directors can use either benches or outside tables and chairs slightly off centre stage to create different levels. A bin is required at one end of the stage. The tuck-shop and toilets are situated off stage. If no resources are available, then the stage can be a bare break field.

Bell Rings and the noise of learners leaving class can be heard. 5 girls come onto stage with their bags and position themselves around the benches / tables. They have just come out of science class.

Director to decide who eats lunch when. Various activities take place throughout the play:

Checking cell phones, writing in diaries, catching up on homework, eating various foods, doing each other's hair, doing their nails, etc. all according to their character.

Nomfundo: I can't believe Mr Kenton wouldn't let me be in charge of the science experiment. He knows that I am the one who always gets straight A's. It should've been me put in charge of the group, not Mandisa. What does Mandisa know? She can't even spell her own name, never mind Bunsen burner.

Natalie: That is so off sides Nomfundo. I think she did a great job.

Nomfundo: Not the point Natalie, I would have done a better one.

Happiness: Whatever!

Nomfundo: Happiness? What would you know; you slept the whole way through the science experiment. Again.

Happiness: Well I'm awake now, and I'm sticking with Natalie. You can't be in charge all the time. It gets boring listening to your voice go on and on and on and on and on...

Nomfundo: *(aghast and lightly hits Happiness who ducks in time and laughs at her.)* Ok! We get it.

Happiness: ... and on and on... *(she ducks the second hit and stops in her own amusement at making her point)*

Joyce: Personally, I found the experiment boring, and that smell! It was ridiculous. I'm sure it's messed up my nasal passages for life!

Melanie: I hear you girl; but at least it singed my nose hairs, so I won't have to pluck them for a while now.

Joyce: You pluck your nose hairs? That's so gross!

Melanie: Nothing gross about it. The less body hair, the better.

Joyce: No Mel, that's taking it too far.

Melanie: You can never go too far with the removal of body hair Joyce. Check these legs, like silk! And these eyebrows – a perfect line! I deserve a medal.

Joyce: You deserve a mental asylum.

Melanie shows Joyce the palm of her hand and turns her head away from her. Then she gets up with her wallet and cell phone in hand. She is permanently attached to her cell phone.

Melanie: I'm going to the tuck-shop, anyone want to join me?

Happiness: Ja, I'll come, all that sleeping has made me hungry.

Melanie: Cool. Anyone else?

Nomfundo: No, I'm going at second break. Thanks.

Natalie and Joyce: No thanks.

Happiness and Melanie leave to go to the tuck-shop.

Joyce: Seriously guys, plucking your nose hairs? Natalie, check up my nose. Do I have long nose hairs?

Natalie: I'm not looking up your nose.

Joyce: Nomfundo?

Nomfundo: Not a chance!

Joyce: Fine, then I'm going to check in the toilet mirror. *(She gets up and starts walking away.)* Later.

Goes off stage.

Nomfundo: Why does she have to prove everyone wrong?

Natalie: So she can always be right.

In walks Gabi with flyers in her hand, passes one to Nomfundo.

Nomfundo: Howzit Gabi. *(Taking the flyer)* What's this?

Gabi: It's a flyer for Megan.

Nomfundo: *(taking a flyer and browsing it)* No way! I forgot! We have to vote for head girl in registration today.

You can have this back Gabi, I'm not voting for Megan.

Gabi: Why not?

Nomfundo: Because she beat me in science last year. She's the reason I'm only going to be a prefect and not head girl next year.

Gabi: What? That's silly, head girls are not head girls just because they do well in science.

Nomfundo: That's what you think.

Gabi: But surely you **want** someone who is as clever as you are to be head girl?

Nomfundo: How can I trust someone who stole my place? Please! Move on.

Natalie: I'll take one Gabi. *(Takes a flyer)* I think Megan would be a great choice. She has the brains to make the right decisions for us next year.

Nomfundo: Us? You aren't a prefect for next year *Natalie*.

Natalie: I'm well aware of that *Nomfundo*, but I am in matric and we will all be led by the same head girl, not just *you* and *your* prefects. We're all seniors and don't you forget it.

Gabi: Natalie's right. The head girl represents the whole school. *(Checks her watch)* I have to go girls, got to hand out the rest of these before break ends. See you in English.

Natalie: Cheers.

Nomfundo ignores her.

Joyce returns carrying a rolled up poster in her hand.

Joyce: I do not have long nose hairs and neither do the grade tens on the field.

Natalie: You didn't?

Joyce: Of course I did. I couldn't make a decision based on my nose hairs alone. It's official: high school students do not need to pluck their nose hairs, and Melanie is a freak.

Enter Melanie and Happiness with their tuck-shop food to overhear Joyce's last comment.

Melanie: Well have you looked in the mirror lately? Because that hairstyle reminds me of my grandmother.

Joyce: Well at least my nose hairs don't.

Melanie pulls a tongue at Joyce, who pulls one back. Happiness has seen Joyce with the poster in her hand after she offered her some of her tuck.

Happiness: What's this Joyce? *(She asks as she takes it, unrolls it and reads it herself)*

Joyce: It was stuck up in the toilet.

Happiness: Vote For Leigh For Head Girl. *(Happiness doesn't understand)* What, have I slept through another year already?

Joyce: We are voting for head girl in registration today. Remember?

Happiness: We are? I must have slept through that too.

Natalie: Well, here's a flyer to vote for Megan. *(She hands the flyer to Happiness, who refuses because of her full hands)*

Joyce: Megan? Are you nuts?

Natalie: Nooo. I think she'll be a great choice, she's objective and fair and she works hard at everything she does.

Joyce: Yes, and she is so far up the teacher's backsides that we see her face teaching us!

Happiness laughs and puts the poster back into Joyce's hands. Natalie looks timidly offended and shrugs her shoulders.

Natalie: You have a negative opinion of everyone; you probably think you should be head girl.

Joyce: Absolutely not. Being head girl is too much responsibility. I didn't even apply to be a prefect, because I think the whole selection process is a scam, and the teachers just choose who they like anyway. I'll bet you a hundred bucks they have already selected the head girl and our vote doesn't even count.

Natalie: How can you say that? All the head girl nominees are good people, and the teachers wouldn't waste their time and all that paper if it didn't count for something.

Joyce: "Good people" does not mean "Good leaders" Natalie, and the teachers wouldn't let someone we actually like be head girl anyway.

Natalie: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. Of course we have to like the head girl. I've liked all the head girls I've ever had, I got to know them really well when I was in all those break detentions.

Nomfundo: Yes Natalie, but you like everyone anyway. Personally, I felt that Mara was a bad choice this year, I never liked her in the first place. She beat me for captain of the Netball team last year.

Happiness: You were grade 10 Nomfundo, and the captain is always a senior.

Nomfundo: Not the point Happiness, I would have done a better job.

Happiness: Whatever! ... and on and on and on...

Nomfundo is aghast and lightly hits Happiness who ducks in time and laughs at her, same as before.

In walk 2 prefects with 2 learners doing litter duty. One prefect comes to talk to the group whilst the other instructs the 2 delinquents to pick up litter and watches them put it in the bin.

Prefect: Hello ladies. Nomfundo, don't you have duties today?

Nomfundo: No, this is my day off. I have to work the foyer tomorrow.

Happiness: (*teasing her*) "Work the Foyer", oooh how exciting. (*To a Will Smith Boom Shake the Room tune*) Work the Foyer, Work Work the Foyer. Work the Foyer, Work work the Foyer.

Everyone laughs but Nomfundo who gets Happiness with a soft punch.

Nomfundo: Whatever.

Prefect: So what are these flyers and posters all about? Science project?

She reaches to Natalie who hands her the flyer.

Prefect: Ah yes, voting today. I hope you guys are going to make a good choice. (*She gives back the flyer*)

Nomfundo: I always make the right choice.

Prefect: Oh really? So who are you voting for then?

Nomfundo: Leigh.

Prefect: But she's white.

Nomfundo: So?

Prefect: Aren't we supposed to have an Indian head girl next year? Last year's head girl was white.

Joyce: Ahhh. So, you think that the teachers choose the head girl before we vote?

Prefect: No. I think that they make our vote worth so little that it doesn't affect how they vote.

Joyce: Ha! You see ladies, I told you so.

Nomfundo: You did not say that. You said that our votes "don't count".

Joyce: Same thing.

Natalie: If that's the case, then why did you tell us to make a good choice?

Prefect: Hope ladies. We've got to have hope. Imagine if the whole school voted for one person for the right reasons. Imagine if everyone voted objectively; not because they have a grudge, or because of skin colour, or something that happened in the past. But, instead, they all vote because of the good that the girl could do. They vote for the person who shows the most honesty, integrity, fairness and impartiality. Can you imagine? Then the teachers couldn't ignore us, because we made a good, solid choice together. That would be cool. (*The other prefect calls her to move on*) On with my duties. Think about it ladies, and don't forget to vote smart!

She leaves the stage with the other prefect and delinquents.

Happiness: She was too much. On what planet would we agree on anything?

Melanie: Like we have a choice not to vote, the teacher won't let us out to break unless we complete that form.

Joyce: You could spoil the vote, or abstain.

Melanie: Say what?

Joyce: If you put 2 ticks or crosses next to someone's name, then your vote is spoiled and it doesn't count. If you take your pen and put a line through the page, then the vote is also spoiled and doesn't count. No one can force you to vote.

Nomfundo: True, but you would be silly not to vote, because that's like giving a vote to the person you don't want to be in charge.

Happiness: What do you mean?

Nomfundo: If you don't vote, then it's one less person against the winner.

Happiness: Oh.

Nomfundo: And if you spoil your vote, then you shouldn't criticize what the head girl does when she's in charge, because you helped to get her there by not voting for anyone else.

Happiness: That's true hey...

Natalie: But don't you think it would be cool?

Nomfundo: What?

Natalie: If the whole school agreed on choosing the person with the most honesty, integrity and fairness?

Nomfundo: No way. Where would the democracy be if we all agreed?

Joyce: Where would the argument be? We could all end up plucking our nose hairs. (*She teases Melanie*)

Melanie: Shut up.

Natalie: C'mon guys I'm being serious. Surely we should all vote for the girl who is best for the job, not the girl who is best for our personal satisfaction?

Happiness: You are living in dreamland girl. Of course I'm going to vote for the girl who can help me.

Nomfundo: And who would that be?

Happiness: Portia.

Nomfundo: Portia? But she's never played in a sports team or even spoken to us before. All she does is public speaking and run her own business at school. She only knows how to spin a story and manipulate everyone to get her own way. There's no real substance to anything she says.

Happiness: But she's black.

Natalie: You can't be serious Happiness. "Because she's black"?

Joyce: Separation ended decades ago!

Melanie: Even I'm not that shallow!

Happiness: It has nothing to do with racism, or separation, or being shallow. Portia knows where I come from. She understands my culture. She bothers to say hello to me, and if I'm sleeping in Zulu class, she's the one who wakes me up before the bells shocks me. She cares about me; and I don't have to talk to her for her to understand me. She is Black like Me. The other two would never even give me the time of day.

Melanie: Hello! You would be too busy sleeping.

Happiness: Ha ha, aren't you so funny.

Natalie: I hear what you are saying, and actually it has nothing to do with colour and everything to do comfort. You're comfortable with her because you think you can relate to her. But is comfort the reason to choose someone? And if you actually had a conversation with her, would you still relate to her?

Melanie: I heard that she comes from very wealthy parents who are in the government and they sent her here because they work in government, but she actually wanted to go to a private school. Apparently her parents are the reason she has been nominated.

Happiness: That's such rubbish! I heard her talking to our language teacher like she was from my home.

Joyce: You mean last week Friday?

Happiness: Yes, after she woke me up and I was leaving to go to Math.

Joyce: No man, she was asking about how the "farm people" talk, because she's doing her English Oral on "Different Kinds of Black Man". She thinks it is a great "Anthropological" topic. The teacher loves the idea.

Happiness: Anthro-what?

Nomfundo: An-thro-po-logi-cal. It's the scientific study of human beings in relation to culture and society and stuff like