

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS to *RENT: SCHOOL EDITION*

The following guide is intended to help families understand the content in the Highlander Theatre Company's (HTC) production of *RENT: School Edition*. It is our hope that families will use this guide to determine the best approach to experiencing *RENT*, by either discussing the themes with children in advance, or deciding to take advantage of our kid-friendly options explained below.

If your family does determine that *RENT* is not appropriate for your children, we hope that you will take advantage of the youth-theatre workshops being offering during performances so that you can enjoy the show while your younger children learn about theatre in an age-appropriate environment!

We also invite you to join us for the remainder of our season, which includes family-friendly plays such as *Silent Sky* by Lauren Gunderson in March, and our to-be-announced, All-City Middle School Musical in June.

Why RENT at SHS?

It is important that we do not define *RENT* by the content detailed below. *RENT*, above all, is a story about a group of friends who support each other through a time of struggle, stand up for their rights, and learn to define their lives by the love they give and receive. A pivotal piece of musical theatre history, *RENT* is an opportunity for SHS students to explore important topics that are especially relevant to them today. For these reasons, our selection committee, made up of students, teachers, parents, and administrators selected *RENT* as this year's musical.

RENT vs. RENT School Edition

HTC will be performing *RENT: School Edition*. With the permission of the Jonathan Larson Estate, this version of *RENT* has been adapted for use in schools and other producing organizations. While retaining the dramatic intent of this groundbreaking musical, minimal changes have been made to language, and one song (Contact) has been deleted.

Types of Mature Content

Language. This version of *RENT* removes all instances of the "F" word from the original version. It also tones down some of the stronger language, notably in the song *La Vie Boheme*. However, *RENT: School Edition* still contains strong language, including references to sexuality, that some families may deem inappropriate for younger children.

Sexuality. This version of *RENT* removes the only scene from the original version that depicts explicit sexual content (Contact). While this version of *RENT* does not portray any explicit sexual content, it does depict characters of varying gender identities and orientations kissing and embracing. All on-stage physical intimacy occurs between consenting characters of appropriate age.

Drug/Alcohol Use and Addiction. Some of the characters in *RENT* either struggle with or are in recovery from drug addiction. These storylines do not glorify drug abuse; they, in fact, focus on its negative effects. While drugs do appear onstage, drug use is never portrayed onstage. There are infrequent and brief references to social alcohol consumption and one reference in *La Vie Boheme* to marijuana.

Illness and Death. *RENT* takes place in the early 1990s at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Multiple characters in *RENT* live with AIDS and one character does die during the second act. The death is portrayed "theatrically" (not realistically) and the character returns onstage for the final number. Another character experiences homelessness and is feared dead from exposure, but eventually returns to life.

Please Note that while we believe these to be the most relevant themes to parents, this list might not address every part of *RENT* that may be of concern to every family. We encourage you to research the musical in more detail or write to our director, Charles Jabour at cjabour@k12.somerville.ma.us with additional questions before purchasing tickets for you and your family.