

Fullerton Union High School's *The Girl in the White Pinafore* explores the lasting impacts of untold tragedy

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On March 18, 1937, the New London High School in Rusk County, Texas, exploded after natural gas leaked into the school and ignited, killing 298 students.

Fullerton Union High School's *The Girl in the White Pinafore* views the legacies of this incident across decades through the eyes of guilt-ridden superintendent W. C. Shaw (David Kwon) and bereaved mother Mary Davis (Sydney Castiglione). As the story shifts between the time of the incident and W. C. and Mary's final days in a nursing home in the 1960s, the complex ways that loss and guilt manifest become painfully apparent.

David Kwon's powerful performance as superintendent W. C. Shaw, who received the blame for the incident that killed his own son, reveals how Shaw's remorse has decayed his soul. He lives his final days battling against and apologizing to the spirit of Amelia Davis (Emma Hill), the girl in the white pinafore, who was killed in the explosion. From the agony conveyed through his twisted facial expressions and distressed physicality to his broken admissions of guilt throughout the play, Kwon profoundly exemplifies how regret can torture a person.

Sydney Castiglione expertly assumes the role of Mary Davis, the mother of Amelia Davis, deftly alternating between a parent experiencing indescribable loss in the 1930s and an exhausted stroke victim in the 1960s. Castiglione's raw, tormented cries upon realizing Amelia's death express an understanding of pain beyond her years.

Nadine Davis Williams (Karina Hunt), the daughter of Mary Davis, and Lucy Everette (Brittany Fisheli) are refreshing as nurses in the ward where Mary and W. C. reside. Their positive demeanors and thoughtful recognitions of the past embody a sense of hope, revealing how tragedy can breed growth.

Lighting designer David Block and sound designer Avi Block collaborate excellently to signify shifts in time, with lighting changing from amber hues in the 1930s to cold tones in the 1960s. These shifts are marked by a resounding "boom," representing how the tragedy of the explosion echoes throughout time. Hair and makeup designer Georgia Rau brilliantly portrays the death of the children's chorus, with childlike blush giving way to gravely pale faces.

Fullerton Union HS's *The Girl in the White Pinafore* conveys with painfully impactful detail how a great tragedy can haunt a person, family, and community for decades to come.