

San Clemente's "Where Words Once Were" Showcases the Power of Language written by Marielle Zambales, a junior at Santa Margarita Catholic High School

Imagine a future where only 1,000 words are permitted, with new words replacing the old, and the old becoming illegal. Those who disobey become silenced, and illegal words become lost forever.

This is what Orhan (Derek Herrmann) wants to make right. As Herrmann confidently walks across stage clutching the strap of his bag, his moments of brave determination are coupled with beats of uncertainty, often taking a hesitant step back and faltering when speaking of illegal words. His mother, Alli (Emalia Probert), never lets down her loving gaze for her son. Probert's soft-spoken voice and affectionate touch truly showcases her motherly love, serving as Orhan's beacon of hope during time of despair.

Isaac (Dylan Johnson) takes charge of the stage as the chief of police, standing tall with his hands in his pockets, embodying the commanding persona of the character. Eventually, his bottled-up suspicion and anger takes over as he slams the bakery cart, rattling those around him. At this moment, Johnson's tension fades away and his body language relaxes, revealing the more human side of his character.

The costumes (designed by Coco Christensen, Jonelle Salas, & Duilio Ramirez) express each character's role in the story, with cool tones and matching uniforms symbolizing the somber and conforming environment. Alli's blue dress highlights her calm and trustworthy nature, while Isaac's navy blue jacket evokes his authority and stability needed to be chief. The black cloaks worn by the storytellers emanate feelings of fear and grief, as they actively use the cloaks to conceal their words.

The props (designed by Derek Herrmann, Karina Hutchinson, & Dylan Johnson) enhanced the environment of every scene. The design of the storytellers' signs, black words on a white background, served as a visual reminder of the uniformity and simplicity of life in the city. Tangible objects, such as flour and dough, work to make scenes more dynamic as they parallel the characters' conversations.

Publicity's (Avery Santore, Mia Smith, Emalia Probert, Lila Davey) original artwork for the show openly pays homage, illustrating a curly-haired girl with the title of the show over her mouth. Throughout the story, the significance of this girl becomes apparent, just as the artwork foreshadows.

Through a combination of thoughtfully designed tech elements and meaningful performances, San Clemente brings this dystopian future to life, while making sure that every voice is heard.