

Directors' Notes

DOUBT: A PARABLE by John Patrick Shanley

What do you do when you're not sure?

Our production of John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Doubt: A Parable*, invites audiences to consider how we make choices when we can't have all the facts. We like to think that we can be certain and judge others, but when we believe we already have what we need to know—about a circumstance or a person—we're putting ourselves in the place of God. The argument of *Doubt* is that we live in a world where people are too quick to certainty.

The play is set in a Bronx Catholic school in the 1960s. The principal, Sister Aloysius, suspects that the progressive young priest, Father Flynn, has had an improper relationship with a student. Sister Aloysius is absolutely certain that Father Flynn is guilty. And nothing that Father Flynn can say will convince her otherwise. In the end, the audience is left without an answer, and the challenge is for us to remain uncertain, to be willing to acknowledge that we can't know the truth for sure because we are not all-knowing. Shanley warns us, "You may come out of my play uncertain. You may want to be sure. Look down on that feeling."

It might seem dangerous to teach high school students that uncertainty may be wise or that doubt can be a good thing, but we are blessed to be part of a school community that invites our students to seek truth. The good news is that there *is* truth, and we can be relentless in pursuit of it. Yet, right now we live in a fallen world. The Apostle Paul wrote, "for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." (I Corinthians 13:12). Truth exists; however, on our own we can only see partially. We want our students to be seekers of truth, to be faithful Christians who passionately search out that which is good, and beautiful, and right. We want them to love truth. But the desire for certainty is not a love of truth. In fact, it is a rejection of the finite nature of our humanity. To hold fast to certainty is to attempt to keep ourselves on the throne. To seek truth is to stay continually dependent on Christ, recognizing our inadequacy to know all things on our own. Doubt is not the same thing as unbelief; righteous doubt is an acknowledgment that we are not God and that we are dependent on Him.

Niki Ellis & Nick Cherone
directors

Discussion Questions

1. When have you experienced not being sure? What did you do with that uncertainty?
2. Why do we want certainty?
3. How might certainty separate us from other people, truth, and God?
4. Imagine yourself in the position of any one of the characters. How would you have responded?
5. Consider Father Flynn's story about the priest and the woman concerned with gossip. How is gossip like feathers?
6. How are stories—either as parables or as plays—an effective way to help people see truth?
7. When we suspect another of wrongdoing, how ought we to respond?