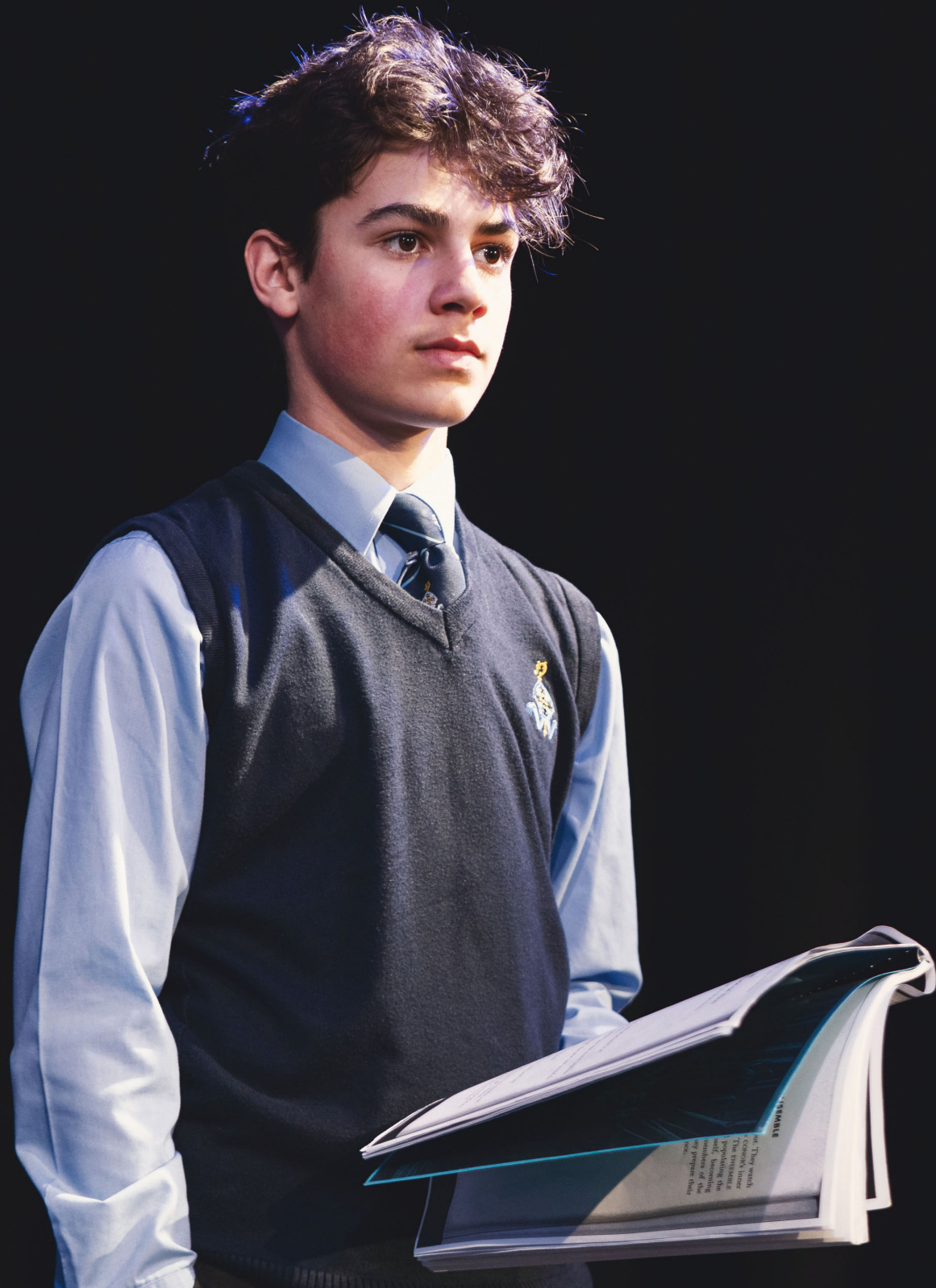




A MONSTER CALLS

THE PLAY

Based on the novel by Patrick Ness
Devised by The Company
11-13 February 2026, PAC
WHITGIFT



Director's Note

Patrick Ness' *A Monster Calls* is a story about grief, truth and the complicated emotions we often try hardest to avoid. Told through myth, memory and imagination, the play explores what it means to face loss honestly, without simplifying it, softening it, or rushing towards easy comfort. Although the story centres on a young boy, its questions are universal: how do we live alongside pain? What happens when love and anger exist at the same time? And why is telling the truth, especially to ourselves, sometimes the hardest thing of all?

In a world where young people are increasingly expected to be resilient, optimistic and "fine", *A Monster Calls* feels especially important to direct now. Many pupils are growing up in the shadow of uncertainty with global conflict, illness, climate anxiety and huge societal technological advancements, often without the language or space to articulate what they are feeling. This play does not offer answers but instead validates complexity. It reassures its audience that fear, guilt, rage and sadness are not things to be hidden from, but emotions to be acknowledged, shared and understood.

For a young cast, *A Monster Calls* is an extraordinary learning play. It demands emotional sincerity, generosity and trust, both in oneself and in the ensemble. The story asks performers to sit with silence as much as sound, stillness as much as action, and to resist the temptation to "perform" emotion rather than truthfully experience it. This has been a profound challenge for the company, but also a deeply rewarding one. Watching pupils discover

that quiet moments can be just as powerful as spectacle has been one of the most moving parts of this process.

Stylistically, the play sits firmly in the world of physical theatre and ensemble storytelling. I chose to stage the production with the entire cast on stage for the duration of the performance, with all props and set visible at all times. This decision reflects the play's central idea: that memories, thoughts and stories are never truly gone: they linger, watch and shape us. The ensemble becomes the world of the play, transforming through movement, gesture and intention to create multiple locations and characters to tell Conor's story. Ensemble work of this nature demands focus, empathy and discipline; every performer is responsible not just for their own role, but for the success of the story as a whole.

It has been a privilege to work with such a brave and committed company on a play that trusts young people with difficult emotions and big ideas. *A Monster Calls* reminds us that stories can help us survive, that truth can be frightening yet freeing, and that theatre remains one of the safest places to explore what it truly means to be human.

It has been an honour to work with this company of performers, and the creative team, in bringing *A Monster Calls* to the stage.

EO Spedding
Director



Facing the Truth: Why Stories Matter

Everything within this play is centred around telling stories. Each new section in the script is not differentiated by scene numbers, but by names - "The First Tale", "The Final Truth". The Monster's entire role is really to teach Conor to confront his real thoughts, fears and emotions surrounding his mother's fate, and he does this through telling him stories. Stories that seem pointless and insulting to the boy at first - after all, he summoned the monster to heal his mother, not to read him a fairy tale before bed. But hidden beneath the characters and their decisions, the setting and its description, is always an important message for Conor, teaching him more about himself and leading him towards accepting his final truth. This underlying meaning is key for Conor's anagnorisis - his moment of clarity surrounding his mother and his own, shameful feelings about the pain her illness is causing him.

Having themes, subtexts and allegories within stories is in their very nature, every deliberately shared narrative has them somewhere. A fantastic example is the actual oldest story to exist today, *The Epic Of Gilgamesh*, an ancient Mesopotamian collection of epic poems that deal with the life of the semi-divine King of Uruk (now modern-day Warka, Iraq), Gilgamesh, who experiences a series of adventures and trials that lead to him accepting his own mortality and to stop pursuing immortality. The underlying messages in this are highlighted by Tzvi Abusch: an academic studying *The Epic of Gilgamesh* at Brandeis University. He writes "Most of all, the work grapples with issues of an existential nature. It talks about the powerful human drive to achieve, the value of friendship, the experience of loss, the inevitability of death." These last two themes he pinpoints are eerily similar to Conor's own experiences in the closing act of *A Monster Calls*, but I doubt either Siobhan Dowd or Patrick Ness, the two authors of the original novel, took direct inspiration from the renowned epic poem.

The origins of the novel itself defines the importance of stories as a whole in our society

and exemplifies the importance of this story in particular. Siobhan Dowd, an already celebrated author, sadly passed away from her own terminal illness of breast cancer in 2007, but not before leaving behind the "roots" of *A Monster Calls* as a set of notes detailing ideas for the characters, plot and the role of the Monster. One of the most notable ideas of hers was for the Monster being a yew tree, influenced by her own struggle with her illness at the time, as she was being treated with Taxol, a chemotherapy drug derived directly from yew trees. After she passed away, these notes were found and the responsibility to actually write and publish her last story fell to Patrick Ness, selected by Dowd's editor at Walker Books to "take the baton" and finish what she started. The book is dedicated to Siobhan and credited to both writers.

T.S. Eliot once said, "The journey, not the destination, matters". But for this story, the journey would be nothing without the destination - Conor's final truth. Which ultimately, then, matters more? I believe that the reason this particular tale is so captivatingly brilliant is that it is both. We would never arrive at our conclusion without the Monster's tales, influence and Conor's struggle, and our destination means nothing without Conor's journey, both in his own head (because another question of the play is whether the Monster is truly real, a figment of Conor's imagination, or only real to our protagonist), and in real life. As we are taken along with him, we are subsequently taken on a journey of our own.

So, this story of stories serves to do exactly what the Monster's tales were designed to - help us confront something in ourselves, maybe something that we were deliberately avoiding or suppressing, so we, like Conor, can come to terms with whatever it is and finally be free too.

Sam Warren
Lower Sixth Form



Cast

Character	Cast
Conor	Michael King Gomez
Monster	Kai Galliet
Mum	Joseph Benjamin
Grandma	Eden Moore
Dad	Zachy Javaid
Harry	Jake Mansour
Sully	Kai Kazemi
Anton	Riley Runsewe
Lily	Jakob Sand
Miss Godfrey	Zebulon Duffy
Mr Marl	Ethan Roberts
Ensemble	Ellis Pang
	Ethan Paramasivam
	Timmy Soon
	Emilian Stan

All other parts are played by members of the company.

Creative and Production Team

Director	Emily Spedding
Assistant Director	George Dixon
Producer	Christiana Aluko
Stage Manager	Charlie Hollingworth
Technical Director	David Jenkinson
Production Technicians	Alex Hill
	Matthew Arakcheev
Lighting Operator	Jack Coppin
Sound Operators	Charlie Lerner
Costume Designer	Christiana Aluko
Musicians/Composers	Joseph Hewlett
	Max Scott
Hair and Makeup	Hannah Macgregor
Photography	Alex Hill



Monsters, Myths and Meaning

Monsters have been a part of stories since forever. You see them in myths, fairy tales, books, movies, and art from all sorts of cultures. Even though monsters are scary, they're not just there to frighten folks. Often, these stories really show our fears, feelings, or problems we all face in everyday life. Bringing monsters into the mix helps make these concepts simpler to grasp and way more engaging for people. Back in the day, monsters in old stories usually stood for what people didn't know or understand. People used to come up with creatures like dragons or sea monsters to make sense of stuff they couldn't understand, things like natural disasters, danger, or even death. When the heroes beat those monsters, it really showed they were brave and strong. Those stories really made people feel like fear wasn't something they couldn't overcome, but something they could confront and conquer.

In Patrick Ness' *A Monster Calls*, the monster isn't evil. It shows the truth and how Conor feels. Conor's really scared; his mom is super sick, and he just can't bring himself to deal with it all. The big scary creature made him finally admit all the things he was really feeling: his fear, his anger, and all that guilt he'd been carrying around. That monster, even with its scary appearance, is really just trying to help Conor face what's true

and become more grown-up emotionally. Other stories use monsters in much the same way. In *Frankenstein*, the monster really shows what it's like to be alone and pushed away by everyone. It really impacts him when folks size him up just because he doesn't look like everyone else, and it makes him both mad and upset. In stories like *Beauty and the Beast*, the beast really shows us that what is inside counts a lot more than what someone looks like. It teaches us that kindness means everything, more than just appearances. Monsters in films often show us what we are really scared of. For example, *Godzilla* really shows how much we fear destruction and nuclear power and vampires often make us think about our fear of death or getting sick.

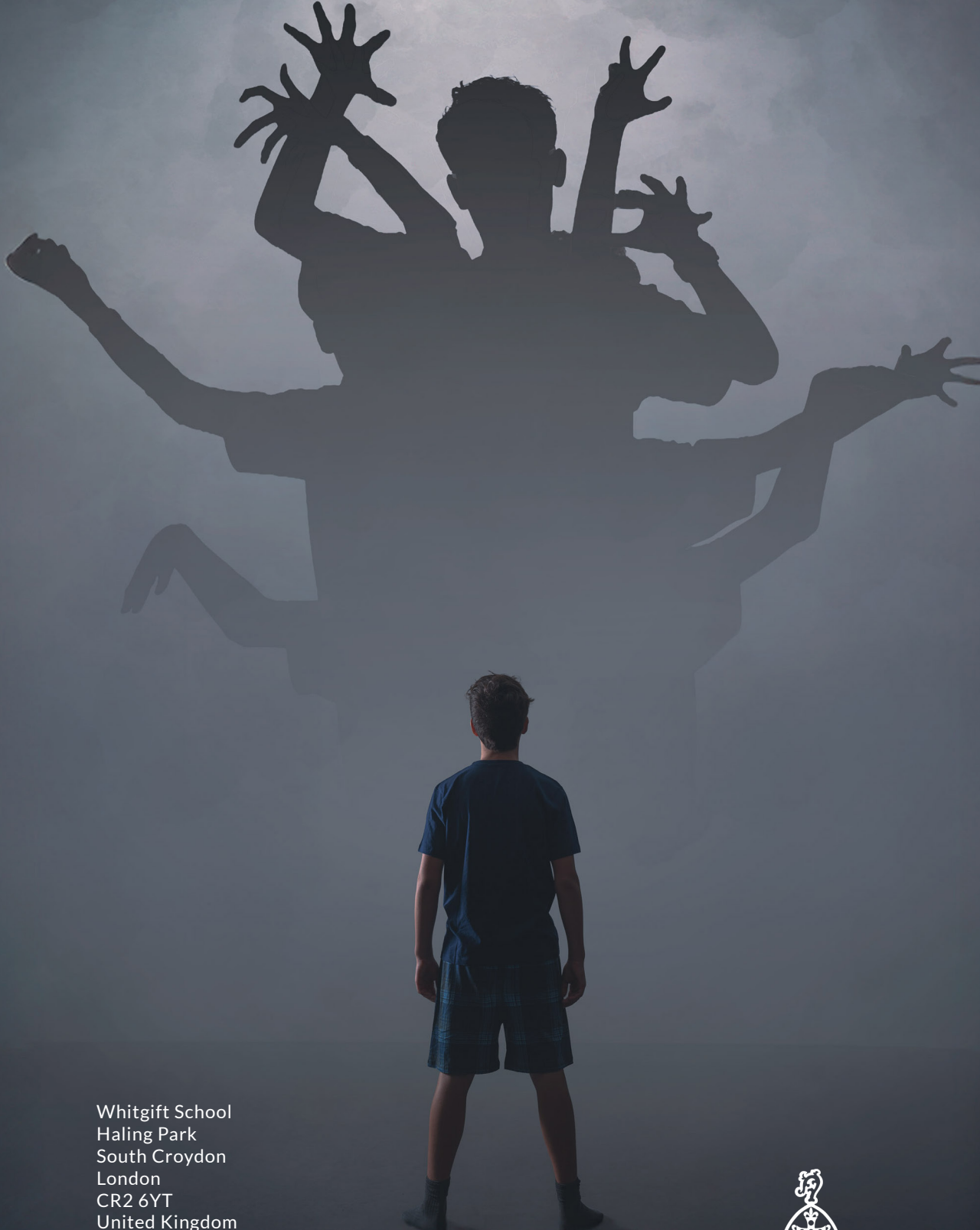
Monsters are really important for understanding what scares us and how we feel. They help us take all our bad feelings and make them into something physical that we can look at and figure out. Monsters teach us that confronting what scares us and accepting the truth, even the tough stuff, helps us grow as humans.

Milo Lamond
Fourth Form


Thank You...


Mounting a theatrical production in such a busy school requires the help and goodwill of a great number of people. We would like to thank: the Headmaster and the Governors for their support and good faith in helping the performers to balance their studies with rehearsal; Christine Pennicott for sending all communications and organising the box office; Catherine Bamber for designing the poster and programme; the Marketing team for advertising the show; the Catering team for providing dinners during show week and for organising interval refreshments; the cleaning staff for cleaning up after long rehearsals and finally, the parents of the cast and crew for supporting their children to attend rehearsals, learn lines and commit to many exhausting rehearsals.





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