

The Children by Lucy Kirkwood

Recommended for ages 16+ / Year 11 and 12

Scripted Dialogue contains description, mention, reference to or staging of the following:

Content warnings: adult themes, mild coarse language, mild sexual references, and the use of herbal cigarettes.

The Children is set in an imagined future in a small coastal town in England. The play takes place in the aftermath of a disaster at a nuclear energy facility. Electricity and water are being rationed and an 'exclusion zone' has been established within the circumference of the facility. The play follows three retired nuclear scientists in their sixties, as they grapple with the aftereffects of the disaster and the role they've had to play in creating it, and question if they must also be part of the resolution. The play explores themes of moral responsibility, fidelity and loyalty, survival, and death.

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Coarse Language:

There is occasional use of the words 'bitch', 'bloody', 'fuck', and 'shit' throughout the play. Characters also speak derogatorily to each other e.g. "fat old hag", "jealous old bitch", "bloody idiot", "silly bitch", "perv".

Sexual Content:

There is a brief allusion to teenage boys masturbating. There is talk about an affair had between 2 of the characters, but it does not go into explicit detail. There is reference to/re-enactment of the size of an unseen character's breasts. There are references to and use of the contraceptive pill, and discussion of use of erection pills: e.g. "I take one of my blue ones [...] Which means I've got about half an hour to kill before lift off [...] her head's right...there on ground zero you know and then, then, then I'm terrified because things are actually starting to happen..." There are references to unplanned pregnancy.

There are physical re-enactments of kissing on the lips and the neck (namely between the two characters who previously had an affair), nonsexual touching of breasts (related to a breast cancer conversation which is described in stage directions as 'scientific, not sexual'), a woman sitting on her husband's lap, and a moment of evident sexual arousal of a character. For context on this final one, earlier in the play, Rose says "There was this man I knew once. And the way he lit a cigarette just took my breath away. And he didn't even know he was doing it, but watching him smoke, watching his hand hold a cigarette, made me want him so much I had to cross my legs to stop myself going down on my hands and knees to lick it." This exact moment may be physically depicted and played out between Robin and Rose onstage later in the play where she watches him light a cigarette and crosses her legs.

Adult Themes:

Traumatic events: The play revolves around the disaster at the nuclear energy facility, the aftermath of which is discussed frequently throughout the play, from the death of beloved livestock to contraction of terminal illnesses, and so on.

Dark discussion topics: The characters discuss whether they'd prefer a dog or a child to get hit by a car, and jokingly mention drinking the blood of virgins. One character discusses her genuine desire for two characters to die, and another says she wanted to smash another's face into a table.

Cancer/death: Characters mention a few times the possibility of getting cancer from radiation exposure and the effects of this: "bleeding from her gums [...] hair falling out nausea bloody vomit diarrhea..." Characters talk about death from cancer or old age. One character briefly discusses experience of breast cancer that has gone into remission. Another character is insinuated to have gotten cancer from exposure to the radiation and will die soon: "the coughing fit becomes more violent. Blood bubbles up from his throat, erupts from his mouth, dribbles down his chin."

Mental illness/suicidal ideation: There are passing references to mental illness in the form of concern for two of the character's daughter who shows "rage" and is taking time off of work. One of the characters discusses how he'd "quite like to die at some point" and how they'll "all want to kill [them]selves anyway" in the future.

Drugs: One character recounts his experience in taking drugs with another: "her pupils are like Frisbees, she says 'd'you want one?'. I pretend I do, she puts this pill in my hand..."

Alcohol: All three characters drink home-brewed wine throughout the play.

Smoking: Two characters engage in the act of smoking onstage.

Violence: One character slaps another in the face and grab another by the hair and pulls it. One talks about being spat at in the face.

There is also reference to bodily fluids in the play, with one reference to semen, and a significant conversation surrounding whether a character went 'number one' or 'number two'; the character going 'number two' causes the toilet to overflow and the characters spend the end of the play walking in the water which has flooded the space.