

16

Characters

Rose, 16
Evan, 17
Olive, 17
Mar, 14
Aleena, 15
Mrs. Wilbur, 38

The stage is split into three. Stage right is the community center, folding chairs are lined up in a circle. Center stage is the school classroom with a whiteboard and desks in rows. Stage left is the hospital room with a hospital bed and a heart rate monitor. Lights rise on all three rooms. Each actor stands shoulder-to-shoulder. After the first line is said, they each go to the appropriate room.

ALL

Sixteen Seconds.

ROSE walks to the hospital room and lays in the hospital bed silent. The heart rate monitor is beeping at a slow, yet constant rhythm for most of the play.

EVAN, OLIVE, MAR and ALEENA walk to the community center and sit in the

folding chairs. ALEENA is timid and keeps quiet. Evan has his arm around Olive, comforting her. MAR is shaking his leg.

MRS. WILBUR

That's all it takes.

MRS. WILBUR walks into the community center. Lights up on the community center.

MRS. WILBUR

Thank you for coming, it's nice to see you all here. You, you're all so brave for being willing to share your feelings and support your peers. Everything you're feeling is natural and nothing to be ashamed of. Grief is not a sign of weakness.

Pause

Trauma is, difficult. It's personal. But it also has this, this unifying function. It has a way of bringing those of us with similar experiences together to relate and console and grieve and recover.

Slight pause

Recovery takes time, of course. All things ease over time. And, while the grief may never end, it is not a place to stay. I am here to help in any way that I possibly can. If not to alleviate pain, then to be an outlet for you to express that pain. I want you all to know that in this room, you, your feelings, your words are all safe. You can, and I encourage you all to do so, share whatever is on your mind at any point during our meetings. I hear you and I am here for you. And, please, keep Rose in your thoughts.

Lights go out in the community center.

When the lights rise again, the same actors are there, but sitting in different seats.

EVAN

The worst part is that I don't even feel calm in my own house. Like, the other day, I was coming down the stairs into the kitchen. I didn't know it, but my brother was hiding behind the corner. When I walked in he yelled, "AHHH."

Some of the students slightly jump at this.

EVAN

And I screamed and I said: "Why would you do that to me? Why would you scare me in my own house," and he just, he didn't get it. I teared up and he didn't get it. He got mad.

MRS. WILBUR

Sometimes it's difficult to discuss our feelings with those closest to us.

EVAN

I can't talk about it with him at all.

MRS. WILBUR

Hmm.

Pause

Let's do an exercise. I'll pretend to be you. You pretend to be your brother. Say what you think he'd tell you.

Evan nods.

MRS. WILBUR

Hey...

Pause

What's his name?

EVAN

Noah.

MRS. WILBUR

Nodding

Hey, Noah. Can I talk to you about something?

EVAN

Sure.

MRS. WILBUR

It's really important to me that you listen and hear me.

EVAN

I'm listening.

MRS. WILBUR

I know we rough-house and joke around with each other a lot. But, what happened last Friday, it shocked me.

EVAN

Okay...

MRS. WILBUR

And I don't think I can play those same games anymore. Not right now at least. I need time to get over how... shocked I'm feeling.

EVAN

Do you think I'd hurt you like that?

MRS. WILBUR

What? No. Oh my God no. I just / think that

EVAN

You didn't even see what happened.

MRS. WILBUR

I didn't have to see it to be disturbed by it.

EVAN

You're being a pussy.

MRS. WILBUR

Woah...

EVAN

Why are you so upset?

MRS. WILBUR

I just experienced something traumatic.

EVAN

Traumatic?

By this point, Mrs. Wilbur is growing increasingly upset, forgetting that they are roleplaying.

MRS. WILBUR

Yes, traumatic. Do you know what it's like to / go through something

EVAN

You don't know what real trauma is.

MRS. WILBUR

You don't get to police my feelings, you fucking ass-

She stops herself. The kids are silent.

MRS. WILBUR

Clearing throat

I'm sorry. Um, that was good for you to get that out. Cleanse your system. We tend to fear that those we love won't understand us. We assume the worst.

Pause

I think that'll be all for this meeting. I'll see you all tomorrow. Have a safe and peaceful night, keep Rose in your thoughts. She'd be here if she could.

Lights go out in the community center. When the lights rise again, the same actors are there, but sitting in different seats.

ALEENA

Every time I close my eyes, I can hear it.

The students all nod.

ALEENA

My ears are still ringing. I hear the sound and I'm taken back for a second before I realize I'm just at home in bed.

Pause

The garage door opens, I hear it.

The car starts, I hear it.

The house is silent, I hear it.

I hear it in everything and in nothing at all.

Pause

MRS. WILBUR

Loud noises can trigger an extreme response. It's important to remember the grounding techniques. To connect with the here and now, do you remember any?

ALEENA

Play some music, take deep breaths, touch or smell or look at my surroundings.

MRS. WILBUR

That's good.

ALEENA

But it doesn't always help.

Silence

ALEENA

It should have been me.

Pause

Mrs. Wilbur walks over to Aleena and puts her hand on her shoulder.

MRS. WILBUR

Don't say that. You had no control over anything that happened.

ALEENA

I was standing right next to her, it could have been me.

Mrs. Wilbur stays silent and hugs Aleena.

ALEENA

It should have been me, it should have been me.

Lights go out in the community center. When the lights rise again, the same actors are there, but sitting in different seats.

MAR

When I think about it, I cry. So I've been trying not to. But, I don't think I can have all this inside me anymore.

Pause

We always have drills. We did what we were taught to.

OLIVE

We did everything we could.

MAR

It doesn't make it easier. It doesn't make it right.

OLIVE

No, it doesn't.

Mar gets up and walks into the class-room, he sits in one of the desks. Olive follows.

MAR

It's all so vivid in my head but it feels more like a dream, or a nightmare, than real life.

They both get up and begin stacking the desks like a barricade, almost robotically, as if it is a task they do daily. As they do this, the heart rate monitor in the hospital room begins to beep rapidly.

MAR

We locked the door.

OLIVE

We turned off the lights.

MAR

We silenced our phones, but some of us used them.

OLIVE

To send a warning.

MAR

To send an I love you.

OLIVE

To send our goodbyes.

Mrs. Wilbur slowly walks into the classroom. She watches them stacking the desks. She's scared.

MRS. WILBUR

I tried to remain calm. I told you to stay away from the windows.

MAR

We sat on the ground.

OLIVE

In the corner of the room.

MRS. WILBUR

I didn't know how to comfort you, but I had to.

OLIVE

We heard sirens in the distance.

MRS. WILBUR

This is real.

MAR

It was over quickly. But we kept still.

The heart rate monitor flatlines then goes silent. Perhaps there's red and blue lights flashing, like police car lights.

OLIVE

Not because we had to, but because moving was too hard.

MRS. WILBUR

I noticed Rose wasn't early to class that morning like usual.

MAR

We were escorted out of the room in a single-file line.

OLIVE

Leave your belongings.

MAR

Come out with your hands on your head.

MRS. WILBUR

This is real.

Aleena receives a text. She covers her mouth.

ALEENA

Quietly

No, no.

MRS. WILBUR

There was blood on the concrete.

OLIVE

I closed my eyes when we walked past.

MAR

I didn't want to believe it.

ALEENA

This can't be real.

They all freeze, broken out of the trance and look at her.

ALEENA

After a moment

She's gone, Rose is gone.

Silence

The lights go out on all three rooms. When they come back up, ALEENA, MAR, EVAN, OLIVE, MRS. WILBUR, and ROSE are standing shoulder to shoulder again.

ALL

Sixteen seconds.

ALEENA

I went to visit Rose every day in the hospital. The day I didn't, her body decided it needed to give up. She couldn't deal with the pain anymore and I don't think I blame her. I was there, that Friday. I was standing next to her. Five inches to the right and I would have been the one in the hospital bed instead of her. But, when the bullet hit her, she fell on top of me. She saved me. She didn't mean to and I didn't deserve it, but she saved me. How can I keep going when she no longer can?

ALL

Sixteen seconds.

EVAN

I wasn't there. I was in the parking lot. When I heard the first shot, I thought a generator blew. But after the second and the third and the fourth, I felt sick to my stomach. I got in my friend's car. I called my mom, "Mom there's shots, there's shots." She didn't believe me at first. "Are you sure?" I didn't see them. In honesty, I wasn't sure. I had never heard a gunshot before. But I wasn't going to stick around to find out. I wasn't going to stick around to be sure. We drove away. We drove to my house. How do I deal with the guilt of not being there?

ALL

Sixteen seconds.

OLIVE

School shootings are something you hear about happening in towns and states that are not your own. You get angry and sad and you hurt for those that lost their lives, but at the end of the day you can fall asleep at night knowing that for now, you're safe. It wasn't you. It wasn't your town. But this time it was. When it happens, it won't feel real. There is a cloud of disbelief and for a lot of the time, you have to remind yourself that yes, it happened, and yes it was real. And for a lot of the time, you won't know how to carry on. How do I go to school when my classmates no longer can?

ALL

Sixteen seconds.

MAR

Walking onto campus makes me uneasy. My knees shake and my thoughts race. A classroom is where you learn. It is

not supposed to be the place where you hide for your life. Desks are no longer desks, but objects you use to barricade the door. Metal water bottles and keys and fire extinguishers are no longer what they once were, but weapons you hold in case you have to fight. And you'll have to fight. Whether in person or with your fists or in your head or with your voice. There will always be a fight. How do I wake up days, weeks, months, years from now and pretend everything's alright?

ALL

Sixteen seconds.

MRS. WILBUR

I am always stuck in that place. In that room. I am calling out, I am trying, straining to tell everyone that it will be okay but I can't make a sound. I am a voiceless leader sworn to protect but unable to provide. I see the faces of my students all the time. In my dreams, they're scared and I am tethered to my desk, I can't help them. In the news, they're statistics shown on a graph. In the classroom, they're staring, waiting, praying it never happens again. How do I help them fight their fears when I can't even conquer my own?

ALL

Sixteen seconds.

ROSE

Two weeks before all this, my friends threw me a surprise birthday party. It was my sixteenth birthday party, and they got me this sweater I'd been wanting.

ALEENA

It was baby blue. Her favorite color.

ROSE

It was cloudy that morning. I decided to wear it and I felt

good. I felt confident. My friends were the greatest people I knew and for that, I'm so thankful.

She holds Aleena's hand.

ROSE

I was waiting outside with them that morning before class. I spent the last minutes of my life with them in the hospital. By the time we realized he had pulled a gun out of his bag, he had already shot me once in the shoulder. The next bullet hit me in the head.

MRS. WILBUR

No future.

ALEENA

No goodbye.

Rose lets go of Aleena's hand.

ROSE

He shot seven rounds in sixteen seconds. They hit me and four other students before he pointed it at himself. At least he knew what was going to happen. My life was taken from me without warning. My parents dropped me off at school that morning in my new sweater and I was sent back home in a body bag.

Rose walks to center stage.

ROSE

Today, you all live,

ALL

but there's no law to thank.

ROSE

If not me,

ALL

then somebody else.

ROSE

How many more children do we have to lose?

ALL

Sixteen Seconds.

ROSE

That's all it took.

Lights out.