

The truth is out: Capistrano Valley's "The Children's Hour" is not one to miss written by Abby Schmude, a senior at Irvine High School

The curtain rises, and a cozy farmhouse-turned-boarding school is revealed, with groups of chattering girls dotting the stage. Set in 1930s New England, "The Children's Hour" follows two teachers as a conniving girl weaves a web of lies with debilitating consequences. Gripping and tense, Capistrano Valley High School's production is a tragic exploration of gossip, rumors, and homophobia.

Martha Dobie (Lauren Swan) marches across the stage, her fists clenched tightly at her sides. She is brash and intense, scoffing and yelling at the accusations leveled against her. In an excellent contrast, Karen Wright (Hailey Poirier) moves daintily, her shining eyes wide and kind. Her voice is sweet and soft, and she interacts gently with her students, placing her supportive hand on shoulders and tucking loose strands of hair behind ears.

Mary Tilford (Isabella Blodgett) is the manipulative schoolgirl who begins the rumor about Martha and Karen's illicit relationship. She skips and prances, her limbs moving loosely and her blond braids flying from side to side. Clad entirely in red, she is truly a menacing figure, swinging back and forth from affected wide-eyed-innocence to screaming hysterics.

Set, led by Emma Hoefnagels and Jonathan Seeker, effectively communicates the mood of the two settings. The boarding school is homey and lived in, rife with spring colors of sage green and earthy tones. The floral wallpaper feels fresh and light, and the window with its lace curtain adds another layer of realism. In comparison, the Tilford house feels cold and imposing, and the maroon and golden color scheme cultivates a suffocating and heavy atmosphere.

Costumes, led by Michaela Rosen, is a masterclass on communicating tonal shifts through clothing. The first two acts of the show take place during spring, and each character is clad in something vivid, from the floral dress of Mrs. Mortar to the deep blue of Martha's pantsuit. However, as the teachers' situation worsens and spring gives way to fall, the color scheme shifts towards browns, blacks, and burnt oranges, displaying the tragic shift in the characters' fate.

Grim and harrowing, Capistrano Valley's "The Children's Hour" leaves its audiences immersed in the 1930s, and is full of strong acting, stunning set pieces, and well-thought-out costumes.