

Getting caught in the web at Westmount CI

Performance sends message of the importance of Internet safety

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Vaughan Today

It's a means of communication and a fabulous ticket to learning, but the Internet can be a dangerous place for children.

That's the message some Westmount Collegiate drama students delivered this week through their production, *Tangled Web*,

performed as part of York Region District School Board Safety Awareness Week.

Students from Thornhill-area elementary schools gathered at Vaughan City Playhouse Theatre Wednesday to watch the 20-minute play, directed by Westmount drama teacher Miriam Guttman, and to discuss Internet safety.

Guttman says the play sheds light on cyber-bullying, which she says is becoming more and more common among pre-teens and teenagers, and sees its teenage characters become "trapped in a web of lies, meanness and deception".

The play looks at the anonymity of the Internet,

the risk of online predators and the reasons why young people often find comfort at the computer screen.

The short production also includes numerous statistics about young people's online usage (which Guttman found online, of course) and grade 10 actor Erin Dessau found surprising.

"The statistics are quite high and shocking," said Erin, who admits she uses the computer for instant messaging. "I have been warned about Internet safety through school and seminars."

Fifty-seven percent of surveyed students say something hurtful has been said about them on the web and 53 percent admit to saying mean or hurtful things, according to Guttman.

She came up with an idea to create a play about cyber-bullying about two years ago. She formed a working group of students and came up with a preliminary script.

Last year, the project was resurrected with a new group of students.

"We toured (last) fall to a bunch of feeder schools with a short version of the play — about 10 minutes — and we got lots of feedback," Guttman said at a rehearsal earlier this week. "From there, we saw that we could create another character and create more depth."

Guttman then compiled the students' writing to create the final script, which students performed for school board members in the spring.

"In its most recent incarnation, I recast again," Guttman said. "This group of students just started this on the first day of school and they (have) really stepped up."

Guttman chose seven students to be involved in this week's show. Joining Adam and Erin are Davida Houston, Hailey Malkin, Lauren Fridman, Orli Schwartz and Tyler Mann. All are in the West Arts program, with a drama focus.

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CAUGHT IN A WEB: In *Tangled Web*, the spider, (Hailey Malkin, centre) tries to prove to the goddess (Lauren Fridman) that her world wide web is a good thing. The students (seen here in rehearsal) performed for feeder schools as part of York school board's Safety Week.



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