

## EXPLORE

For more than 80 years, this family business has helped customers cope in an expensive city, L4

## LIFE



CLASSIFIED, L6

## Play tells students story of the T-shirt

**RICK WESTHEAD**  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPORTER

The sock puppet delivered a cryptic riddle.

The puppet in this case, Mr. Toe, was a teacher and his struggling student was desperate to graduate with his classmates.

Mr. Toe, voiced by actor Norah Sadava, assured that all his student had to do was solve this question: "It has four holes, four hems and two sides. Basic comfort it provides." What is it?

So begins the hour-long theatre produc-

tion *The Tale of a T-shirt*.

Since the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh last April, interest has been building around the world about the treatment of apparel workers in developing countries, how clothing companies have been engaged in a race to the bottom, and how consumers can affect change.

But having that discussion with school-aged children is tricky.

How does one appropriately tell kids here that factory fires and collapses in countries such as Bangladesh are a common occurrence? Should kids be made to

feel guilty about the clothes they wear? Should they be told there's a chance they were made using child labour?

Lisa Marie DiLiberto, artistic director with the Toronto theatre production company Fixt Point, grappled with those kind of questions for months before the Rana Plaza collapse April 24, 2013. In 2007-08, DiLiberto and her partner, Charles Ketchabaw, used a series of arts council grants to take their production of *The Tale of a T-shirt* on the road.

T-SHIRT continued on L5



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Lise Cormier, left, Marissa Zinni, holding cotton, and Nina Gilmour tell the story of the T-shirt.

## Humour helps dress up T-shirt story

T-SHIRT from L1

They played to audiences in Canada, the Czech Republic and Austria.

After Rana Plaza, the Toronto theatre company Theatre Direct agreed to provide a venue for DiLiberto to show a children's version of her play.

"Instead of being preachy about where clothes come from we wanted to combine some clown work with a social message, making it interesting for kids," DiLiberto said. "It isn't necessary for us to go too in-depth, but we want kids to know that their clothes don't magically appear in the stores."

*The Tale of a T-shirt* debuted Wednesday to several Toronto schools at Artscape Wychwood

Barns. Third- and fourth-graders from The Grove Community School comprised the first audience to watch the production Wednesday.

After taking their seats, the students were asked to examine the tags on their own shirts: many discovered they were made in China or Bangladesh.

The play navigates the journey of a T-shirt, from humble beginnings as a cotton seed to looms in India, apparel factories next door in Bangladesh and finally back to the ports of British Columbia, where clothing is then sent by train across Canada.

There's enough humour — some bathroom-inspired — to keep the kids interested, but after the play, most of the students' questions and com-

ments focused on a poignant scene that depicted a factory fire. Months before Rana Plaza, 112 garment workers died in a fire at Tazreen Fashions, also a factory in Bangladesh.

"I wanted to show that the problem is about more than Rana Plaza, more than one building collapse," DiLiberto said. "There continues to be a number of tragedies and crises."

During the scene, following a particularly sloppy factory inspection, three of the play's four actors escaped a sudden fire, bolting out a window because the fire exits were locked shut. The theatre went dark for moment before an image of a real-life factory disaster flashed in front of the young audience.

"If we are paying \$2 for a T-shirt,



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Children from The Grove Community School at the debut of *The Tale of a T-shirt* display their glee that one of the characters gets her T-shirt.

does it actually cover the cost of people dying and making sacrifices?" Nora, a 9-year-old Grade 4 student, said after the play. "They make the T-shirt for us because we have money and they don't."

*The Tale of a T-shirt* is open to the public Friday and Saturday, with shows at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., at Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie St. Tickets, \$12, available in advance at [TheTaleofaTshirt.eventbrite.ca](http://TheTaleofaTshirt.eventbrite.ca)

# 5 Things This Weekend



## BILLY JOEL

Billy Joel is playing Madison Square Garden monthly, but he's also popping up here and there instead of embarking on a full-on tour. On Sunday, he hops a flight for a show at Air Canada Centre, where fans can expect a *New York State of Mind*, of course. March 9, 8 p.m. \$68.75 to \$164.75. Air Canada Centre, 50 Bay St., 1-855-985-5000 or [ticketmaster.ca](http://ticketmaster.ca).



## SWAN LAKE

Russian star Svetlana Lunkina is assuredly ready to share the lead role in the company's version of the mystic, revered *Swan Lake*. "I am not ready to surrender," said the former Bolshoi ballerina upon arriving in Canada last fall, after a sterling 15-year career in Russia. March 8 to 16. \$25 to \$184. Four Seasons Centre, 145 Queen St. W., 416-345-9595 or [national.ballet.ca](http://national.ballet.ca).



## THE TALE OF A T-SHIRT

From Fringe Festival favourites Fixt Point, this comedic piece aimed at audiences aged 10 to 16 uses puppetry and live music to address globalization and shed light on the true cost of our cheap garb. To March 8, \$10. Wychwood Theatre, Artscape Wychwood Barns, 76 Wychwood Ave., 416-526-9332 or [thetaleofatshirt.eventbrite.ca](http://thetaleofatshirt.eventbrite.ca).



## 6 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

A half-dozen questions are asked in a new play about a daughter's relationship with her estranged mom. The piece is based on *Projection Encounters with my Runaway Mother*, a memoir by Priscilla Uppal, who is one of Canada's coolest poets, no question about it. To March 30. \$23 to \$45. Factory Theatre, 125 Bathurst St., 416-504-9971 or [factorytheatre.com](http://factorytheatre.com).



## TORONTO COMICON

*Napoleon Dynamite* star Jon Heder will be on hand, as will Billy Boyd from *The Lord of the Rings*. Of course, they'll also be available for photos, Q&As and autographs at the convention itself. March 7 to 9. \$10 to \$25 (weekend pass, \$45). Metro Convention Centre, 255 Front St. W., [comicontoronto.com](http://comicontoronto.com).

Brad Wheeler