

The Manningtree Witches - Content to Consider

The Manningtree Witches has an age guidance of 14+, it contains strong language, flashing lights, haze, physical and emotional violence, scenes of a sexual nature, mentions of miscarriage, post-natal depression and child death, and depictions of torture, smoking and hanging.

If you think you'll be affected by any of the above we've provided further detailed information below, please note, this does include spoilers. We've also provided a list of helplines at the end of this document.

Act 1

Content: Strong language, sexual language

The play opens on a scene with Rebecca West and Matthew Hopkins, she is telling him of a time where her Mother and her friends dragged her to the woods to be part of their coven, she mentions her mother threatening her and that if "I spoke a word of what I was about to witness, she'd flay me alive, that she'd chain me down and let the Devil have his way with me, let him push hot spikes inside of me.", Rebecca calls her Mother a whore. At the end of this scene she asks the audience, "What would you have fucking done?"

Content: Strong language, physical violence, death, sexual language

In the following scene we see a sword fight between King Charles & Oliver Cromwell, the Beldam West says "As Kings tend to fucking do" and we see two members of the chorus carry a "dead" man across the stage. After Rebecca speaks to John Edes, Judith says "You might as well undress in the market, lay down and let him have you Becky!" After the women discuss a new man coming to Manningtree, Liz says he's going to open the Thorne Inn and give everyone free beer, Margaret says "Free beer? Fuck off"

Content: Strong language

After the scene where Rebecca visits Bess, her Mother, the Beldam West is introduced, during this Liz says "It means you wanna stay out of her fucking way...", the women mention a time that the Beldam swung Goody Rawbood round by her plaits, as Goody had said she was looking at her husband, the Beldam then says "I wouldn't look at your husband if he was the last cock in England!"

Content: Physical violence

In the next scene Rebecca is at home with her Mother, they get into a heated argument and her Mother says "let that tongue unravel again and I'll kick you from here to Colchester" whilst throwing a spoon at her.

Content: Physical violence

Following the scene with Rebecca and her Mother, the characters assemble at Church, during this scene Thomas repeatedly kicks Liz's chair, she gets frustrated and slaps him

Content: Strong language

After the scene in the Church, Rebecca talks about the ongoing war and how Parliament secured a victory over the King's men, the Beldam says "At fucking last!"

Content: Sexual language

In the next scene at Church, Matthew Hopkins gives a sermon warning of the devil, during it he says "He speaks to all creatures, to the centipedes and toads until they slide on their soft bellies to nestle between the legs of a simple woman, where she dreams of a man who uses his tongue down there."

Content: Strong language, physical violence

After the church scene, the women of Manningtree discuss recent goings on, they mention a woman who has called her child Silence, to which Liz responds with "Fuck off! No she hasn't", they then discuss their children and Margaret says "Well my Judith's a little shit." The women then notice Thomas Briggs throwing bacon to crabs, the Beldam has a physical altercation with him and drags him by his neck and he scrabbles away.

Content: Sexual language

After the incident with Thomas Briggs, Rebecca and Judith play the cabbage game, whilst blindfolded Rebecca sees John Edes who says "Would you like me to touch you where no one else has been?" she then sees Matthew Hopkins who says "You reek of it. Your hands, your neck, your breath, you beg for it".

Content: Post-natal depression

After Rebecca meets with John Edes, there is a scene with Rebecca and her Mother, during it the Beldam mentions that she struggled when Rebecca was a child, she was lonely and Rebecca wouldn't stop crying, she mentions how she saw the Devil who told her to put Rebecca in the fire, which she did, but Margaret rescued her.

Content: Strong language

After Rebecca learns that Thomas Briggs is sick, she goes home to see her Mother, during this scene Rebecca talks of how she can't stop thinking of John Edes, her Mother explains to her that she is "just a little cunt struck"

Content: Child death

After Rebecca has been to see Thomas Briggs, she mentions how two babies don't make it through birth, Judith then arrives who tells Rebecca that Thomas Briggs is dead

Content: Physical violence

After we learn of Thomas Briggs death, Bess visits Leah Miller to ask for some food, John Stearne arrives and is angry at Bess for visiting Leah who is pregnant, he throws her walking stick away from her and she crawls to retrieve it.

Content: Scenes of a sexual nature, strong language

Following the scene with Bess, John Edes visits Rebecca, telling her to leave Manningtree, at the end of the scene he kisses her, picks her up and they continue to kiss whilst on the ground together, he then leaves, she calls for him, then says "...what a mess you've made of me Sir, a pauper, a witch and now a whore!"

Act 2

Content: Torture

Act 2 begins with a scene with Bess, a disabled woman accused of witchcraft, she is examined for witch marks and deprived of food, water and sleep for three days.

Content: Strong language, child death

After the accused women are arrested, and held at The Thorne Inn, they are angry with the situation and use the words "fucking" and "slut", Priscilla Briggs mentions burying her son, Thomas.

Content: Miscarriage, threats of hanging

After the accused women have been taken to Colchester Gaol, Matthew interrogates Rebecca, he accuses her of causing Leah Miller's miscarriage, he tells Rebecca if she is found guilty, she will hang.

Content: Death, child death, physical violence

After John Stearne & Matthew Hopkins agree to charge other towns for their services, they have a conversation where they mention a woman at Colchester Gaol that died during childbirth and a newborn baby that died after falling out of it's crib, resulting in a broken neck. Later in this discussion Hopkins is angry after Stearne mentions that he'd like to give Rebecca West lessons, he grabs his arm and twists it back, calling him a degenerate.

Content: Threats of hanging

After Matthew Hopkins has visited John Edes, he interrogates Rebecca again, he again says she will be found guilty and that she will be hung at the gallows.

Content: Strong Language

When Rebecca returns to the cell with the other women, her Mother convinces her to accuse the other women of witchcraft, she does so at the end of this scene, writhing as if in pain, Liz Godwin calls her a “conniving fuck”.

Content: Strong Language, sexual language

When Rebecca accuses the other women to Matthew Hopkins she mentions that “Bess Clarke had kittens under her skirts that she let suckle at her secret parts”, how the devil “slipped inside of us” and she calls her Mother a “whore and a slattern”. Matthew asks “Did the Devil use his tongue between your legs?”

Content: Depictions of hanging

Following Rebecca’s accusations Bess, Margaret, Liz & Anne are tried at Chelmsford. During this scene Bess is dragged off to be hung, and we see a physical representation of Margaret, Liz & Anne being hung.

Content: Strong language, sexual language and child death

After the hangings, Rebecca is back in Manningtree working for Matthew Hopkins, she mentions that he left her mother “twitching on a line like a pig on a hook”, and says she wishes “he would try to fuck me”. Priscilla Briggs arrives and before she leaves she mentions her son’s death and how Rebecca’s Mother took him from her.

Content: Physical violence, strong language

After Doctor Croake has visited Matthew, Rebecca goes to see him. He thanks her for her confession and she reveals it was a lie, she then tells him she will kill him, she climbs on to his bed and takes one of his pillows, he tells her to think of her soul and she says “Fuck my soul, I’ll think of my Mother.” she smothers him with the pillow, he tries to fight her off, but she succeeds and he dies. In her closing monologue, Rebecca uses the word fuck twice.

Further Resources

The Manningtree Witches covers a number of difficult themes. Please know that you can leave the auditorium at any time if you wish.

If you would like someone to talk to, please don’t hesitate in the first instance to speak to one of our friendly ushers or a member of the Mercury team.

If you feel affected by the themes of the show, please refer to the list of resources and information below. This is not an exhaustive list and is not intended to replace support from a GP or therapist.

Support Resources

Samaritans – Call 116 123 (24/7) or visit www.samaritans.org

SHOUT – Text SHOUT to 85258 (24/7) or visit www.giveusashout.org

Hub of Hope – national database of support services in the UK, visit www.hubofhope.co.uk

The Association for Post-Natal Illness – Call 0207 386 0868 (10-2 Mon-Fri) or online www.apni.org

Sands – National Helpline for those affected by the death of a baby – Call 0808 164 3332 (10-3 Mon-Fri) or online www.sands.org.uk

Miscarriage Association – Call 0303 0036464 (9-4 Mon-Fri) or online www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

If you would like to search for a specific support resource in relation to the themes in this production, please visit www.mind.org.uk