

FLORIDA STAGE

PLAY ABOUT MISFITS WILL RESONATE

By [Hap Erstein](#) | [Theater](#) | December 16, 2009

If you were musing what young people with a tendency towards violence have in common, as playwright Carter W. Lewis seems to be doing lately, it would be hard not to notice that most of them see themselves as misfits. But then who among us did not consider ourselves misfits when we were in our teens?

Certainly Peck and Dora, the two central characters in Lewis' latest play, *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy*, now receiving its world premiere at Florida Stage through Jan. 17, have been ostracized by their peers. Their crime? They are smart and smart-mouthed, exactly the qualities that draws audiences to their side. And exactly that draws their teacher Caitlin, something of a misfit herself.

Caitlin teaches creative writing, and her star pupil is Peck, a kid with a knack beyond his years for spinning creative narratives off the top of his head. She is fascinated by his verbal skill, even if she is mystified about what exactly is going on in that head.

Then there is Dora, the only other person Peck feels he can communicate with. The way the two of them ping-pong language back and forth is one of the prime assets of *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy*. Abused and neglected, Dora is so desperate to be noticed that she nail-guns her hand to the wall at school to gain attention.

Lewis has written a character-driven play, creating a small microcosm of high school life from these three misfits, peeling away layers until he gets to Caitlin's secrets, which haunt her as she starts a new life in this unspecified "small American town."

Violent events do occur, but they do not dominate the play as much as they are interwoven with Peck's storytelling. If you start wondering what is real, what is imagination and whose story the play is anyway, Lewis is likely to be pleased.

He has to be pleased with the three young actors — all making their Florida Stage debuts — who inhabit his script, under Louis Tyrrell's deft direction. As Peck, Marshall Paillet strikes the right chord of nerdy geekiness, but when he starts reciting one of his stories, aided by sound engineer Matt Kelly's aural effects, he is completely in command.

Bethany Anne Lind (Dora) handles much of the potty language, but underneath her simmering anger, she lets us see the girl who is so desperate to be loved. As teacher Caitlin, Laura Carbonell probably has the toughest assignment, for the role is sketchily written. Even after she reveals her past in a monologue of emotional turmoil, we still want to know more.

For Florida Stage's senior audience, *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy* may resonate as a view into their grandchildren's generation. That would make the experience worthwhile enough, but the play is elevated by playwright Lewis' — and his characters' — facility with language.