

THE EDIBLE COMPLEX

a play for grades 4-6

by Melissa Leilani Larson



PLAN-B
Theatre Company



THE EDIBLE COMPLEX by Melissa Leilani Larson received its world premiere October 8-November 18, 2016 as Plan-B Theatre Company's Fourth Annual Free Elementary School Tour, funded in part by an ArtWorks grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Directed by Cheryl Cluff and designed by Aaron Swenson (costumes and artwork). Featuring Anne Louise Brings as Anna and Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin as Mom and all the Food.

Although THE EDIBLE COMPLEX was originally created to be performed by two actors, casting is flexible depending on the needs and resources of your production.

Please contact playwright Melissa Leilani Larson for production rights through her website melissaleilanilarson.com

TIME

Now.

SETTING

Home, the school bus and school.

ANNA: I love food. It's my favorite thing. I love the color of avocados, and the smell of new bread, and the sound of an apple when you first bite into it. It's not like I just want to sit around eating all the time.

Someday I'm going to be a famous chef. Like Gordon Ramsay, only American. Every night after dinner when I watch my hour of TV, I watch cooking shows, like Chopped and The Great British Baking Show. My favorite is Iron Chef. (Impersonating the Chairman) "Today's secret ingredient is— Ba ba ba! Chocolate chips!" And then all of the recipes that night have to have chocolate chips in them, even the appetizers and the drinks.

I have a wooden box my grandma left me when she died. It's full of recipes she wrote out in her thin, spindly handwriting on index cards so old they've turned yellow around the edges. Once I took a card from Grandma's box—a recipe for pecan cinnamon rolls. I read the card so carefully, and I got all the ingredients together. I used warm water to activate the yeast, just like we did in science. I followed all the instructions, and I think Grandma's cinnamon rolls turned out pretty awesome. Except that I forgot to chop the pecans. I'll remember next time. Mom liked those cinnamon rolls so much she said she got something in her eye.

(A knowing smile. She picks up a magazine)

My mom loves magazines. Our house is full of them, old ones and new ones, full of pictures of faraway places and fancy clothes. She has these big fashion magazines that show the newest clothes coming out of Paris and Milan. That's in Italy, where they invented pizza. A lot of the women in Mom's magazines look the same. They're tall and thin, and they never smile. They aren't the kind of women you see every day, walking downtown or shopping in the mall. I wonder sometimes if they're even real. My mom's smile is part of what makes her pretty.

(ANNA'S MOM enters)

If I had my own magazine, I'd be like Oprah and pose on the cover. And I'd ask Mom to be a model, all glossy and beautiful and smiling across a two-page spread.

MOM: Oh, Anna, really.

ANNA: What?

MOM: I've told you so many times. It takes a certain kind of beauty to be a model.

ANNA: What kind?

MOM: An expensive, skinny kind.

ANNA: Are skinny people prettier?

MOM: The world wants us to think so.

ANNA: Maybe the world is wrong.

MOM: Maybe. Now, hurry, or you'll be late for school. Have you got your lunch ready?

ANNA: Almost. What kind of sandwich should I make?

MOM: What kind do you want to make?

ANNA: Hmm. Something a little different. Pancakes! Remember when Dad flipped that pancake and it stuck to the ceiling?

Mom: I think so.

ANNA: I couldn't stop laughing. And you got so mad at him—

MOM: Let's focus on today, please.

ANNA: Someday I'll be a famous chef with my own chain of restaurants, and you can come by any time and I'll make you pancakes from scratch.

MOM: I know you will. You can do anything you put your mind to. But for right now, you need a sandwich, and quick.

ANNA: Something with jam. Hmm. Just a tiny taste of sweet. Maybe some jam with turkey. Like cranberry sauce at Thanksgiving.

MOM: You know, that sounds pretty good.

ANNA: I can make you one too.

MOM: No thanks. I'm sure it's great. But I'm watching my weight.

ANNA: And my sandwich will make you fat?

MOM: Better safe than sorry. (She moves to the door)

ANNA: But Mom! You haven't eaten anything. You always say, "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

MOM: You're right, it is. Especially for a certain someone who has a lot to focus on in school all day long.

ANNA: What about you? You love breakfast.

MOM: Sooner or later you're going to learn, you can have too much of a good thing. I need to go or I'll miss my train. Don't forget to lock the bolt when you leave.

ANNA: I won't.

MOM: I'll see you later, sweetie. (MOM exits)

ANNA: Huh. That was weird. Mom usually loves breakfast. Pancakes are like her favorite thing. Things? That's why Dad and I worked so hard to learn how to make them. On Mother's Day, I make pancakes for dinner. Sounds weird, but it's really good. We stack them really high and drown them in syrup. Mmm. I'm just about a pro at flipping pancakes without a spatula. It took a lot of practice—and a lot of misses—but now it's pretty easy. I take the handle of the pan in both hands, and I spread my feet apart, and I toss the pancake in the air. The hard part is to catch it in the pan without dropping it. Dad can do it, easy as pie, and with just one hand. He was going to help me learn how. But that was before he and Mom started fighting. He lives in another state now, too far to drive for pancakes. So I had to learn by myself.

Why doesn't Mom want breakfast? Is she not feeling hungry? Like at all? I feel like I'm always hungry. Probably doesn't help when you think about food as much as I do. I guess I could stop being hungry if I really wanted to. Is that what you need to do to get skinny? Stop eating? Gosh. But I love food so much. (She picks up her magazine) An expensive and skinny kind of beauty. If I were to write a recipe for that). I wonder. What would go on the recipe card? Would it just be blank?

(ANNA gets ready to leave for school. A GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICH approaches her)

GRILLED CHEESE: Psst. Anna. Hey.

ANNA: What?

GRILLED CHEESE: It looks like you're going to leave for school without a sandwich.

ANNA: I know.

GRILLED CHEESE: I wouldn't want you to forget your lunch.

ANNA: Yeah, well, I didn't.

GRILLED CHEESE: This is one grilled cheese sandwich volunteering for duty.

ANNA: You don't have to do that.

GRILLED CHEESE: It's okay. My calendar's free. I'll just go with you.

ANNA: No thanks.

GRILLED CHEESE: Is this what rejection feels like? Such a strange sensation.

ANNA: You'll get used to it. I gotta go.

GRILLED CHEESE: But—

ANNA: I'm going to skip lunch today.

GRILLED CHEESE: That makes absolutely no sense.

ANNA: If I go to the library during lunch, I can get some extra reading time in.

GRILLED CHEESE: Won't you be hungry?

ANNA: Maybe a little. Nothing I can't handle.

GRILLED CHEESE: I think you want a grilled cheese sandwich. All crispy and brown on the edges, filled with melty cheddar cheese that strings from the bread to your mouth. Mmm mm mmm.

ANNA: That does sound pretty good.

GRILLED CHEESE: I know, right?

ANNA: But look at the women in this magazine. Do you think they eat grilled cheese sandwiches?

GRILLED CHEESE: Who cares what they eat?

ANNA: My mom.

GRILLED CHEESE: Well, moms can be weird.

ANNA: She's watching her weight. Maybe I should too.

GRILLED CHEESE: But how? And why?

ANNA: Because that's how you grow up to be pretty.

GRILLED CHEESE: Huh. But your mom has to eat, doesn't she?

ANNA: She doesn't seem to. Not a lot, anyway.

GRILLED CHEESE: But Anna! You love food.

ANNA: I know. Maybe that needs to change.

GRILLED CHEESE: I think you need some nice melty cheese and a tall, cold glass of chocolate milk. That'll make you feel better.

ANNA: No thanks.

GRILLED CHEESE: I don't understand.

ANNA (Firmly) I'm not hungry.

GRILLED CHEESE: You have to be hungry sometime.

ANNA: No, I won't. I've decided not to be hungry. Ever again.

(The GRILLED CHEESE is rather shocked)

GRILLED CHEESE: Can you do that?

ANNA: I can do anything I put my mind to.

GRILLED CHEESE: But Anna. Don't you love me anymore?

(ANNA looks uncertain. But she makes up her mind. Stands up a little straighter)

ANNA: No. I don't. (She turns away, leaving the GRILLED CHEESE alone and dejected) Wow. I did it. If I can turn down an awesomely gooey grilled cheese sandwich, then I've totally got this. I don't need to eat ever again. Easy as pie.

(ANNA pages through the magazine. She tears out a page of an ad featuring a model. She gathers up her books and tucks the torn-out magazine page into her notebook. She heads to school. On the school bus, a plate of WAFFLES comes up to her)

WAFFLES: Good morning.

ANNA: Here we go again.

WAFFLES: Is this seat taken?

ANNA: No. But—

(The WAFFLES sit. ANNA can't help staring)

WAFFLES: It's okay. You can take a bite. I won't be offended.

ANNA: Um, thanks. But I'm okay.

(They ride for a bit in silence)

WAFFLES: ... Notice anything?

ANNA: No. Should I?

WAFFLES: You didn't have any breakfast.

ANNA: I'm well aware.

WAFFLES: Just thought I should check. Skipping breakfast doesn't sound much like you.

ANNA: I made a choice, so I'm sticking to it.

WAFFLES: It's okay if you forgot. Everyone forgets sometimes. You get busy and forget important things like doing your homework. Or turning off the TV. Or eating breakfast.

ANNA: I chose not to eat breakfast.

(The WAFFLES are stunned by this admission)

WAFFLES: But it's is the most important meal of the day.

ANNA: Of course you think it is. You're breakfast.

WAFFLES: Mmhmm. Homemade waffles with sliced strawberries and whipped cream that doesn't come from a can. Plus scrambled eggs and bacon. You have to have the bacon.

ANNA: Wow. That does sound pretty important. And amazing.

WAFFLES: A good breakfast keeps you energized all day.

ANNA: Yep.

WAFFLES: Where are you going to get your energy today?

ANNA: Mom says I have enough energy to light Chicago for a week. I'll be okay.

WAFFLES: At least waffle about it.

ANNA: Thanks, but ... No.

WAFFLES: Aren't you hungry?

ANNA: I'd rather be by myself right now. Please?

WAFFLES: If you think being polite and business-like will make me forget how you've hurt me, you've got another thing coming—

ANNA: I have to go to class now.

(She leaves the bewildered WAFFLES on the bus)

ANNA: That wasn't too bad. I like school, and it usually goes by pretty fast when I keep busy. I just need to do my assignments and not think about food. Easy as pie.

(She sits at her desk and takes out her notebook, writing with a pencil)

ANNA: During social studies, Ms. Cabbab gives us a special project. She says we're going to learn about planning. We're all supposed to figure out a plan, and write out all the steps, and show our progress to the class. She says planning is important if we have a goal to meet. I've

been learning how to cook several of my grandma's recipes from her wooden recipe box. A recipe is like a plan. I wonder if I can use a recipe for my project.

(She raises her hand to ask the question. But she stops, thinking. Slowly her hand comes down again)

ANNA: But thinking about recipes make me think about my tummy, and it's pretty empty. It's okay, though. I can take it. I can do anything I put my mind to. I hum a little song and think about Honolulu being the capital of Hawaii. Boise is the capital of Idaho. Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana. Des Moines is the capital of Iowa. Farmers in Iowa grow big, beautiful ears of yellow corn. For my birthday in August, Mom boils ears of corn and I cut fat tomatoes into slices and that's what we eat for dinner and it's amazing. Sweet corn smeared in butter and salt ... Num num num ... Wait, what about the capital of Kansas?

(Everyone is looking at her. She answers in front of the rest of the class)

ANNA: The capital of Kansas is Sweet Corn. (Mortification. She remembers the right answer too late) Topeka! Topeka is the capital of Kansas.

When the lunch bell rings, I go to the library instead of the cafeteria. But that's when things get a little tricky.

I've been reading this book, this really exciting story about this girl who was left alone on an island. She has to hunt and fish all by herself, and make her own clothes. It's really intense. Reading is something I love almost as much as food, and it helps me forget for a little while how hungry I really am.

(She reads, completely engrossed in her book. A pair of CHICKEN WINGS comes up to her)

CHICKEN WINGS (Like a chicken) Bawk bawk bawk ...

ANNA: Ssh. I'm reading.

CHICKEN WINGS: But you're hungry and some tasty, juicy chicken wings will hit the spot.

(ANNA doesn't look up)

ANNA: I'm not hungry.

(But her stomach growls. She tries to cover it up)

CHICKEN WINGS: Are you sure? Sounds like your tummy is all rumbling.

ANNA: You're imagining things.

CHICKEN WINGS: So are you. (Pulling at the corner of ANNA'S book) Hey.

ANNA: Stop that.

CHICKEN WINGS: Hey hey.

ANNA: Quit it.

CHICKEN WINGS: Hey hey hey!

(ANNA uses her book as a shield to keep the CHICKEN WINGS at bay. Standoff at Popeye's)

ANNA: What do you want?

CHICKEN WINGS: I was just about to ask you that.

ANNA: I don't want anything.

CHICKEN WINGS: Nothing at all? But you love chicken wings.

ANNA: Not at the moment.

CHICKEN WINGS: Aw.

ANNA: I want to be left alone so I can read my book. Is that so much to ask?

CHICKEN WINGS: What can possibly make you happier than a tasty treat right now?

ANNA: What makes you so sure I'm not happy?

CHICKEN WINGS: You're about as happy as ice cream left out in July.

ANNA: It'd make me happy to know how this book ends, but you keep interrupting. What if she never gets off the island?

CHICKEN WINGS: She's alone on an island? That's depressing. Why would you want to read that?

ANNA (Under her breath) I wouldn't mind being alone on an island right now.

CHICKEN WINGS: I heard that. (The CHICKEN WINGS snatch the book away, peeking at the end. ANNA might cry) Eat some chicken and I'll tell you the ending.

ANNA: My head hurts.

CHICKEN WINGS: Ah ha.

ANNA: But just a little.

CHICKEN WINGS: That headache is your body telling you that you need to eat something.

ANNA: I don't. I'm fine. Please go away.

CHICKEN WINGS: But Anna. I thought we had something special.

ANNA: I don't even like chicken wings. (The CHICKEN WINGS are sad) But it's a lie. I love chicken wings and they would taste amazing right now. I don't even really care about how this book ends. Why am I in such a rotten mood?

On the way back to class, I stop at the drinking fountain to get a slurp of water; I think it might make the rumbling in my stomach go away. But it doesn't. Neither does the ache behind my eyes. I can't seem to think of anything but food. In science, Ms. Cabbab talks about density and buoyancy and how certain objects float in water—

ROOT BEER FLOAT: Like ice cream floats in root beer.

ANNA: In math, we work on fractions, and how a circle can be sliced into eighths and shared—

APPLE PIE: Just like a pie. I have an eighth of an apple pie right here on a plate, warm and gooey with caramel sauce.

ANNA: Oh, man. It's so hard to concentrate when you're hungry! This is so much tougher than I thought.

(She gathers up her school books and heads home)

MOM: Hi there. How was school?

ANNA (A little snappish) Fine.

MOM: Anna.

ANNA (Without the snappish) Sorry. It was fine.

MOM: Just fine?

ANNA: We have a new project due next week. We need to figure out a plan, and write out all the steps, and show our progress to the class.

MOM: Wow. That sounds like it's right up your alley.

ANNA: Maybe. I don't know.

MOM: Well, what are you planning to plan?

(It's a cute joke; MOM waits for ANNA'S response but gets none)

ANNA: My first thought was to show them a recipe, and then make it.

MOM: That's a great idea.

ANNA: I guess.

MOM: I can help you find a recipe if you'd like. Maybe one of Grandma's recipes—

ANNA: I don't really want to do it anymore.

MOM: But it's perfect for—

ANNA: It's okay. I'll think of something else.

MOM: ... If you say so.

(ANNA shrugs and moves away. A big plate of SPAGHETTI enters)

SPAGHETTI: Anna! Guess who.

ANNA (To the audience) I hate everything.

SPAGHETTI: It's your favorite food ever. Real Italian spaghetti! (ANNA avoids eye contact with THE PLATE OF PASTA) Oodles and oodles and oodles of noodles!

ANNA: I don't want any.

SPAGHETTI: Wait, what?

ANNA: Not interested.

SPAGHETTI: I'm sorry, did I— You are Anna, right? And this is Anna's room?

ANNA: Yep.

SPAGHETTI: The Anna I know loves noodles.

ANNA: Do you mind? I have homework.

SPAGHETTI: You'll do better if you eat something.

ANNA: How many times do I have to say it? I don't want you here.

SPAGHETTI: But— But— But—

ANNA: Just go away.

SPAGHETTI: Did I do something wrong?

ANNA: No. Your noodles are perfectly cooked—

SPAGHETTI: Al dente!

ANNA: And your sauce is—

SPAGHETTI: Just the way you like it. Tangy and sweet, with parmesan cheese sprinkled on top.

ANNA: But I can't. Not right now.

SPAGHETTI: Maybe a little later.

ANNA: Not ever.

SPAGHETTI: Not ever??

ANNA: This isn't about you. It's about me.

SPAGHETTI (Fighting back tears) Sure. That's what they all say.

ANNA: I think we should just be friends.

(Heartbreak)

SPAGHETTI: If that's what you want.

ANNA: I'm sorry. I'll miss you.

SPAGHETTI: You say that now, but you'll forget me and eat something else instead.

(The SPAGHETTI exits, a mess of noodles and tears)

ANNA: Spaghetti is probably my favorite food. And it would taste soooooo good right now. I just need to think about something else. Maybe a funny joke.

BOX OF COOKIES: Ooh, I know a funny joke!

ANNA (Incredulous) You're a box of cookies.

BOX OF COOKIES: I am. Fresh baked with an excellent sense of humor. What do you call a redhead throwing a temper tantrum?

ANNA: What?

BOX OF COOKIES: A ginger snap! (Potentially the funniest joke ever—at least, to a box of ginger snaps. ANNA doesn't laugh) I thought it was pretty good.

ANNA: You're not helping. I need to think about something other than cookies.

ICE CREAM: Like ice cream?

ANNA: No.

FRENCH TOAST: Or French toast?

ANNA: No.

FISH AND CHIPS: Or fish and chips?

ANNA: No! (The FOOD leaves her alone) I know I think about food a lot, but this is ridiculous.

(A TURKEY TACO enters, searching for a sound)

TACO: Do you hear that?

ANNA: What?

TACO: That sound. What is it?

ANNA: I don't hear anything.

(The TACO stops, pointing at ANNA)

TACO: Ah ha! It's you.

ANNA: What? I didn't do anything.

TACO: Your tummy. It's like a distress signal. I can hear it rumbling from a mile away.

(ANNA covers up her tummy. Tries to, anyway)

ANNA: Sorry.

TACO: It's okay. I'm here to help out. Because nothing makes your day better than a turkey taco. Am I right?

ANNA: I guess. No. I've quit eating. For good.

TACO: But how can you be a chef if you don't eat?

ANNA: I'm good with directions, and I'm an excellent planner. Ms. Cabbab says so. If I follow the recipe, I'll be fine.

TACO: You have to try your own food. Great artists go to museums to learn from the work of others. Composers listen to music so that they can improve their own. You can't be a chef without eating.

ANNA: I will! I'll be the first chef ever in the entire world who hates food!

(The TACO gasps)

TACO: Anna!

ANNA: Sorry. Look. I'm sure you're super tasty—

TACO: You don't know. You'll never know. You have no idea how tasty and crispy and spicy I am, all cool with lettuce and sour cream. Who doesn't like turkey tacos?

ANNA: I want to be pretty and skinny like the people on TV, and in magazines.

TACO: Why?

ANNA: Why not?

TACO: You are pretty, Anna. What makes you think you're not?

ANNA: Because I don't look like this.

(She shows the torn magazine page to the TACO)

TACO: Do you really want to look like that?

ANNA: She's beautiful.

TACO: But she isn't happy.

ANNA: How do you know?

TACO: She isn't smiling.

ANNA: Yeah. I was thinking about that.

TACO: She's probably grumpy because she's never had a taco. Hmph.

(The TACO leaves. ANNA looks at her magazine page)

ANNA: Oh, what I wouldn't give for a cheeseburger right about now.

(A CHEESEBURGER enters)

CHEESEBURGER: You called?

ANNA: No.

CHEESEBURGER: Yes you did.

ANNA: No I didn't.

CHEESEBURGER: You did. You said "Oh, what I wouldn't give for a cheeseburger right—"

ANNA: I know what I said.

CHEESEBURGER: Ooh, someone's hungry.

ANNA: I'm not.

CHEESEBURGER: You are too. Your temper is short and you're getting upset about things that don't really matter.

ANNA: I don't mean to.

CHEESEBURGER: But you don't feel so good, do you?

ANNA: No.

CHEESEBURGER: Mhmm. What did I tell you?

ANNA: Just go away. (The CHEESEBURGER raises an eyebrow) Please?

CHEESEBURGER: Fine. That is just fine. You know, if I had some French fries here, I bet things would be different. This is what I get for flying solo.

(A very proud CHEESEBURGER exits, head held high, trying not to show that her feelings are hurt)

ANNA: Oh, not French fries. That was mean, to make me think about fries.

MOM: Anna, it's almost time for dinner. Want to help me chop the vegetables?

ANNA (Automatically) With the good knife?

MOM: Of course.

(ANNA considers)

ANNA: No thanks. I should finish my homework.

MOM: Well, it'll be ready soon.

ANNA: I'm not hungry.

(MOM stops. Has the sky fallen?)

MOM: Are you feeling all right?

ANNA: Uh huh.

MOM: But you're not hungry.

ANNA: Nuh uh.

MOM: I'm making veggie shish kabobs.

ANNA: Are you going to have some?

MOM: I made them for you.

ANNA: No thanks.

MOM: How are you feeling really?

ANNA: Fine. Just not hungry.

MOM: Well, I'll put some in the fridge if you change your mind. (She exits)

ANNA: I should have told her about my headache. But then she'd probably make me eat something. For as long as I can remember I've wanted to be a cook. I was going to grow up and move to Paris like Julia Child, and learn to cook things like lobster bisque. I don't even know what a bisque is, except that it sounds lovely, doesn't it? But the taco had a point: if I don't eat the food I cook, how will I know if it's any good?

BROWNIES: You won't. You can't.

ANNA: But if I follow the recipe—

BROWNIES: The recipe is only a guideline. A real chef takes it and makes it her own.

ANNA: And I can't do that without eating.

BROWNIES: Nope, you can't. Brownie?

(The BROWNIES offer ANNA a brownie. She shakes her head. The BROWNIES keep offering. ANNA has to run away. The BROWNIES make chase)

BROWNIES: Aw, come on). Come on).

ANNA: Stay away!

BROWNIES: You know you want to try one.

ANNA: I don't.

BROWNIES: So chewy and chocolatey, with just a dash of salt to cut the sweetness.

ANNA: Why won't anyone believe me when I say—I AM NOT HUNGRY!

BROWNIES: Mostly because it's a big fat lie.

(The BROWNIES disappear)

ANNA: It's because I've surrounded myself with food, isn't it. Because I've decided to be a chef when I grow up. Well, maybe I won't be a chef, then. Maybe I'll be something more exciting. Like a truck driver. Maybe I'll just drive a big truck all over the country, delivering packages everywhere on time.

(It's time for the lightning round)

FOOD: Very important packages. Like boxes and boxes and boxes of strawberry Pop Tarts.

ANNA: I could be a teacher, and help kids learn to read.

FOOD: And all your students will bring you crunchy apples to thank you for your help.

ANNA: Um). I could be an astronaut and travel into space.

FOOD: The moon is made of green cheese.

ANNA: I could work with the monkeys at the zoo.

FOOD: Don't slip on the banana peels.

ANNA: Farmer.

FOOD: Milk.

ANNA: Marine biologist.

FOOD: Sushi.

ANNA: President of the United States!

FOOD: Broccoli!

ANNA (Bursting out) Isn't there a job in the world I can do without thinking about food?

(Her MOM is in the doorway, listening)

MOM: Why would you want a job like that?

ANNA: Nothing. Never mind.

MOM: Really. I'd like to know.

ANNA: I was just trying to figure something out. By myself. Please?

MOM: And you're still not hungry.

ANNA: No. (MOM looks uncertain, but she turns and goes) Ugh! (She plops on the floor and pouts) This has to be the hardest thing I've ever done. I thought memorizing the preamble to the Constitution was hard; I spent a whole afternoon reciting the words over and over. I was the first one in class to do the whole thing. Learning to play "Für Elise" on the piano took me weeks and weeks. But I did it and now I don't need the music anymore. I can just sit down and play it. And flipping a pancake without a spatula—I practiced and practiced until I did it. Why can't I practice not eating and get good at it too? Practice makes perfect, right? Mom said I just need to

put my mind to it. It may take a little while, but I can be patient. Easy as— No. This is not easy. Not at all.

(A skewer of SHISH KABOBS approaches her)

SHISH KABOBS (Sing-song) Anna).

ANNA: Oh, good gravy.

SHISH KABOBS: Mm, gravy. You know, a really tasty dinner is waiting for you.

ANNA: I know. I can smell it.

SHISH KABOBS: Just breathe it in.

ANNA: Ssh.

SHISH KABOBS: Kabob.

ANNA: How do you keep finding me?

SHISH KABOBS: Your tummy is calling out, “Feed me!”

ANNA: I can’t do anything about that.

SHISH KABOBS: You have to eat something. You need food to grow up strong and well.

ANNA: I want to be beautiful.

SHISH KABOBS: You’re never more beautiful than when you’re strong and well.

ANNA: You’re just saying that.

SHISH KABOBS: It’s the truth. Ask your mom.

ANNA: But—

SHISH KABOBS: Look, you can say no if that’s what you really want. But I think we both know that you’re much happier with food in your life than without it. I mean, you haven’t thought about anything else all day.

ANNA: I know! I’m so hungry that I can’t think straight.

SHISH KABOBS: I can think of a really great solution to your problem. It starts with “D” and ends with “inner”. (Sing-song) I’ll be waiting in the kitchen.

(The SHISH KABOBS exit. Longingly ANNA watches them go)

ANNA: I wonder if this kind of thing ever happens to Bobby Flay.

(MOM comes in. She carries a wooden recipe box)

MOM: Anna? Have you thought of a new idea for your project?

ANNA: I told you, I'm not hungry.

MOM: That's not what I asked.

ANNA: I'll think of another project. It's not due for a while anyway.

MOM: You don't want to fall behind. I was thinking we could look through Grandma's recipes and find something—

ANNA: Whatever.

MOM: Don't you roll your eyes at me.

ANNA: Sorry. (She is. Kind of)

MOM: What's got into you today? You never miss dinner. And you always help make it.

ANNA: Not anymore.

MOM: Why not? What happened? (No response) Anna.

ANNA: I was just thinking about being something else when I grow up. That's all.

MOM: I'm glad you're thinking about it. You can be whatever you want. But everyone has to eat, sweetie.

ANNA: Including you.

MOM: Sorry?

ANNA: You need to eat too.

MOM: ... Yes. Well, I've been trying to watch my—

ANNA: Watch your weight. I know.

MOM: Anna. Is that what this is all about? (ANNA shakes her head) Then what? Is it a secret?

ANNA: Sort of.

MOM: You can tell me anything.

ANNA: You won't get mad? Promise?

MOM: Pinky swear.

(They cross pinkies)

ANNA: I decided to try something different today.

MOM: Okay.

(ANNA unfolds the torn magazine page, now a little crumpled and ragged, and gives it to MOM)

MOM: Who's this?

ANNA: Someone pretty.

MOM: Yes. She is.

ANNA: I've been carrying that around with me today, to remember.

MOM: Remember what?

ANNA: What I could look like if— If I stopped eating.

MOM: Why would you—? Oh, Anna. You don't need to look like this.

ANNA: But you want to. You watch your weight, and you go to the gym, and you don't eat a lot (MOM is shocked into silence) Why do you have to watch your weight? Aren't you a good mom size?

(MOM laughs)

MOM: I never thought of it that way before. I guess I am. I don't know. I've always been a little self-conscious of my appearance.

ANNA: But you're so pretty.

MOM: Thank you. It's always been a bit of a sensitive subject for me. Since your dad left— I thought I'd be happier if I tried to become someone else.

ANNA: But it didn't work.

MOM: No. I think you were trying to do the same thing, but in a different way.

ANNA: I thought I could handle being hungry all day. But I can't.

MOM: You don't need to worry about anything except figuring out who you want to be. What you're going to do. Don't worry about the women in magazines.

ANNA: Why not?

MOM: They're not real. They're not supposed to be. They're what we call an ideal—like a dream. Far off and unreachable. Some kids will grow up to look like that, and that's fine. You

can do whatever you want. When you figure out what it is, I'm going to be so excited for you. If you grow up to be President, or a journalist, or a three-star chef— Whatever you choose to be, you will be beautiful. I know it. Especially if you're happy. The way you're happy baking cupcakes and peeling potatoes. In fact, I'm pretty sure you're the only person I know who's happy peeling potatoes.

ANNA: It makes a nice noise. The peeler.

MOM: Exactly. Anna. You're beautiful just as you are.

ANNA: Do you really think so?

MOM: I know so.

ANNA: But if you were trying to look like this).

MOM: I wasn't thinking. I didn't realize you were paying attention. Somehow I forgot that you're always paying attention. I'll make you a deal. Come down and have some dinner, and I will too.

ANNA: Promise?

MOM: Promise.

ANNA: Okay. Thanks, Mom.

(Pinky swear)

ANNA: I've been thinking.

MOM: About?

ANNA: About what to make for my class project. Something from Grandma's recipe box.

(She takes the box from MOM and opens it. Looks through the cards and reads some of them)

ANNA: Sweet carrot casserole ... Orange-glazed chicken ... Baked halibut in cilantro butter ...

MOM: Goodness. Grandma was the best cook. She'd be so proud of you.

ANNA: Beef stir fry with snow peas ...

MOM: Oh, that's a good one.

ANNA: Do you think so?

MOM: Oh yes. The sauce is just a little sweet, and the beef is thinly sliced and tender, and the snow peas are—

ANNA: Fresh and crunchy. I like to eat them all by themselves.

MOM: But with the beef and onions ... Heaven.

ANNA: What if I try this one?

MOM: Do you think the kids in your class will like snow peas?

ANNA: Hopefully they'll be brave and try something new.

MOM: Hopefully.

ANNA (Reading the recipe card) "Ingredients. Two half-pound New York strip steaks, sliced into thin strips."

MOM: You'll need a very sharp knife. I'll help you with that part.

ANNA: "One pound of snow peas; two tablespoons corn starch; two tablespoons soy sauce; one and a half teaspoons white sugar; three tablespoons olive oil; one sweet onion, chopped; two cloves of garlic, crushed; one tablespoon oyster sauce." Do we have any oyster sauce?

MOM: I don't think so. But the Konishis down the hall probably do.

ANNA: "Salt and pepper to taste. And then a little bit of oil for frying."

MOM: Do you think you can handle it?

ANNA: There's one way to find out.

MOM: Okay. Let's go.

ANNA: Wait.

MOM: What?

ANNA: Can I— May I have some shish kabobs first, please?

MOM: Of course you may. We'll have dinner first.

ANNA: Both of us?

MOM: Both of us.

ANNA: What about dessert? We can't forget dessert. We could make cookies, maybe. Snickerdoodles. Num. Or I saw this recipe online about making a fudge cake in a coffee mug. We could make pudding, or slice up apples with caramel, or bake a cake. You know, waffles are so good with syrup. I bet waffles would be good with ice cream. Don't you think so?

MOM: I never thought of it before. I don't see why not.

ANNA: Mm. We could make waffle sundaes with maple syrup and vanilla ice cream. And bacon.

MOM: Bacon?

ANNA: Oh yeah. You have to have the bacon.

MOM: But for dessert? Really?

ANNA: It's just a little bit, for flavor. Salty goodness. Trust me, Mom. I'm going to be a famous chef someday.

MOM: Yes. I think you are.

ANNA: Come on, let's go. I'm so hungry.

(THEY head to the kitchen)

END OF PLAY



a world premiere by
by Melissa Leilani Larson

**Plan-B Theatre Company's
Fourth Annual Free Elementary School Tour
created specifically for grades 4-6
(running time 35 minutes)
October 8-November 19, 2016**

planbtheatre.org/theediblecomplex



**National
Endowment
for the Arts**
arts.gov



THE EDIBLE COMPLEX by Melissa Leilani Larson (running time 35 minutes) is a comedy about ten-year-old Anna, who dreams of being a chef. She is also becoming aware of how her body is different from others at school. So, one day she decides to stop eating, but it's hard to ignore your Food when it starts talking to you.

Plan-B Theatre Company provides a free assembly for schools across Utah each year. THE EDIBLE COMPLEX, our Fourth Annual Free Elementary School Tour, is a funny and thoughtful new play about body image created specifically for 4th thru 6th graders. Students will watch with delight as the food around the protagonist comes alive to teach a lesson about loving oneself in the face of multiple, conflicting messages regarding what society values when it comes to body shape and size.

Why Body Image?

The topic is often neglected in schools, even though it is a part of the health core curriculum and affects boys and girls equally in grades 4-6. One of the reasons it may be neglected is the lack of available lessons or materials for teaching about body image to young people. Only one fifth grade lesson is available through the state board website which is woefully outdated.

A 2015 BYU-Idaho study revealed that:

- Although 6.4% of Utah adolescents are obese, obesity is far higher among boys than girls (13.2% vs. 8.9%) in grade 5.
- 50% of 9-year-old (grade 4) and 80% of 10-year-old (grade 5) girls in Utah have dieted.
- While most Utah and Idaho school districts have drug and alcohol treatment information readily available, nearly none have similar information regarding eating and body image issues.
- Utah boys and girls grades 4-6 are more afraid of becoming fat than they are of cancer, nuclear war or losing their parents.
- Utah boys and girls grades 4-6 are more likely to develop problems with eating and body image than with drugs or alcohol.
- While most Utah and Idaho school districts have drug and alcohol treatment information readily available, nearly none have similar information regarding eating and body image issues.

Prior to the assembly, we encourage you to have some preliminary discussions and activities about body image. Not only will you be addressing the core curriculum, you will be preparing students to get the most out of their assembly experience.

Ask students what they understand about the term body image.
Listen to ideas and come up with a class definition.

Have a discussion with students using the following questions:

- What do you notice in others when you first see them?
- What do you think others notice about you when they first see you?

Encourage students to generate positive messages about themselves. Encourage them to focus on writing a positive comment that is less focused on the body and more focused on talents. Ask students, "Why might it be important to focus more on our internal rather than our external strengths?" Stress that our comments about other people may influence their body image. Even a comment that is meant as a compliment like, "Wow, you are really skinny," can lead to individuals being overly aware of their bodies and what others perceive of them.



Use the Book “The Best Part of Me: Children Talk About Their Bodies in Pictures” By Wendy Ewald

Third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students offer personal observations about their bodies in this insightful, accessible and age-appropriate book. It will help students see themselves and their bodies in a positive light, diminishing the body shaming impulse.

Discuss the Role of Media in Shaping Body Image

Have students generate ideas for the types of media they interact with regularly and encourage them to consider how people in those media are portrayed: What do the characters in video games look like? On television? In movies? What do you like or not like about that? However negative its influence may be, especially related to body image, media is not going to diminish. If anything it will become more present in their lives. Therefore it is important to empower children to be wise consumers. As long as we are teaching children to critically think about the images they are presented with while encountering media, they will be less subject to its negative messages.

In a lesson plan about different versions of beauty, the Teaching Tolerance website offers several free images that students can use to process the beauty and intended messages of particular images. Once students have discussed beauty as portrayed in different images, they may finish the following sentence starter verbally or in writing: Beautiful is _____. This can serve as an additional reminder of how different our perceptions of beauty can be.

Encourage Healthy Lifestyles

Books such as “Eat Healthy, Feel Great” (Sears, Sears, & Watts Kelly), “Good Enough to Eat: A Kid’s Guide to Food and Nutrition” (Rockwell), “Staying Healthy: Eating Right” (McGinty), and “Being Active” (Schuh). Again, there are free posters available through the Teaching Tolerance website to help students identify healthy forms of exercise, healthy versus unhealthy foods, and healthy alternatives.

Utah State Office of Education Core Standards Related to Body Image Grade 4

Standard 1, Objective 1: Demonstrate effective decision-making based on positive self-worth.

Objective 3: Set goals to enhance personal health.

Standard 2, Objective 1: Discover personal strengths and talents that make one unique.

Objective 2: Identify the qualities of positive role models.

Standard 3, Objective 3: Exhibit qualities associated with healthy body image.

Standard 6: Students will understand how a healthy diet and exercise can increase the likelihood of physical and mental wellness.

Grade 5

Standard 1, Objective 3: Predict the influence body image may have on body acceptance.

Standard 5, Objective 3: Develop vocabulary that shows respect for self and others.

Standard 6: Students will understand how a healthy diet and exercise can increase the likelihood of physical and mental wellness.

Standard 7, Objective 2a: Analyze the influence of media on needs and wants.

Grade 6

Standard 1, Objective 2: Demonstrate acceptance of self and others.

Standard 3, Objective 1a: Adopt behaviors contributing to a healthy body image.

Standard 6: The students will understand how a healthy diet and exercise can increase the likelihood of physical and mental wellness.

Standard 7, Objective 3a: Recognize media influences on making healthy choices.

Resources

tolerance.org

WebMD: Body Image and Children

planbtheatre.org/theediblecomplex





planbtheatre.org/theediblecomplex