Words

By: Amy Pettinger

**Characters (in order of appearance):**

**Narrator**

**Paige Young** (the main character, freshman in high school)

**Alexandria Young** (Paige’s little sister, 6th grade)

**Jennifer Young** (Paige’s mom)

**Group of gossiping girls**

**High school students**

**Ashley Fisher** (Paige’s friend, freshman)

**Emily Baker** (Paige’s friend, freshman)

**Celeste Sheridan** (popular girl, freshman)

**Mrs. Lisa Thomas** (Paige’s English teacher, around 40-50)

**Allyssa**

**Ryan**

**Joseph** (members of Paige’s group in English, freshman-sophomores)

**Andrew Fletcher** (jock guy, freshman)

**Sawyer Peterson** (jock guy, Andrew’s friend, freshman)

**Ms. Rebecca Mullins** (guidance counselor at Paige’s school, late 20’s)

**Johnathan Young** (Paige’s dad)

**Act I**

**Scene 1**

*The stage is dark. The narrator is standing center stage near the front. A single light comes on and shines upon him. He is dressed like a normal teenager: jeans, t-shirt, and tennis shoes. The t-shirt is a bright color. His hair is done simply, just brushed. No styling or hair accessories.*

Narrator: (*pausing for a moment before speaking. Looking to be in deep thought.)* Words. There are so many sayings about them. One such saying is one we all know: “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” But are these words, this saying really true? Do words really not hurt you?

*The spotlight goes out as the narrator leaves the stage. When he has left the stage all the lights come on. There is a bathroom set up: a sink, mirror, and counters. On the counter sits make-up items. There is a lot spread out: foundation, sponges, eye liner (both pencil and liquid), eye shadow, blush, lip gloss, lip stick, and various make-up brushes. There is also several bottles of perfume sitting near the makeup. A young teenage girl stands in front of the mirror, hairbrush in hand. She is dressed in nice jeans and a colorful top. She is also wearing brightly covered shoes. Her nails are also done in a bright color. Around her neck is golden locket.*

Paige: *(mumbling to herself)* How should I do my hair?

*She continues to mess with her hair. She stopped when there is a pounding on the door.*

Alexandria: *(yelling, sounding annoyed. From backstage)* Paige! Would you get out of the bathroom? You’ve been in there for an hour and I need to get ready!!

Paige: *(yelling back)* Go away Alexandria!

Alexandria: Mom!!!!!!

Jennifer: *(annoyed. Also from backstage)* Paige let your sister have the bathroom. You’ve been in there long enough.

Paige: *(sarcasm in voice)* fine…. *(now whispering)* But it’s my first day of high school. Don’t they understand what I grow through?

*Taking one final look in the mirror she picks up one of the bottles of perfume and sprays in the air and on herself. The lights then go dark.*

**Scene 2**

*When the lights come one it shows a school setting. There are lockers on either side of the stage, creating a hallway. There is a group of girls in the back corner of stage right, gossiping. All the girls are dressed nicely in designer fashions. There are also several students standing around talking. Paige stands off to stage near the front of the stage with two other girls. All three girls look nervous.*

Paige: *(looking around)* Wow, I can’t believe how many people are here. It’s so big.

Ashley: Yeah, I can’t believe that this day is here. The first day of high school.

Paige: I just hope it was better than junior high.

*Everyone freezes as the narrator comes back on stage.*

Narrator: What Paige is talking about is that she was bullied in junior high school. She dreaded school each day but managed to get by because Ashley and Emily were in all her classes. Now Ashley and Emily have different schedules and they have no classes with each other.

*As the narrator leaves the stage everyone unfreezes and start talking again.*

Emily: Guys look. Celeste Sheridan is coming our way.

*Celeste emerges from the crowd of high school students. She has a snooty look on her face and is dressed in designer clothes: jeans, nice shirt, flats, and a purse. Her hair is done in a nice up-do and her make-up is done to perfection.*

Ashley: What’s she doing coming our way? ‘

Celeste: *(turning towards Paige, ignoring Ashley and Emily)* I was looking over here and I saw your hair Paige. And I was like oh my God is there a rat in that? Seriously do you ever brush your hair? And your make-up. It looks like a two-year-old applied it. Actually I think my two-year-old sister could apply it better than you. *(She then turns towards the group of gossiping girls as she is walking away. She is still speaking loudly, loudly enough for Paige to hear her)* Hey guys look at Paige. Her outfit is so last year. And her hair…

*Paige now has tears in her eyes. She drops her gaze shamefully to the floor*

Paige: *(whispering)* But I spent an hour getting ready today.

Ashley: *(trying to comfort her)* Just ignore her Paige. She doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She just thinks she’s better than everyone else because her family is the richest in town.

Emily: Yeah Paige don’t listen to her. You are way prettier than her.

Paige: *(still whispering. Head is still down)* I got to go

*Paige walks quickly off the stage, head down and shoulders slumped. Ashley and Emily look at her worriedly.*

Emily: Do you think she will be okay?

Ashley: Yes of course she will. *(pauses)* I hope.

*The lights go out with Ashley and Emily looking at each other worriedly.*

**Scene 3**

*When the lights come up there are chair arranged to look like desks. There is about 20-30 students in the classroom. Paige is sitting in the row closest to the audience, about two seats from the front. Students sitting behind her repeatedly poke her in the back when the teacher isn’t looking. When she looks back they all point at each other and giggle. The class is English.*

Mrs. Thomas: Now this is what I expect out of you guys this year for English. We will be going over what is listed on the paper I will hand out in a second. *(holds up papers in her hand)* I also expect you to know the rules of my classroom. Go over this because there will be a quiz over it tomorrow.

*Students groan*

Mrs. Thomas: Now I’m going to put you in groups and I want you to discuss what you know about the first book on the reading list for this year.

*As she turns to her desk to get a piece of paper to poking continues. Paige has a look of annoyance and anger on her face. She will not turn around anymore, hoping that it will make them stop. This only makes them poke at her more*

Mrs. Thomas: Group 1-Abby, Levi, Andrew, Christopher. Group 2-Paige, Allyssa, Joseph, Ryan…

*The students start getting up and move into groups. Paige goes to her group and looks nervously around. These are people she has never met before.*

Allyssa: So what book are we supposed to be talking about?

Ryan: *(looking down at the sheet in his hand)* To Kill a Mockingbird

Allyssa: Never heard of it. But judging by the title it’s about killing mockingbirds.

Paige: Actually the phrase “To kill a Mockingbird” is only a metaphor used in the book. The book is about racism and prejudice in the South during the 1930’s.

Mrs. Thomas: *(listening to group)* Well done Paige. I wish I had more students that know books as well as you do.

Allyssa: *(Once Mrs. Thomas has walked away)* Teacher’s pet. Nerd.

Joseph: Actually she’s right about the book…

Ryan: Are you defending the teacher’s pet?

Joseph: *(quickly)* No!

Paige: *(as everyone is talking)* What’s wrong with being smart? *(drops gaze to the floor again)*

Mrs. Thomas: Alright everyone back to your seats. *(pauses as chairs are put back where they belong and everyone returns to their rightful spot)* Now I have heard some good things out of a few people which encourages me.

*School bell rings signaling the end of class.*

Mrs. Thomas: *(shouting as kids rush out of the classroom)* Don’t forget that there is a quiz tomorrow.

Paige: *(nervously, looking down)* Ummm excuse me Mrs. Thomas could I have my desk moved.

Mrs. Thomas: Is there anything the matter with where you are sitting?

Paige: *(a little too quickly)* No no nothing like that. I just prefer the back row.

Mrs. Thomas: Well that can be arranged. I will talk to Jordan at the beginning of class tomorrow and move him to your seat.

Paige: Thank you

*Paige walks quickly out of the classroom before Mrs. Thomas can ask any more questions. Mrs. Thomas looks at her with concern on her face. The lights dim.*

**Scene 4**

*It is now lunchtime. There is a lot of high school students in the cafeteria. Some are standing in line getting their lunch. Most are already seated at their tables. Paige stands alone.*

Paige: *(to herself)* I wish Ashley and Emily had lunch with me.

*Paige moves through the lunch line. She pays for her food and looks around at the full lunch room. Finally she spots a table that has people sitting at half of it. When she sits down everyone at the table gets up and leaves.*

*Paige looks like she is about to cry again. She will not let any tears roll down her face though. She eats her lunch in silence, hoping that lunch will soon be over. As she is about half-way done eating Andrew and Sawyer walk up.*

Andrew: Hey Paige, why are you eating so much? What did you eat for breakfast today? A doughnut?

*Both boys laugh*

Sawyer: *(still laughing)* No that’s way too small for a girl like her to eat for breakfast. She probably ate a dozen doughnuts.

*Both laugh hard as they walk away.*

*Paige looks at her un-eaten food, suddenly not hungry.*

Paige: *(to herself)* What’s wrong with a size 12? Size 12 isn’t fat.

*Paige looks down. More tears are in her eyes. Yet she will not cry. The lights go dim as the Narrator steps out onto the front of the stage again. He pauses a moment before he begins to speak.*

Narrator: Now when most people are accused with bullying they say that they didn’t really mean it. That they didn’t really mean to hurt someone. But what I think is that they really did mean to hurt that person. You see, everyone knows how much words hurt. Yet kids, teenagers, and adults all across the world use words to put someone down. Most don’t think, however, of the consequences of their words.

*Lights dim.*

**Act II**

**Scene 5**

*The lights are dim. The narrator is standing in his usual spot at center stage close to the audience. Again a single spotlight comes up and shines upon him.*

Narrator: Three months have passed since that first day of high school you saw. Things have only been getting worse for Paige at school. She dreads each day of school and cries herself to sleep every night. Once a straight-A student, her grades have started to slip. Depression has become a main part of her life.

*As he finishes speaking the lights dim. He goes offstage. When he goes offstage the lights come up, the hallway scene is up again. Paige is standing at her locker with Ashley and Emily. Her hair is pulled back into a messy pony tail. She has a baggy dark shirt on. It has long sleeves. She’s lost weight. Her jeans are also dark and baggy. The shoes are black. No make-up is on her face, showing swollen eyes from crying herself to sleep every night. Her nails are painted a dark color, but are badly chipped. Ashley and Emily have looks of concern of their face.*

Ashley: Are you okay Paige? You’ve lost weight

Emily: Yeah. And your eyes are really swollen. Plus I haven’t seen you in bright colors for at least a month.

Paige: *(the lack of confidence is in her voice)* Yeah I’m fine

Ashley: Well you don’t look fine and I’m seriously wondering if you need to talk to someone. You need help. Something is going on with you and you are not saying a word to me or Emily. We just want to help you Paige.

Paige: *(loudly*) No! I don’t need help! I told you that I’m fine.

*Paige walks away quickly, anger is evident in the way she is walking. Ashley and Emily exchange worried glances.*

Emily: I think it’s time we went to see Ms. Mullins.

Ashley: I think you’re right.

*Lights dim.*

**Scene 6**

*As the lights come up Ashley and Emily are sitting in the counselor’s office. They are sitting at a table. Ms. Mullins is sitting in a chair facing them. All three have serious looks on their face. There is a computer and a phone on the desk in the office.*

Ms. Mullins: Why are you girls here today?

Emily: Well we are worried about our friend.

Ms. Mullins: What is your friend’s name?

Emily: Paige Young. She’s a freshman.

Ashley: Paige just hasn’t been herself lately. We are really worried about her.

Ms. Mullins: How has she been different?

Emily: Well she used to dress in really bright colors. She hated dark colors because she said that they were depressing. Now those colors are all she wears. She doesn’t really care about her appearance anymore either.

Ms. Mullins: How so?

Ashley: Well she used to take a long time doing her hair in the morning. Her hair is really pretty but it’s hard to manage. She would brush it really well in the morning but it will knot right back up by afternoon. Now all she does is pull it up into a ponytail. A messy one. And her nails used to be nicely painted in bright colors. Now if they’re even painted they’re badly chipped. It’s like she doesn’t try anymore.

Ms. Mullins: Do you know if anything has been going on in her life? Problems at home? Or here at school?

Emily: Yes, I think it’s here at school. She was picked on at junior high but Ashley and I were always there to defend her and cheer her up. Now we don’t have any classes together. Ashley and I get lunch together but that’s it. I think she’s been having trouble in her classes.

Ashley: Her grades have been dropping. She was complaining to me about her parents wanting to ground her because her grades had dropped. When I asked her why her grades had dropped she clammed up and changed the subject. She’s been doing that a lot lately. When we ask her if anything is wrong she either clams up and changes the subject or gets angry.

Emily: She used to be a straight-A student and wouldn’t get mad over anything…

*There is a silence in the office as each person thinks about what has been said.*

Ms. Mullins: Thank you girls. I know this couldn’t have been easy. I think I need to talk to Paige myself now. Do you know what class she’s in?

Ashley: Yes I think I do. I think she has English with Mrs. Thomas this hour.

Emily: Can you please not tell her our names if possible.

Ms. Mullins: I can try but that is not always possible. Do you girls (need a pass?

Emily & Ashley: Yes please.

*Ms. Mullins signs two hall passes. Both girls exit the office to backstage. Ms. Mullins is now in her office alone. She waits several moments, thinking, before picking up the phone.*

Ms. Mullins: *(dials number)* Lisa? It’s Rebecca. Can you send down one of your students to my office? *(pauses)* Which one? Paige Young. Tell her to bring all of her stuff with her. *(another pause)* Nope that’s all. Thank you. Goodbye.

*There is about a minutes wait between the phone call and Paige stepping into Ms. Mullin’s office.*

Ms. Mullins: Sit down Paige. A couple of your friends are worried about you.

Paige: *(anger in her voice)* I’m fine

Ms. Mullins: I’m not convinced of that. Is there anything you want to tell me about?

Paige: No. If I tell someone it will just make it worse. Then they will just call me a rat too.

*Paige slaps her hand over her mouth like she has just said too much.*

Ms. Mullins: Are you trying to say that they call you names?

Paige: *(forcibly)* I said that everything is fine. I don’t need your help. I don’t need anybody’s help. I’ve got everything under control.

Ms. Mullins: *(sadly)* Okay if that is what you are insisting. I can’t force you to tell me anything. You may go.

*As Paige gets up to leave the bell rings for class to end. Ms. Mullins puts her head in her hands and looks to be in deep thought.*

*Lights dim.*

**Scene 7**

*As the lights come on, Paige is sitting on her bed, alone. The room is decorated in bright colors. A laptop is sitting on Paige’s lap. On the bedside table next to Paige’s bed is a glass of water, a bottle of pills,*

Paige: *(reading off the laptop)* “Paige is the biggest loser in the school.” “She looks like a turd.” “Her nose is just like Pinocchio’s and her ears are just like Dumbo’s.” “Doesn’t she know that she is ugly? Why does she even come to school?” “She should just kill herself.”

*With each line Paige has more emotion in her voice. She has a look of sadness to her. By the last sentences she is crying.*

Paige: *(still crying)* They are right. I don’t belong on this earth anymore. I’ve starved myself to make me skinny but that isn’t good enough. I’m fat. I’m ugly. I’m unloved. I’m worthless. I hate myself for not being good enough.

*Paige is now sobbing. She takes the laptop, closes it, and sets it under her bed. She reaches for the bottle of pills and the glass of water. She also picks up the piece of paper and folds it up in quarters. She writes something on the front of it. When she does this the audience can see the cuts on her arms.*

Paige: *(looking at the scars)* I just wish someone would have accepted me.

*As Paige curls up into a ball on the bed, the lights dim.*

**Scene 8**

*As the lights come on Paige is still curled up in the same position. The folded-up piece of paper is now in her hand, which is visible to the audience. The glass of water is empty and is sitting on the bedside table next to the empty bottle of pills. There is a peaceful look to Paige’s face.*

Jennifer: *(from backstage)* Paige! Time to get up! Paige! PAIGE! Paige?

*Jennifer comes onstage, with a look of concern on her face.* She *walks up next to Paige.*

Jennifer: *(shaking Paige’s body)* Paige honey, didn’t you hear me call you?

*When Paige still doesn’t respond she starts to look worried. There are tears in her eyes. It is then she notices the folded-up paper in Paige’s hand. She starts screaming and collapses to the floor. About thirty seconds after she screams, Alexandria and Johnathan come running into Paige’s room.*

Alexandria: *(with concern)* Mom!? What’s wrong? PAIGE!?

*Alexandria starts crying too. She falls to the floor next to Jennifer.*

Johnathan: *(He also shakes Paige’s body. He picks up the note from Paige’s hand. He starts crying and falls to the floor next to Alexandria and Jennifer.)* Paige… What have you done?

*He starts to read the note*

Johnathan: Dear Mom and Dad,

*After this line is read Paige’s voice cuts in from backstage.*

Paige: If you are reading this then I finally ended my pain. You see I couldn’t live with myself anymore. School has been a nightmare every day. I wanted to tell you, wanted to tell you what I was going through but I couldn’t. I just couldn’t face another night of crying myself to sleep. Another day of hoping that nobody would notice I was in the room. All I wanted was one day where everyone just left me alone. I’m sorry to inflict this pain upon you. I love you.

Johnathan: Paige.

*All three are on the floor, hugging each other, sobbing heavily.*

*Lights dim.*

**Scene 9**

*The stage is dark. The narrator is standing in his usual spot. The lights come on with one spotlight like usual.*

Narrator: *(pauses before speaking)* It has been a year since that fateful day. Everyone who took part in the bullying of Paige were stunned. Like kids, they never thought of the impact that there their words were making. Each student faced punishment, but it was too late. They did, however, change their ways. The whole school did. After that day, each student vowed that they would never put another person down again. But that won’t erase the guilt that they were feeling.

*The narrator exits the stage. When he has exited the lights come on to a graveyard scene. It looks peaceful. In the center of the stage is a gravestone with a picture frame of Paige in front of it. There are also fresh flowers in front of the grave. Ashley and Emily come onto the stage, looking extremely sad. They walk up the gravestone and kneel next to it.*

Ashley: Hey Paige. Can you hear us? We miss you.

Emily: It’s been a year Paige. You wouldn’t recognize your parents. Your mom just stays inside all day, staring at the last picture she has of you. Your dad works all the time, as if he is trying to erase the memory of you.

Ashley: Alexandria hasn’t been herself either. She won’t admit it but she cries herself to sleep every night just like you did. In the day she can’t seem to smile. We try to help her but we don’t know how.

Emily: We miss you so much Paige. I keep wondering if there was more we could have done. Was there more? I would give anything to have you back, even if it was just for one day.

Ashley: Ms. Mullins didn’t return to be the guidance counselor at school this year. I think she wonders what more she could have done too.

Emily: Everybody blames themselves. Your death impacted the whole school. There have been no more reports of bullying for the entire school, even the freshman class who weren’t at school last year don’t put each other down.

Ashley: I hope you are finally at peace Paige.

Emily: We would give anything to have you here again.

*Both girls start sobbing. The lights dim with this as the narrator walks back onto the stage.*

Narrator: You see, words do leave a lasting impact on everyone. As Brennan Manning said, “Anyone we come in contact with, we either offer them life, or we drain them; there is no neutral exchange.” You see, when we come across a person we either lift their life up, or we bring them down. The question is, which one do you do? Do you give life or do you take it away?

*Lights dim.*