

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Dylan Smythe

Has Sadness Ever Taken You Down to the Dump?

by Caitlin Green

"THIS IS THE WORST DAY EVER!" screams Terry, throwing down her yellow backpack in a fit of overwhelm. She stands in front of a brightly colored backdrop depicting a bedroom equipped with a lava lamp, bookcase, and wall hangings, hand-painted by Mehgan Abdel-Moneim. Terry has arrived home from school, visibly upset.

With hands in fists, lips clenched, a furrowed brow, and tension held in almost every inch of her body, it seems she could erupt at any moment. Straining, she stutters, "Have you ever felt... Have you ever felt....", and before she can finish, a growl of frustration escapes from her depths. Starting again, she attempts, "Have you ever felt like..." but is interrupted by the same intrusive flood of emotion that she's struggling to convey. It's almost as if her brain and body are in combat; she's at maximum capacity. Frantically searching for the words, and practically shaking at this point, Terry finally unleashes a hearty, feral roar of anger and exhaustion that leaves her breathless.

This was the start of the charmingly playful and inventive family-friendly story, *Magic Trash Day*, a clown-theatre and contemporary dance performance by [Rough and Tumble Productions](#). Meant for ages 4-10, the theater work journeys viewers through a child's process of identifying her own emotions and learning ways to regulate, with the help of a few unexpected friends along the way. Emerald Sims, playing Terry, convincingly depicts the moment where emotion and intellect are at odds: the urgent impulse of expression, and the desire to be understood, especially when dysregulated. Sadness (Marsell Chavarria) and Heap (Bellisant Corcoran-Mathe) encourage and affirm Terry's self-discovery, ultimately uncovering a new awareness and perspective of feeling down in the dumps. They accompany Terry on a magical adventure where they go down to "The Dump."

Sadness is a gloomy yet curious trickster who is felt but not seen by Terry. He wears blue overalls with pictures of crying hearts and rain clouds painted on them and a sparkly blue clown nose. Sadness pesters the fed-up Terry, who isn't quite able to identify his presence

but can feel his influence.

As Terry reads a book to try to calm down, Sadness sits down behind her, pressing their backs together and rocking her side to side. Terry seems to notice but responds as if there's no one there... until Sadness takes her book. Frustrated and confused, she eventually repositions herself to lay on her stomach. Sadness, too, repositions himself, sitting comfortably on top of her feet, which are kicked up behind her. The two continue the duet with a movement score that embodies the playful banter between them. Though Sadness's essence is comical, his looming presence seems to push Terry even further into frustration. So Sadness encourages Terry to embark on an adventure to "The Dump" where she will meet Heap.

Heap, a seer, draped in trash, wears a vest and pants layered with recycled items and fabrics, plus a helmet topped with a red solo cup. They lug around several large plastic bags of garbage like a trashy Santa Clause, with the cheerful gleam to match. Heap is known for repurposing unwanted items into tools for facilitating a very unique variety of mediumship. With the help of a few young audience members who offer up their trash donations, Heap is able to read their garbage in order to assess each item's origin story and even connect psychically to the one who disposed of it. Using the oracle, and chanting, "Speak through the rubble, what is Terry's trouble," Heap is called to brew a potion in a trashcan cauldron that's sure to cheer Terry up!

But... it doesn't work. Despite that bubbles gloriously ascend from the garbage bin, Sadness returns.

This time, Terry and Sadness' duet is full-bodied, flailing, and has an air of surrender about it. It's emotive, quirky, and satisfyingly in sync. Their dance gives the feeling of being blown around by the wind: suspended bodies, backward matrix hinges and sideways lunges with arms extended, waving wildly overhead. There's running, full-body thrusts, and a moment of planting their feet, openstance, with arms wide as they look upward as if to surrender to the force. The duet leads to Terry finally seeing Sadness; they get to know each other better, and things start making sense for Terry.

Magic Trash Day is a fun, educational, and relatable invitation to acknowledge big feelings, with a lighthearted and humorous approach. By personifying sadness as an unseen, curious trickster, who is mostly here to help, the show creates an invitation for viewers to welcome the emotion with a little more patience and acceptance.

"Next time, I'll recognize you sooner," Terry says to Sadness. Smiling, Sadness responds, "That way we won't have to go all the way to The Dump."

[Magic Trash Day](#), Rough and Tumble Productions, Urban Movement Arts, Feb. 23.

Homepage image description: *Two people dressed in blue sit on top of an overturned recycling bin, with their arms extended overhead as if riding a rollercoaster. They have nervous looking facial expressions, and are in front of a curtain backdrop which is painted like a bedroom. There is a hand coming from behind the backdrop, grasping it, as if preparing to enter the stage.*

Article image description: *Two people stand in front of a curtain backdrop that's painted like a trashed cave and swamp. One person is wearing a blue checkered long-sleeve shirt with black overalls and big blue swimming goggles, holding the lid to a trash can. Another person is holding a blue fly-swatter in one hand and a toy stuffy in the other. They wear a costume made of trash and repurposed fabrics, and are standing in front of a large plastic trash bag.*

By Caitlin Green
March 2, 2025