

HER OWN WORST ENEMY

A Serious Comedy About Choosing a Career

ALICE SAVAGE

*I*NTEGRATED *S*KILLS *T*HROUGH *D*

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Steve Herbert and Molly Dill were interviewed by the author in November, 2017. The author and publisher would like to thank them for their time.

Introduction

DTHE LANGUAGE classroom is a great place for drama. When you produce a play, you combine both language and skills practice. You study vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. You also learn about conversations and develop strategies for interacting with others. Plays can demonstrate the phrases and expressions we use when we make friends, disagree with someone politely, offer praise, and reach other conversational goals.

In this book, you will have a chance to work on all these areas by preparing and performing a play. Through background readings and discussions, you will develop your vocabulary and explore the themes of the play. Through focused stress, intonation, and pronunciation work, you will learn to communicate the emotional intentions of your message, as well as learn the sounds of words in connected speech. Finally, through the production of a play, you will explore culture and language while performing the sometimes serious, sometimes funny, moments of the life of a young woman struggling with the decision of what to study in college.



A special feature of this book is the opportunity to work on something called **pragmatics**. Pragmatics describes the skill of getting messages across through the culturally appropriate use of language and gesture. Everyone uses pragmatics in their own language, but it is practiced in different ways among different communities. When people are good at the pragmatics of a language, they reach their goals without hurting their relationships. Here is an example:

Mike lives alone. He would like an invitation to a holiday dinner from his friend Lin. Mike says to Lin, “What are you doing for Thanksgiving?” Lin explains that she and her husband are having a few relatives over. “Oh, that sounds nice,” says Mike. There is a pause. Lin says, “What are you doing for the holiday?” and Mike says, “Oh, nothing.” There is another pause. Lin says, “Well, why don’t come to our house? It’s a simple gathering, but we’d love to have you.” Mike is happy, “Oh, great!” he says, “Thank you so much. That’s very kind of you!” and the conversation continues.

In this short exchange, Mike communicates his desire for an invitation indirectly. Mike cannot say, “Can I come to your house for Thanksgiving?” because that would not be polite. He would be putting Lin in an awkward position because it would be hard for her to say no. Instead, Mike creates the conditions for Lin to understand his situation. Then *she* can decide to invite him or not without feeling uncomfortable or rude.

In this instance, Mike is demonstrating good social skills, which is another way of saying he’s good at pragmatics. However, this is only true if Lin is happy with the conversation as well. If Lin feels that Mike has pushed her to make the offer, she will use her own pragmatics skills to let him know that his efforts to get an invitation were inappropriate.

Pragmatics skills are most useful in challenging situations. These situations rarely appear in textbooks, which is why pragmatics is often considered a hidden language. In fact, people tend to need pragmatics most during uncomfortable or important conversations. In these cases, people with good pragmatics skills use special phrases to signal their intention. For example, look at the sentence, “I don’t want you to take this the wrong way, but I don’t think singing is for you.”

The expression, *I don’t want you to take this wrong way, but . . .* is a familiar signal in English. It is how you can warn someone that you are about to say something that is truthful, but not complimentary. When the listener knows criticism is coming, they can prepare for it. There are many of these signal phrases that you can use to feel in control of a conversation. A play is a good place to learn them because you can experience the expressions in a social and emotional context.

In addition to pragmatics, while working on the play, you will have opportunities to practice the more familiar skills of pronunciation. Because you will be speaking high frequency phrases used by family members and friends, you can work on natural tone, intonation, and gesture. You may notice that your voice goes up or down, or slower or faster, depending on the mood of your character. Sometimes you will try to speak in a joking way. At other times, you will show frustration or confusion.

to be shown to a wider audience. Also, feel free to allow students to adjust or even change lines to suit their goals.

There are other ways to be flexible with the script as well. If you have several groups stage the same play, consider having some of the groups rewrite a specific scene, such as the ending, or even write new scenes. This will allow them to be creative and keep the show fresh from one performance to the next. If groups produce different plays, you may want to start performances with a short introduction to the script's central issues. This can be done by the director as a way to help the audience follow the plot. In addition, you can change names in the script to reflect different genders or countries as needed. You can also add or double up roles. However, it is a good idea to have at least one person who does not act and can take on the role of director, videographer, and/or stage manager.

While students are rehearsing, you can circulate, take notes, and provide support as needed. You can also meet with each group to give specific feedback on pronunciation or scene work. Some groups may need more encouragement than others, but as long as the play is comprehensible and they have the language skills to communicate with each other, they should be able to produce a play with minimal support.

You also have choices on how you handle performances. Some teachers like to do all the plays on the same day, while others do one a day for two days. If your class is doing one play, you might perform for a different class, perhaps one at a lower level. In any case, allow at least 30 minutes for each performance, and consider doing a talkback or having classmates give feedback at the end. (See the post-performance section on page 57)

Finally, there are ideas for different types of assessment at the end of the book. If using a rubric such as the one on page 62, it is a good idea to give the rubric to the students at the beginning of the production so they know what you will value.

Most importantly, enjoy the process! Experiment. Think critically. Be creative. And above all, have fun!

SUGGESTIONS FOR DIFFERENT CLASS SIZES

Different classes have different numbers of students. This can present a challenge when producing a play, so here are some suggestions for making sure all students are engaged. By dividing the class into groups and giving each group a project, you can provide practice for everyone. One way to do this is to give students a preference sheet. Some may prefer to act. Others may prefer to participate in a debate.

Group option one: Produce the play

Group option two: Have a second group produce one of the other plays in Alphabet Publishing's Integrated Skills Through Drama series. Have the two groups perform for each other.

Group option three: Organize and have a debate based on the readings and possibly some outside research on the topic. See page 58. (See instructions and materials for structuring a mini-debate on the Alphabet Publishing website at <http://www.alphabetspublishingbooks.com/integrated-skills-through-drama>)

Group option four: Have one or two videographers make a documentary about the process. They can interview and film the actors as they prepare for their roles. Then the videographers can edit the video and share it with the class.

Group option five: Write and produce a short sequel to the play. Choose one of the following ideas or create your own. Create enough characters so that everyone has a role. See page 58 for ideas.

DISCUSS THE TITLE

What does *She is her own worst enemy* mean? Read the situations below. Which ones do you think fit the expression? Can you think of other examples?

- a. Po likes to play soccer, but he often gets angry and fights with other players. Now it is hard for him to find a team to play with.
- b. Lan wears very old clothes to job interviews because she does not think her appearance is important to employers.
- c. Jefta asks his older brother for help with his homework so he can do well on the test.
- a. Prima can never find her keys, so she is often late to appointments.

She is her own worst enemy

In English, we often use the phrase *She is her own worst enemy* or *He is his own worst enemy* when we think someone does something that is not good for them. Sometimes it is a habit or a personality characteristic that leads the person to make a poor decision. It is possible to say *You are your own worst enemy* to someone we know very well, such as a family member, but most often we use it to talk about someone who is not there.

We should also note that the people who say this may or may not be correct in their analysis.

WRITE ABOUT THE TOPIC

People usually like what they are good at, but what if they don't? What if someone has a talent for something such as sports or singing, but they don't want to develop it as a career? Should they do it anyway? Have you ever been in this situation? Do you know someone who has?

Discuss your ideas in groups. Then write a short paper with your answers to one or more of these questions. Try to use examples of someone you know to support your ideas. When you finish, share your thoughts with a partner.



The pragmatics of encouraging someone

Sometimes people see something valuable in another person, but that person cannot see it in themselves. In order to encourage the other person, a friend, partner, or family member might ask questions or make observations that help the person gain confidence.

Note that pragmatics in an informal family conversation is very different from pragmatics in a formal work or academic situation, so it is important to pay attention to the context so you can make informed decisions about what to say, how and when.

A wants to give B confidence.

B is reluctant to accept an opportunity.

MOVE 1: Bring up the topic.

Greet B, exchange a few pleasantries. Then introduce your purpose. Say you heard about B's opportunity/challenge.

Acknowledge the opportunity. Then give reasons why you think it won't work.

MOVE 2: Ask questions to challenge B's thinking.

Listen to B carefully and ask WH questions:

- Why do you say that?
- Where does this idea come from?
- Why do you think you have this opportunity?
- Truthfully, what is *really* making you nervous?

Listen to A and answer the questions honestly.

MOVE 3: Help B imagine a more positive view.

Listen to B and try to guide B to a positive perspective with questions and observations. E.g.,

- What do you think it would be like to . . . ?
- If you did say yes, how would you . . . ?
- I remember how you handled . . .
- I have noticed that . . .

Use A's guidance to explore new ways of thinking. Become more hopeful. Thank A for his/her help.

Her Own Worst Enemy

READ THE SCRIPT

Read the play. Make notes. Then discuss the questions that follow.

 **THE PLAY** takes place in and around the home of a family living in the United States. A high school senior, Aida Rivera, is preparing for college. Everyone has plans for her, but Aida has her own ideas. The play explores the question, “How do young people make good choices when it comes to choosing a college major?”

CAST

Marie Rivera: (mid 30s) Aida's mother

Laith Rivera: (late 30s) Aida's father

Lily Chen: (late 20s) Laith's sister

Ken Chen: (mid 30s) Lily's husband

Aida Rivera: (18) a senior in a U.S. high school (Note that Aida can be played by a male actor. Then his name would be Aiden.)

Vanessa Lewis: (17) Aida's friend (This role can also be played by a male. Then his name would be Van.)

Alan Horncastle: (late 30s) A theatre director at The Juilliard School, a well-regarded college for the Performing Arts¹(This role could also be played by a female. Then the name would be Alyssa)

Offstage Voice: This is a staff member at The Juilliard School.)

Note: The characters are meant to be a combination of people from different cultural backgrounds. They were born in the U.S., but the cast can decide on the heritage countries.

¹ The character of Alan Horncastle is not based on any real staff member of the Juilliard School living or dead.

Other Roles

Director: This person manages the production, helps actors prepare in a way that supports the message of the play. The director may also introduce the play and lead the talkback after.

Stage manager: This person assists the director, organizes sets and set changes, manages special effects, such as the phone sounds, and turns off lights between scenes. The stage manager also reads the script silently along with the actors and gives lines if actors forget.

Videographer: This person videos the play and edits the video. They can work with groups individually to achieve close-ups and sound clarity. The Videographer may also interview cast members to create a documentary about the production as a side project.

Scene 1: *The Rivera family home. Evening. Marie Rivera, Laith Rivera, Lily Chen, and Ken Chen are all sitting around a dinner table stage right. They've just eaten a meal, and they are relaxing and chatting. Stage left, Aida and Vanessa are sitting on the floor and looking at their phones. They do not move or speak during this scene. Or they can be facing away from the audience.*

Marie: Aida doesn't know how talented she is.

Ken: She doesn't?

Marie: No, I don't think so. She can't see herself, can she? And she certainly won't believe me.

Lily: What do you mean, Marie? You're her mother.

Marie: It's complicated. I mean, Aida's just 17, right? And she's never seen herself on the stage, so she doesn't really know. How could she?

Ken: That's a shame. She really is good. I was amazed at the show tonight. Her performance was so deep. Seriously! I wasn't expecting much because it was just a high school production, but wow! It was like professional theatre!

Lily: Ken's right. She's brilliant. But she's good at a lot of things. She can do anything she sets her mind to.

Laith: (*Pleased*) Lily! That's nice of you to say so.

Lily: No, I mean it. You don't need to be modest, Laith. Aida is an amazing girl.

Marie: Yeah, I'm just sad that she doesn't want to do theatre anymore. She's quitting.

Ken: Noooooo! Please tell me you're kidding.

Marie: No, I'm not. It's true. She says she only did it because her friends were doing it.

Lily: Well, it's not so easy to be an actor in this world. Imagine all the auditions, all the rejections, all the waiting around for a director to call. I understand. Those things would be depressing!

Laith: (*Joking*) Yeah, maybe you're right. Aida says she wants to study biology or something like that, so we'll have to settle for a scientist in the family.

Marie: I suppose we can't complain. It's just hard to think that was Aida's last performance.

Ken: Maybe she'll change her mind.

Lily: And if she doesn't, she'll be a great scientist.

Marie: Yeah. (*She sighs.*) I just can't help being sad, you know?

(*The couples get up and leave the stage.*)

Scene 2: *The same house as scene 1, immediately after. The focus shifts to the living room where Aida and Vanessa are sitting. If they are facing away from the audience, they turn around. The girls put down their cell phones and start talking. They are close friends and feel comfortable teasing each other.*

Vanessa: They're talking about you, Aida.

Aida: I know.

Vanessa: Doesn't it bug you?

- There's **nothing wrong** with **working** in a **hospital**
- What do you mean "**trapped**"?
- I'm about to **open** the **door** and **jump** out into **traffic**.
- **Machines** and **computers** are doing **a lot of work** these **days**.

Notice that **emphasizers** (*so, a lot of*) may be small but they can be stressed to make an impression on the listener.

- a. Practice saying the examples in the box above out loud. Then make corrections.

Word Stress

When words have two or more syllables, hearing stress on the wrong syllable can make the word incomprehensible for listeners, so it is also important to learn the stress of longer words. In the following examples, the stressed syllable is underlined, but some dictionaries capitalize or bold-face the stressed syllable, or they put a dot over it.

It's **just** an **audition**

Do your **breathing exercises**.

You don't have to **decide** now.

We want you to be one **hundred percent** sure.

I **really appreciate** your **time** here, but I **promised** my **father** I'd **come** just to **make** him stop **pressuring** me.

Okay, okay, I'm at **baggage claim**.

- b. Go over your lines and mark nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that you want to stress.
Use a dictionary to identify and mark the stress of longer words.
- c. Use a recording device such as your phone to record yourself saying the lines out loud.
Listen and make adjustments.
- d. Practice saying your lines with the other actors in the play. Help each other with intonation, pronunciation and stress. Speak loudly and clearly.

Post-Performance

 **THE FOLLOWING** activities can be used to explore the themes and language with the audience after a production.

LEAD A TALKBACK

The director/teacher leads the class in a conversation about the play between the actors and the audience. There are many ways to do this but the following process is helpful.

- a. There is a five-minute break after the play ends while audience members take a few minutes to write some questions. Here are some examples:
 - How did you prepare for your role?
 - Do you think Aida's parents are typical?
 - Why do you think your character . . . ?
 - Do you think the father made mistakes about the type of science on purpose?
 - How does the ending fit with the title?
 - Why do you think Aida fought against becoming an actress?
- b. The director and actors come out on stage and face the audience. The director invites questions and comments. The audience asks about the play or the characters, and the actors answer. People can direct their questions to individual actors.

WRITE AN ALTERNATIVE ENDING

Break up into groups and discuss other possible endings. Answer the questions. Then write your own dialogue.

- a. What happens in the new ending?
- b. Why does it happen?
- c. How will it affect the lives of the different people involved?
- d. Which is a better ending for the characters?

Perform your new ending for another group. Which ending is more believable and why?

GATHER LANGUAGE

Go through the script one more time and circle phrases and stems that you want to remember for when you have important conversations:

- Encouraging/responding to encouragement
- Giving advice/receiving advice
- Teasing a friend/responding to teasing
- Talking through an issue/supporting someone talking through an issue
- Praising/receiving praise

Note: Remember to pay attention to language used in casual situations between friends and in more formal situations between a professor and a student.

HAVE A MINI DEBATE

Form two teams and a panel of judges. One team thinks Aida made the right decision. The other team thinks Aida made the wrong decision. Each team gets a turn to make an argument. Then the other team gets a chance to respond and make a counterargument. You may have three or four rounds of argument and counterargument. The judges can individually write down up to five points for each team at the end of each round. When the debate is over, the judges meet to add their points and declare a winner.

See instructions and materials for structuring a mini-debate on the Alphabet Publishing website at <http://www.alphabetspublishingbooks.com/integrated-skills-through-drama/>.

CREATE A SEQUEL

Work with a partner or in small groups. What do you think Aida's life will be like in the future? Pick a time, such as five or ten years from now and write a short play about Aida's life. You may want to invent new characters. Here are some ideas, or you can invent your own.

- Five years later, Aida comes back to her high school class reunion. She talks to different people about their career choices, and they describe what they are doing and how they feel. (Students can research different careers for each character.)
- Ten years later: Write about a day in Aida's life as an actress. First, she has an interview with a reporter. Then she meets her parents for dinner, and they talk about their lives now.
- Ten years later: Vanessa has gone into a STEM field. Aida visits her, meets Vanessa's family, and Vanessa shares about her work. Perhaps her husband is also in a STEM field.