

Short Plays
for English Learners

COLORADO GHOST STORY

A goat farm can be a surprisingly dangerous place



by Alice Savage

With a Foreword by Steve Hirschhorn

Alphabet 
PUBLISHING

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FOREWORD

There is probably little need for me to present and extrapolate on the manifold benefits of the use of drama in the English language teaching classroom but it is worth mentioning that there is a body of research which shows how much well-organised theatrical events can improve student-centred learning, encourage collaboration amongst peers and increase exposure to consistent real-world language. Of course the process isn't magical and all concerned must be engaged and challenged to work together for the ultimate aim of generating a work of art together and that's exactly what Alice Savage's handiwork aims at.

Alice Savage provides a much-needed response to the lack of dramatic material which is already prepared for classroom use, as opposed to adaptations of already existing plays or creating productions from other types of literature. The author has cleverly relieved busy teachers of the drudgery of changing a masterpiece into something English learners can access by creating her own mini masterpieces which are already accessible and graded or gradable.

Not only are her plays beautifully crafted in terms of the scripting but they also carry important messages which are perfectly aimed at the age group for which these works are intended. Significantly, these tenets are not presented in obvious or condescending ways but are a subtle by-product of the story line.

The stories themselves are engaging page-turners with the reader (and presumably the audience) waiting with bated breath to see how the situation might be resolved. Sometimes, in the style of the best mysteries, there is no obvious resolution, which naturally motivates players and indeed audiences to consider and discuss a possible solution.

As well as the plays themselves, the Alphabet Publishing website (<http://www.alphabetpublishingbooks.com/scripts>) provides numerous aids for students and teachers to access before, during and after the production, once again supporting the teacher in what is a thoroughly worthwhile endeavour: drama in the English language teaching classroom. There is invaluable advice on how to approach a production as well as extremely useful information on the use of language, pronunciation, pragmatics, and more. There is a plethora of materials attached to the plays themselves which will guide teacher and students into some vital development.

It is worth noting that in being involved in such drama activities (whether as actor, prompter, stage hand, director, or whatever), the benefits to language development are clear but there is no doubt that there are considerable advantages in terms of personal growth too. Shy students can become more self-assured, bossy students more collaborative, disruptive students more focused, and students with poor self-esteem can become more confident.

I imagine that teachers will welcome this innovative addition to their resource library and probably be waiting impatiently for the next play in the series!

*Steve Hirschhorn
Budapest, Hungary
January 2019*

TO THE STUDENT

This play is full of conversations. When you work with a script, you get to try out these conversations. You can become someone else for a short period of time. You can say what they say, feel how they feel, and want what they want. If you like the way a character says something, you can take that phrase and use in your own life.

Whatever Trevor was hoping for when he came to King George Goat Farm in the Colorado Rockies, it wasn't this. His host family are vegetarians, and his American "brother" is in the hospital. To make matters worse, he's forbidden to go out at night. When his friend Pippin comes for a visit, the two friends make a plan to find out what is really going on under the cover of darkness. They quickly find out that the danger is real.

Of course, creating your performance may take a bit of work. As an actor, you will have to show many emotions. You'll need to speak clearly and collaborate with other actors to make the relationships feel real. At the back of the book, you'll find some support. **Production Support** has specific ideas for structuring your work and troubleshooting. **Pronunciation Tips for Actors** helps you develop strategies for working on the sounds and rhythm of English, and other suggestions for preparing your play. Finally, there is a list of **Theater Vocabulary** with commonly used words and terms.

Finally, there are many additional supporting materials and teaching ideas on the Short Plays for English webpage on the Alphabet Publishing website, <http://www.alphabetpublishingbooks.com/spel>. There, you will find engaging activities and icebreakers for getting comfortable with your classmates as well as some monologues and short sketches that you can use for practice.

And if you like this play, you might want to try another one. There's something magical about performing a story with an audience, and people often want to continue. In fact, there's even an expression for it: You've got the theater bug.

Alice Savage

PREVIEW

When was the last time that you took a risk? Where were you, and why did you do it? What happened, and what did you learn about yourself or the world?

VOCABULARY

1. _____ my host brother
 2. _____ a miner
 3. _____ keep an eye on them
 4. _____ a ghost story
 5. _____ made a fortune in silver
 6. _____ haunted house
 7. _____ hold still!
 8. _____ It backfired big time!
 9. _____ worth a try
 10. _____ in their territory
-
- a. *watch them carefully*
 - b. *It is a good idea to try.*
 - c. *a home with the spirit of a dead person in it*
 - d. *This land belongs to them.*
 - e. *My plan failed and made things worse for me.*
 - f. *Don't move!*
 - g. *I lived in his house with his family as an exchange student.*
 - h. *got a lot of money and became rich from mining silver*
 - i. *a story about a dead person that appears to people*
 - j. *someone who digs for gold, silver or other valuable metals*

Answers: 1. g 2. j 3. a 4. i 5. h 6. c 7. 8. e 9. b 10. d

A PLAY

COLORADO GHOST STORY

SETTING

A ranch at the end of a dirt road in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Genders can be changed as needed.

TREVOR: A foreign exchange student who has been placed in the home of goat farmers in Colorado

PIPPIN: Another foreign exchange student who is spending the weekend with Trevor.

MADLINE: Trevor's host-mother and co-owner of the King George Goat Farm

ARTIE: Trevor's host-father and co-owner of the King George Goat Farm

SCENE 1: Late afternoon: An old house in the Colorado Rockies that is attached to a goat farm. Trevor and Pippin are in Trevor's bedroom.

TREVOR: I'm so bored!

PIPPIN: So, Colorado's not exactly what you expected?

TREVOR: No! It's a good thing you came to visit. I was about to go crazy. I've got no Internet, no television, no friends. My host brother is in the hospital. . .

PIPPIN: What happened?

TREVOR: He fell off a cow!

PIPPIN: What was he doing on a cow?

TREVOR: Well, a boy cow. You know. . . what are they called? I forgot the word.

PIPPIN: A bull? What was he doing on a bull?

TREVOR: He was in one of those cowboy shows. It's called a rodeo. That's like a thing where cowboys ride cows and . . .

PIPPIN: Bulls.

TREVOR: Balls. The cowboys ride balls.

PIPPIN: Bulls.

TREVOR: Bulls! And the bulls jump around and try to make them fall off.

PIPPIN: Oh, right! I know about that. You can break your neck.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR ACTORS

Answer the questions as your character. Then discuss your answers with your scene partners.

1. What do I want at the beginning of the play?

2. What is stopping me? (Do I have a fear, an enemy, a hardship, or some other obstacle?)

3. What strategy or strategies do I use to try and achieve my goals? (They can be positive or negative.)

PRAGMATICS: VENTING

People sometimes complain to friends about things they cannot control. This is called venting, and it allows speakers to express frustration or anger without having to confront the person who is responsible for the problem. Speakers sometimes use expressions such as the following in

Venting	Responding
- I can't even get a steak!	- That's too bad.
- I'm so tired of this!	- Maybe you'll get used to it.
- And get this! They make me stay in my room.	- That sounds pretty bad.
- I didn't sign up for this.	- I hear you.
	- I'd be upset, too.

conversations where there is venting.

A. Find a scene in the play where a character vents. Discuss the pragmatics.

1. Why is the person venting?
2. How does the other person try to help?
3. Is the other person successful?

B. Practice the language used in the scenes you found in part A in one of the roleplays below. A vents and B tries to help.

1. The line at the store was very, very long.
2. You have the worst neighbor in the world.
3. A coworker or classmate is asking for too many favors.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The following advice and suggestions come from professional theatre and pronunciation experts.

Tablework

Read the whole play and talk to your classmates about the story. What does it make you think about? What is your opinion about the ending? Would you handle the situation differently?

Talk about the characters and take notes. How do the different people in the play change? What do they realize as they experience the events in the story? Do some people change more than others? Also, think about which character is most like you or people you know. Or, who is different from you? In what way?

Get comfortable performing in front of your classmates. Work in pairs and groups to play drama games. Say your lines with different emotions or try to show where you are simply by the way you move. Then get other students to guess the situation. Have fun, and don't be afraid to be silly.

Preparation

Think about how you will produce the play. Depending on the number of students in the class, you can have two or even three casts. You can also create new characters who can perform a monologue at the beginning. Or you can write in new scenes.

If you don't have enough students for two or three separate casts, some actors can participate in more than one performance. Finally, you might consider doing plays in repertory, which means some students perform a different play in the series. Or if some students are feeling creative, you might write a prequel or sequel to perform separately.

Once you've organized your approach, choose a role or audition for one. Remember the students with the biggest roles will have the most work, so think about how much you can commit to the process. Then once your role is assigned, use a highlighter to mark your part. This will help as you prepare your script for working with other actors. Use the extra space on the page to make notes about your character, your feelings, and move-

PRONUNCIATION TIPS FOR ACTORS

As an actor, your job is to connect with the audience. When this goes well, your viewers feel what you feel and experience what you experience. Achieving this connection is difficult for any performer, but it is especially hard when you are speaking in a new language. There is always the possibility that the audience will not understand. However, you can work with your script to make sure your English is comprehensible and that you are expressing the emotions and intentions of the character with your voice and body. The benefits of this pronunciation work can transfer to English in other areas of your life.

Here are some tips for making your pronunciation clear and believable. You can do these activities in any order, and often you may revisit one or another of them during rehearsal.

1. Decide how you will express the emotions that your character feels. Read your part and think about your character. What is their backstory? What do you notice about your character's outlook on life? What is your objective in the play as a whole and in each scene? What is your obstacle? How do you feel? Angry? Powerful? Confident? Secretive? Scared? Frustrated? Or some other emotion? Write your emotions and other notes in the margin of your script next to your lines. When you understand your character, you will be able to identify the character's feelings and make decisions about your intonation. It will be believable and support your message.

2. Next, mark your script for stressed words and syllables. First, identify the thought groups. Every thought group has at least one focus word, the word that carries the most meaning, along with surrounding grammar words, which are often reduced or linked. Focus words are generally nouns, verbs, adjectives, and sometimes adverbs. They also include emphasizees. Put a slash between thought groups and underline or highlight the focus words. Here is an example.

The **branch breaks**, / and I **fall**./ **Crash**, / **bang**, / **boom**. /
I **bounce** / from **branch** / to **branch** / and as I **fall** / all I'm
thinking is / I've **got** / to **protect** / my **head**.

3. You may also want to mark other pronunciation points such as syllable and word stress, the linking of consonant sounds such as *get_uto* or vowel to consonant sounds such as *have a_useat*, as well as reductions that

THEATER VOCABULARY

The following words and concepts can be helpful as you prepare to produce your show.

Actor/actress Actors (male or female) and actresses (female) are the performers who become other people in order to act out a story for an audience. Who are you in this play?

Audience The people who watch a play. Sometimes they are called audience members. The audience members might laugh or take a deep breath during the play, but they do not interrupt the show.

Audition An actor who wants to be in a play must try out for a part in an audition. During an audition, the director may ask the actor to read a monologue (a short speech spoken to the audience) or a scene with another actor. The director offers the part to the actor whom they think will play that role the best.

Backstory The characters in a play represent people with a past, a childhood, a family and other details that are not always in the script. Actors and directors sometimes imagine those details to help them decide how the characters will act. What is your character's history?

Blocking Blocking involves the way characters in a play stand, sit, walk, where they move, and who they look at. What will you do with your body during the play?

Character A play usually has two or more characters. They want or need something to happen, and their actions and words tell the story of how they try to get it. Who is your character and what does he or she want?

Costumes Costumes are the clothing that the actor wears to look like the character. A character's clothing is a part of that character's story. What clothing will best show your character's personality? What will you wear as this character?

Curtain (call) A curtain is the piece of fabric that hides the stage, but it also indicates the end of the show when it closes. A curtain call is the bow you take at the end of the play.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ALICE SAVAGE comes from a theaterrical family, but she strayed from that path to become an English-language teacher.

However, she could not escape her past. After many happy years in the classroom, she eventually came to realize that theater offers a great way to learn a language.

She now lives in the most international city in the U.S., Houston, Texas, where she teaches, writes, and produces plays with her students at Lone Star College.

In addition to the Integrated Skills Through Drama series, Alice has books with Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and Wayzgoose Press.

More Drama at Alphabet Publishing

alphabetpublishingbooks.com/scripts

Short Plays

These 15-minute plays provide a script with vocabulary and pragmatics support and are suitable for a drama class or a short theater module.

Just Desserts: A foodie drama about a chef gone bad

Introducing Rob: Lola's family is thrilled about her new boyfriend. Until they actually meet him.

Strange Medicine: Who decides what the truth is?.

Colorado Ghost Story: Two exchange students make trouble in the old West.

The Drama Book

This teacher's guide is designed for teachers who want to try drama in their English classrooms but don't know where to start. It contains monologues, sketches, and scripts, as well as activities and teacher support—everything you need to go from drama games and pronunciation activities to a full production!

ISTD Coursebooks

These coursebooks contain a complete curriculum with background readings, vocabulary and pragmatics exercises, writing, pronunciation activities, and more to support the production of a 20-30 minute one-act play as an elective or module in an oral skill class.

Her Own Worst Enemy A serious comedy about choosing a major.

Only the Best Intentions A love triangle between a guy a girl and a game

Rising Water A stormy drama about what happens to people in a crisis

“...provides students with ample opportunities to practise using language in a variety of situations. . . . they’ll be having so much fun that they won’t even realise that they are learning!”

—David Farmer, NILE training consultant, director, and author

The Short Plays for English Learners series makes it easy to bring drama into the classroom. These original plays were written to expose students to real-world language and authentic situations, while also engaging them in a real page-turner!

Colorado Ghost Story is about a foreign-exchange student disappointed to find out that the Wild West means his vegetarian host family’s goat-farm. But something is killing off the rabbits. And it may not stop there.

As students read, practice, and perform the play, they learn:

- cultural contexts
- conversational moves
- intonation and body language
- high frequency lexical phrases and grammar patterns

These scripts are short enough for a project in a speaking class, but expandable to fill a whole elective class, drama unit, or theater club production.

Learn more at alphabetpublishingbooks.com/spel

