

Short Plays  
for English Learners

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# JUST DESSERTS

*A foodie drama about a chef gone bad*



by Alice Savage

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[info@alphabetpublishingbooks.com](mailto:info@alphabetpublishingbooks.com)  
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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 support website (<http://www.alphabetpublishingbooks.com/istd>) 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

## PREVIEW

plays themselves which will guide teacher and students into some vital development.

It is worth noting that 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  
MA, PGCHE, FHEA  
*Budapest, Hungary*  
*January 2019*

## PREVIEW

Some bosses treat their employees unfairly. Do you know a story about a bad boss that you or someone you know experienced? How did the story end?

### Language

Define each phrase below by writing the letter of the explanation on the line next to the phrase.

1. \_\_\_ He's hard on her.
  2. \_\_\_ a pastry chef
  3. \_\_\_ You took advantage of me.
  4. \_\_\_ She's been on my case.
  5. \_\_\_ He looks familiar.
  6. \_\_\_ You owe me an apology.
  7. \_\_\_ a terrible misunderstanding
  8. \_\_\_ Prove it.
  9. \_\_\_ threatened to fire me
  10. \_\_\_ a bully
- 
- a. *someone who bakes cakes and desserts*
  - b. *I think I've seen him before.*
  - c. *I expect you to say you are sorry to me.*
  - d. *someone who uses power or strength to hurt others*
  - e. *He said he might take away my job.*
  - f. *You used my work to benefit yourself.*
  - g. *Show evidence for what you said.*
  - h. *people do not share the same information*
  - i. *He is critical of her work.*
  - j. *She keeps telling me to do something.*

A PLAY

# JUST DESSERTS

## SETTING

The kitchen and restaurant of a seaside hotel. There is a beach and a fairground nearby.

## CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

*Genders can be changed as needed.*

LAYLA: A high school or college student who works as a pastry chef at the Hearthstone Hotel

KURT: Head chef at the Hearthstone (Kurt's age can vary, but he's older than college age.)

HANA: A third college student who works as a waitress at the Hearthstone

JAY: Another college student who also works as a prep cook and dishwasher at the Hearthstone

MAXINE: Owner of the Hearthstone (Maxine's age can vary, but she is also older than college age.)

ANDRE: A local food writer and judge in baking contests.

JUST DESSERTS

*SCENE 1: Layla is in the kitchen. Kurt walks by and looks over her shoulder, frowns disapprovingly and leaves. Hana makes a face.*

HANA: Why is Kurt so hard on you?

LAYLA: Me?

HANA Yeah

LAYLA: Isn't he hard on everyone?

HANA: Yeah, but he picks on you more. Like, why do you have to prep the salad? That's Jay's job.

LAYLA: Well, Kurt's the boss.

HANA: Yeah, well, he's not a very good one.

*(JAY enters.)*

JAY: I can't believe that guy!

LAYLA: Who?

JAY: Kurt!

HANA: He's in a particularly bad mood today.

JAY: *(Turns to LAYLA)* Why is he so hard on you, Layla?

LAYLA: Really?

HANA: See, Layla. Even Jay has noticed it.

LAYLA: Well, if you say so.



PREVIEW

JAY: Business is down.

HANA: Yeah, I've noticed that. The restaurant isn't crowded anymore.

JAY: Kurt's supposed to be this big celebrity chef, and he's losing customers.

HANA: But I have some good news.

JAY: What?

HANA: Layla's orange saffron cake is a big hit. Customers love it!

JAY: That's right. It's fantastic. And that pistachio cream is brilliant.

LAYLA: It was just an experiment. I don't think Kurt liked it.

HANA: Well, it's genius, and if his majesty King Kurt doesn't like it then he can . . .

*(KURT enters. Everyone becomes tense.)*

KURT: What did you say, Hana?

HANA: Oh nothing.

KURT: No really. What did you say?

HANA: Errr, just something about how the customer is king.

KURT: That's weird, Hana. *(Turns to LAYLA.)* Layla, you ruined my strawberry trifle!

LAYLA: I did?

JUST DESSERTS

KURT: (*Disappointed*) How many times do I have to tell you? The strawberries need to be cut into quarters. You can't leave them whole. The little old ladies won't be able to eat them! Do you even know how to eat a trifle?

LAYLA: Not really.

KURT: You want a bite where cake, cream, and strawberry come together and create a perfect blend of flavor and texture.

LAYLA: I got it. Create a perfect blend of flavor and texture.

KURT: Then don't just throw in berries. Cut them, and cut them right!

LAYLA: Okay, okay.

KURT: Layla, let me make myself clear. I will not tolerate laziness in my kitchen. You either follow instructions, or you find another job.

LAYLA: I'm not lazy. I just thought I'd try something a little different.

KURT: (*Sighs impatiently*) Have you won any awards for your desserts?

LAYLA: No.

KURT: Well I have. My trifle won the Seaside County Dessert Bake-Off two years ago and I got an honorable mention in the Watertown Food Fair that same year. Do you know what that means?

LAYLA: Yes.

KURT: It means professionals have recognized me as a top baker.

LAYLA: (*Sighs*) Right.

PREVIEW

JAY: I think Layla just believes in whole berries.

KURT: Oh, so now you're an expert, Jay?

JAY: No, but . . .

KURT: How about you, Hana?

HANA: Uhm, I kind of liked Layla's trifle.

KURT: It figures. (*Turns to LAYLA*) Don't think, Layla, and don't listen to them. Just follow my recipe. Didn't I just say it's an award-winning recipe?

LAYLA: Yes, you told me.

KURT: Then don't try to improve it! No wonder we're losing money!

*[Lights out]*

*SCENE 2: The dining room of the restaurant. Kurt is drinking coffee and reading a magazine. The owner, Maxine, comes in. She is carrying a computer or books.*

KURT: Maxine! I wasn't expecting you.

MAXINE: Kurt, have you got a minute?

KURT: Sure. Just waiting for a delivery. What's up?

MAXINE: (*Opens a folder/laptop.*) Business is down, Kurt.

KURT: No, I don't think it is.

JUST DESSERTS

MAXINE: I've got the books right here. Look at these numbers.

KURT: That can't be right.

MAXINE: Look again if you need to, but I want you to fix this.

KURT: Raise prices?

MAXINE: No, I will not raise prices when business is down.

KURT: Cut staff?

MAXINE: We may have to. But how are you going to get back our customers?

KURT: I know you have an idea. Why don't you just tell me.

MAXINE: As a matter of fact, I do. Your trifle is getting a little old. We need something fresh! Something that will get us some media attention. Maybe even a prize. I want you to create a new dessert.

KURT: Oh.

MAXINE: Yes. I need to see some creativity.

KURT: (*Getting an idea*) Now that you mention it, I have been working on something.

MAXINE: Oh, tell me about it.

KURT: I've been playing around with some new ingredients like . . .

MAXINE: What?

KURT: Well, saffron!

PREVIEW

MAXINE: Cool! That's an exotic spice. And it's yellow. I like it! Good for spring and summer. Go on.

KURT: Maybe a saffron cake.

MAXINE: Good. . . (*Gestures for KURT to keep talking*)

KURT: With. . .

MAXINE: With what.

KURT: With, um, pistachio cream.

MAXINE: Brilliant! I love pistachios. Why have you been hiding this from me?

KURT: It's not ready.

MAXINE: Well, make it ready. I want you to enter this year's Seaside County Dessert Bake-Off.

KURT: But it's in two weeks.

MAXINE: Come on, you've won it before. I have faith in you, Kurt. I'm going to sign you up.

KURT: I, uh . . .

MAXINE: Gotta run.

(*MAXINE leaves. KURT puts his head in his hands and groans.*)

*[Lights out]*

## Rehearsal Notes

Use this space to make notes during your rehearsal. Write down the date, what you did, what went well, and what you want to work on.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What went well?

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What do I/we need to work on?

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**Other Notes**

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## PRAGMATICS

### Responding to false accusations

People sometimes make false accusations. They say that someone else is cheating or lying. Sometimes they want to hide their own guilt. Sometimes it's hard for their victims to defend themselves without getting upset, but certain expressions can help.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Um, I don't really know how to answer that.</li> <li>- I think there's been a misunderstanding here.</li> <li>- I'd like to tell my side of the story.</li> <li>- That's not true, and I can prove it.</li> </ul>	<p>mild</p>  <p>strong</p>
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A. As you read, note the scenes in the play where a character makes a false accusation against another. How do the other people respond? Does the accuser get away with it?

B. Practice the language used in the scenes you found in part A in one of the role-plays below. Partner A makes a false accusation, and B responds.

1. A accuses B of forgetting to lock the door.
2. A accuses B of reading A's private email messages.
3. A accuses B of eating the last cookie.

C. What other interesting conversational pragmatics did you notice in the play?



# 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

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*Colorado Ghost Story* Things do not go according to plan when Lola brings a new friend home to meet her family

*Death Wish* Lari's frequent accidents alarm her friends

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## ***Drama for English Learners: Activities, Lesson Plans and Scripts for the Classroom***

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!

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

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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!

In *Just Desserts*, a baking competition pits an award-winning chef against a member of his own staff with a secret recipe from a faraway country.

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