

# ONLY *the* BEST INTENTIONS

*A modern romance between a guy, a girl, and a game*

ALICE SAVAGE

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



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*A Modern Romance Between a Guy, a Girl, and a Game*

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# Introduction

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**THE 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 study conversations and develop strategies for interacting with others. Plays can demonstrate the phrases and expressions we use when we make friends, express frustration, praise talent, and reach other conversational goals.

In this book, you will have a chance to work on all these skills 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 expressive



language while performing the sometimes serious, sometimes funny, struggles of a serious computer gamer, his fiancée, and the lively family he hopes to marry into.

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, you will have opportunities to practice the more familiar skills of pronunciation. You can develop a natural tone, effective intonation, and even use gestures because you will be speaking high frequency phrases in contexts typically used by family members and friends. 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.

Word and sentence stress will also be important. As you rehearse, you must make decisions about which content words to emphasize to best support your meaning. You'll say these words louder and clearer so the audience will understand. You'll also become aware of syllable stress in longer words. Having the right stress helps people recognize the word when you are saying it.

Finally, you'll have a chance to practice free conversation skills when you read and discuss the topics in the background articles and prepare to perform the play. You'll share opinions, give reasons, make suggestions, offer and respond to advice, and provide encouragement to your peers. These are all useful academic and workplace abilities.

After the play, you will find additional activities for repurposing the content and language in new ways. Hopefully, by the end of this book, you'll feel a little more confident about your English conversational skills, especially when talking about the role of technology, the Internet, and esports, and how these new media are impacting human relationships. If that is not preparing for the future, what is?

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The activities and ideas in this book are presented in a specific sequence. However, the book is designed to be flexible. You can use it alone or to support another book. Some teachers may take a full session to work on the play and the accompanying activities. A longer time frame allows you to use some of the post-performance activities to go deeper into research and skills development throughout the rehearsal period. Other teachers might want

to work on the play one day each week to prepare for a final end-of-session performance. Still others may take a week, skip over some of the activities, shorten rehearsal time, and have students read with a script in hand. However you decide to do it, students working in collaboration will benefit from their experience with conversational English.

The best way to plan your theatre production is to read through the background readings, script, and post-performance activities. Then decide on an approach that best fits your students' level, your curricular objectives, and your schedule. Also decide how much you will need to be involved in supporting the production. For many classes, the students are able to do much of the work themselves.

You can mix and match the activities to fit your curricular objectives. There are texts that can be expanded to work on reading skills. There are discussion and writing prompts that allow students





to analyze the topic from different perspectives. These can also be used as preparation for a mini-debate on the role of screens in family life—a major theme of *Only the Best Intentions*.

To plan the production, think carefully about your schedule. You want students to feel a sense of accomplishment at the end. Having students memorize lines, block, rehearse, and perform a play is rewarding but it takes an investment of time and energy. If you don't have the time, you can aim for a rehearsed reading in the style of Reader's Theater and still reap many of the benefits (For Reader's Theatre support go to <http://www.alphabetspublishingbooks.com/integrated-skills-through-drama>).

There are a number of ways to adjust the materials to the level of your class. This module is designed for intermediate levels and up. For lower levels, you could simply use the play as a text. You can do the activities and discuss the characters' decisions and the plot, as well as the topic of choosing a college major. Then you can have students practice reading the parts from the script to work on sounds and intonation. For middle levels, you might have students memorize and perform the play, but do a rehearsed or staged reading (see page 59 for some ideas on how to produce the play). To increase the challenge for higher levels, do a full performance. Have students memorize lines and perform for another group, or even create a video to be shown to a wider audience. Also, feel free to allow students to adapt the script to suit their goals.

If you have several groups stage the same play, consider small changes such as having a male actor play the lead, or having some of the groups rewrite a specific scene, such as the ending, or even write new scenes (Feel free to change names in the script to reflect different genders or countries as needed). Small adaptations like this will allow you and the students to be creative while keeping 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 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. For more ideas see the suggestions below.

While students are rehearsing, you can circulate, take notes, and provide language and skills 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 or more 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 25 to 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 67)

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 66, it is a good idea to give it 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 one:** Produce the play as is.

**Group option two:** 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 67. And see the materials for structuring a mini-debate on the Alphabet website at: <http://www.alphabetpublishingbooks.com/integrated-skills-through-drama>.

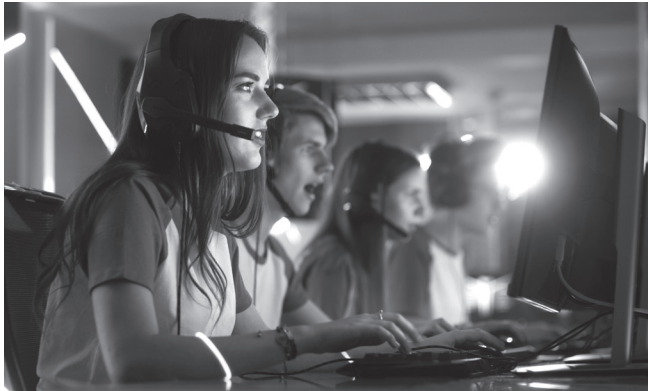
**Group option four:** Have one or two videographers make a documentary about the process. They can interview and film the actors as they prepare for their roles. Then the videographers can edit the video and share it with the class.

**Group option five:** Write and produce a short sequel to the play. Create enough characters so that everyone has a role. See page 68 for ideas.

**Group option six:** Use the Pragmatics Lesson on page 69 to create a short play.

# Preview

LOOK AT THE PHOTOS and discuss your answers to the questions below:



Team of video game players



Sports Team Celebrating Victory

## THINK ABOUT THE TOPIC

- How would you describe the personal lives of the people in these pictures?
- How are computer gamers similar to athletes? How are they different?
- Do you agree with this statement: “When people are in love, they will not let anyone or anything get in their way?”

## DISCUSS THE TITLE

Read the examples with the phrase *best intentions* below. What do you think happened in each situation? What does *best intentions* mean in each case?

- One roommate to another:** Oh no! Now you are really sick. I’m so sorry I made you eat those eggs. I had the best intentions. I thought eating something would make you feel better.

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### *Why we text*

One of these researchers is Sherry Turkle. The MIT sociologist turned her investigations into a book called *Alone Together*. In her book and public talks, she explains why people started choosing texting over phone calls. According to Turkle, texting allows people to control the conversation. They can revise and edit what they say. They can also choose when to communicate and how much time they want to spend. When they are done communicating, they can just stop answering a text. They also do not have to listen to any boring or uncomfortable parts

of a conversation. In a 2012 TED Talk, she described a 15-year-old boy who said, “Someday, I’d like to learn to have a conversation, but not now.” For this teenager and many other subjects, texting removed much of the emotion from the interaction and was therefore easier to handle than a real conversation.

In a different example, Turkle emphasized the potential downside of texting. In an NPR interview with Terry Gross, she talked about a young man who wanted to cancel a dinner with his grandparents. When his mother told him to call them, he heard the emotion in their voices. He sensed their excitement about spending time with him. The phone call created an emotional connection, and he changed his mind. He promised to visit them. Turkle explains this might not have happened if he had just texted that he couldn’t make it.

### *How avatars change us*

Like texting, avatars also give people a sense of control. Avatars are the characters and creatures that people become in a game or a computer simulation. Sometimes, people choose an avatar. Other times, people can create the avatars by choosing hair color, body type, and other features. Avatars appeal to both males and females because they offer an alternative identity. While this is a little bit like getting up in the morning and choosing what clothes to wear, it can take the creation of a separate self a step further.



Nick Yee is particularly interested in avatars. The Stanford-trained researcher has done experiments that show an interesting effect of virtual reality. When people become an avatar, the physical appearance of that avatar can affect their behavior. In one of Yee’s experiments,

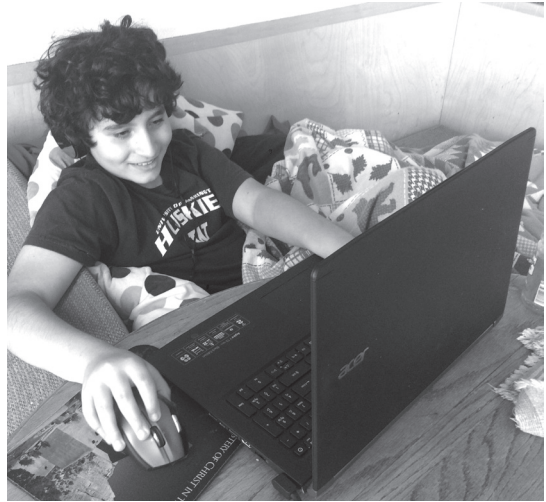


**READ** the article about the way computers can create conflict between generations. Highlight and take notes on important points. Then do the discussion task after the text.

## A Gamer in the Family

In the home of an online gamer, dinner time can be a source of stress. The food is on the table, the family is waiting, and the 13-year-old is deeply involved in battling a dragon or taking a tower. Someone calls him—90% of multiplayer online battle games are played by males—and he responds, “Just a minute!” However, the minute passes, and still he does not show up. If he leaves the battle arena, he’s letting his teammates down. He can’t do that, so he makes his family wait.

The struggle in this household is not unique. Around the world, families must cope with the fact that many young men and women are living in two worlds. They have the reality of school, family responsibilities, and other activities. Then they have the virtual reality of a game in which they build an identity, a skill set, and a social life that may feel as important to them as the people in their real world.



### *Parental expectations*

Many parents see gaming as a threat. When mothers and fathers see their child in a dark room, lit only by a screen with flashing explosions, they feel alarm. And when that kid makes a choice not to come to the table because he has to finish a game, they are hurt. The average parent today did not grow up playing multiplayer online games such as League of Legends, StarCraft, or World of Warcraft, so their idea of a normal childhood is different from their children’s. For the older generation, childhood means going outside, playing in the park, meeting friends, learning to climb trees, ride a bike, or one of many other activities that involve a physical rather than a virtual experience.

This conflict between parental ideas and children’s preferences often grows worse during the early teenage years. Parents can use parental controls with younger children, but they often expect their thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds to take on more responsibilities for organizing their time and setting goals. Many hope their child will make good choices and are disappointed when those choices do not meet their expectations (A 2015 Pew research survey reported that about a quarter of adults feel that most gaming is a “waste of time”).

For gamers, negative parental attitudes can be painful, especially for players who feel passionately about their game. They may struggle to explain the rules and goals to an indifferent listener. Or a player might have an exciting win, but no one in the family cares. As a result, gamers can feel lonely.



***Attentive listening***

Collaborating with others requires good listening skills. When people have your attention, they can talk through their ideas. When you have their attention, you can talk through yours. Then you can work together to put the best ideas into action. Good listeners remember the ideas they hear. Then they respond to those ideas before they transition to their own ideas.

Use one of the stems below to rephrase the speaker's ideas.

- I am interested in what you said about . . .
- So you get a lot out of . . .
- So here's what I think you are saying . . .
- You make a good point about . . .

To transition, use one of the stems below to add or comment.

- So my experience is a little different . . .
- But don't you ever feel that . . .
- Yeah, you're exactly right, and I also think . . .
- What you said about . . . makes me think about . . .

**PRACTICE ATTENTIVE LISTENING**

Choose an appealing online site or app such as a game, an online store, a social media site, or a video channel. Then form groups of four or five for the speaking task. Use the sentence stems from the box above, or your own ideas.

- a. Choose a timekeeper. The timekeeper sets a phone timer for three or four minutes and monitors the speakers to make sure they listen attentively.
- b. One speaker begins by introducing his or her online activity and explaining why it's appealing.
- c. Other partners respond, but each member must summarize what one previous speaker has said before continuing the conversation.
- d. The time keeper stops if anyone does not summarize the ideas of the previous speaker.
- e. When the timer goes off, discuss your feelings about the activity. What was hard? What did you like? What did you not like? Also listen to the time keeper's comments.
- f. Switch roles and repeat.

family in the U.S.! We are his family now. We need to make him feel welcome, so yes, you have to come.

*(Gigi walks in looking upset. Fiona is still on the phone. Gigi stops and looks at her mother. Fiona sees her and holds up a finger.)*

**Fiona:** Paulo, I gotta go, uh-huh . . . bye. *(Hangs up the phone and looks at Gigi)* Gigi?

**Gigi:** Mommy!

**Fiona:** What is it? What happened?

**Gigi:** I've broken up with Oscar! *(Wipes away tears)*

**Fiona:** But . . . you've only been engaged for 3 weeks!

**Gigi:** *(Sits down)* I know, but it was a huge mistake. It's over!

**Fiona:** Oh, Gigi. *(Looks at her watch)* Do you want to talk about it?

**Gigi:** Can you, Mommy?

**Fiona:** You're my daughter. Of course I can. . . . For 15 minutes?

**Gigi:** I don't know what to do! We had so many plans.

**Fiona:** Tell me. What has my future son-in-law done?

**Gigi:** He's a computer addict. That's what he's done. He only cares about his stupid game.

**Fiona:** Oh, honey, I'm so sorry.

**Gigi:** Do you know he gets up at five o'clock in the morning to play with people in Korea?

**Fiona:** Korea? How do you know?

**Gigi:** Jaime told me.

*(Fiona frowns)*

Yeah! It makes me so mad! So that means he's too tired to go running. We were supposed to run six miles last Saturday, and Oscar didn't show up.

**Fiona:** Oh, Gigi.

**Gigi:** Yeah, and then we were supposed to meet to talk about the wedding, and I'm at the coffee shop, and again he's not there. I text him. No response. Then finally I get a text. He says he'll be there in a minute. He just has to finish his game. I was so mad I left without telling him.

**Fiona:** Oh dear. (*Gently*) And you didn't know this before you got engaged?

**Gigi:** I mean I knew he played computer games, but we talked about it. I thought he was going to change!

**Fiona:** And he didn't?

**Gigi:** Noooo.

**Scene 2:** *No set. Miranda and Fiona are on opposite sides of the stage talking on the phone.*

**Miranda:** Fiona! You aren't driving, are you?

**Fiona:** No, just working. But I'm glad you called. I was just about to call you.

**Miranda:** Good. I want to talk to you about Saturday.

**Fiona:** Me too!

**Miranda:** I can't do it.

**Fiona:** What do you mean? Everyone's supposed to meet Oscar. Your parents are coming tomorrow.

**Miranda:** I have a work thing . . . in Singapore.

**Fiona:** Singapore?

**Miranda:** Yeah, my boss is sending me to Singapore. But don't worry, I've made it very easy for you. All you need to do is pick up the food and take it to your house. I'll be back Sunday, so I can help with everything. I promise!

**Fiona:** I can't do it at my house. The repairs aren't finished.

**Miranda:** Okay, my house then. How about Paulo. Can he bring the stuff?

**Fiona:** He's picking up your parents at the airport. Anyway, don't worry about it. I think you can call off the party. Gigi's fighting with Oscar! She showed up at the house this morning, says she's breaking off the engagement.

**Miranda:** What? I mean I saw this coming. But I didn't think it would happen so soon!

**Fiona:** Gigi says he plays computer games too much.

**Miranda:** (*Smugly*) Well I'm not surprised. He's highly ranked, right?

**Fiona:** What's that? Highly ranked? I don't even know what that means.

**Miranda:** It means he's really good. He's played a lot of games and leveled up. And that means he's been spending a lot of time practicing.

**Fiona:** Really? I wasn't really paying attention.

**Miranda:** So I read an article about this on the plane the other day. You know that once someone is addicted to computer games, it's like a drug? People die in front of computers. They don't eat. They don't sleep. They just die.

**Fiona:** Oh, it can't be that bad! He's still working at the restaurant. They've got plans to open their own place.

**Miranda:** I'm just sayin' . . . He's been on his own for a long time, and you, yourself, said Gigi is upset.

**Fiona:** Yeah, she is. But I figure they'll talk and work it out. And if that fails, I'm calling in your mother. If she can't fix it, I don't know who can.

**Miranda:** Oh yeah, Mimi's good at family stuff.

- c. Five years later, Oscar has become a famous gamer, but he is now single. He talks to another gamer about the sacrifice he had to make to become a champion.
- d. Eight years later, Jaime has finished college with a soccer scholarship. He is offered a chance to join the soccer team in Los Angeles, but his girlfriend has a good job locally. Oscar and Gigi give Jaime advice on what to do.
- e. Ten years later. Gigi is happily married to a business person and she has three children. Then she accidentally runs into Oscar at the airport, and they talk about their choices.

## PRACTICE PRAGMATICS: MANAGING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

- a. Read the situations below. What do you say (or do) when someone frustrates or disappoints you?

A person

- 1. does not come to an appointment or meeting
- 2. makes a mess and leaves the work for you
- 3. promises something and then doesn't follow through on the promise
- 4. takes something without asking
- 5. forgets something that is important to you

### *The pragmatics of interpersonal conflict*

Even with good intentions, people can sometimes frustrate or disappoint others. When one person expresses frustration, the other person usually tries to repair the situation by explaining their behavior or making an excuse. They might even try to get the other person to laugh or smile. If that doesn't work, the person often moves to making an offer to fix the situation or apologizing.


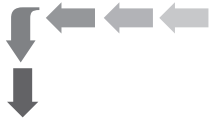

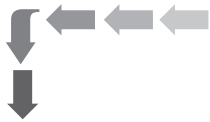
Note that sometimes people do not say what they mean, so it is important to pay attention to other signals such as indirect language and voice.





You are going to do a role play of an interpersonal conflict.

b. Read the diagram of how a conversation might work.

<i>A is upset by something B has done</i>	<i>B wants to repair the relationship</i>
<b>MOVE 1: Raise frustration</b> Greet B and exchange some information. Then introduce your purpose. Express frustration about B's behavior.	
	<b>Respond:</b> Defend yourself with an explanation. Try to get A to understand your reasons.
<b>MOVE 2: Reject B's explanation.</b> Listen to B. Continue to express frustration. Share your feelings and/or the effects of B's behavior.	
	<b>Repair:</b> Listen to A and show you understand. Try to repair the situation. Make an offer to fix the problem or apologize. Try to get the other person to smile.
<b>MOVE 3: Accept repair/apology</b> Listen to B and accept B's offer or apology. Possibly give a warning. Reestablish the relationship, so it ends in a friendly way.	

# Only *the* Best Intentions

**The** Curry family is a typical busy modern family, juggling jobs, business trips, school, and sports. Thank goodness for smartphones, Skype, and Uber to keep everyone on track and connected. Now, their 20-year-old daughter is marrying her boyfriend Oscar and they plan to open a restaurant. A parent's dream? Not when Gigi discovers Oscar wants to be a professional video game player. Should she break it off or support him as he follows his dream? Everyone wants to help the couple find happiness, but in a modern romance, the rules of the game are always changing.

As students prepare to perform the play, they will also practice:

- Pronunciation: Sentence Stress for Clarification or Contrast & Linking Word Sounds
- Pragmatics: Managing Interpersonal Conflict
- Performing Arts: Learning a part, staging plays, body language, improv
- Attentive Listening: Why is technology addicting?
- Readings on family life in the age of screens, the rising world of esports, and the dangers of tech addiction.
- Debate and Discussion: Is playing video games a sport?
- Creative Writing: Add a scene, write a new play, change the ending.

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***Integrated Skills Through Drama*** is a collection of plays written specifically for English learners. Each course book contains a complete curriculum with pre-production skills activities, an original one-act play, and post-production lesson plan options, as well as assessment materials. Each book is flexible and adaptable so teachers can fit the materials to any class size or schedule.