2. CHANGE A LIGHTBULB

This warmer helps students embody language through physical movement, expressions, and gestures that evoke a setting.

Aim: Practice body language, practice verbs
Preparation: Lists of activities that describe an action to display, plus slips of paper with individual activities written on them (see below)
Time: 15-20 minutes +

Activity

a. Prepare the slips of paper with one activity for each. Preview any unknown vocabulary (e.g., *wade, jet lag*).

- Climb a ladder and change a light bulb
- Get lost in a dark forest at night
- Fry an egg
- Wade across a river
- Find a wallet on the street
- Try to get around an angry dog
- Avoid an ex-spouse or boy/girlfriend at a party
- Walk a dog that likes to chase squirrels
- Fold laundry while talking on the phone
- Try to end a conversation at a party
- Find and kill a big scary bug in your house
- Move a sleeping baby from the car to the house without waking her up
- Sneak out of the house without waking your parents
- Navigate an airport security check
- Watch a scary movie
- Get caught in a downpour
- Cross a street with fast-moving, dangerous traffic
- Build a fire
- Play a challenging video game and win
- Stub your toe on a piece of furniture
- Eat spicy food

b. Put the slips in piles. Have a volunteer come up, take a slip, and mime the activity. Tell the rest of the class to shout out guesses until they get one right. Then have another volunteer or volunteers come up.

Variation

Pair students and give them five minutes to plan a silent scene together. Then have them take turns acting out the scene for the class to guess.

Notes:

3. HEART TO HEART

Research suggests that when people reveal something personal about themselves, they feel closer to others, a major element of building trust and community for theater activities. This is a great way to start your class every day.

Aim: Build trust and intimacy in the group
Preparation: A question about the students' personal experiences or opinions
Time: 10 minutes or more depending on class size

Activity

a. Have students stand in a circle. Start the activity with a bean bag. Give them a minute to think about something they are afraid of. Then tell them something you are afraid of and toss the beanbag randomly to a new speaker and invite them to share their fear. Then they toss the beanbag to the next speaker and so on until everyone has shared.

b. On subsequent days, repeat with other questions such as:

- Who is your hero?
- What are you grateful for?
- What is your biggest pet peeve? (A *pet peeve* is something that other people do that annoys you such as twirling their hair, tapping their leg, or interrupting)
- What do you wish people understood about you?
- How can this group support you?

Variation

Take notes or have students quickly write down their answers and hand them in. Later, use the information for improvisation games later. Here are two examples:

- Benjamina is afraid of snakes.

Improv: Benjamina, Xing, and Raul are camping. They are looking for wood to build a fire. Secretly tell Xing and Raul that they see a snake in the tent, but they don't want Benjamina to find out. What do they do?

- Carolina is grateful for her boss who has given her a good schedule so she can take classes.

Improv: Walter and Kaiko want Carolina to recommend them to her boss. Secretly tell Carolina that she is quite sure they will be nothing but trouble, so her goal is to convince them not to apply.

Notes: _____

3. STRESS EXPRESS

This activity provides stress strategy practice with high-frequency expressions. Actors can use the strategy to identify the syllable stress in their lines and then practice those lines repeatedly, potentially improving their oral comprehensibility.

Aim: To highlight and practice syllable stress
Preparation: Provide a list of high-frequency expressions that include multisyllable words. A list from the play *Strange Medicine* (script in Part two) is provided below. There is also a photocopiable student handout in Appendix 1.
Time: 30 minutes

Activity

a. Give students the handout in Appendix 1. Check that they understand the meanings of the expressions.

b. Discuss stress in multisyllable words. Explain that if the stress is on the wrong syllable it is difficult to understand the word. As a result, actors will need to know the stress patterns of every multisyllable word they speak.

c. Train students to identify syllable stress by saying the following words with an elongated vowel sound on the stressed syllable. Say the word, then say it in a sentence. Then say the word again. Have students write 1, 2, 3, or 4 depending on which syllable is stressed.

WONderful (1)	That's wonderful news!
POPular (1)	It's not exactly a popular idea.
iMAgine (2)	Imagine that!
adVENture (2)	What an adventure!
underSTAND (3)	Don't you understand!
interFERE (3)	Let's not interfere!
particiPAtion (4)	Excellent participation!
realiZAtion (4)	I had a sudden realization!

d. Go through the list and check answers. Do the drill again, and have students repeat after you. Spot-check individuals and provide additional drills as necessary.

e. Do a new round with expressions on the worksheet. Tell students to listen again as you read the expression and then the word. They should then underline or mark the stressed syllable. (You can use the key below for support.)

	Expression	Multisyllable word
1.	I have a funny feeling.	FUNny
		FEEling
2.	She's harmless.	HARMless
3.	It's so pointless!	POINTless
4.	I didn't realize.	REalize
5.	It's complicated.	COMplicated
6.	I'm not comfortable with that.	COMfortable
7.	It's perfect!	PERfect
8.	It's probably nothing.	PRObably
		NOthing
9.	I was just wondering.	WONdering
10.	That's creepy.	CREEpy
11.	Stop bothering us.	BOthering
12.	What a relief!	reLIEF
13.	I'm extremely concerned.	exTREMely
		conCERNED
14.	Apparently, It's pretty typical.	apPARently
		PREtty
		TYpical
15.	That's ridiculous!	riDICulous

f. Have students pair check, and go over the syllable stress as a class, by eliciting the stressed syllable.

g. Have students practice the expressions in pairs. Partner A says the expression, and Partner B says a follow-up answer (see the worksheet in Appendix 1).

Variation

a. Continue the activity by having pairs choose a context and build a dialog around one or more of the expressions. You could give a different number to each of several pairs to perform for the class.

b. Give feedback on syllable stress and consider assigning students to use resources to identify the stress in other multisyllable words in their scripts. They can find explanations of some of the principles of word stress on reliable grammar websites, although there are no hard-and-fast rules and stress can change depending on meaning.

Notes: _____

10. INTONATION WITH AN ATTITUDE

This fun, dramatic activity raises awareness of emotional messages behind seemingly neutral statements.

Aim: Communicate feelings and attitudes through intonation
Preparation: Create two short lists. One should include three or four neutral statements (These may be taken from a script if you are working with a play.) The other should include words that describe emotions, such as fear or joy.
Time: 15 minutes +

Activity

a. Write the neutral statements on the board. Pick lines that could appear naturally in a conversation. They do not need to be long, but they should be open to different emotional readings. Here are some examples.

   - He's bringing his wife.
   - Ajax forgot his phone.
   - My parents are coming tomorrow.
   - Kurt changed the recipe.
   - I think this belongs to you.

b. Next, write the emotion words. The following examples illustrate an easier and a more challenging version.

   - EASY: happy, nervous, angry
   - CHALLENGING: suspicious, frustrated, disappointed, sarcastic, brave, reluctant, cheerful, sympathetic

c. Model the activity by saying one statement with one of the emotions. Your delivery will require choices relating to stress, volume, pitch, and facial expressions.

   (Tip: Try putting yourself into the emotional state through a physical posture before speaking. For example, smile and hold out your arms before modeling *cheerful*; furrow your eyebrows and wring your hands before expressing worry; or put your hands on your hips to show anger. This acting technique establishes a character both externally and internally, so the emotional line delivery comes out more naturally.)

d. Ask students to guess which emotion you feel. Students can call out the emotion. If they do not get it the first time, repeat until the majority get it right.

e. Continue modeling with the other emotions and consider having students repeat the rhythm and pitch so they get sufficient pronunciation practice.

f. Have students stand in a circle or U-shape so everyone can see everyone. Invite or nominate a volunteer to perform one of the lines with an emotion of their choice. The class then guesses.

   Have the volunteer nominate the next performer (or do it yourself). The next student performs and so on until everyone has a turn.

Variation

a. Move to pair practice. Put students in A/B pairs and have them perform the lines. A says a line, B guesses the emotion. Then they switch. While they practice, go around the room and provide support.

b. You can also give them a line with an expected emotion and have them try saying it with an unexpected emotion. For example, give them the line. "This is completely unacceptable!" with the choices *delighted, nervous*, and *bored*.

Notes: _____

3.

WORKING WITH MONOLOGUES

Monologues are speeches spoken by a single character, usually directly to the audience. Simple ones can provide an initial low-stakes performance for beginning actors. They can also be useful for developing prosody as students must communicate the feelings of a character in a way that is different from the more neutral delivery of an academic presentation.

Importantly, monologues allow learners to speak as someone else. They can try on a new identity and speak from another point of view. They can be a native speaker or not. They can be a hero or a villain. Characters may be deceiving themselves or making a confession. Trying on these personas can trigger interesting discussions about both culture and language.

The monologues in part two can be used with the activities that follow. They are intentionally brief so as to serve multiple purposes including diagnostics, individual or group performances, or audition pieces. Their main role in the activities below, however, is to provide pronunciation practice and acting experience.

With so many possible pronunciation features to work on, it can be tricky to know where to begin, especially when faced with a variety of distinct issues in students. While using your own judgment is a valid option, the following list of priorities is based on a review of research by Isabelle Darcy:

- Word stress, number of syllables
- Natural intonation (thought groups)
- Connected speech features, linking
- Syllable timing and vowel reductions
- Pausing and fluency
- Final and "important" consonants
- Vowel duration[3]

Pronunciation expert Judith Gilbert suggests that focus words and thought groups are the single most important feature of pronunciation[4]. In effect, they create the prosody of language, which can easily be compared to the craft of the actor. A good actor is a master of thought groups, knowing how and when to pause, and where to stress in order to create suspense and maximize the intention behind their message. One does have to be careful of *chewing the scenery*, however. People say this when they feel an actor is taking up too much time with their lines and slowing down the pace of the performance.

Monologues can be performed in a variety of ways and in any order. You might begin by teaching strategies with a single monologue, and have students practice together. Next, you can give teams of students a set of theme-based monologues to prepare as a group and perform for the class. You can even have them write their own monologues to add to the set, or students can choose a new theme altogether.

Finally, in responding to students' work with monologues, consider what theater directors do when they give notes during a rehearsal. A director watches and reflects on an actor's performance. Then there is a follow-up conversation about the way the performance came across. Consider telling the actor how the performance affected you. Did they *intend* to sound bored or scared? Were you able to understand the words? Consider the following sentence frames:

- When you … I felt …
- I was a little confused when …
- There was a moment where … and I thought it *worked/didn't work* because …
- My sense was that your character felt *sorry for himself/herself, proud, disappointed*, (*other*) Was that your goal?
- I'm sorry, your voice is very quiet, and I couldn't hear you.

3 Darcy, "Powerful and Effective Pronunciation Instruction: How Can We Achieve It?" 30.

4 Gilbert, *Teaching Pronunciation: Using the Prosody Pyramid*, 2-6.

In sum, monologues offer a taste of theater without an extensive time commitment. A monologue module or project gives both students and teachers a means to experience an initial cycle of preparation, skills development, and performance in as little as a single class period or perhaps two (one for practice, one for performance). They can support a range of objectives from targeted pronunciation work to the introduction and practice of high-frequency, *spoken* lexico-grammatical expressions, all while providing a gentle, initial experience performing on stage.

b. Read the first few lines of the monologue aloud. Go over a few examples together. Then read the rest and have students mark them on their own.

Don't ‿tell‿her what happened. She'll freak ‿out. Seriously. She's ‿already dealing with one kid ‿in the hospital ‿and ‿if she finds ‿out ‿about ‿the accident, she'll definitely lose ‿it. You understand ‿don't you? I just don't want ‿her to worry. It's going to be okay. Just promise me you won't say anything ... at least not until I get ‿there.

---

c. Have students share with a partner and review as a class. Then have them practice the monologues, saying them aloud and noticing how the linking and reductions support the clarity of the focus words.

4. Create a Backstory for the Speaker

a. Assign monologues to students. (See examples in part two of this book.) Give students paper and colored markers or pencils and have them design a poster that develops their character. You can use the following structures or do it freeform:

- A timeline of the character's life
- A bubble map that shows details about the character's life. (Bubbles can indicate physical location in the world, relationships with family and friendship details, personal fears, wants, and needs)
- A drawing of the character and the character's context

b. Have students take turns sharing their visual representation in groups. The others should be encouraged to ask questions and support the speaker in developing a sense of their emotions and relationships.

5. Personalize Your Character.

a. Invite students to adapt the monologue to reflect their ideas about who the character is and what they want. Share ideas such as the following:

- Add filler words and phrases such as you know, right, so, anyway, yeah, or even uh
- Make small changes to the text so you feel comfortable with it. For example, if a student is struggling to pronounce the word dehydrated in the line, "You'll get dehydrated," she can change it to, "You'll get sick!" Or if a student doesn't feel like his character would say, "That's ridiculous," he might change it to, "That's crazy!"
- Think about what your character wants to achieve. What is your goal?
- Consider your personality. What body language (posture, movements, gestures) will communicate details about you?
- Think about how your character feels. What facial expression will show your emotion?
- Use your voice. Does your character have a loud and confident voice, or are they uncertain and in need of encouragement? How can your voice communicate this?

6. Monologue Teams

a. Explain that while most monologues are performed alone, it is also possible to perform a set of two or more monologues where the characters present different points of view. In this activity, pairs or groups write and present monologues that are related in some way.

b. Put students in pairs or groups and have them choose a theme, or assign one. The following are some options.

Stories

- A waiter describes an encounter with a crazy customer/The customer describes a crazy waiter.
- A retelling of a really bad job interview by both the interviewer and the interviewee.
- Someone with no experience with children talks about babysitting for a friend or relative. The child then tells the same story from their point of view.

3. IN OR OUT

This longer structured improvisation activity involves close collaboration among actors who must construct a consistent backstory for their "evening" so that "their parents" believe they really were home.

Aim: Collaboration, fluency, comprehension and comprehensibility
Preparation: none
Time: about 30 minutes or more if several characters are involved.

Activity

a. **Set context.** Introduce the topic of parents leaving their teenage kids home alone on a Saturday night. Often the kids will go out and pretend that they didn't.

b. **Prepare.** Ask for volunteers to play two teenage siblings. They must leave the room for 10–15 minutes to create the story of their evening including details about what they ate, watched, and did.

   While the teenagers prepare, work with the remaining students to prepare a list of questions to ask the teenagers to test their story. Then divide them into two groups, the father group, and the mother group. Make sure each group has a list of *the same* questions. (You can write them on the board and have the teenagers face away from the board during the interrogation.)

c. **Interrogate.** Bring the teens back into the room. Separate them and have the fathers interview one sibling while the mothers interview the other. Tell them to take notes on the answers for a later comparison.

d. **Evaluate.** Bring the class back together and have the parents compare their children's answers to the questions. They then decide if the kids are telling the truth.

Notes:

Microsketches

Some conversations are both uncomfortable and funny at the same time. The first set of microsketches features one character trying to influence the other with conversational tactics, and the results may make the audience laugh in recognition. Students can try out acting skills and intonation in a fun short performance. Then they can create their own role-plays.

The following lesson plans go with the microsketches in Part two.

1. THE FAVOR

a. **Practice.** Put students in pairs. Give them copies of *The Favor*, on page 109. Have them choose roles, decide on their relationship, e.g., colleagues, classmates, spouses, parent, and child. Then give them a few minutes to practice.

b. **Perform.** Have pairs perform the sketch. If it's a big class, you can have pairs perform for other pairs who can be given the task of guessing the details of their relationship)

c. **Introduce pragmatics**. Start with a list of expressions that people use to interrupt someone who is working, such as the ones in the list below. You might reveal one at a time to see if students can guess the goal of the speaker. You can also ask them how they might feel if someone said these things to them while they are studying for a test.

- Are you busy?
- Umm, do you have a second?
- I hate to bother you, but …
- Are you in the middle of something?
- I am so sorry to interrupt, but I'm stuck and you are the only person who can help me.

d. **Introduce/build language**. Use the sketch and your own ideas to add a few examples of the language of response.

Available/polite

It's okay. How can I help?
Oh, what is it?
Sure, I'll be happy to help if I can.

Unavailable/familiar

Actually, I've got this deadline …
Is it important?
Again?

e. **Identify strategies**. Use the following or your own.

- Offer a favor in exchange
- Remind the person of a past favor you did for them
- Show gratitude

f. **Role-play**. Assign roles and have students role-play the following situations or use themes from their personal stories. (You can add a conflict by secretly telling one partner to suggest a different solution before saying yes.)

- I need someone to edit my paper/report
- This furniture is too heavy for me to lift by myself
- I have an appointment and I need someone to work my shift

Notes:

3. MOTIVATION MODALS

The dramatic tension of a script allows for the practice of modals as students evaluate motivation. The practice prepares them for discussing hypothetical situations regarding people they encounter in the real world.

Aim: practice modals for speculating about character's motivations
Preparation: A script where characters' backstories and motivations are somewhat mysterious, a list of past participles that could be used to describe the characters.
Time: 20 – 30 mins

Activity

a. After students have read a script and are familiar with characters and relationships, review modals for speculating about characters motivations and past actions. You might start with a list of past participles that are likely to fit the plot descriptions.

might have	lost
could have	annoyed
	forgotten
	hidden
	wanted to be famous

Point out the reduction that occurs with modal + present perfect as in "must've" "might've" and "could've". Explain that these forms often reduce to utterances that sound like *musta, mighta*, and *coulda*. Note that not being able to hear the full word can sometimes interfere with one's use of the form.

b. Start the activity as a whole class by asking two or three *why* questions about character's decisions. Have students write their answers (In this way, all students get practice forming a sentence with the structure.) The examples below go with *Suspicious* in Part 13.

- Why did the friends leave Joe behind?
- Why didn't Sid want to talk about his job search?

c. Invite volunteers to share their sentences orally. Give corrective feedback as needed, using written forms if necessary, and attending to the reductions.

d. Put students in groups. Give them additional questions to discuss. Circulate and continue to give corrective feedback as needed. You can use the following additional questions or write your own, or have students come up with the rest.

- Why did Lubna give Chloe the last sip of water?
- Why did Victor talk for a long time about the meteorite?
- Why did Sid leave the group? How do you think he felt?
- Why did Victor and Lubna take the meteorite?

e. Return to the whole class to share thoughts on characters. Here the discussion can bridge both grammar practice and character analysis giving students practice in using the grammar for authentic communication.

Notes:

7.

STAGING PLAYS

If you have made it to this chapter, you are at least a little bit interested in staging a play. Perhaps you've done some of the activities in earlier chapters and you are ready for a bigger challenge. What can you expect from the process? If you were to pop by and observe ELLs in a theater class, you might observe some of the following elements.

The first would be community builders like those at the beginning of this book. For a true collaborative process to unfold, students must feel safe. Theater classes love a circle, so desks might be pushed to the side, with students standing in a ring. They could be miming actions, doing voice exercises, or sharing impressions. Or they might be performing role-plays, or mingling in a simulation.

The teacher would play various roles in guiding this process: giving instructions, monitoring, and note-taking. Or the teacher would be eliciting ideas and feedback, presenting language models, or perhaps doing pronunciation work, as well as initiating pair, small group and whole class conversations. As a result of this process, students would ideally build supportive patterns of interaction to serve them as they collaborate and make decisions, taking increasing responsibility for their performances.

This emerging independence would be part of students taking on more responsibility for bringing the vision of a play to life, something that would be particularly necessary with large classes. Some scripts can accommodate 20 people through the use of a chorus or small roles, but it is difficult to develop character and relationships with a large cast. You might therefore consider doing a shorter play with a handful of characters but create multiple casts. This format allows you to do some of the skills work as a larger group and then break students into teams for rehearsals. The performance teams won't have the teacher coaching them through every step. Instead, they will depend on one another more and problem-solve together. Their talk will be authentic in that they'll be making suggestions, expressing feelings, giving encouragement, sharing and evaluating ideas, planning, volunteering, and performing many other functions as they work through the process.

The teacher continues to organize activities, work with students individually and in groups, provide models, and structure the day around language and skills work, rehearsals and feedback. However, there is an expectation that students have agency in preparing their roles, learning their lines, and planning the costumes, sets, or even the program. At the end of a class, you can come back together for "notes." This last reflection stage allows everyone to raise concerns, ask questions, and share their observations. The teacher can give notes on language or performance elements, and everyone can participate in making suggestions and setting new goals.

Finally, on performance day, you might see students pacing the hallways, running lines with each other, or adjusting costumes and hair. The scene resembles any backstage where nervous actors are hoping to bring another place and time to life. In this case, language learners feel the same anticipation, only more so since pronunciation and intonation will factor in to whether the audience gets it.

When the performance begins, the lights go on, and an ordinary classroom, even one with a whiteboard in the background, evokes another place in time. Friends, family, other teachers, and classmates watch as the drama unfolds. They may gasp at danger or laugh at a familiar family squabble. When this happens, the actors know they have nailed it.

While teachers without a theater background may feel a bit of uncertainty going into this process, there is no one way to do it right, and as long as there is a spirit of collaboration, the show will go on. At the same time, there are some steps and activities that can make the experience unfold more smoothly, and hopefully, this chapter will help. In this section, you'll find suggestions and activities that you can pick and choose from in producing your play.

Plays as Language Resources

A play tells a story, so it can be used as a text. Lessons can be built around understanding the message, the characters' choices, and the context of a play. In professional theater as well as drama in education pedagogy, actors research the background of the story and the characters. They might explore history, or be inspired to investigate the science mentioned by a character, or research a cultural phenomenon such as the computer gaming community.

A play is also a valuable source of language but unlike a text meant to be read, a play offers a unique opportunity to learn spoken language, including high-frequency collocations, fixed expressions, and sentence frames and stems that show how a speaker feels or wants other people to feel. Here are a few examples selected at random from scripts, along with the meaning they communicate. Notice that these expressions are fairly common but would be unlikely in a reading text.

I can't help it	I am aware that I am doing something I shouldn't be doing.
I'm glad I ran into you	I have something to tell you.
Let me know if you hear anything	I want to stay involved in the issue.
I can take it from here.	You do not need to help me anymore.
Well, when you put it that way,	You are giving one version of events but there are other ways of looking at it.
At least he's getting a job	Yes, I acknowledge the situation is bad, but I want to focus on a good thing.

When students work with a script, they often stumble upon these expressions and want to know what they mean, so in addition to working with a story, students can continue developing their repertoire of useful language to use in various situations. You can continue to investigate pragmatics in plays and create lessons around them.

A play also inspires dedicated pronunciation work. The repetition during a rehearsal process creates conditions where leaners iterate and reiterate their lines, working on stress, intonation, and sounds until they are comprehensible. If they practice strategies for recognizing focus words and thought groups in a play, learners will also have strategies for giving speeches and participating in other prepared talks.

In addition, when actors learn their lines, they free up cognitive space to move from the articulation of sounds to the rhythm and prosody of intonation. In other words, they develop emotional resonance, one of the hardest things to learn in another language but one that is important for creating intimacy and bonding with other people.

Furthermore, plays are a useful resource for investigating cultural conventions. By looking at the relationships and behavior in a play, learners can draw insights into the values and habits of a subset of the larger culture. For example, they might be surprised at the way a parent and child talk to each other or intrigued by the way a boss treats an employee. They might become indignant at the expectations one friend has for another or alarmed at the risks a teenager is willing to take to be polite. These human interactions provide opportunities for students to discuss the rewards and consequences of more serious choices than comedy sketches and to have a more dramatic effect on an audience.

Planning a Production

A production process should balance skills and language lessons with rehearsal. You may want to do pronunciation warm ups, background readings, and language mini-lessons at the start of class. Then you can segue into rehearsals. It's a good idea to finish with a reflection stage where you share observations and give notes on what you want students to work on. Here's an example of activity types that can be combined in different ways depending on goals.

LANGUAGE	DRAMA
Pronunciation points sentence stress (thought groups with focus words) word and syllable stress stress emphasis linking reductions consonant clusters vowel sounds intonation register	**Drama activities** monologues – preparation and performance role-plays and improvisation – pragmatics skills sketches – preparation and performance auditions – try out for a part in a play table reading and research – understanding the play reader's theater – staged reading rehearsals to learn lines, pronunciation and movements (blocking) character development – exercises to strengthen nonverbal body language and acting choices blocking – choosing where to move and look production design –a set and props, sound design, costume design properties (props) playwriting – develop original scripts process drama – experience a scene by playing characters
Pragmatics / functional language (examples) politely raising a concern asking for a favor delivering bad news encouraging someone in distress expressing discomfort presenting an alternative point of view.	
Reading and vocabulary plays background texts critical thinking activities: comparison, synthesis, analysis, creativity vocabulary and lexical grammar	
Writing exercises reflection character backstory summary and response playwriting	

Choosing a Play

There are many possible ways to choose a play. You can search for scripts that are written for reader's theater and/or English learners specifically or try a professional one-act play, though you may have to cut it down to be feasible. (Some teachers like to work with Shakespeare, but that is beyond the scope of this book due to the length of those plays and the Shakespearean language.)

In general, a good play has at least some of the following characteristics:

- It is situated in a recognizable historic or contemporary context.
- There is a sense of place.
- There is a plot driven by the main character or characters who are striving to overcome obstacles and achieve goals.
- Characters' personal choices reflect diverse human strengths *and* weaknesses.
- There are consequences to characters' choices, either good or bad, and these are often unanticipated.
- As the story evolves, the characters' struggle changes them (or shows the results of not changing).

Rehearsal Guidelines

Rehearsals are essential to a successful run, and they are much more than just memorizing lines. They offer an opportunity for the story to evolve, for actors to find new insights into the story or their characters. To make the most of a rehearsal, encourage students to see the play as a work in progress and invite them to make changes as they go from reading at the table to planning their movements, and choosing costumes and props.

1. Run-throughs

The following are different strategies for creating variety during rehearsals while students are memorizing their lines.

- Have actors read or, if they are memorizing, say their lines as quickly as possible.
- Have actors say their lines in a different voice, such as that of a queen, a child, a tired parent, or a nervous employee.
- Have actors read a scene but each actor should prepare by identifying a line that is more important than the rest. While reading, the actor should deliver that line with a pause and more stress emphasis and emotional power. Other students should listen for it and say, "Power line" when they hear it.

Blocking

As actors are memorizing their lines, they also begin planning where they will stand and sit, as well as when and how they will move. As they develop this visual story, they add gestures, facial expressions, and choose costumes and props (objects). In this final stage of rehearsal, actors work on using their bodies and moving around in the space in ways that communicate important emotional information and build suspense.

You might want to review activities for working with body language from the first chapter. **Changing a Lightbulb and Visual Vocabulary** *are both helpful for reviewing physical and auditory choices.*

2. Block Scenes

Use later run-throughs to focus on the visual story of the production. How will the actors move in the scenes? As they go through the scenes and make decisions, the actors can write notes in the script for their character. Here are some helpful guidelines for blocking:

- Actors should avoid speaking with their backs to the audience. (In reader's theater, when not in a scene, actors may turn around.)
- Actors should not make eye contact with the audience. They can look over the audience's heads, however.
- When one actor is speaking, all other actors should look at the speaker or look down. They should not move or attract attention in any way.
- When two actors are having an interaction, they often move toward each other.
- A seated actor looking up is generally less powerful than a standing actor looking down.
- Pauses are very important for creating suspense. For example, if a character is about to leave, and another character wants to stop him, that actor can delay the line, to build tension.
- Actors should move and behave as if the story is happening to them for the first time and they are in a real conversation.

Stage Directions

When planning the blocking, it is important to have a common language for mapping the stage. Notes on entrances and exits and where to place important props can appear in professional scripts and directors often use specific terms to give instructions to actors.

In general, all directions are given from the actors' point of view and not the audience's. So, stage right means the right side of an actor who is looking at the audience. Stage left means the left side of an actor who is looking at the audience. Front and back also describe directions from the actor's position. Downstage means close to the audience while upstage is away from the audience.

PART TWO

SCRIPTS

THE HARVEY MONOLOGUES

In the fall of 2017, Hurricane Harvey dropped 27 trillion gallons of water on the Gulf Coast city of Houston, Texas. These monologues tell personal stories of people who survived the storm and those who helped them get to safety. By performing together, a team of students can communicate the immediacy, danger, and heroism of the experience.

a. The last time there was a hurricane, it was kind of fun. The whole city shut down for a couple of weeks, and we got to hang out at home with our families. Every night we got together with the neighbors and barbecued the meat from our freezers. So, I hate to admit it, but I was kind of looking forward to that happening again.

b. I was new in Houston, so Harvey was my first hurricane. I didn't know what to expect, but I did what they said on the news. I got some water, batteries, and candles, and I put tape over the windows. My friends came over because we didn't want to be alone, and we just played cards. We had no idea what was about to happen!

c. The rain was coming down and it was coming down hard. My family and I were safe, but I couldn't help thinking about all those people out there who were not. And finally, I had to do something, so I volunteered to be an operator for the emergency rescue teams.

d. We live in Mississippi. Do you know where that is? It's on the Gulf Coast, on the way to Florida. It's a long way from Houston, but when I heard that the people up there were in trouble, I called my buddies, and we all hooked up our boat trailers and headed over there.

e. My husband and I didn't think anything was going to happen, so we went to bed. Can you imagine? Suddenly the neighbors rang the doorbell. When I got out of bed to answer the door, the water was up to my knees.

f. As soon as I found out the city was flooding; I called my grandmother. I just knew her house was going to flood. I could tell by her voice that she was scared, so I made a decision right there. No matter what, I couldn't just leave her by herself. I had to find a way to get to her.

g. It was dark, and the rain was crashing, I mean, crashing down. I looked out the window, and I could see all this dark water rising up around my apartment building. It looked so weird. Normally, there's a pool and furniture, but all I could see was this huge black lake.

h. I will never forget that night. I was sick and I'd gone to bed early. Then my friend called. I almost didn't answer the phone. In fact, I didn't the first time, but thank God, she called back. I pick up, and she sounds all panicky, and she says, "Have you looked out the window? We've got to get you out of there."

i. The dispatchers were heroes! They connected the people with boats with the victims of the flood. It took the army, the local police, and thousands of volunteers. They worked through the night to help people, and they saved, many, many lives.

j. I've always been a proud Houstonian, but I have never been prouder of my city than I was after Harvey. When the storm was over, everyone was in shock. But it only lasted for about three minutes. As soon as it was safe, people got busy. They set up shelters, donated food, and started the cleanup. H-town, till I drown!