

Short Plays
for English Learners

STRANGE MEDICINE

Who decides what the truth is?



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.

In *Strange Medicine*, there are many different kinds of people, an impulsive teenager, a mysterious scientist, a hardworking nurse, and a friendly neighbor. As they talk and learn about each other, the tension rises. Who is this mysterious scientist? What is she doing? Is the community in danger? How will they respond? When you perform the play, you get to create this suspense. The audience might lean forward and pay attention. They might laugh at a funny behavior, or take a breath when they are worried.

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

DISCUSSION

No one controls the Internet, and *anyone* can upload *anything*. Some people and news organizations check their facts, talk to experts, and have the goal of presenting the truth, but others publish false information. How do you recognize truth when you use a search engine?

LANGUAGE

Match the word or expressions with its meaning.

1. ___ germ theory	a. when a disease moves from person to person through contact with sick people or things that carry the disease
2. ___ an old soul	b. passed through airport security
3. ___ hazardous material	c. fail to help a person who needs something
4. ___ spread infections	d. research that showed how micro-organisms caused disease
5. ___ the FBI	e. agree to do a difficult task or job
6. ___ a strange virus	f. a wise person who seems to have the experience of many lifetimes
7. ___ bioterrorism lab	g. the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a government law-enforcement agency
8. ___ cleared customs	h. an unusual organism that lives inside cells and can make people sick.
9. ___ let someone down	i. a liquid, powder or other thing that is dangerous to humans
10. ___ take on a mission	j. a place where scientists study biological weapons.

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

A PLAY



STRANGE MEDICINE

SETTING

The play takes place in and around the Seattle home of Terry Duckworth and her son, Ramsey, as well as the parking lot of the hospital where Terry works.

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Genders can be changed as needed.

TERRY DUCKWORTH: (40's) A nurse, Ramsey's mother.

RAMSEY DUCKWORTH: a teenager, Rue if played by a female

LYNN BENNET: a college student, A next-door neighbor to Ramsey and Terry

SARAFINA WEXLER: (mid 30s) A scientist and doctor of alternative medicine

GUS: (mid-30s) A mysterious stranger. This is a non-speaking role



SOUND EFFECTS: Birds, a car

COSTUMES: Contemporary, a pair of sunglasses

PROPS: A rolling suitcase; a box of bottles or plastic; a mailed package; various breakfast items, including a coffee cup; a balled-up piece of paper that resembles a rock.

Scene 1: Outside TERRY's house. SARAFINA appears. She is wearing sunglasses and pulling a suitcase. She stops to check her phone, looks at the house, and walks off. A few seconds later, GUS follows her with a camera. He does not want to be seen, and he is filming SARAFINA. Then he jumps as if someone has seen him. GUS takes one last photo and turns and exits back the way he came.

RAMSEY appears with a cardboard box or bag as if taking out the recycling. He begins to sort it into different plastic containers (This can be mimed).

SARAFINA appears still dragging her suitcase. She looks over her shoulder to check that she is not being followed and startles RAMSEY as she starts to walk past. RAMSEY jumps in surprise when he sees Sarafina.

RAMSEY: Oh, you surprised me. Are you Sarafina Wexler?

SARAFINA: (*cautiously*) Yes. How do you know my name?

RAMSEY: Uhhh my mom told me to watch for you. You booked our guest house?

SARAFINA: Oh, right! Yes. Good. Sarafina Wexler, that's me. Uhm, and you are . . .?

RAMSEY: Ramsey, Ramsey Duckworth, at your service.

SARAFINA: Oh. (*pause*) Hello.

RAMSEY: Right. So I can check you in. Do you have any other luggage?

SARAFINA: No. No more luggage.

RAMSEY: Alrighty then. Can I carry that for you?

SARAFINA: No. I've got it. *(She looks around as if making sure no one is watching.)*

RAMSEY: Are you sure?

SARAFINA: I'm sure. Is it that place over there? *(She points offstage or over the audience's heads.)*

RAMSEY: Yes, the door is unlocked. I'll take you.

SARAFINA: No need. I'll just let myself in. Wi-Fi and password are inside, I assume.

RAMSEY: Yes, on the table. And there's water in the fridge, towels. . .

(SARAFINA looks over her shoulder again and then walks off while he's talking. RAMSEY calls after her.)

RAMSEY: Let us know if you need anything.

(RAMSEY watches her go and shakes his head. LYNN enters from the other side of the stage and looks where RAMSEY is looking.)

LYNN: Hey Ramsey. What are you looking at?

RAMSEY: Odd.

LYNN: What?

RAMSEY: Some people are just odd. That's our new guest.

LYNN: Where?

RAMSEY: She went inside.

LYNN: What's so odd about that?

RAMSEY: She's wearing sunglasses

LYNN: Yeah....

RAMSEY: Look around. It's night time!

[Lights Out]

Scene 2: The next morning. TERRY and RAMSEY are in the kitchen setting out breakfast plates.

TERRY: What do you mean she's weird?

RAMSEY: She just is. She wouldn't let me touch her suitcase.

TERRY: Maybe your hands were dirty. What were you doing?

RAMSEY: The recycling.

TERRY: Well, there you have it!

RAMSEY: Maybe. I just have a funny feeling.

TERRY: I'm sure she's harmless. You should probably just leave her alone.

RAMSEY: I will.

TERRY: Anyway, we need the money.

RAMSEY: I know.

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.)


4. How do the events in the play change me?

5. What do I learn by the end of the play?

Other Notes

PRAGMATICS: CHANGING THE SUBJECT

People often use signal expressions to prepare the other person when moving from a safe or general topic to a more serious one. They might also use their voice and body language to communicate a warning that the new topic may be difficult.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It's probably good I ran into you. I wanted to talk to you about something. – I wasn't going to say anything but . . . – You're not going to like this, but . . . – You should probably sit down 	<p>Light</p>  <p>More Serious</p>
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A. Find a scene in the play where someone uses a signal expression to prepare another character for an unpleasant topic. Then find another scene where someone speaks directly. How are your impressions of the speakers in each scene different?

B. Practice the language of changing the subject in one of the role-plays below. Start out talking about the weather. Then A changes the subject

1. A is moving out of their shared apartment and going to a different city.
2. A cancels a plan for them to take a class together.
3. A knows that B is about to lose his/her job.

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_tto* 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 theatrical 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

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"...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!

A teenager's curiosity about his family's new guest could get him into trouble. She says she's a scientist, but Ramsey isn't sure. Especially as the house is being watched! Will Ramsey learn the truth?

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