

English - Context Clues

Pre-Show Activity for Grades 6-12

Goals

- Students will learn important context to deepen their experience of seeing the play.
- Students will analyze historical, social, and moral contexts from *English* by matching textual evidence with historical clues.
- Students will use research and reasoning to articulate in writing or speech how each selected quote reflects different aspects of the social and historical context of the play.

NOTE: This activity has been aligned with TEKS and [Universal Design for Learning](#). TEKS can be found at the end of this document.

Materials

- *English*: Clues and Quotes handout (included).
- *English* Who's Who handout (included).
- Chart paper or whiteboard space for each group.
- Research devices (optional – for digital reasoning extension).
- Access to Alley Re-Sourced guide.

Introduction

Review the Re-Sourced guide Pre-Show page with the students.

Explain that *English* explores **what language represents**, not just how it functions. Discuss:

- Why might learning English be tied to opportunity, migration, or status?
- How might language affect how people see themselves or are seen by others?

Read this line aloud:

MARJAN: “When you speak another language... you just feel so loud all the time.”

Ask:

What does this suggest about language beyond grammar?

Note for UDL alignment: Students can Think-Pair-Share, write answers in a journal, or discuss answers in small groups before sharing with the class.

Reviewing the Clues

In pairs or small groups, students examine “Clue” cards related to:

- Accent and power
- Immigration and visas

- Education and testing
- Identity and belonging

Use **See / Think / Wonder**:

- What do you notice?
- What does this suggest about the world of the play?
- What questions does it raise?

Matching Clues with Quotes

- Give each group a set of “Quote” cards from the included handout.
 - Provide the Who’s Who sheet (included) for students to deepen their understanding of the characters speaking the quotes.
- Students match each quote with one or more clues they believe align thematically.
 - Students explain their reasoning behind the match.
- **Example:**
 - **Clue:** Accent affects opportunity
 - **Quote: ELHAM:** “If I have accent, bad TOEFL score.”
 - **Reasoning:**
Elham links accent directly to failure and lost opportunity, revealing internalized pressure.

Reflection and Reasoning

- Groups share one strong pairing.
Ask:
“What makes you say that?”
“What evidence supports your thinking?”

Note for UDL alignment: Encourage multiple expression modes: oral presentations, visual charts, digital slides, 1-on-1 reports.

Closure

- Revisit the playwright’s bio on Alley Re-Sourced.
 - How does the author’s bio relate to or reflect the context clues we just worked with?
 - How does an author’s world impact how they write?
 - How does an author’s writing tell us about their world?
- **Metaphor Swap**
 - Turn each “Clue” category into a single metaphor (e.g., “language is a passport”)
 - Share: Pair up and explain why your metaphor fits. Use a matching quote as evidence.
 - Quick debrief (optional): What new insight does the metaphor reveal?

Optional Extensions

- Gallery Walk: Display quote–clue pairings; students use sticky notes to leave feedback or alternative interpretations.
- Research Challenge: Students choose one category from the “Clue” cards and find one new fact that deepens understanding.
- Performance Connection: Have students stage a brief tableau illustrating one of their matched quote–clue pairs.

TEKS**ELA 6–12**

- (RL.6–8.1), (RL.7.6), (RL.8.9) – Cite textual evidence to support analysis; analyze and compare points of view and how author choices develop themes and character perspective.
- (RI.7.1), (RI.7.9) – Cite evidence and analyze how different authors shape presentations of information and emphasize evidence.
- (L.6.4.d), (L.11–12.4.a), (L.11–12.4.d) – Use context to determine and verify meanings of words and figurative language (including metaphors) and analyze their role in tone and meaning.
- (W.11–12.3.a), (WHST.11–12.2.d) – Use precise language and figurative techniques (metaphor, simile, analogy) to convey meaning and manage complexity in writing; orient readers and develop perspective.
- (W.4.3.a), (W.5.3.a), (W.3.3.b) – Develop narratives or responses that orient readers and use dialogue/description to show character responses to situations.
- (RL.8.1), (RL.4.4), (L.4.4.a), (L.4.5.a) – Determine meanings of words/phrases, explain figurative language, and connect illustrations or details to character/setting where relevant.

Theatre I–IV

- (2A–B), (3A–C), (4A–B), (5A–B) – Interpret characters and social context through performance; collaborate to express narrative meaning; analyze dramatic structure, character motivation, and moral themes (supports tableau/performance connections and expressive Metaphor Swap sharing).
- (TH.1–12.3) – Use dramatic conventions to communicate character perspective and context (aligns with staging/tableau extension).

General Grades 6–12 (cross-grade ELA/Theatre competencies)

- (Cite textual evidence): (RH.6–8.1), (RH.11–12.1), (RH.11–12.3) – Cite and evaluate textual evidence to support analysis and explanations of actions, events, and perspectives.
- (Interpret figurative language): (L.8.5.a), (L.11–12.5.a) – Interpret and analyze figures of speech and their role in text.

- (Analyze author/world connections): (ELD-LA.9–12.Narrate.Interpretive), (ELD-LA.4–5.Narrate.Interpretive) – Analyze how author choices reflect context, develop themes, and shape character actions.
- (Language & identity): (PLD.9–12.INT.WP-Prec.PL6), (ELD-SS.6–8.Argue.Interpretive) – Analyze how language choices create meaning, and evaluate point of view and credibility in social contexts.
- (Communication & collaboration): (Theatre standards above + W.11–12.3.a) – Collaborate and present interpretations orally or through performance; justify interpretations with evidence.

Who's Who: The Cast and Character Descriptions of Alley Theatre's *English*



Jamie Rezanour
Marjan

Marjan - the teacher of the class. She lived in England for years and loves the English language. She wants her students to speak only English in class, even when it's hard. Marjan is patient and caring, but sometimes strict. She believes learning English can open doors—and change lives.

Key Traits:
Wise
Encouraging
Determined

"I want you to hear your voice and fall in love with what it becomes."



Shadee Vossoughi
Elham

Elham - 28 and wants to go to medical school in Australia. She's smart and strong-willed, but English feels like a battle. She has taken the TOEFL test many times and needs a high score to reach her dream. Elham speaks her mind and doesn't like to lose.

Key Traits:
Ambitious
Competitive
Bold

"I am not an idiot. And also I am nice."



Pantea Ommi
Roya

Roya - 54 and learning English so she can talk to her granddaughter in Canada. She loves her family and calls them often, even when they don't answer. Roya is warm and funny, but she worries about losing her connection to home.

Key Traits:
Loving
Hopeful
Stubborn

"I just want her to know me."



Nima Rakhshanifar

Omid

Omid - 29 and charming. He speaks English well and dreams of getting a green card—but he also hides a secret. He wants to belong, but isn't sure where. Omid is helpful and kind, and he makes people laugh.

Key Traits:

Confident

Friendly

Curious

"I made you laugh. In English. I didn't know I could do it."



Vaneh Assadourian

Goli

Goli - 18 and the youngest in the class. She loves English and thinks it makes her feel taller and braver. Goli is sweet and optimistic, even when she struggles. She wants to learn everything—and make friends along the way.

Key Traits:

Cheerful

Open-hearted

Determined

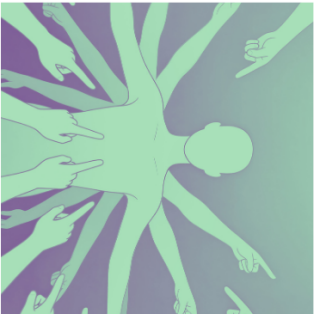
"When I speak English, it's like there are no question marks at the end of my sentences."

CLUE

from

Accents and Power

A social phenomenon...



Studies have shown that listeners consistently associated stronger accented English with lower perceived Intelligence and confidence. There's a persistent social bias against accented English.

CLUE

from

Education and Testing

Your life boiled down to a test...



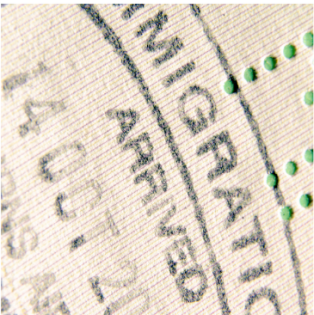
The TOEFL became a high-stakes gatekeeping exam for international students. Passing scores are often required multiple times for school admissions, scholarships, or job opportunities. Playwright Sanaz Toossi has described it as emotionally brutal.

CLUE

from

Immigration and Visas

The process got harder...



After the late 1990s and early 2000s, immigration processes for Iranians became more restrictive and unpredictable, especially for travel, study, and residency in Western countries.

CLUE

from

Identity and Belonging

Stuck between two worlds...



For many immigrants, speaking English can signal opportunity and modernity, while native languages hold cultural identity. Sanaz Toossi has written about feeling split between languages, where fluency does not equal comfort or belonging.



QUOTE
from
English

ELHAM:

“If I have accent, bad TOEFL score.”



QUOTE
from
English

MARJAN:

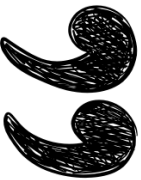
“When you speak another language – a language that’s not yours – you just feel so loud all the time.”



QUOTE
from
English

ROYA:

“They’re harder on men. With visas and green cards.”



QUOTE
from
English

ELHAM:

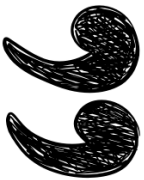
“I have taken the TOEFL five times.”





QUOTE
from
English

OMID:
“I think I live there: in that gap. Not from here, not from there.”



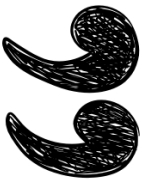
QUOTE
from
English

ROYA:
“He forget in English. But in Farsi, he remember.”



QUOTE
from
English

MARJAN:
We’re just having a conversation.
You speak. You listen.
This is just life!
Remember that, and the TOEFL will feel less like a test.



QUOTE
from
English

ELHAM:
“When I speak English, I know I will always be stranger.”

