

English - First Impressions

Pre-Show Activity for Grades 6-12

Goals

- Students will analyze character descriptions from *English* by Sanaz Toossi.
- Students will learn important context to deepen their experience of seeing the play.
- Students will identify personal connections and points of interest within these characters.
- Students will engage in [Artful Thinking](#) routines to deepen perspective-taking.
- Students will demonstrate their understanding through multiple means of expression.

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

Materials Needed

- Character descriptions from *English* (included)
- Writing utensils or digital devices
- Optional art or presentation tools

Introduction- Meet the Characters

English is set in **2008 in Karaj, Iran**, inside an English-language classroom preparing students for the TOEFL exam. The play follows a small group of adult learners and their teacher as they wrestle with language, identity, ambition, and belonging.

Introduce the main characters:

- **Marjan** – The teacher; confident, disciplined, deeply shaped by having lived abroad
- **Elham** – Highly intelligent, competitive, and frustrated by her accent
- **Roya** – Older student motivated by family and connection across distance
- **Omid** – Fluent, calm, and hiding a complicated relationship to English
- **Goli** – Youngest student; expressive, imaginative, and openhearted

Invite students to choose **one character** to focus on.

Same, Different, Connect, Engage

- After reading the character description, respond to the following:
 - **Same**- What traits, experiences, or qualities do you and this person share?
 - **Different**- What important differences do you notice between you and this person?
 - **Connect**- How do the values or tensions in this character's life connect to how you think about your own life?
 - **Engage**- What would like to ask, say, or do with the person if you had the chance?

Creating a Response

- Students may respond in a way that matches their strengths and preferences:
 - **Write:** A journal entry, poem, or short script excerpt.
 - **Visualize:** A sketch, storyboard, collage, or symbolic representation.
 - **Perform:** A pose, tableau, mime, or short scene.
 - **Record/Produce:** An audio podcast reflection, video response, or digital graphic.
- Encourage students to capture how they see themselves in relation to the character through similarities, differences, and points of connection.
 - We haven't met them yet – we only know what's been provided. What questions do you have about the character? What knew information from seeing the play might impact your perspective?

Sharing and Feedback

- Offer varied ways for students to share:
 - Pair-share or small group discussion.
 - Gallery walk (physical or digital wall of responses).
 - Anonymous posting (teacher reads aloud or shares highlights).
 - Whole-class presentations (optional, not required).
- Conclude with a reflection using **Connect–Extend–Challenge:**
 - How did you connect with this character?
 - How did this activity extend your thinking about them or about yourself?
 - What challenged or surprised you?
- Students can reflect through a quick-write, sketch-note, pair-share, or digital submission.

Optional Extension

Revisit this activity with students after seeing the play. Compare their findings from before and after the show.

TEKS**Fine Arts — Theatre (Grades 6–8 and High School)****Middle School Theatre (6–8)**

- 117.111. Theatre, Middle School, Adopted 2013. (1) Foundations: inquiry and understanding. (B) imagine and clearly describe characters, their relationships, and their surroundings.
- 117.111. Theatre, Middle School, Adopted 2013. (2) Creative expression/performance. (B) define characters by what they do, what they say, and what others say about them.

High School Theatre — Levels I–IV (select levels appropriate to course)

- 117.113. Theatre, High School, Adopted 2013. Level I. (1)(E) analyze characters by describing attributes such as physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions
- 117.113. Theatre, High School, Adopted 2013. Level II. (3)(C) analyze characters, themes, and elements of a script to determine artistic roles and interpretive choices;
- 117.113. Theatre, High School, Adopted 2013. Levels III–IV. (2)(C) analyze and interpret characters from various genres and styles, describing physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions;

English Language Arts & Reading (Grades 6–12)**Middle School (Grades 6–8)**

- 110.36. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 6. (c)(5)(A) describe personal connections to a variety of sources, including self selected texts;
- 110.36. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 6. (c)(5)(B) write responses that demonstrate understanding of texts, including comparing texts within and across genres;
- 110.36. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 6. (c)(11)(I) use an appropriate mode of delivery, whether written, oral, or multimodal, to present results.

High School — English I–IV (Grades 9–12)

- 110.39. English I. (c)(5)(A) describe personal connections to a variety of sources, including self selected texts;
- 110.39. English I. (c)(5)(B) write responses that demonstrate understanding of texts, including comparing texts within and across genres;
- 110.39. English I. (c)(11)(I) use an appropriate mode of delivery, whether written, oral, or multimodal, to present results.
- 110.41. English II / 110.42. English III / 110.43. English IV: include parallel items for each course that address describing personal connections, writing comparative responses, and using appropriate modes of delivery (c.5.A; c.5.B; c.11.I).

Additional ELA TEKS to support multimodal composition, speaking/listening, and reflection

- 110.5.b.9.F (Grade 9/grade cluster): recognize characteristics of multimodal and digital texts.
- 110.36.c.1.C (Grade 6): give a presentation using informal, formal, and technical language effectively to meet the needs of audience, purpose, and occasion, employing eye contact, speaking rate such as pauses for effect, volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.
- 110.38.c.1.C (Grade 8): give a formal presentation that exhibits a logical structure, smooth transitions, accurate evidence, well chosen details, and rhetorical devices and that employs eye contact, speaking rate such as pauses for effect, volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.
- 110.36.c.9.B.ii / 110.37.c.9.B.ii / 110.38.c.9.B.ii (grades 6–8 parallels): develop an engaging idea reflecting depth of thought with specific details, examples, and commentary — supports scaffolded creative responses (journal, poem, script excerpt, podcast).

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."

**Shadieh 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."