

Real Women Have Curves - Context Clues

Pre-Show Activity for Grades 6-12

Goals

- Students will analyze historical, social, and moral contexts from *Real Women Have Curves* 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 time period or author's life.

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

Materials

- *Real Women Have Curves: Clues and Quotes* handout (included)
- *Real Women Have Curves 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

- Begin by reviewing the time period and setting, outlined on Alley Re-Sourced.
- Discuss: “How does an author’s world impact how they write? How does an author’s writing tell us about their world?”
 - Use this line from Ana as an example:
 - **ANA:** I went to the store today and saw an old friend...When she was still in high school, she told me she knew I was going to do something with my life. I don’t want her to know I work here.
 - Ask: “What might have inspired the playwright to write that?”

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

- Students can work in pairs or small groups. Each group should receive a few “Clue” cards from the handout. If working in groups, each group may receive their own complete set.
- Give students a few minutes to examine their cards, using “See-Think-Wonder” as a framework.
 - *What do you see?*
 - *What do you think this tells you the world of the play? The playwright’s life? Their point of view?*

- *What do you wonder?*

Matching Clues with Quotes

- Give each group a set of “Quote” cards from the included handout.
- Students match each quote with one or more clues they believe align thematically.
- They use reasoning or additional research to justify their paring. Example:
 - Clue: “Body Positivity wasn’t a thing...”
 - Quote:
 - ANA: I don’t want to go to the bakery. I don’t want bread.
 - CARMEN: That’s good, at least you won’t get fatter
 - Reasoning: Carmen is freely commenting on Ana’s weight, in a teasing/negative light framed as a positive observation.

Reflection and Reasoning

- Each group selects one or two pairings to present.
- Use the Artful Thinking Routine “*What makes you say that?*” to encourage critical reasoning.
 - “What evidence supports your match?”
 - “How does this reflect the author’s point of view or time period?”

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

Closure

- Revisit: “How does an author’s world impact how they write? How does an author’s writing tell us about their world?”
- Invite brief, one-sentence reflections from each group using one of these sentence frames:
 - “I used to think...now I think...”
 - “The story connects to the past because....”
 - “What surprised me was....”

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: (6A–C), (7A–B), (8A–C) – Analyze how historical, cultural, and social contexts influence literature; draw connections between themes and author perspective; use textual evidence to support interpretation and discussion.
- 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 and moral themes.

Who's Who: The Cast and Character Descriptions of Alley Theatre's *Real Women Have Curves*



Brenda Palestina
Ana

ANA – Recent high school graduate, feminist, aspiring writer, hates being underestimated, hides her journal behind the toilet. She's outspoken and idealistic, frustrated by her family's expectations but determined to shape her own future.

Key Traits:

- Smart
- Bold
- Independent

"I'm keeping a journal so when I become 'rich and famous' I can write my autobiography."



Angela Lanza
Carmen

CARMEN – Ana and Estela's mother, dramatic and opinionated, loves mole and gossip, fears aging and losing her identity. She's tough on her daughters but deeply loves them, struggling to balance tradition with change.

Key Traits:

- Funny
- Proud
- Maternal

"It's because I love you that I make your life so miserable."



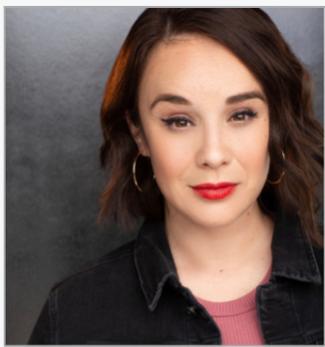
Melinna Bobadilla
Estela

ESTELLA – Owner of the sewing factory, Ana's older sister, practical and stressed, secretly romantic, has a criminal record for stealing a lobster. She's overwhelmed by financial pressure but dreams of designing clothes and proving she's more than her mistakes.

Key Traits:

- Hardworking
- Ambitious
- Secretly tender

"I was arrested for illegal possession of... a lobster. Out of season!"



Xochitl Romero

Pancha

PANCHÁ – Mellow but sharp-tongued, struggles with infertility, loves snacks and sarcasm, doesn't trust easily. She's skeptical of Ana's ideas but slowly opens up, revealing her vulnerability and loyalty.

Key Traits:

- Witty
- Guarded
- Loyal

“Wind, that's what I am... Empty, like an old rag.”



Sophia Marcelle

Rosalí

ROSALÍ – Sweet and soft-spoken, obsessed with dieting, faints from heat and hunger, secretly takes diet pills. She wants to be accepted and seen as beautiful, but learns to value herself beyond appearances.

Key Traits:

- Kind
- Insecure
- Hopeful

“This is more important to me than being a size seven.”



A woman's body was public business

Commentary on weight, appearance, and femininity—often framed as “concern” or “love”—was normalized, especially among family members.



Traditional roles were enforced...

In many Mexican-American families in the 1980s, daughters were expected to prioritize family responsibility, marriage, and caregiving over personal ambition—especially if money was tight.

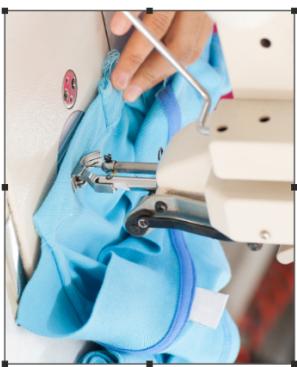
Gender in the 80s & 90s

CLUE
from

CLUE
from

Gender in the 80s & 90s

CLUE
from



López has stated that *Real Women Have Curves* was inspired by her own experience working in a garment factory with her sister after graduating high school. The play draws directly from her time there.



Like Ana, López was a recent high school graduate at the time she worked in the factory. College felt both possible and out of reach, shaped by money, family pressure, and immigration status.

Life of Josefina López

CLUE
from the

CLUE
from the

Life of Josefina López

She worked in a factory...

She graduated in the late 80s...





Gender in the 80s & 90s

Body Positivity wasn't a thing...

The language of "self-love" did not exist in the way students know today. Claiming bodily autonomy was radical, not trendy. The push was for matching body standards, not changing or challenging them.



Sweatshops & Immigration

The IRCA just passed...

Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 made it possible to apply for amnesty and legal status. But the process was slow, confusing, and incomplete—especially for working-class families.



CLUE

from



Sweatshops & Immigration

LA was full of small factories...

In the 1980s, the Los Angeles garment industry employed tens of thousands of workers—mostly immigrant women—producing clothing for major brands.



CLUE

from

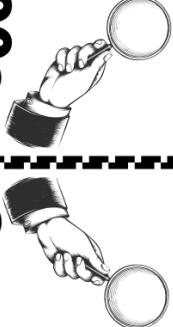


Sweatshops & Immigration

Conditions were rough...



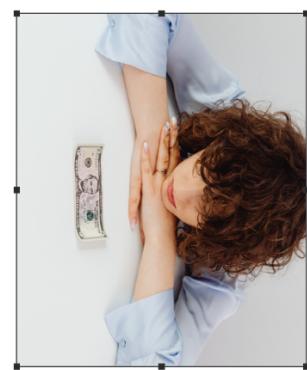
Long hours, low wages, broken equipment, and unsafe conditions were widespread. Workers without legal status were less likely to report abuse or demand fair pay, fearing deportation or job loss.



CLUE

from

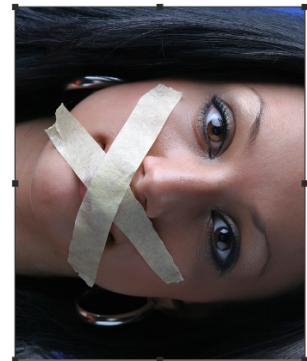




Working Class

Debt controls daily decisions...

Bills, rent, medical costs, and remittances to family members can shape choices more than personal goals.



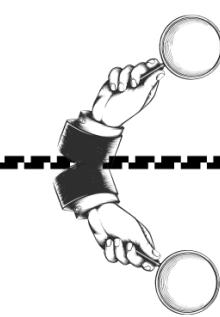
Working Class

Survival meant silence...

Speaking out against unfair treatment could mean losing everything, not just a job. Especially in working class immigrant communities, where a fear of raids remained high and legal status did not guarantee safety.



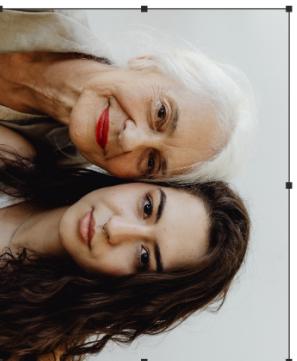
CLUE
from the



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Pressure to conform came from family and community as well as outside forces. Women who were “proper”, obedient, and invisible could reduce risk in a world where they have limited power.



There's a push and pull between generations for any social or economic class. For a lot of working class families, that friction is made worse by the fear that deviating from the norm could mean losing everything.

Gender in the 80s & 90s

It wasn't just the media...

Generational Conflict...



CLUE
from the



CLUE
from the





QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

ANA: I just graduated from high school. Most of my friends are in college. It's as if I'm going backwards.

I'm doing the work that mostly illegal aliens do.

ANA: I don't want to go to the bakery.
I don't want bread.

CARMEN: That's good, at least you won't get fatter.



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

ESTELA: The money they pay me is not enough to hire any more help. So because we get behind, they don't pay.

PANCHА: The machine is not working.
ESTELA: Not again!



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves

ANA: Thank God, I'm legal. I will never have to

lie on applications anymore, except maybe about my weight.

ROSALI: I used to work in factories and whenever they did a raid, I'd always sneak out through the bathroom window.



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves

(*after the women all hide from la migra.*)

PANCHÁ: Pero, why are we hiding? We're all legal now.

CARMEN: ¡Ay, de veras! I forgot! All those years of being an illegal, I still can't get used to it.

ANA: I went to the store today and saw an old friend... When she was still in high school, she told me she knew I was going to do something with my life. I don't want her to know I work here.



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves

(while talking about her weight)

CARMEN: But you know what it really is. It's just water. After having so many babies, I just stopped getting rid of the water. It's as if I'm clogged.



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves



QUOTE

from

Real Women Have Curves

CARMEN: Your husband's not going to like you knowing so much.

PANCHÁ: A girl shouldn't know so much.

ANA: I'm not a girl, I'm a woman.

ANA: Why didn't you just say "No"?

CARMEN: Because, M'ija, I was never taught how to say no.