

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 pairing. 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 – A recent high school graduate, feminist and aspiring writer. She hates being underestimated and hides her journal behind the toilet. She's 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. She fears aging and losing her identity. She's tough on her daughters because she deeply loves them but struggles 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

Estela – The owner of the sewing factory and Ana's older sister. She has a criminal record for stealing a lobster and is overwhelmed by financial pressure. She 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!"



Gloria Vivica Benavides
Pancha

Pancha – 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
Rosali

Rosali – She doesn’t always treat herself the best, but learns to value herself beyond appearances.

Key Traits:

- Kind
- Insecure
- Hopeful

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

CLUE

from the

Life of Josefina López

She worked in a factory...



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.

CLUE

from the

Life of Josefina López

She graduated in the late 80s...



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.

CLUE

from

Gender in the 80s & 90s

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.

CLUE

from

Gender in the 80s & 90s

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.

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

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.

CLUE

from

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

Gender in the 80s & 90s

It wasn't just the media...



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.

CLUE

from the

Working Class

Generational Conflict...



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.

CLUE

from the

Working Class

Debt controls daily decisions...



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

CLUE

from the

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.



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

ANNA: 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.



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

ANNA: 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

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



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

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





QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

ANNA: Thank God, I'm legal. I will never have to lie on applications anymore, except maybe about my weight.



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

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

(after the women all hide from la migra.)
PANCHIA: Pero, why are we hiding? We're all legal now.
CARMEN: ¡Ay, de veras! I forget! All those years of being an illegal, I still can't get used to it.



QUOTE
from

Real Women Have Curves

ANNA: 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.



<p>“ QUOTE from ”</p> <p>Real Women Have Curves</p> <p><i>(while talking about her weight)</i></p> <p>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.</p>	<p>“ QUOTE from ”</p> <p>Real Women Have Curves</p> <p>ESTELA: Why do you think your way is better? All my life your way has been better. Maybe that's why my life is so screwed up!</p>
<p>“ QUOTE from ”</p> <p>Real Women Have Curves</p> <p>CARMEN: Your husband's not going to like you knowing so much.</p> <p>PANCHIA: A girl shouldn't know so much.</p> <p>ANA: I'm not a girl, I'm a woman.</p>	<p>“ QUOTE from ”</p> <p>Real Women Have Curves</p> <p>ANA: Why didn't you just say "No"?</p> <p>CARMEN: Because, M'ija, I was never taught how to say no.</p>