

English - Exploring Themes

Post-Show Activity for Grades 6-12

Goals

- Students will identify and analyze major themes in *English*.
- Students will connect themes to characters, scenes, and theatrical choices.
- Students will synthesize understanding through discussion and visual creation.

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

Materials Needed

- Story Outline (included)
- Art supplies or digital tools

Introduction

Review the idea that *English* is about **more than learning a language**.

Introduce core themes:

- Language and Identity
- Belonging and Cultural Identity
- Bias and Accents
- Connection and Isolation

Ask students to name moments from the play that stayed with them.

Group Discussion

Assign each group one theme.

Groups discuss:

- Key scenes where this theme appears
- Characters most affected by the theme
- How language or silence plays a role

Notes for UDL alignment: Bridge the language of the students (the way they phrased their ideas) with any academic or formal variations you wish to support. “Just cause you’re poor doesn’t mean you’re a bad person” would be another way of saying “The author’s critique of poverty and inequality.” Learn more about UDL guidelines for language and symbols [here](#).

Group Work Time

- Each group will create a visual representation of their assigned theme. They can choose from various formats, including:
 - A poster that includes memorable quotes from the play, visuals, and explanations of the theme.
 - A collage using magazine cutouts, drawings, or digital images that symbolize the theme.
 - A short multimedia presentation that combines images, text, and audio to convey the theme.
- Use a visible timer while students are creating and give them verbal warnings.
 - Keep the list of themes visible if possible.
 - Encourage the use of the Story Outline and notes from their discussion.

Sharing and Feedback

- Designate a stage area and have each person or group present their work, explaining their theme and how it was expressed in the play.
- If time allows, students can display their work in a gallery walk.
- During presentations, use “See / Think / Wonder” to encourage reflection from the rest of the class:
 - What did you see in this visual? Objectively, without interpretation. Just visual details.
 - What do you think is happening in this visual? What do you see that makes you think that?
 - What do you wonder? What questions come up for you as you look at this stage picture?

TEKS

English Language Arts and Reading (Grades 6–12)

- (2A–E), (3A–C), (5A–C), (6A–B), (7A), (8A) – Analyze theme and genre; interpret character and plot development; make inferences and draw conclusions with textual evidence;

Theatre I–IV

- (1A–C), (2A–C), (3A–B), (4A–B) – Develop and sustain characters using voice, movement, and imagination; interpret scripts and dramatic literature; collaborate to express ideas and themes through performance; analyze and critique theatrical works and performances.

English - Story Outline

Outline

This outline is a reference to help you remember the play. Use it to notice connections between characters, setting, and themes. You do not need to add anything unless your teacher asks you to. Use the outline to support your analysis or creative response.

Basic Play Information

Title: *English*

Playwright: Sanaz Toossi

Genre: Contemporary drama

Setting: 2008, Karaj, Iran

Primary Location: An English-language classroom preparing students for the TOEFL exam

Central Point of View: Primarily Marjan, with shifting focus among the students

Setting as a Driving Force

- The classroom is a controlled space with strict language rules (“English Only”)
- It is a place of ambition, pressure, and vulnerability
- Language functions as both a tool for opportunity and a source of conflict
- The classroom becomes a site where identity is tested, reshaped, and revealed

Major Themes

- **Language and Identity** – The struggle to learn English is not just academic, and characters wrestle with how speaking English changes their sense of who they are.
- **Bias around Accents** – Characters in the play speak with varying degrees of fluency and accent, which impacts who is heard, valued, or dismissed based on how they speak.
- **Belonging and Cultural Identity** – The characters in this play are not only learning a different language, but are also exploring what it means to live in a different country where English is spoken.
- **Connection and Isolation** – Language is portrayed as a bridge — and sometimes a barrier — to intimacy.

Key Characters & Motivations

Marjan

- Teacher who believes deeply in English as a tool for self-expression
- Struggles with her own fractured identity between Farsi and English
- Values discipline, immersion, and emotional restraint

Elham

- Highly driven and academically gifted

- Frustrated by her accent and repeated TOEFL failures
- Sees English as an obstacle rather than a refuge

Omid

- Fluent and calm, with an American passport
- Hides his complicated relationship to English and belonging
- Ultimately chooses home over outward opportunity

Roya

- Older student motivated by family connection
- Wants English to connect with her granddaughter abroad
- Values heritage, memory, and emotional continuity

Goli

- Youngest student; imaginative and expressive
- Finds freedom and confidence in English
- Represents possibility, growth, and openness

Key Moments / Ideas

- Early classroom exercises reveal differences in fluency, confidence, and power
- Conflicts arise around accent, correction, and favoritism
- Elham's frustration builds through repeated testing pressure
- Omid reveals his American citizenship and chooses not to leave Iran
- Roya asserts the importance of native language and cultural memory
- Marjan confronts the emotional cost of living between languages
- The final scenes emphasize acceptance rather than mastery

Language as a Theatrical Device

- English and Farsi are both represented through English dialogue
- Accents signal identity, status, and emotional distance
- Silence, repetition, and correction shape the rhythm of scenes
- Language becomes action, conflict, and metaphor

Overall Impact

- *English* explores what is gained—and lost—when learning another language
- The play resists simple answers about success or assimilation
- It emphasizes emotional truth over linguistic perfection
- The ending centers growth, self-recognition, and coexistence of identities