

Five Plays for Today

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Summary

Watch and learn!: Two friends, Sam and Paul, are talking in a park. Paul is a quiet, studious boy who likes reading books. Sam criticises him because he hasn't got any friends and is boring. Sam, on the other hand, thinks he is very interesting because he has a lot of hobbies and all the girls love him. He promises to teach Paul how to maintain a conversation. Two girls, Anna and Susan come into the park. Sam immediately starts telling them about his new motorbike, computer and jeans. Anna is interested but Susan appears bored. Anna asks Sam some questions, but because he is so interested in himself, he doesn't answer her. When Anna wants to show the boys one of her photos, Sam merely responds by insisting on showing some photos of himself. Paul asks if he can see Anna's photo and she shows him a photo of herself and Sam at a party. Paul compliments Anna on her appearance, and says he doesn't like parties because he can't dance. Susan offers to teach him and invites him to a party later that evening. Anna notices Paul's book and praises it, and shows him a book she is reading. The two girls say they both like reading, playing sports and listening to music. Then they decide to go for a coffee and call Sam, who is busy looking at his phone. On the way, Susan tells Sam that Paul is really interesting and that he asks questions and listens to the answers, and suggests that Sam could learn a lot from his friend.

Let's talk now!: Judy is looking at the people in the town from her bedroom window. She wonders why everybody is always in a hurry, and they have no time to make friends. She is regretting living in the town. She would prefer to be in the country, where all her friends are, and where she used to go to school. Her next door neighbour, Emily, is also looking out of her bedroom

window and the two girls say hello. Emily goes to the same school as Judy and is surprised to discover Judy lives next door. Emily admits that she didn't talk to Judy at school because she thought she was a quiet girl, and because Judy was a new girl at the school. The girls then talk about Emily's family problems. Her father has left home and she lives with her mother. They then talk about their pet cats and decide to become friends. Emily wants to walk to school with Judy the following day.

Say it!: Leo and Jane are sitting at a bus stop. Standing behind them are Leo 2 and Jane 2, who represent what each of them is thinking. Jane 2 wants to speak to Leo, but she is too shy, and Leo 2 wants to tell her she is beautiful but is reluctant to do so because Jane never speaks to or looks at him. Leo 2 persuades Leo to say 'hello'. Jane returns the greeting and looks away quickly. Leo 2 thinks she hates him and that he is stupid, and Jane 2 thinks Leo 2 feels the same way about her. Leo 2 decides to say something nice and instructs Leo to ask Jane the time, even though he has a watch. Jane 2 thinks he is bored, and there follows a series of misunderstandings. Leo then compliments Jane on her jacket and she returns the compliment, saying she likes his T-shirt. Finally Leo manages to say he likes Jane and she says she likes him too.

Young love!: Sue is waiting for her boyfriend in a café. A man and a woman are sitting at the next table, wondering what the boyfriend will be like. Her boyfriend, Danny, comes in, and angrily demands to know where Sue was the previous day. Sue shouts back at him and is told by the man to be quiet. Danny suspects that Sue had been with another man, which she strongly denies, telling him she was at her seriously ill grandmother's house. Danny apologises and she reassures him that he is the only man in her life. The man at the next table thinks she is lying, but the woman with him disagrees. They decide to listen into the conversation, the man being sure it will be revealed that she has got two boyfriends. Danny orders a cup of coffee from the waiter and Sue asks for a glass of water, claiming she hasn't got any money. Danny offers to pay for her coffee. The couple are happy again and this convinces the woman that she hasn't got two boyfriends. A man called Alex walks into the café, surprised to see Sue there, and sits down at the table. He wants to know why Sue wasn't at her grandmother's house. Danny replies that she had seen her yesterday, whereupon Sue says they are going there now, and tries to get Danny out of the café. The waiter arrives with the two coffees

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and Alex orders another. He asks Danny if he knows Sue's grandmother. Sue and Danny reply simultaneously with him saying he doesn't and she saying he does. Sue then tries to change the conversation. The men have two questions for Sue. Alex wants to know who Danny is, and Danny wants to know if Sue was with Alex the previous day. At this point, Sue's phone rings. She walks away from the table to answer it. The man is now convinced that she has two boyfriends, and the woman is beginning to accept the possibility. The waiter assures them she hasn't got two boyfriends. Sue is talking to John on her phone and trying to convince him not to come to the café, saying it was full of unpleasant people. The man and woman are offended when they hear this, and Sue offers to buy them a drink. The man orders a bottle of wine. John comes in and notices Danny and Alex fighting. He agrees with Sue that the people in the café are not very nice, and she tries to get him out quickly. Danny demands to know which of the three men is Sue's boyfriend. John, who doesn't know either Danny or Alex, says he is. The waiter then announces that Sue has three boyfriends. The man triumphantly claims that he was right, but is corrected by the woman, who says that she was right because Sue hasn't got two boyfriends, she has three. Sue then goes round the three men in turn, declaring each of them to be her boyfriend. The men, in turn, all leave, saying they want nothing to do with her. She is then presented with a bill for the coffees and wine, amounting to twenty pounds. Taking a lot of money from her bag, she swears never to have more than one boyfriend again, on account of the cost.

We're not going away!: A group of stupid bullies are talking outside a school. They are saying how famous, strong, intelligent and bad they are, and that they are not going to go away. The head teacher is watching them and she realises she has a big problem on her hands. The bullies, pretending that they want to help an old woman with her heavy bag, push her over in the street. Oliver arrives and the bullies demand money from him. He tells them he hasn't got any, and they tell him to ask his mother. His mother notices something wrong with Oliver, but he won't tell her what it is. When he asks her for some money, and she refuses, the bullies tell him to steal it. He takes the money. Oliver's friends, Jeff and Sally, arrive and they admit that they have also taken money from their mothers. They go to talk to the teacher about their problem. The teacher and Oliver's mother decide to call the police, but they are doubtful of whether this will

make the bullies go away. The bullies reaffirm that they are not going to go away.

Background and themes

The art of listening: In the first play we are shown an example of someone who is incapable of talking about anything other than himself. He thinks this makes him a more interesting person than his friend, but in the end he is told that listening to people will make him a better person.

Shyness: In the second and third plays, three of the characters are very shy and one is very sociable and has many friends. Although shyness is not a very bad trait, one must learn to overcome it and be more self-confident, and self-confident people must be aware of shyness in others and allow them into their circle of friends.

Faithfulness: In the fourth play, the main character has three boyfriends. She tries to hide the fact, but in the end they all leave her, and she is left counting the cost of her mistake.

Bullying: The last play deals with the terrible practice of bullying in schools. The strong pick on the weak and defenceless, abusing them physically and making them commit crimes. The victims of this behaviour often feel they cannot talk about their experiences to anyone, not even members of their family.

Discussion activities

Watch and learn!

While reading (p. 4, after 'Oh, that's a great book.')

- Discuss:** Put the students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions about books: *Do you like reading books? What book are you reading at the moment? What is your best book? Do you sometimes read books and feel afraid? Do you like funny books or exciting books? How often do you read? Do you read books on the computer?*

After reading

- Write and ask:** Write *Where is Paul waiting for Sam?* on the board and elicit the answer (In a park.). Ask students to write another question about something in "Watch and learn!" Now have students walk around the classroom, asking and answering each other's questions.
- Write:** Put the students in groups of four and tell them each to write a summary of the play. The summary must be exactly fifty words long, not one word more or less. The students then read out their summaries to each other.

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Let's talk now!

While reading (p. 7, after 'Oh, you've got a cat.')

- 4 Write and game:** Put the students in groups of four and ask them to write down the names of all the animals they can think of in English. Put their suggestions on the board, adding some of your own. Then play the twenty questions game. Student A thinks of an animal. The rest of the group have to ask him/her questions to guess which animal Student A is thinking of. Student A can only respond 'yes', 'no' or 'sometimes'. The group can ask twenty questions. If they can't guess in twenty questions, Student A has won. See Discussion activities key for possible questions.
- 5 Discuss:** Remind the students that the girls have both got pet cats. Then put them in pairs and ask them to talk about the following questions: *Have you got an animal? What animal is it? Would you like to have an animal? What animals do people normally have and what strange animals do some people have? What are some of the problems you can have with an animal?*

Say it!

After reading

- 6 Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *shy, feet, bored, watch, bus, clothes*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in 'Say it!'
- 7 Pair work and write:** Remind students that Jane and Paul are shy people and that Paul thinks that Jane is beautiful. Put them in pairs to make a list of all the words they know in English to describe a person's physical appearance and personality. Get feedback from the whole class and then ask students to individually write a short composition describing somebody they know well.
- 8 Discuss:** Remind students that Jane and Leo talk about clothes and put them in groups to discuss the following questions: *Are clothes important for you? How often do you buy new clothes? Where do you buy them? What do you usually wear during in the week and at weekends? What do you wear to parties?*

Young love!

While reading (p. 18, after 'We really must go now!')

- 9 Role play:** Put the students in groups of three and tell them they are going to act out a conversation between Sue, Danny and Alex. The two boys want to know about the confusion about the time of the visit to Sue's grandmother's house and they are sure that Sue is seeing both of them. Sue tries to defend herself. See Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.

After reading

- 10 Write and guess:** Write *Danny was happy when he came into the café* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (angry not happy). Now students choose a sentence from 'Young love!' and rewrite it changing one word. Students walk around the classroom, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.
- 11 Describe and draw:** Put the students in pairs. Student A describes what is happening in the picture on page 17 and Student B has to draw it. Then Student B looks at the picture on page 21 and describes it to Student A. How accurate are their drawings?

We're not going away!

While reading (page 27, after 'There isn't a problem. OK?')

- 12 Discuss:** Oliver has told his mother a lie. Put the students in groups and ask them to discuss the following questions: *Do you sometimes tell lies? Do you know somebody who always tells lies? Is it sometimes OK to tell lies? Your friend buys new trousers and you hate them. Do you say they are nice, OK or ugly? Is it sometimes very bad to tell lies? What bad things can happen to you if you tell lies?*
- 13 Write** (p. 28, after 'I lied to my mother and I took money from her bag.'): Ask students to write a diary entry as if they were Oliver. Tell them to write about a typical school day during which Oliver has to face the bullies. Encourage them to be imaginative about the things that happen to him and to write about Oliver's feelings in the first person.
- 14 Write and discuss:** Put the students in small groups to make a list of things that people are sometimes afraid of. Get feedback from the whole class and write the things on the board. Now put students in pairs to discuss which of those things they feel afraid of and why.
- 15 Discuss and write:** Put the students in groups to discuss what other problems, apart from bullying, they have in their school. Ask them to consider how they could make their school a better place. Get feedback and then ask the groups to write a school manifesto, including rules about what students can't do and what students should do.