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# Landscape and Identity

So far in this book, you have focused on your perceptions of nature and your reflections about the world around you. Now we're going to ask you to shift your lens slightly, to focus instead on yourself in relationship to the world around you. Of course, your perceptions come from who you are, so you certainly haven't been observing and reflecting without realizing that who you are shapes what you see. We want you to think about the relationship between the landscapes around you and your identity.

Exactly what do we mean by *landscapes*? Defined broadly, we mean your surroundings—geographical, historical, and interpersonal. How have the places where you have lived helped shape who you are? What influences come from the past? From other people?

Who we are is often defined by where we're from—at least by others. In *Blue Highways: A Journey into America*, William Least Heat Moon talks about such geographical perceptions. He has stopped in Tennessee at a roadside cafe for breakfast where the waitress asks him if he's from the North. He replies, "I guess I am," and tells the reader, "A Missourian gets used to Southerners thinking him a Yankee, a Northerner considering him a cracker, a Westerner sneering at his effete Easternness, and the Easterner taking him for a cowhand." (The entire excerpt appears in the next chapter of this text.)

What qualities are associated with each of these stereotypes? What does it mean to be a "Yankee" or a "cowhand"? What geographical stereotypes do you know of? Take a few minutes to discuss this with the rest of the class. Then think about and discuss whether all characteristics must be stereotypes. For example, are there certain qualities that can reasonably be associated with people from certain parts of this country or from other parts of the world? How might the geography have demanded particular qualities from those who needed to survive there? Do you have particular characteristics or values that you can trace to geographical influences?

In this chapter, we'll explore the relationships between landscapes and identity through reading various texts that require you to use your imagination. And we'll ask you to approach your reading through an angle you may not have tried much—performance. If "performance" conjures up visions of producing full-length plays, memorizing lengthy speeches, wearing makeup, and standing under hot lights in front of hundreds of people, you're not perceiving it the same as we are. For the purposes of this chapter, we are talking merely about using your voice and your body to respond to and interpret the literature that you read.

## Seeing and Performing

You may have been introduced at an early age to the dramatic power of the human voice. Many of us remember the pleasure of a trusted adult—mother, father, teacher—reading aloud to us. *Where the Wild Things Are* may have come to life first through the voice of another reader. The rhythm and rhyme of *The Cat in the Hat* are even more important than the words themselves. Perhaps we first heard folk tales in our ancestors' native languages, learning about humans interacting with coyotes, turtles, dragons, frogs, or cranes.

Although some might scoff that reading aloud is “kid stuff,” many people attest to the popularity of listening to literature. Teens and adults purchase millions of dollars' worth of tape-recorded books each year. Driving or jogging, they listen to books and, possibly, remember the pleasure of the first time someone read aloud to them. They know that listening to literature read well is pleasurable for all ages.

In this chapter we hope you will find that reading aloud to interested listeners can be a performance as much as acting or singing might be. We hope that you will also discover that reading aloud is another way of interpreting literature—another angle of vision. The way you read the words demonstrates your understanding of the text. In addition, trying out different ways of reading a poem or story may help you arrive at additional understandings. Occasionally, it is helpful to get up and move around as you try to envision the exact positions of characters in relation to each other or as you try to imagine the effect an author wanted to create through the posture or gesture of a particular person or speaker.

If you think about it, it is nearly impossible simply to read a story in the sense that most of us understand the term “reading”—a set of word recognition skills and vocabulary useful in reading for information and correct answers. This is one kind of reading, but it is far different from what happens when we create new meanings of our own from a text—when a single line or even one word can stir in us eager leaps of the imagination beyond the specifics of the story or poem or play.

As we *react* we also *enact*. That is, when we read and react to what we've read, we stage performances in what is often called “the theater of the mind.” The reading of fiction nearly always amounts to a performance in this imagined theater—where we see and hear not only what the author may have perceived in his or her imagination, but also (or even instead) what we bring to the reading from our own backgrounds.

## Landscapes of Memory

Our memories make up part of the background that we bring to observation and imagination. What we remember and the emotions associated with events and people from our past shape who we are now. Bill McBride demonstrates this interplay of past and present, memory and reality in “I Remember.”

### I Remember

*Bill McBride*

As I watch you now,  
not remembering where the silverware is kept  
or how the knives and forks are placed,  
I remember when such a common task was pure reflex.

As I hear you now,  
asking which pan to use  
or how to peel the potatoes or turn the stove on,  
I remember American enchiladas, homemade wedding cakes,  
and T-bone steaks for breakfast.

As I talk with you now,  
reminding you again and again  
who your visitors are and  
what your yesteryears involved,  
I remember frosted cake pans, antique tan dresses,  
and postcard messages gone awry.

Now that you live in a fleeting, fragmented present tense,  
I remember—for both of us.

### Log Entry 1

1. Jot down your initial reaction to the poem.
2. Look over what you have written and focus on one word. Maybe it stands out because you can think of more you would like to say about it or it intrigues you because you wonder why you

wrote that particular word or maybe it's a word from the poem that you would like to explore further. Freewrite for five minutes about that word as a way of expanding your thinking about the poem. This is called a *focused freewrite*.

## Collaborating

In small groups of three to five:

1. Discuss your reactions to the poem, including questions you have. You may or may not want to share the results of your focused freewrite.
2. Who do you think the speaker is? How old? What does the speaker look like? Think about how the speaker would say each of the lines and stanzas. Discuss the best way to express each line, given the identity that you believe the speaker has. For example, would your tone change within each stanza when the speaker says "I remember"? What feeling would you want to convey?

## Work in Progress

What do *you* remember? What specific sights, sounds, smells, and tastes contribute to your memory? How does what you remember relate to who you are now? Draft your own "I Remember" poem, incorporating concrete details of one part of the landscape of your memory. Your poem can be as short as McBride's poem or as long as—or longer than—the two poems in the following section. Your purpose is to demonstrate a contrast between then and now, using vivid details that help the reader visualize the interplay between memory and identity. You may decide to read this poem aloud to your group or your class, refine the draft for your portfolio, or just leave it in your writing folder.

## An Oral Collage

Occasionally, poems take on additional meanings when they are read together. First, read aloud each of the next two memory poems separately and then follow the directions on pages 82–83 for creating an oral collage.

### A Life of Evolution

*Charles Alexander*

I remember a simpler time  
When all that troubled my heart  
Were the social graces of being six.

I remember a time before  
I knew about sex, race or THE HATE  
Of bigotry, homophobia, sexism or ignorance.

I remember a time of wonder,  
Discovery, being carefree when  
I ran on the playground basking in the sun.

I remember a time  
When Blacks and Whites walked hand in hand  
When the “Dream” was a reality for me.

Yes, I remember, but then . . .

CORRUPTION!

Racism crashed down.

I remember the first time  
I became aware that I was Black  
And hence . . . different.

I remember the lies in school,  
“You came here on the Mayflower,  
Europe is your heritage.”

I remember asking  
“Why are all the great men white,  
Where are the ones who look like me?”

I remember that all-White school  
Being called names: Nigger, rug-head, monkey man.  
Humiliation was the rule.

I remember being told  
"Go back to Africa you F——  
Spear chucking jigaboo."

Yes, I remember, but then  
DISCOVERY at age ten  
When my father taught me about Africa.

I remember the African music,  
Jazz, blues, R&B and rap  
When the rhythm touched my soul.

I remember Black pride  
Afros, dashikis—the discovery of  
Mother Africa.

I remember Dr. King,  
Malcolm X, my father,  
My grandfather and his father.

I remember discovering my history.  
I remember discovering my warrior within,  
I remember overcoming ignorance and fear.

### **I Remember Junior High**

*Antonette Aragon*

I remember the days I could not wait.  
Wait for school to end.  
School was boring,  
Junior high that is.

I remember the crowded school  
and the boring teachers  
and my friends.  
My friends were fun  
but sometimes they were mean.  
My friends laughed at me  
because I had hairy legs  
and I still liked my roller skates, dolls and bike.  
My friends liked dates, trips to malls, and Mike Dike.

I remember wanting to be smart  
but teachers told me I could not be on the fast track.  
I did not care what they said  
and I signed up anyway.  
I am Mexican and I am smart.

The days were long and school was boring.  
But Mrs. Garcia said school is short and so is life.  
I remember junior high.  
That's all that I remember.

## Collaborating

- Discuss these two poems with a partner. How do you envision the speakers? Describe their physical characteristics, their ages, and their attitudes.
- How would you describe the tone of each poem? You can often discern different tones as a poem is read aloud—bitter, sarcastic, nostalgic, enthusiastic, and so on.
- Are there words or phrases that you are uncomfortable saying aloud? Why might the poets have included those words or phrases? What effect do they have on the rest of the poem?

## Performance

Using these two poems, create an oral collage by having two speakers, possibly a male and a female, read alternate lines or stanzas. One pattern would be to have the first speaker read the first stanza of Aragon's poem, beginning "I remember the days I could not wait." The second reader would then read the first three stanzas of Alexander's poem. Then the first reader would continue with, "I remember the crowded school." The reading could continue alternating stanzas and speakers in this way to the end of the poem. Or,



create your own variations, depending on the tones you identified and the effect you wish to create.

As a class, discuss the effect of the different readings. How did the meaning or mood of the poems change for each variation? Do you prefer one manner of presenting the poems? Why?

## Portfolio Entry

If you want to explore this idea further, you might form a small group to create your own oral collage. Using your “I Remember” poems or other poems that you select or write, try different ways of combining the texts. When you have the combination that you prefer, record it and/or present it to the class. Your recording could go into your portfolio as a demonstration of what you know and are able to do with oral reading.

## Many Voices, Many Meanings in Performance

In this part of the chapter, you will focus on the voices in literature. When you're only reading words on the page, you're missing an important dimension of interpretation—the voices behind the words. We each have a distinctive voice quality. From our voices, listeners estimate our geographical origin, age, social status, health, and even mood. Good oral readers train their voices to convey a range of these and other qualities. That doesn't mean you have to be an impersonator or mimic; it does mean that you should attempt to make your character's voice fit his or her personality in convincing ways.

Experienced readers know that the words on a page can reveal live characters speaking in many voices. Through reading, we begin to liberate those characters, to give them form and flesh and voice. We try to understand their personalities. And, when deciding to present those characters to an audience of one or more, we share our understanding and appreciation of the literature we perform.

In this section of the chapter, you will learn about one way to do that—Readers Theater. This is a special kind of reading-aloud performance sometimes called Theater of the Imagination or Theater of the Mind because it capitalizes on the imaginations of the audience. Costumes, props, and sets somewhat limit—even determine—our interpretation of traditional plays, but no such constraints apply to this type of performance. The actors sit on stools or stepladders or risers, reading from their scripts and providing characterization through facial expressions, voice, and body language rather than through costumes and movements.

Scripts differ as well. While plays can be used, so can all sorts of other literature—short stories, song lyrics, poems, letters, diaries, essays, and newspaper stories. A narrator can be added to provide transition between selections or details of setting or situation that the characters themselves can't convey. The variety of available script material makes Readers Theater a good vehicle for understanding all sorts of prose and poetry, not just plays. And, an added advantage is that scripts don't need to be memorized.

Another difference between traditional theater and Readers Theater is that the actor's voice, while always important, becomes even more so. Without props, makeup, or costumes, the voice becomes the primary means of bringing characters to life for the audience.

Even though you will be holding your script and won't need to memorize it, you will need to know it very well. After all, you are supposed to be the character, and few real, live people sound as though they're reading lines when they're talking.

Before putting together a full script, though, you may want to complete some preliminary activities.

## Thinking About Performing

You might be uncomfortable about getting up in front of the class, especially if you think you'll be laughed at or graded. Neither should happen to you. If you're a little nervous, think about why you feel that way and what kind of performances you would be comfortable doing. Could you perform in a small group? As part of a larger group or the whole class? Maybe you're excited about performing. What can you do to make others as excited and comfortable as you are?

If you discuss some of these questions in a small group or as a whole class, you'll probably discover that you're not alone in your feelings. Everyone, even experienced performers, feels some stage

fright before going in front of an audience or a camera. In fact, some nervousness is good because it causes your adrenaline to flow, giving your performance a little extra energy. With practice, most people learn to control their feelings enough that stage fright does not incapacitate them.

## Log Entry 2

Besides the nervousness or excitement you might feel, there are other ways in which performing literature is different from reading it. Think of several ways in which this is true. Take a few minutes to list those ways in your log. Make a T-chart like the one below and list all the differences between reading and performing literature that you can think of. Then discuss your findings with others.

<i>Reading</i>	<i>Performing</i>


## Voice Exercises

The activities in this chapter will not train you as an actor, but they are meant to help you enjoy and understand literature through the dimension of performance. Thus it is helpful to do some of the voice exercises that trained performers use.

## Collaborating

With your partner or in a small group:

1. Imagine the personality behind each of the following phrases. You might be a spoiled child, an irritable businessman, or an energetic cheerleader. Any distinctive type that you imagine (without engaging in cruel stereotyping) will probably work.

- 
- I'm tired.
  - What do you mean?
  - Who are you?
  - I have something to tell you.
  - Where are you going?

2. Say each phrase in two or three different ways.
3. Discuss the exercise after everyone has practiced. How does the meaning of the phrase change as you change characters? Although you say the same phrase each time, what is a businessman thinking when he says, "I'm tired"? What does a spoiled child mean by the same phrase? How can you use your voice to reveal the thoughts behind the words?

Your group may want to do additional voice exercises for practice. Any drama book will offer a wealth of choices. You might practice saying tongue twisters to improve your articulation (ability to say words clearly) or recite nursery rhymes, standing at some distance from your audience, to improve your ability to project your voice.

## **Producing a Readers Theater Program**

In producing a Readers Theater program, you will use several tools to help you understand and enjoy what you read. There are some guidelines in this section for selecting material and converting it to a script. In the process of adapting material, you'll notice that thinking through and discussing literature improves your performance of it, and performing it increases your understanding. Besides, you may enjoy it.

### **Selecting material**

Experience can guide you here. As a class, discuss considerations when selecting literature for an audience. What sorts of stories, poems, and plays are you interested in? Who will the audience be? What are they interested in? How would your material differ if you

were preparing a program for a group of fourth graders rather than a group of high school students? What if your audience were all senior citizens? Or if the audience were all male or all female? Suppose that instead of performing for members of an English class, you were reading for a social studies class. Take the time to deal thoughtfully and specifically with these considerations.

## Log Entry 3

Summarize the key aspects of the discussion. You might begin by completing these two sentence stems: “The audience partially determines the selection because . . .” and “Literature for performance should have these characteristics: . . .” Don’t stop with those sentence stems, though, and don’t even use them if they don’t fit the discussion your class had. What is important here is the summary of your own discussion.

### **Adapting material**

When you have selected your material, you need to adapt it for performance. You may choose one long selection or compile a script from many shorter selections. Whichever you do, there are additional choices to make:

- Decide how to break the selection into lines for characters if necessary. Some selections, such as plays, may already have lines divided for you.
- Decide where the climax or climaxes are in the piece; you’ll need to build to them by raising your voice, adjusting your emphasis, or using some other means as you read.
- Decide how to handle action. A narrator might tell about it, or the actors might suggest it through various poses or a series of frozen pictures (tableaux) that change for each scene, or through minimal movements. Be creative; use your imagination to stimulate the audience’s imagination.

The following scripts offer some ways to elicit voices from a poem that doesn’t have any dialogue. As you try out the different scripts,

consider how the surroundings define the people in the poem. What perspectives does the poem add to the theme of “learning the landscape”? (Script 1 follows the stanza breaks of the poem.)

## Collaborating

With your partner or in a small group:

1. Read each script.
2. Discuss the questions that follow.
3. Write your conclusions in your log.

Script 1:

*[Reader 1:]*

### **Abandoned Farmhouse**

*Ted Kooser*

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes  
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;  
a tall man too, says the length of the bed  
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,  
says the Bible with a broken back  
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;  
but not a man for farming, say the fields  
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

*[Reader 2:]*

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall  
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves  
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child  
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.  
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves  
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar-hole,  
and the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.  
It was lonely here, says the narrow gravel road.

[Reader 3:]

Something went wrong, says the empty house  
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields  
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars  
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.  
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard  
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,  
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,  
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

## Log Entry 4

What is the logic of this division? Discuss why it does or does not strike you as providing appropriate dramatic effect to the piece. Does it, as divided here, lend itself to performing?

Script 2:

[Reader 1:]

### Abandoned Farmhouse

*Ted Kooser*

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes  
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;  
a tall man too, says the length of the bed  
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,  
says the Bible with a broken back  
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;  
but not a man for farming, say the fields  
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

[Reader 2:]

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall  
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves  
covered with oilcloth,

[Reader 3:]

and they had a child  
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.

[Reader 2:]

Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves  
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar-hole,  
and the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.  
It was lonely here, says the narrow gravel road.

[Reader 1:]

Something went wrong, says the empty house  
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields  
say he was not a farmer;

[Reader 2:]

the still-sealed jars  
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.

[Reader 3:]

And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard  
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,  
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,  
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

## Log Entry 5

Does this version represent better or worse the logical breaks or shifts in the poem? Does each reader have an equal share? Does it seem more like a play or a reading? Are there advantages either dramatically or thematically to this division over the first one? For example, do you know any more about the characters or why they left? Does the characterization seem to be as distinct as in the first version?

Script 3:

[Reader 1:]

### **Abandoned Farmhouse**

*Ted Kooser*

[Reader 2:]

He was a big man,



[Reader 4:]

(echoes) a big man

[Reader 1:]

says the size of his shoes  
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;

[Reader 2:]

a tall man too,

[Reader 4:]

(echoes) a tall man

[Reader 1:]

says the length of the bed  
in an upstairs room;

[Reader 2:]

and a good, God-fearing man,

[Reader 3:]

(echoes) good and God-fearing

[Reader 1:]

says the Bible with a broken back  
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;

[Reader 2:]

but not a man for farming,

[Reader 1:]

say the fields  
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

[Reader 3:]

A woman lived with him,

[Reader 1:]

says the bedroom wall  
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves  
covered with oilcloth,

[Reader 4:]

and they had a child

[Reader 1:]

says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.

[*Reader 3:*]

Money was scarce,

[*Reader 1:*]

say the jars of plum preserves

and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar-hole,

[*Reader 2:*]

and the winters cold,

[*Readers 3 and 4:*]

oh, so cold

[*Reader 1:*]

say the rags in the window frames.

[*Reader 3:*]

It was lonely here,

[*Readers 3 and 4:*]

so lonely

[*Reader 1:*]

says the narrow gravel road.

[*All:*]

Something went wrong,

[*Reader 1:*]

says the empty house

in the weed-choked yard.

[*Reader 2:*]

Stones in the fields

say he was not a farmer;

[*Reader 3:*]

the still-sealed jars

in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.

[*Reader 4:*]

And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard

like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,

a rusty tractor with a broken plow,

a doll in overalls.

[*All:*]

Something went wrong, they say.

[*Reader 4:*]

(*echoes*) Something went wrong.

## Log Entry 6

Are there advantages either dramatically or thematically to this division over the other two? For example, do you know any more about the characters or why they left? Do you know more about how the characters feel? Does characterization seem to be more distinct? Who do you think readers three and four are? How would you change the divisions if you believed the wife and child left because the man took out his frustrations on them?

## Putting It All Together

Because the focus throughout the chapter has been on the relationship of imagination to performance and how developing that relationship can help you understand and enjoy literature, the suggestions that follow are designed for classroom performance. If you want to know more about full-scale Readers Theater productions, check your school's drama department or a school or public library. However, if you've done the exercises in this section and you use your creativity, you should have a program that will entertain and inform any audience that sees it. The following steps will help you prepare.

### 1. Form groups of three to five to prepare a performance

### 2. Select a script

You might find already-published scripts that you like. Or you may choose to write or compile a script of your own.

### 3. Analyze the script

Your knowledge of literature will help. You probably already know something about point of view, theme, tone, mood, and characteri-

zation as they apply to literary selections. Apply that knowledge to your Readers Theater script. Only if you know the selection thoroughly will you be able to convey its intricacies to the audience.

Here's a sample analysis for "Abandoned Farmhouse."

*Point of view:* The speaker is an outside observer who knows no more than the reader. All of the speaker's information comes from an unknown "they" and the speaker's own observations.

*Theme:* Possibly, how little outsiders know of the relationships within families, or the tragedy of the farm crisis that forces families to abandon their livelihood.

*Tone:* Objective; it's a series of images pieced together for a total picture.

*Mood:* Loneliness, sadness, uneasiness because of the mystery about what really happened.

*Characterization:* A speaker and three characters—man, woman, and child. The child may be a girl because of the doll in overalls. The man seems to be a failure at what he does, but he is large and stern. The woman tries to decorate only the bedroom and the kitchen. Motivation must be inferred, but it is quite important. Why did the events in the poem happen? Why did the people do what we assume they did? There are broken dishes and a broken-backed Bible on the floor that indicate the man might have had a temper. That is supported by the woman's leaving in "nervous haste." Perhaps they did not all leave together.

Analyze each of these elements in the script you plan to use. Record your analysis in your notebook before you go on.

#### **4. Stage the production**

Earlier in the chapter you learned that Readers Theater productions generally use few props, costumes, or lights. The fact that you need only a few tools or chairs and perhaps some music stands for the scripts makes this kind of production possible for groups that may not have the budget, time, or desire to stage a full-scale production.

The absence of many traditional staging devices makes the suggestive use of a few elements more dramatic. If you have a stage bare of everything except the actors, they will obviously be more prominent. If you add a simple spotlight, you have increased the importance of whatever or whomever you choose to highlight. If you pantomime most props, the one prop you do have will appear to be important. For example, what prop might the child hold during the performance of "Abandoned Farmhouse"? Why would you

select that one? What makes it more dramatic than another one or no prop at all?

You might also use music and sound effects dramatically. Each production will have specific characteristics determined by the director and the actors, so it's not possible to tell you what music to use or what sound effects you'll want to employ. Keep in mind that your primary goal is to help the audience imagine the world that the author created. Use whatever staging techniques or tools you think will help. But remember to use them as tools, not gimmicks. The audience should never be consciously aware of the elements of the performance; instead, they should be focused on the total performance.

A final, and the most important, element of staging is the actors. Where are they? What do they do? How do they "act"? Again, the best advice is the least advice. Experiment. Try several different approaches before deciding on one. Think about the effects of each approach. Should the actors be on different levels using stepladders or risers? Where should they focus? If the actors look at each other, the audience may feel it is watching someone perform for them. If the actors look directly at the audience, they may seem to be individuals rather than a group. If they look at points at particular spots in the auditorium, the audience may feel invited to imagine the same picture the actors are imagining. Depending on the situation and the purpose of the production, each of these focuses can be effective. How far apart will the actors be seated? Will you vary the distances to show relationships? How many readers do you need? Will some read more than one part?

This may seem like a dizzying array of decisions. But, when you begin producing a script, the decisions should fall into place. You need to know your options, but you also need to know that you have the power to be as creative as your imagination and resources allow. Try several approaches.

One final word to the actors. Remember that you are doing far more than reading aloud. You want to recreate the author's meaning and your interpretation using all of your resources. The dramatic use of your voice is one resource; your body is another. Although you are not walking around the stage, you are not motionless either. Your actions will be more natural if you don't plan a particular gesture or facial expression to accompany a certain line.

Rather, you should get so involved in the script that your physical reactions come naturally. Don't think of yourself as a reader of lines; think of yourself as the character from whom the lines would reasonably issue. Understand your motivation, your reasons for doing and saying everything you do and say. Understand your relationships to the other characters and how you react differently to each one. Again, try different approaches. Practice in front of a mirror. Most important, keep yourself open to suggestion from a director or from others who can see what you are doing when you rehearse. That kind of feedback will help you present the most believable character to the audience.

## Action, Another Angle of Vision

While the emphasis so far has been on using your voice to enact your understanding of a text, there are times that you may also—or exclusively—use your body. Improvisation, pantomime, and tableaux are three kinds of dramatic actions that can help you understand and convey your understanding of a text.

An *improvisation* is an impromptu creation of a story or character. You don't need to follow a script or memorize anything. Although you may be given a basic situation, you make up the plot and dialogue as you go. Some of the games you played as children were probably improvisations of situations you'd seen on television or read in books.

*Pantomime* is a kind of improvisation where the emphasis is on action without words. If you have ever played charades you've done a kind of pantomime. Marcel Marceau is probably the most famous classic mime; when he acts, he creates believable characters in believable situations. What he does is a far cry from the game of charades, but it also takes more training than we can deal with here.

A *tableau* is like pantomime with no action. It is a still, living picture of characters in relationship to each other. It's like a snapshot of action, frozen in time, or like the game of statues you may have played as a child. Seeing characters in tableau is an especially helpful way to understand their emotions at significant moments in the story.

As you read the following play, think about where you might add improvisation, pantomime, or tableaux. Some suggestions follow

the play, but we encourage you to come up with your own ideas as you read through the lens of a performer. Improvisation could be used wherever you want to add a scene that was not included. Where did the playwright leave out information that you would have liked to have?

Ouida Sebestyen, the author of *Holding Out*, uses pantomime to add another dimension to the story. But how might you use it differently or in other places in the play? How might you use it to understand the characters' motivations? A tableau could be used any time you want to understand or emphasize the characters' emotions.

*Holding Out* takes place in both the present and the past. As you read this play aloud, in groups or as a whole class, be conscious of the landscape. On one level, this story can happen only in this place. Why? What does that have to do with Valerie and Curtis? What does it matter to us? Be conscious, also, of the power of memory. What role does memory play overall? What role does it play for each of the characters?

## Holding Out

Ouida Sebestyen

### Characters

CURTIS

VALERIE

INDIANS OF THE MODOC TRIBE

### Time

The present, late afternoon on a chilly spring day.

*SCENE: A roadside rest area. One sturdy picnic table with benches and a trash can are the only signs of civilization. Behind them, in the dimmer light, jagged outcroppings of lava rock and clumps of sagebrush stair-step up a desolate slope. A drum is beating softly, almost like the thump of a heart.*

*At curtain rise, CURTIS strides out through the rocks at right. He is sixteen and comfortable being alone. He stumbles on a stone and pushes it out of the trail with a slender branch he is using as a staff. He also carries the thin Park Service booklet he has used on a self-guided hike. He looks around and, because no one is there to see, holds it with his teeth so he can pretend his staff is a rifle. After a few quick shots he climbs up on the table and continues to read, deeply interested. A truck door slams. He stiffens. A few*

*moments later VALERIE appears, dressed like him in jeans and sweatshirt, raking her tangled hair. Neither of them takes notice of the drum which slowly fades away.*

VALERIE. Curtis, don't *do* stuff like this to me. I woke up and there I was, parked all by myself in the middle of nowhere, with my feet out the window.

CURTIS. (*pointing up the slope*) There's a trail up there that makes a loop. So I walked around it, to get the kinks out.

VALERIE. Yeah, tell me about kinks. I feel like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. How long did I sleep?

CURTIS. About six hours.

VALERIE. You're kidding. Nobody can sleep six hours in the cab of a pickup truck and live to tell about it.

CURTIS. Well, I guess you just made medical history.

VALERIE. Where *is* this? Are we still in Oregon?

CURTIS. (*taking a pebble out of his shoe*) No, we've crossed back into California. After you didn't wake up, I thought, What am I supposed to be doing? So I pulled off the highway and stopped here.

VALERIE. Oh, man—no. Not back in California.

CURTIS. What was I supposed to do, with you zonked out? Turn west and drive till we went down in the Pacific, blub, blub, blub?

VALERIE. You could have waked me up, for starters.

CURTIS. (*softening*) I guess. But you'd done nearly all the driving last night, and you looked really pooped. Snoring away like that. I sort of—

VALERIE. I wasn't tired from last night. I was tired from this morning.

CURTIS. Yeah, I know. I saw it. When you came out of your dad's house you looked really different. Your face was white. I thought maybe he'd hit you or something, and that's why you wouldn't say anything when I tried to talk.

VALERIE. No, I just had to—I don't know—get into a little dark space and stay really quiet for awhile. Curled up. Like a snail. And just wait till the shock wore off. Okay?



CURTIS. Hey, you don't have to explain it. I just didn't know what to do, So I just kept on driving and thinking and wondering. One spot up there in the mountains I was screaming along through this snow-storm. In my dad's truck. Oh, man. I never drove in a snowstorm before. So I thought I better stop, for Pete's sake, and hang around here till you joined the world again.

VALERIE. (*looking around*) You didn't pick a really great spot, Curt. This is pretty awful.

CURTIS. I don't know—it's kind of interesting. All this dark, red jagged rock is hardened lava. You know, like Hawaii.

VALERIE. It figures, I go to sleep in a truck and wake up in a lava bed. Couldn't you have stopped in a town? What am I supposed to do for a restroom?

CURTIS. There's one up the trail. Over past that dark bunch of junipers.

VALERIE. Oh, great. It would be. (*She takes a few uncertain steps that bring her back to her starting point.*) Did you read the same thing I did about some kidnapper or hired killer or somebody—

CURTIS. Oh, that? Yeah—he dumped the body in one of these pits. Not out in the bushes where nobody ever goes—no, it's got to be in there where some park service guy can notice it. But I guess maybe he was thinking the quicklime or whatever would dissolve the—

VALERIE. Curtis! Shut up. Just shut up, you're gross. I'm not in any shape for scary stories. Or this weirdo place, whatever it is.

CURTIS. It's a National Monument. So don't put it down—the government's trying hard to keep weirdo places like this unspoiled for our grandchildren. (*He rethinks.*) Well, not *our* grandchildren . . .

VALERIE. No store, or anything? What do we eat?

CURTIS. We've still got the apples. And potato chips. I can go see what else.

VALERIE. (*uneasily*) Okay. And I guess I can go see if anybody is stashed in the outhouse. (*She starts off again, and turns back.*) Curtis, if I yell, you better come running.

CURTIS. Don't I always? (*His question stops her, and they lock eyes. She jerks around and goes up left through the looming lava shapes. He goes off to the parked truck.*)

*[A MODOC INDIAN SENTRY stands up unhurriedly from behind a rock and watches them go. Another sentry rises from his nearby hiding-place. They wear simple rough shirts and pants, and round flat-brimmed hats decorated with feathers. Their faces and hands, their clothing and moccasins, their cartridge belts and long 1870s rifles are shades of gray, as if they were being seen through gauze, or the haze of time. They study the horizon carefully, pointing and nodding to each other. Their movements are slow, almost trance-like with fatigue. They watch with quiet interest as CURTIS returns and puts two paper sacks and a can of pop on the table. His gaze goes past them and he starts to read. VALERIE comes back and walks past them, unaware.]*

VALERIE. Yuck. Can't they design those things to flush or something? *(She is holding a large feather which she sticks in her hair.)* Boy, talk about primitive.

CURTIS. Beats a bush.

VALERIE. Just barely.

CURTIS. *(noticing the feather)* What's that?

VALERIE. I found it. Some critter got ambushed, I reckon. Oh, great, you found something to drink.

CURTIS. If you don't mind drinking from the same can.

VALERIE. You're really cute, Curt. Here we are, runaways, with a practically stolen truck on our hands, and maybe the police hunting us by now. And your folks yelling, Where's our baby boy! And my mom blaming everybody in sight—and you make it sound like we're on a shy little first date. *(She drinks and hands him the can.)* Hey, you found the cookies. I forgot we saved some. *(She divvies them up.)* I'm starved! Aren't you?

CURTIS. *(gently nudging her toward reality)* Val, this is all the food we've got. And we're running low on gas. We need to talk about what we're doing.

VALERIE. We know what we're doing. We're having a picnic in lava-land. *(She starts to eat an apple from one of the sacks.)*

CURTIS. No, what we're doing is putting off talking about what happened. And what we're going to do *now*. What direction we're going.

VALERIE. Curtis. Give me a break. I'm not ready. It's too soon—it's just too— Eat. Okay?

CURTIS. (*regretfully*) Val, your dad doesn't want you. You've got to go back home.

VALERIE. Back home? What home? (*She forces an airy laugh.*) You mean my mom's apartment where I hang my clothes and step over the bottles? That home?

CURTIS. Whatever you call it, it's the only place you've got to live in.

VALERIE. That's a big lie. I've got the whole world to live in. I can live right here. People live in trucks.

CURTIS. Not in my dad's truck, they don't.

VALERIE. I can get a job and have my own apartment.

CURTIS. On that twenty-five bucks you've got left?

VALERIE. I've got money. I've got another forty I didn't tell you about.

CURTIS. Yeah? Forty that sort of stuck to your fingers while your mom wasn't looking?

VALERIE. Forty I saved! (*She tests other answers.*) I found it. My dad sent it for my birthday.

CURTIS. Okay. Forget it.

VALERIE. If you're in such a hurry to back out, why don't you just get in your daddy's precious pickup and drive off? I don't need this.

CURTIS. Sure you don't. But you needed *me*, Val. You needed the stupid truck to get to Oregon and find your dad, so I took it and got you there. You call that backing out?

VALERIE. Okay! (*She slings an apple core away, just missing him.*) I needed you. I used you. Sue me.

CURTIS. Val—I'm not mad at you! I'm just telling you something. Your dad's not going to take you in. (*He picks up her apple core and puts it in the trash can.*) Listen, you don't have to talk about it till you're ready. But you've got to rethink your plans now. It's not going to be the way you were dreaming it. (*She begins to pace rapidly.*) What are you doing?

VALERIE. Exercising. (*She marches up and down, swinging her arms.* CURTIS and the MODOC SENTRIES watch, bemused.) I'm stiff. I hurt.

CURTIS. Why don't you walk around the trail loop? It's just about half a mile.

VALERIE. Because I want to walk around right here. Okay?

CURTIS. Sure. Forget it. *(He returns to his booklet, refusing to look at her.)*

*[An OLD WOMAN in a shawl and a long skirt, gray with time, enters right and brings a small jug to the two SENTRIES. They drink sparingly. When she offers the jug again they shake their heads and go back to their lookout posts. She hobbles off, left, perhaps to others. Neither CURTIS nor VALERIE takes notice.]*

VALERIE. *(looking around, still angry but curious)* What's the trail for, anyway? What's up there? It's just flat.

CURTIS. That's what's strange. It looks like a plain old pasture full of sagebrush. From here you can't tell that the lava is all broken up into crevices and ledges and little caves. It's like World War I up there. Full of trenches.

VALERIE. That book's telling about it?

CURTIS. Yeah. They have them up there in a little box by the trail so you can take a self-guided walk.

VALERIE. Trust you to find a book to stick your nose into, even out here in no man's land.

CURTIS. There were people here, once. There were some Indians called Modocs, and they had a war here. Well, more like a siege, I guess you'd say, because about sixty men held off the United States Army for months, holed up in those crevices.

VALERIE. *(forgetting to pace)* What for?

CURTIS. Because all this around here was their homeland. But the white settlers wanted it, and got the government to send the Modocs to live on a reservation with another tribe they didn't like. So they ran away, and when the Army ordered them back, they refused, and gathered up their people here in the lava beds to hold out.

VALERIE. You mean women and little kids and everybody?

CURTIS. Yeah, the old folks. The horses and dogs. Everything they had.

VALERIE. What did they eat?

CURTIS. *(with a shrug)* What they could find, I guess. And there's a lake back over there. They sneaked down to it at first, but toward the last the soldiers cut off their water supply. *(She starts to drink the last of the pop, but hesitates, and impulsively offers it to CURTIS. He shakes his head. She drinks thoughtfully, looking around.)*

VALERIE. Why the blazes didn't the Army just let them *have* their stupid hunk of land and save everybody a lot of trouble?

*[As she speaks, the two SENTRIES stand up warily as a small tattered group of MODOC MEN and WOMEN gather between them. Two tall imposing men are obviously rival leaders, unable to agree about something. They mime an argument. Their supporters, anxiously watching, slowly divide into separate sides.]*

CURTIS. Yeah, that's what some people back East wondered. *(He waves the booklet which has given him the story.)* So finally they sent out five people to be, like, a peace committee or something, to try to talk.

*[The FIRST LEADER defends his position passionately, but the SECOND LEADER senses weakness in him, and suddenly grabs a women's shawl and drapes it over his rival's head. The FIRST LEADER, shocked, throws it off, but he has been called a coward. His followers back away from him.]*

But it turned out the Modocs had broken up into two groups with two chiefs. One chief kept trying to work things out. But the other group just stood up at a meeting and blew away a general and a minister from the peace party. Naturally the Army said, "That does it—not a *general*"—and started lobbing mortar shells into the hide-out every fifteen minutes. Like, this is *war*, man—no more shilly-shally stuff.

*[In deep anguish the FIRST LEADER reluctantly agrees with the SECOND, who hurries off triumphantly with his men. The little gray crowd melts away. In contrast to CURTIS's flippant comment, the FIRST LEADER sinks to his knees in despair.]*

VALERIE. *(rubbing her shoulders)* It's cold here. The sun's about to go down, isn't it? How do you suppose they stayed warm in this place?

CURTIS. I guess they had woven mats and things. Blankets. Some of the ledges and little cubbyholes maybe kept off part of the rain and snow. But it must have been hard, surrounded in here. And nothing much to make fires with.

VALERIE. You think we could make a fire?

CURTIS. *(looking around)* I guess it wouldn't hurt. You're supposed to be in a campsite, but it looks like somebody made a fire once, here in these rocks. See if you can find some dead sagebrush or something. *(They leave in opposite directions.)*

*[A SHAMAN appears, wearing a gray tunic, his head bound with a white cloth. The SENTRIES give him rapt attention. The broken LEADER, still kneeling, bends his forehead to the ground like someone badly beaten who refuses to fall. The SHAMAN lifts his arms reverently to the sky. One hand holds a medicine stick about four feet long. Feathers, fur, beads, and charms hang from it on a thong. He plants the stick on a rocky ridge, faces the four points of the compass and leaves. CURTIS and VALERIE return with some small dry branches.]*

VALERIE. Like this?

CURTIS. Yeah, this might do it, with a little dry grass twisted up to start with. *(He lays a fire and nods toward the tote hanging from her shoulder.)* You got any matches in that bag-lady collection of junk?

VALERIE. You know I don't smoke. Don't you have some in the truck?

CURTIS. Bound to. *(He goes to look. VALERIE turns slowly, her eyes passing over the Modoc leader and the medicine stick. She rubs her arms, still cold.)*

VALERIE. Curtis? *(She kneels to break up some twigs.)* It's eerie out here.

CURTIS. *(returning)* Not one stupid match anywhere. My dad doesn't smoke either, and I guess he just . . . *(He kicks the pile of twigs.)* We're real pioneers, man. *(He hands her a sweater he had brought.)* I found this, though.

VALERIE. I don't need it.

CURTIS. Hey, put it on. You're shivering.

VALERIE. *(laying her feather on the table and pulling the sweater over her head)* You don't have to be nice to me.

CURTIS. *(exasperated)* Was I being nice? Sorry! I keep forgetting myself and doing weird things my parents taught me. It won't happen again, I promise.

VALERIE. *(too serious to play along)* You are nice, Curt. Face it.

CURTIS. And that's what gave you the idea in the first place.

VALERIE. What idea?

CURTIS. The big idea to come on to me like I was suddenly a new invention you couldn't live without.

VALERIE. What are you talking about? You have a really twitchy mind, Curtis. Always cranking corners and throwing people off balance.

CURTIS. You know what I'm talking about. You needed a way to get to Oregon and track down your dad. You didn't have the guts or money to hop a bus and do it yourself. But you didn't mind working *me* over for a couple of weeks till I was ga-ga-gooey enough to steal a truck and head off, any direction you pointed to. You want Oregon? Sure, I'll just go tearing right up the middle of California on this screaming freeway like I know what I'm doing.

VALERIE. You knew what you were doing. Don't try blaming me for that part of it. You wanted to run as bad as I did. You didn't like the way you were living any more than I did.

CURTIS. Nothing was wrong with the way I was living.

VALERIE. That's the whole point, stupid. You've been this nice decent kid with the good grades—forever! You never had a problem because you never made a wave. Curtis, you needed to make a *wave*. A number nine wave, to see if it was going to drown you or if you could ride it in.

CURTIS. Yeah? *(He sits on the table, as far as he can get from her.)* That's really dumb stuff to think.

VALERIE. No, that dumb stuff is the truth. I did use you, Curt—I admit it. But you used me, too. To test yourself. Am I right? This whole trip has been your test. *(He shrugs and twists the empty paper sacks into lumps, unable to meet her eyes. She studies him, her voice going softer.)* Didn't it ever bother you? To *always* do what was expected of you?

CURTIS. *(with difficulty)* Sure. I guess it bothered me. I guess I thought about it, when my folks started planning my life for me, or things like that.

VALERIE. But you didn't do anything about it, Curt.

CURTIS. *(giving his life a long slow look, and almost smiling at its ironies)* Not till now. Not till Miss Valerie V put the whammy on me.

VALERIE. Is that a compliment? *(She sits beside him on the table, moved by his pain.)* You know what made me sad when I first noticed you in school? The way you always seemed like you needed to put yourself down. Just because you were serious and kind and curious about things, and—sort of, you know, in love with life. *Besides* being smart and nice. I couldn't understand that, how you could be all those special things and still always seem like you didn't like who you are.

CURTIS. What's so smart and nice about this mess?

VALERIE. Oh, great, Curt.

*[The SENTRIES stop searching the horizon and lean quietly on their long rifles, curious.]*

I know you don't think taking your dad's truck was a really smart idea. Or selling your watch yesterday to get the radiator fixed. But I—I realize you're here in the lava bed with me and the Murdocks because you wanted to help me be happier. That's nice.

CURTIS. Modocs. Not Murdock. Mo-doc.

VALERIE. *(softly)* Okay. Whatever.

*[The SENTRIES smile at each other. The defeated LEADER gets to his knees and stares into emptiness, perhaps seeing his people's future.]*

CURTIS. I'm sorry the way things turned out for you this morning. Maybe your dad had his reasons for whatever he said, but—man, when you got back to the truck, I thought—the way you looked—I thought he'd socked you in the mouth or something.

VALERIE. You did? No—he didn't lay a finger on me. Not even a handshake. I was a real shock to him, I guess. He opens the door and there I am like Hi, I'm Valerie and I've come to live with you, Dad. And his eyes go like, Valerie Who?

CURTIS. Yeah. I guess without any warning like that, what could you expect? But when you went in, what happened?

VALERIE. Nothing. He asked how was I. He said he was just about to leave for work. That's what really got to me the most. When he looked at his watch.

*[TWO WOMEN enter and kneel on either side of the LEADER. One hands him a morsel of food. He pushes it away, not angrily but so abruptly that it*



*falls from her hand. The women crouch constrained until he finally sighs deeply and holds out his hands to them so they can help him rise. They guide him slowly out of sight.]*

CURTIS. But when you explained to him. How things were, and all . . .

VALERIE. He said it was a bad idea. He asked if my mom had put me up to it. Then he looked at his watch again. Damn—he could've faked it! He could've pretended he was glad to see me, and really wished I could stay with him but, golly gee, he was just starting a three-year job at the South Pole or something and he'd see me when he got back.

CURTIS. He didn't know how to handle it, Val.

VALERIE. He ought to have tried. It would've helped a lot if I could remember he tried. Even *I* take the trouble to lie if it'll make things not hurt so much! Couldn't he?

CURTIS. Maybe he thought it would be easier on you if he just said right out you couldn't stay with him.

VALERIE. He didn't even *try*.

CURTIS. You scared him, Val. You made him feel—defensive and stuff.

VALERIE. Why do people get that way? Why can't they sit down and say, Let's talk? Let's listen. Till we understand each other. What the blazes is so hard about that?

CURTIS. I don't know, Val.

*[One of the SENTRIES ventures out to find the morsel of food, picks the twigs off and shares it with his companion. They eat hungrily and lick their fingers as they return to their posts.]*

VALERIE. *(staring into the distance)* It feels so strange. All these years my dad's been out there, like some kind of magic spell I could make. I knew no matter how bad things got, all I had to say was, Hey, I don't have to take this. I can go live with him. And now . . . *(She struggles to keep her voice even.)* All at once there's not any magic to call on anymore.

CURTIS. *(hurting with her)* Maybe he'll feel different some day. Maybe even the fact that you came to him and asked . . .

VALERIE. It's going to snow, isn't it? The sky's so heavy. We're going to be found here frozen to a picnic table, all white and ghosty.

CURTIS. (*briskly, relieved that she has regained control*) Yeah, it feels really strange to be cold, when you stop to think that all this rock that we're walking around on out here was flowing once, red hot, pouring over trees and grass, and nothing could stop it. (*As he speaks he goes off left to the truck and returns with a dark bundle.*) And all these little mountains were cinder cones, and the ashes . . .

VALERIE. (*interrupting*) What's that?

CURTIS. Wrap up in it. You're still shivering.

VALERIE. It's a sleeping bag. (*Shakily she chooses to laugh instead of cry.*) Oh, man, Curt. Just one sleeping bag? You were thinking ahead, weren't you?

CURTIS. (*surprised into defensiveness*) What's that mean? No. Hey, people take sleeping bags. When they go hunting or something. In case they get stranded or something.

VALERIE. In case they get lucky or something. Were you making big plans for us?

CURTIS. I don't know what you mean. Yeah, I do, but—okay. It occurred to me. Just wrap up in it. Things turned out different. Okay?

VALERIE. (*wrapping herself in it gratefully*) Thanks. (*She hunts inside it.*) I've lost one of my earrings.

CURTIS. No. You lost it while you were asleep in the truck. (*He pats his shirt pocket.*) I've got it.

VALERIE. (*studying his face*) Oh. (*She wraps herself tightly again.*) I keep thinking about the children, and the old ones. How hard they had it. When it wasn't their fault. Have you read far enough to know what happened?

CURTIS. (*referring to the booklet*) Well, the siege lasted three or four months, with these sixty guys holding off twelve hundred soldiers. But they were nearly starving, and when they tried to escape to the south over there, they got captured in little groups

VALERIE. Didn't they ever get their homeland?

CURTIS. (*shaking his head*) The settlers got it.

VALERIE. But it's empty. Couldn't they have *shared* it, even?

CURTIS. (*rolling the booklet into a tight cylinder*) I guess not. And the Army figured hanging the leaders would set the right example. So they did.

VALERIE. Oh, man, that's sad. That's so stupid and sad.

CURTIS. It said when the Army came in here, afterwards, they found like this stick that the medicine man had propped up in the rocks. It was supposed to give the Indians victory—you know—stop the bullets and all that. Only it hadn't.

VALERIE. Whatever happened to the other Murdocks?

CURTIS. The Mo—I don't know. It didn't say.

VALERIE. (*suddenly bending forward in pain*) Why couldn't he want me, Curt? Why couldn't he be glad I was his kid and wanted to live with him? It stinks. (*She begins to cry.*) It really stinks.

CURTIS. Hey, Val. Don't do that. Listen. Hold out. (*He can't even take her hidden hand.*) You've got to just—hold out. Till it gets better.

VALERIE. (*bitterly, still crying*) You figure four months of holding out would do it, Curt? Like the Murdocks?

CURTIS. They tried, Val. Aren't you glad they tried?

VALERIE. But it wasn't enough.

CURTIS. You tried, too, Val. This morning—

VALERIE. But it didn't help.

CURTIS. Listen to me. I was proud of you this morning, walking up to your dad's door. You're brave—don't ever forget how brave. And you're way ahead of the Modocs—they had their troubles a hundred years ago but you're right here—alive, with everything still ahead for you. (*She grows quiet as he stumbles on, distressed.*) There's got to be better things out there, and love, and—I wish I was the one because the way I feel about you—I mean these really deep feelings—but right now what they're like is—friendship. I don't know if that means anything to you, but if it does . . .

VALERIE. (*calmly*) You want me to give up.

CURTIS. No. Just go back. And hold out. That's all.

VALERIE. (*testing reality*) Are your folks going to give you hell?

a painted backdrop or a bare stage? What would be the thematic and dramatic effects of your decisions?

3. Reflect, in writing, on the form of the play. How was reading this play different from reading a poem or a short story? Did the form affect your ability to visualize the characters and the setting? In what ways did you read as a viewer? In what ways did you read as a performer?

## Performance

After you have read this play, you might improvise several additional scenes to understand it from different angles.

- A group of three might portray the scene when Curtis arrives home and talks to his parents. How do they react when they first see him? What does Curtis tell them? Do they believe him?
- Another possible scene would be between Curtis and Valerie a month after the events of the play. Have they continued to see each other? How does Valerie feel about her life now? Has Curtis changed at all because of his ride on a “number nine wave”?
- Curtis tells about the Modocs’ attempt to save their land and the discussion they had. Using the hints in the play and what you know or can find out about this episode in Native American history, reconstruct the discussion that might have occurred. You will need people to play the parts of the two Modoc leaders, the American general, the minister, and followers for both sides.

You can also capitalize on the use of pantomime in this play.

- As the play opens, Curtis must convey by the way he walks and by his posture that he is comfortable being alone. He has to show his playful, adventurous nature by pretending to shoot a rifle, but he also has to be sure no one is around to see it. He has to react to the sound of the truck door slamming, and he has

to show his attitude toward Valerie in the nonverbal way he greets her when she joins him at the table.

- Jot down some notes in your log to help you make decisions about how Curtis will act. Imagine that you are the actor playing Curtis. Write your thoughts as you prepare for this part of your role; use your log to think aloud on paper. As the actor, what can you do to make the audience know Curtis better? How will you walk? How will you greet Valerie? How well do you know her? Will you lean toward her slightly? Are you happy to see her? Are you worried about all the trouble she might have caused for you at home? Are you worried about how she feels?
- The Modocs play a vital role in the play but never speak. How might you portray the seriousness of their condition? Consider their postures, gestures, and facial expressions. As you practice, work with a partner who can tell you what attitude you are expressing through a certain posture. With the feedback of a partner or a student-director and close observation, you can develop a believable pantomime.

## Identity, Landscape, and *Holding Out*

As a class, or in small groups, consider the relationship of the play to the themes of this chapter. According to Sebestyen, at least, how do the landscapes of the past—the lava beds and the events that occurred there—affect people in the present? How does she indicate that she believes that past injustices haunt the landscape? Why does she have the Modocs seem oblivious of Valerie and Curtis most but not all of the time? What's the significance of the scenes where the Modocs seem to watch what's happening in the present? According to Sebestyen, how does “holding out” define who we are?

Do you believe that past events influence people and events in the present? Can you think of examples from your own experience or reading?



## Log Entry 8

Record the key points of your discussion in your log.

## Building Your Course Portfolio

From this chapter, you have a memory poem, your oral collage if you chose to do one, your Readers Theater script and/or videotape of your performance, and other jottings that might be worthy of revising for your portfolio. You might also plan to stage *Holding Out* or prepare it as a second Readers Theater program and videotape that for your portfolio. Remember to include written summaries and reflections for the videotapes and/or live performances.