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Plot Summary

Rudy, a ninth grader, confides to his best friend Alex that he likes an eleventh grader named Patricia. He has asked her out for a lunch date at Steaks, Steaks, y Mas Steaks. He needs advice on how to behave and money to pay for the meal. Rudy gets advice and loans from friends and family. In the meantime, Patricia has her hair done at a local beauty salon. By chance, her stylist is Rudy’s mother, who offers advice and worries aloud that she is losing her son. Rudy meets Patricia for lunch and sees that his Uncle Juan is working there as a musician. Then Rudy discovers that more of his family and friends are there, including his mother. Nevertheless, the date is a success. As the play ends, Rudy prepares to sell some prized childhood possessions in order to pay off his loans.

The Play as Literature: Characterization

Explain to students that ancient plays often included stock characters, which stood for attitudes, emotions, and principles, such as good and evil. Most plays today feature complex realistic characters, whom we expect to act as real people do in real life. They have hopes and fears, good qualities and bad. Sometimes, one character may even exhibit opposing traits, depending on the circumstances.

To help students get an idea of what a complex character might be like, write on the chalkboard a list of traits (e.g., bashful, outgoing, selfish, generous, suspicious, easygoing, happy, proud, fearful). Ask students to write down the traits that they have shown at some time in their lives. (Students will probably list many of the traits you have written, as well as others.) Then ask them to place an asterisk next to the traits they show most often. Point out that the differences between people—and characters—begin to emerge in the items they chose to asterisk.

The Play as Theatre: The Set

Explain to the students that the set includes the total environment in which the characters find themselves. In a theatrical set, the background is called the scenery. Large items and pieces of furniture that are essential to the set are called set pieces, and these are built by the set crew. Small, portable items that characters use are called props. Props are treated differently from the set.

Warm up! If time permits, follow up on this activity by inviting students to role-play the meetings discussed, as well as others between enemies, strangers, and acquaintances of various ages. Allow the class to brainstorm a history for each pair of actors before they role-play their meeting.
Responding to the Play
1. Students’ answers will vary, but should reflect a knowledge of details in the scene and an understanding of the characters.

2. The characters in the play are largely realistic, in that their motivations are logical and understandable, and their concerns are normal for their ages and circumstances. Nevertheless, some students may feel that the characters are either flat or “too good to be true.”

3. Alex, Rudy’s mother, Estela, Uncle Juan, and Alicia all care about Rudy and/or Patricia, and all seem capable of giving at least some good advice. Rudy also gives good advice—to the old man. The value of each character’s advice is limited by his or her particular concerns.

4. Answers will vary, but should reflect an understanding of the scene chosen.

5. The following elements would probably be essential. Scene 1: two lawn chairs; Scene 2: sofa, magazine; Scene 3: weights, jump rope, squeeze bottle; Scene 4: studio pieces, such as wheeled chair and table; Scene 5: beauty-shop chair, hair dryer; Scene 6: apple display; Scene 7: four tables with chairs, stool. Suggest that students allow for places where each character can sit, stand, walk, and perform the actions required by the play.

For Further Discussion
1. Who in this play do you think gives the best advice about love? Who gives the worst? (Answers will vary.)

2. Patricia says she likes Rudy because he is honest. Do you think she is correct or not? Use examples from the play to support your answer. (Students may focus on Rudy’s denial of his relatives at the restaurant, or they may focus on his confessions regarding GI Joe and his bicycle license.)

3. Do you think Patricia will go out with Rudy again? Why or why not? (Students may focus on Patricia’s kiss and compliment, or they may focus on the fact that she caught him in a lie and that she left the restaurant alone.)

Creating and Performing
1. Remind students that Mama Rosa and El Gato have distinct radio personalities. El Gato tries to be macho and cool; Mama Rosa is mystical and folksy. Direct them to develop answers that fit those personalities.

2. Possibilities include: be yourself, ask about her likes and dislikes, be polite, keep a sense of humor, be honest, etc.

3. To help students develop specificity in their moments, ask them to think about the image each character wants to present to the world. You may want to provide prompts such as the following.
   - How would this character hold his or her head?
   - What would the character do with his or her hands?
   - What shoes is the character wearing?
For Reading

• Before reading, ask for a show of hands from students who know or are studying Spanish. Go through the text and have Spanish-speaking students read aloud the Spanish words and phrases. Invite volunteers to give English definitions or equivalents for the Spanish in the play. Challenge the class as a whole to try out the Spanish pronunciations.

• Remind students that the characters in this contemporary play are meant to be lifelike and realistic. Encourage students to imagine themselves in the roles of Rudy and Patricia. Ask them to think about their own family members and friends who could stand in for Uncle Juan, Mama Rosa, Estela, El Gato, Alex, Alicia, and even the waiter.

• Note that the conflicts in this play are mild, but they still move the action forward. Ask students to jot down each of the conflicts they encounter as they read. (Students will probably note a conflict between Rudy and his mother, a conflict between his love of childhood toys and his desire to go on a date, among others.)

For Performance

• Remind the students that this play has seven scenes and that each scene takes place in a different setting. Explain that scenery and set pieces can be expensive to buy or time-consuming to make. In addition, long scene changes interrupt the flow of a play and keep audience members from getting involved. As a result, many contemporary set designers create sets by placing a few key pieces on a bare stage. For example, a length of fence can suggest a backyard. Encourage students to think about and discuss simple scenery or set pieces that could define each scene in this play.

• Point out to the students that each setting in the play provides information about the circumstances, habits, and personality of one or more characters. For example, Alex hangs out with Rudy in his backyard and helps him out with a sale in his front yard. Clearly, Alex is a close, personal friend. Encourage students to identify each character’s “place” or “places” and explain what those settings tell about the characters.

Asides

Music

In his own production notes for the play, Soto reminds performers that they must not use copyrighted music or borrow from popular songs. He suggests using either original music or music in the public domain. He also offers the following ideas:

• In Scene 3, Uncle Juan’s song should be sung with a country western twang, probably employing G, A, and D chords.

• In scene 4, the song should be sung with either a rap or a ranchera beat.

Writing

References to Fresno, California, may be changed to local references. References to well-known people and places also may be changed for local appeal.

Costumes

To accomplish the change in Estela’s hair color, hide a wig in the hair dryer. Direct the actor playing Estela to pull the wig on secretly, as she pretends to check her hair for dryness.
Reading
Based on what you know about the characters, match each quote to the person who said it.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Just level with her. Tell her you’re sorry you look like you do.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>A Chicano hippie, lo mejor, the best.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>You got to stop your nonsense. It’s about time you got a regular job.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Dance? No, I’m too full. Those crackers filled me up.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>What is love but some spring in your legs and a combination plate from El Pollo Loco?</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>I ain’t got an attitude! How come everyone thinks I got an attitude?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I like him because he’s honest.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>You don’t have to please me. It’s the boss. She expects you to bring in a crowd.</td>
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<td>Now, about potions. I recommend a simple one.</td>
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<td>To be frank, I’m just a boring guy.</td>
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Writing
Write lyrics for a song, in English or Spanish, that Juan can sing at Steaks, Steaks, y Mas Steaks. If you wish, compose the music, as well.

________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________

Performance
Choose one of the following activities to perform.

- Sing and/or play the song you composed in the writing section of this assessment page.
- Imagine you are a disc jockey on a radio talk show. Write your own questions from callers and perform a show in which you read the questions and answer them using your radio personality.
- Perform a phone monologue in which Patricia describes her date with Rudy.