

The Play's the Thing for Improving Your English

The English Magazine, by Michael Ugilini

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The English Magazine – love English, Friday, 01 August 2008 00:00

The English language has a rich history within the theatre. From the plays of William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw, to those of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Lerner and Loewe, among others, the variety is endless. With so many great dramas, comedies, and musicals to choose from there is ample opportunity for anyone to build their English vocabulary through plays and the theatre. On top of the classics are hosts of modern contemporary plays that one can choose from to learn new words and phrases. Plays and theatre are truly enjoyable tools for learning English.

One way to use plays and theatre to build your English skills is to attend plays and listen closely to the words being spoken during a performance. By paying close attention to what the performers are saying, you pick up new words, phrases, and expressions that you may never have heard before.

You can make mental notes of some of these words. You can even, during an intermission, take out a little notebook and write those words down for future study and if you're very cheeky you can make a recording of the play to review later.

Even if you are not sure of the spelling, you can write the words down phonetically until you can research the correct spelling and meaning of them. It's a great way to build your English vocabulary. Theatre offers entertainment and an opportunity to increase your knowledge of a language without it seeming like an academic exercise.

Another way plays can help you build your English language skills is by teaching you the proper pronunciation of words. Think of it, when you attend a theatrical performance you are hearing words projected clearly for an audience to grasp.

Theatre performers are excellent enunciators. Their professional training teaches them to project their voices with power. Their training also teaches them to articulate their lines with clarity so an audience can distinguish the words they are speaking. When you concentrate not only on the words they speak but on the way they speak them, you learn the proper pronunciation of these words.

This means you will speak the words in the same way when you choose to use them. Your articulation and pronunciation will be accurate because of what you heard and then stored in your memory.

Plays and the theatre also allow an observer to glean the meaning of words. It's great to learn new words. It's even better when you can learn new words and immediately understand their meaning.

Theatre is perfect for this because the action taking place on stage, the setting, and the context in which the words are being spoken often provide the exact meaning of the words and phrases.

You may hear a word or phrase and grasp the meaning quickly because of what you are witnessing as the words are being spoken.

This means no running for a dictionary when you get home because the "show and tell" of the stage provides you with the meaning. If a character on stage says to another character "I don't really like or trust people, and try to avoid them" and another character replies "I always thought you were a misanthrope". Then you know right away that the word "misanthrope" means "someone who dislikes and distrusts others and tends to avoid them."

The play did the explaining of the word for you through its dialogue. The topic of conversation between actors and actresses on stage can often provide you all you need, to understand words and phrases. Again, you are building your English vocabulary all the while you are enjoying the excitement of a live theatrical performance.

You can build your English vocabulary skills by reading play scripts as well, in the comfort of your own home. Many are available for purchase in hardcover or paperback.

Some are available for download off the web for free. It just takes some searching for the style and genre you find interesting. When you read a well-written play script you become absorbed in the story. As you read page after page to find out what is going to happen next you come across an assortment of words and phrases, some of which may be new to you.

Again, you can write down the ones you are not sure of. You can try to understand their meaning within the context they are written and by other words that surround them.

Sitting at home you can have a handy dictionary at your side to look up any words from the play script you are unfamiliar with. With a script in front of your eyes you can go back and reread a passage several times to try and ascertain the word's meaning before you consult a dictionary.

Reading a play script gives you the proper spelling of words within dialogue. Seeing a play live gives you the word, its pronunciation, but not its spelling. If you have a favourite play, seeing it live and then getting a copy of the play script can really help you build your English vocabulary faster.

A great way to build your English vocabulary is to volunteer to act in a local theatre production. You can really further your English language education this way. It may only be a small part, but it's a start.

Here you will read a script, and rehearse a script through numerous re-readings. You will also speak and act out the script. You get the complete package this way. You see the English words on the page, and their proper spelling. You memorize lines as you rehearse, which stores new words in your mind.

You learn to speak English words clearly. You learn the proper pronunciation of these English words. The act of being on a stage in front of an audience also gives you the necessary confidence you need in your English skills. The more you speak English the more comfortable you are with the language.

If it's a musical you involve yourself in, you will learn songs and their lyrics. The songs that are part of a musical are a great way to ingrain new words into your psyche. There's something about words and music within a live theatrical performance that grabs a hold of us. These types of theatrical songs are another excellent way to memorize English words.

You can use plays and theatre creatively to improve your English vocabulary. It won't seem like work at all when you use the pomp and circumstance of theatre to learn words. Whether it's live theatre or vibrant dialogue within a play script, plays can teach you the words you need to know to be a better English reader and speaker.

All the world's a stage they say - and the real stage – that's a part of theatre, is waiting for you to embrace it, to improve your English language skills.

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