



## **Audio Description Notes for *English***

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to the Guthrie Theater's production of *English* by Sanaz Toossi. This production is directed by Hamid Dehghani and presented in co-production with Chicago's Goodman Theatre.

My name is Alyssa Melby, and I will be the audio describer for this performance, which is approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes and will be performed without an intermission.

### **OVERVIEW**

The creative team for this production includes:

- Scenic Designer: Courtney O'Neill
- Costume Designer: Shahrzad Mazaheri
- Lighting Designer: Jason Lynch
- Sound Designer: Mikhaal Sulaiman
- Dramaturg: Yasmin Zacaria Mikhael
- Vocal Coach: Keely Wolter
- Dialect Coach: Vaneh Assadourian

This production contains mature language and themes.

### **SYNOPSIS**

Language educator Marjan maintains a strict "English only" teaching method in her classroom to ensure her four Iranian students pass their English proficiency test with flying colors. Everyone has varying motivations, accents and enthusiasm as they pursue fluency together. After six weeks of trial, error and effort, what they discover about themselves may be the greatest learning curve of all. This Pulitzer Prize-winning new play tenderly explores the realities of the language-learning process and the parts of our identities that are lost and found along the way.

### **SETTING**

2009. Karaj, Iran.

### **STAGING AND PROPS**

The set shows the interior of a classroom amid the exterior urban landscape of Karaj. The side walls of the classroom building, which jut out toward the audience, show both the finished interior and the tan speckled concrete stucco of the building's exterior. An air conditioning unit sits above the classroom on the roof and is connected by a large metal pipe. Several electrical wires drape above it. A stucco apartment building is located right behind the classroom and is partially visible through the classroom's large rear window. The apartment building extends upward beyond the classroom's ceiling, and one unit's window is visible to the audience, with partially open lace curtains that reveal a hung painting and plants in the windowsill. The lower portion of a billboard advertisement in Arabic is seen on the top right corner of the apartment's exterior wall.



## **STAGING AND PROPS (continued)**

The interior classroom space is where the action of the play takes place. Two large industrial shop lights with metal canopies hang from wires in the center of the classroom. On the left side wall is a white double door with large rectangular frosted glass pieces in the middle of each door. The right door is halfway ajar with red light from the hallway exit sign pouring in. Above the doors is a glass window that says "F-V" in black lettering.

In the back left of the classroom is a vent for the HVAC near the ceiling, a five-peg white wooden coatrack and shelf at shoulder height and a small black garbage can on the floor. In the center, covering a large expanse of the back wall, are two adjoining casement windows that can open outward. A turn handle is in the middle of each window. The windows are covered by a vertical blind that opens periodically throughout the show. At the start of the show, the left blinds are rotated open, and a golden yellow light streams in and streaks the linoleum floor with morning light. Later, the blinds will open further to reveal a projection of crowded flat city rooftops through the left side and the picture window of the lower apartment through the right side.

Near the back right corner of the classroom is a metal teacher's desk with a boombox on it and a black rolling office chair. An electrical outlet high up on the back wall has a VCR and flatscreen TV plugged into it, which are both mounted on the right side wall. Centered in front of the classroom windows is a rolling whiteboard which has "TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language" written across the top. Seven student desks with aluminum chairs and an attached wooden writing board on the right-hand side are in the center of the classroom.

Each scene change is indicated by a loud boom sound and lighting transitions.

## **CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES**

**Marjan**, played by **Roxanna Hope Radja**, is the teacher. Marjan is a casual yet professional 44-year-old woman. She wears a tan blazer jacket with large gold buttons running down the center and skinny jeans tucked into calf-length black leather boots. When she arrives in her classroom, she wears a tan mid-thigh trench coat that belts at the waist, and she carries a large black satchel. Her jewelry consists of a gold chain bracelet and a diamond wedding ring on her right hand. Marjan is often listening to music on her iPod via corded headphones. Her head is covered by a one-piece dark gray hijab that shows a bit of her hairline.

**Goli**, played by **Shadee Vossoughi**, is the youngest student in the class at age 18. Goli first wears a floral headscarf with bright orange tassels that covers about half of her head, revealing dark brown hair pulled back below the scarf. She dons a purplish gray puffer jacket over a tan corduroy button-down jumper and a pink floral long-sleeve blouse, flared blue jeans and orange sneakers. Goli wears a silver watch and carries a purple school bag covered in buttons.

**Elham**, played by **Nikki Massoud**, is a 28-year-old woman who bulldozes her way through English with a very thick accent. She first wears a black hijab which, like Goli's, shows part of her dark brown hair. Around her neck is a maroon scarf, and she wears a navy blue knit dress over white skinny trousers and navy high-top sneakers. Over this she dons a khaki green quilted jacket that zips up the middle. Elham carries a maroon woven backpack with a geometric triangle pattern.



## CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES (continued)

**Omid**, played by **Pej Vahdat**, is the lone male in the class and is 29 years old. His black hair is slicked back, and scruffy stubble lines his cheeks and neck. He wears a dark brown puffer jacket over a moss green hoodie, skinny dark jeans and brown laced leather boots. He carries a chestnut brown leather backpack.

**Roya**, played by **Sahar Bibiyan**, is a grandmother and is 54 years old. She enters wearing a black chador, which means “tent” in Persian. The chador is a head-to-toe piece of fabric that covers the head (but not the face) and is closed with pins in the front or held in place with the hands. She takes this off once inside the classroom, revealing a tan head covering that fully covers her hair, a red and black thigh-length knit cardigan over an orangish-red, floral, knee-length cotton dress, copper straight-leg slacks and gray low-heel boots. Roya wears a gold bracelet on her left hand and a gold watch on her right. She carries a fashionable black purse, large enough to carry a notebook, with gold buckles.

As each scene shows a new day in class, the characters subtly change their costumes by taking off a jacket, removing a scarf, etc., or they may enter the scene wearing a new outfit. All subsequent costumes are similar in style and form to what the characters initially wear at the beginning of the play.

## THINGS TO KNOW

- *English* premiered in March 2022 at the Atlantic Theater Company and received the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Fresh off the heels of sold-out performances and an extended run at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre, this acclaimed new play transferred to the Guthrie stage.
- Hailed by the *Chicago Reader* as “riveting, wrenching, hopeful and bursting with humanity,” *English* continues to draw rave reviews from critics and audiences alike.
- Sanaz Toossi is an Iranian American playwright who grew up in California as the daughter of immigrants. In her work (and life), Toossi wrestles with the ambiguous loss that comes from leaving one’s home or longing for a place one never knew.