

TEXT	<i>THE RECKONING</i> (1930)
AUTHOR	Percival Wilde
THEMES	The world of work (unit 19)
VOCABULARY	Time phrases, polite conversation, questions
WRITING	Students write a dialogue and create their own ending.
SPEAKING	Students rehearse and perform their dialogues.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Percival Wilde (1887–1953) was an American author and playwright. His work included novels, short stories and one-act plays. Although one-act plays can be found in Greek theatre, they reached a pinnacle of popularity in the 20th century in the work of writers such as Edward Albee, Harold Pinter and Arthur Miller. These plays are often quite easy to perform, requiring few props and often only one or two actors. But this doesn't mean they are simple or superficial. The economy and directness of short plays lend an intensity and focus often lost in a longer performance.

### WARMER

Show a picture of a hairdresser's and barber's. Ask students to tell each other about the last time they had their hair cut (you might want to briefly review/teach the *have something done* form) – or perhaps they did it themselves or someone at home cut their hair? What do they like or dislike about having their hair cut? How long did it take? Do they usually go to the same place?

### ABOUT YOU

Use the questions to get students to think about what we talk about when we are in a situation where we interact with strangers. Elicit other examples of places where we might start talking to strangers – on a plane or train / in a shop / in a taxi / in a long queue, for example, and topics we might talk about, e.g. the weather, sport, current news topics, etc.

#### MIXED ABILITY

Ask stronger students to take on roles such as people on a train or in a queue. The weaker students decide what topics they should talk about (the weather, football, transport, the book someone is reading, where someone lives, etc.) and tell the students to time one another to see if they can keep a conversation going for one minute.

Go through the introduction and explain/elicite the format of a one-act play.

- 1 Students read the extract – they should do this silently as they are going to read it out loud later. After reading, discuss the question. Although the barber knows who the customer is, we are not told if they ever met.

## 2

### Possible answers

- 1 He tells the barber he is in a hurry (*I've just got five minutes*) and is worried about the time (*He glances at the clock*).
- 2 He is very polite and correct, but there is also something strange about him.
- 3 He has lived in the same places as the customer.
- 4 When the barber lowers the seat suddenly and when he says: *but it may be the last*.
- 5 Ask for ideas and suggestions. You might use Question 4 to highlight the possibility of something bad happening – is it possible the barber has been waiting for this man to use his shop? What might he want – money? Information? Is he going to hurt the man? Point out that the man is in the chair and the barber has scissors and knives. With a stronger group, spend some time exploring the meaning of the word *reckoning* – get them to look it up and find how it can be used.

## VOCABULARY

## 3

### Answers

- 1 it's a small world
- 2 started
- 3 critical
- 4 I'm in a hurry
- 5 following us about

#### MIXED ABILITY

This activity shouldn't prove too hard for students, especially if they use the glossary definitions. This can be encouraging for weaker students, but possibly too easy for stronger students. Tell the stronger students to write their own sentences using the target vocabulary. You can then read out the sentences and ask the class if they think the meaning is clear.

## 4

### Answers

- 1 I can't talk because I'm in a hurry now. (Allow other sentences with different word order: 'because I'm in a hurry I can't talk now' / 'because now I'm in a hurry', for example, but 'I'm in a hurry because I can't talk now', while grammatically correct, doesn't make much sense.)
- 2 When the president died they lowered the flag. / They lowered the flag when the president died.
- 3 The government made a critical decision.
- 4 They knew I was a southerner because of my accent.

## WRITING

- 5 Working in a group, encourage students to discuss different ideas (they may already have some ideas from Activity 2), rather than just choose their first idea. Once they have decided on their storyline, they should write the dialogue in the same format as on the worksheet. Tell them they should try and keep the same kind of language used – the barber very polite, the customer a bit impatient and surprised, etc.

## SPEAKING

- 6 Suggest starting the performance from when the customer says: *Anyone might think you've been following me about.* Having chosen the students to play the roles, the others in the group can work as directors. Remind students that emphasis and pauses are a very important part of speaking. The directors should make sure their actors are doing both as they read. Finally, the new scripts can be acted/read out to the whole class and a vote can be taken as to which is the best.

**Note:** In the play, the barber is the father of a young woman who was in love with the customer. He treated her very badly and she killed herself. The barber has been following the customer around, waiting for him to use his shop. He places his razor on the customer's neck but at the last moment, the barber doesn't kill him. The customer says the barber is a fool – he hasn't killed him and now he is going to make a lot of money because he will be on time for his meeting. He still has one minute. The barber tells him that's a shame, because his clock is five minutes slow. The customer has missed his meeting and is bankrupt.