

Teaching Pack: *Blues for an Alabama Sky*

Cambridge IGCSE™ / IGCSE (9–1)
Literature in English 0475 / 0992

Cambridge O Level
Literature in English 2010

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Introduction

This *Teaching Pack* supports teachers and learners when studying Cambridge IGCSE / IGCSE (9–1) and O Level Literature in English set texts.

Set texts regularly rotate on the syllabus and may change from one year of examination to the next. Before you begin teaching, check the set text list for the year in which your candidates will take their examinations.

Teachers may use this teaching pack to engage their learners when introducing a set text, or as a revision tool.

The content of these set text resources will need to be expanded on to cover what candidates are expected to know and be able to comment on in an examination.

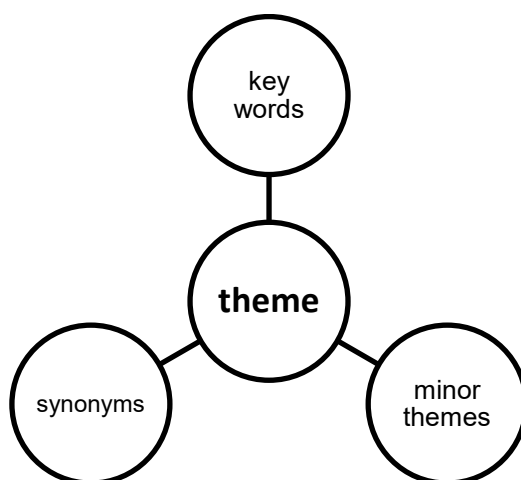
To increase learners' understanding and appreciation of the set text we recommend learners to set up a **reading log**, which could include:

- brief synopses of chapters/acts (in no more than a couple of sentences in their own words)
- a timeline of events (useful when a narrative is arranged non-chronologically)
- a list or diagram of characters and their relationships with each other
- first impressions of main characters
- initial thoughts about the main themes or ideas in the text.

The teaching pack aims to help learners to understand and think about the themes of the text, key quotations and their meanings, the significance of character behaviour, relationships and actions and how characters are depicted in the set text being studied.

The key words we use for the themes in this *Teaching Pack* are not exhaustive.

We suggest teachers discuss synonyms and alternative key words for themes that are identified for a text. Create key major theme mind maps and then from each of those key themes map connected and subsidiary/minor themes.



Lesson resources



Included in this pack are some resources to use with your learners. You may ask your learners to create their own worksheets similar to these, around another text, which they are studying:

Character summaries and quotation analysis – learners create their own character summaries and quotation analysis. Learning strategies and exam-style questions provide learners with practice and consolidation of characters in the set text.

Reflection activities – after reading the text learners reflect, consider and explore.

Quiz – a fun quiz to test the learners' knowledge of the text.

1. Themes and text summary

Some of the themes Pearl Cleage explores include:

- love and relationships
- dreams and ambitions
- musicians and singers
- financial hardship
- gender
- reproductive rights
- race.

The play is set during the 1930s Great Depression in Harlem, New York. The stage shows two neighbouring apartments (rented by Guy and Delia) and the street outside.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Act 1, Scene 1 | At 3am, Angel is being helped home by her friend, Guy, in whose apartment she is staying. She has had too much to drink after discovering her boyfriend has just married someone else; she shouted at him from the stage during a theatre performance and has lost her job. Guy is the stage production's costume designer and has also been fired because he defended Angel. Leland, a passer-by visiting New York from Alabama, helps Guy take Angel home and becomes attracted to her. Guy's neighbour, Delia, also helps with Angel, who is crying. Delia kindly thinks of helping Angel by enrolling her on a typing correspondence course, but Angel will hate this because as a singer she has an artist's temperament and is not suited to office work. Delia is a social worker and is trying to open a family planning clinic in Harlem. Guy is trying to interest Josephine Baker in his costume designs – Josephine is a famous African American singer and dancer, living in Paris. |
| Act 1, Scene 2 | Later that day, Delia comes in to see how Angel is, and their friend, Sam who is a doctor, visits too, having successfully delivered twins at the hospital. Sam, Delia and Guy go out for dinner, leaving Angel to recover from her hangover. She sees Leland out of the window but doesn't remember him – he has called to see how she is feeling. She flirts with him and invites him to go on an evening stroll with her the following Sunday. |
| Act 1, Scene 3 | On Wednesday afternoon, Angel returns from searching for a new singing job without success. Guy tells her that Nick, her old boyfriend, has set up an audition for her with a friend of his, Tony T. This cheers her up; she and Guy get ready to go to a party, while Delia and Sam work on Delia's presentation to a local church about the clinic. She hopes to persuade them to support it. Sam begins to flirt with Delia, but as he reads her presentation, he falls asleep – he is exhausted from his work as a doctor. |
| Act 1, Scene 4 | On Sunday, Sam and Delia are successful in getting the church's support for the clinic; they go to the theatre with Guy to celebrate, while Leland visits Angel. We learn he has come to Harlem to visit his cousin, and that his wife died in childbirth, and their baby died too, just a few months ago. He is religious and trying to find a church to go to in Harlem, but Angel can not recommend one – she is not religious. He is attracted to Angel because she reminds him of his wife. He returns Angel's scarf, which she dropped the first night they met. |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <p>Act 1, Scene 5</p> | <p>On Friday evening, Guy is excitedly telling Delia about a telegram he has received from Josephine Baker; she likes his dress designs and has asked him to send her some sample outfits to look at. They talk about Angel, and Delia wonders if he and Angel might start a relationship, but Guy reminds her that he prefers men. Delia returns to her own apartment. Leland arrives to see Angel; she is out at the audition with Tony T. Guy dislikes Leland's conventional attitudes, but makes an effort to be polite to him, for Angel's sake; he praises a rather drab dress Leland has brought for Angel. He goes out, leaving Leland waiting for Angel. When she arrives, she is startled to find Leland. She tells him that the 'audition' did not happen; Tony T wants her to be his mistress in return for his financial support. Leland thinks she turned down his offer; in fact, she may well have accepted it, because she has no money and no job. Leland says he loves her and wants a serious relationship with her, but Angel says she doesn't love him and warns him against loving her; but agrees that he can call on her the next day.</p> |
| <p>Act 2, Scene 1</p> | <p>Two weeks later, on Sunday. Guy is ready to send his outfits to Josephine Baker, and has arranged a celebration tea. He returns from the grocery store, he is dishevelled after being attacked in the street by 'hoodlums', because of his sexuality. Sam and Delia arrive, followed by Leland, who expresses his prejudice about homosexuality, so Guy tells him to leave. Angel is still keen to marry Leland because he will provide her with a home and security.</p> |
| <p>Act 2, Scene 2</p> | <p>Two weeks later. Sam confirms with Angel that she is two months pregnant. Angel is worried about money because she has no job, and the landlord intends to evict Guy. When Leland arrives, he is delighted at the news of her pregnancy and proposes marriage, which she accepts unenthusiastically.</p> |
| <p>Act 2, Scene 3</p> | <p>The next day. Delia is distraught at a fire in the clinic building, set by someone who is opposed to the clinic. Sam offers her part of his parents' house to use for the clinic, where he used to have his doctor's offices and examining rooms. Guy has been invited by Josephine Baker to go to Paris and work for her; she has sent him money and a boat ticket. Guy has bought another ticket for Angel to go with him. Guy and Delia leave to celebrate. Angel tells Sam she now wants to go to Paris with Guy and doesn't want to have the baby. Reluctantly, Sam agrees to perform the abortion in the morning, but warns Angel that it 'will kill' Leland especially after he lost his previous wife and son.</p> |
| <p>Act 2, Scene 4</p> | <p>The next afternoon, Angel tells Guy 'there is no more baby'. Leland arrives, gives Angel an engagement ring and talks of all the children they will have. At first Angel tells him she has had a miscarriage, but then tells him the truth. Leland is shocked and angry, and leaves. He realises Sam must have carried out the operation. As he exits, Sam arrives. In anger, Leland shoots and kills him.</p> |
| <p>Act 2, Scene 5</p> | <p>Two weeks later. Guy and Delia have not seen Angel since Sam was killed. Delia is grieving for Sam. She agrees to go to Paris with Guy. Guy leaves to get a cab, and when Delia leaves her apartment to join him, she sees Angel entering Guy's apartment. There is nothing they can say to each other except goodbye. Delia leaves too. Angel sits pensively looking out of the window. She initiates a conversation with a 'respectable looking' man outside...and the play ends.</p> |

2. Character summaries and quotation analysis

Angel Allen

Angel is a thirty-four-year-old black woman. She is a talented singer and used to work as a back-up singer at the Cotton Club, a top nightclub in Harlem during the Prohibition Era. At the start of the play, she has just been fired because she argued with her boyfriend during a performance, when she discovered he had got married to someone else.

She has a good friend in Guy, who offers her accommodation in his apartment while she has no job. They came to New York together, and he looks out for her. They enjoy each other's company and socialise together.

When Guy tells her of the offer of an audition with Tony T, a friend of her ex-boyfriend, she is excited and rehearses with musicians to prepare professionally. However, when she gets there, she realises he wants her as his paid mistress. She feels forced to consider his offer, repugnant as it is, because she has no other option to bring in money.

At the end of Act One, when Leland declares his love for her, she warns him that she will only drive him "crazy" and tells him that she doesn't love him but allows him to carry on seeing her because he is offering her a chance to have a home and some financial security. Leland is conventional and religious, unlike Angel. When she confirms she is expecting his baby, he is delighted and expects to get married immediately, and she goes along with his plans, despite not loving him – the prospect of having a baby, places more pressure on her financially.

Guy makes Angel an offer she really wants to accept. He is invited by Josephine Baker to work for her in Paris, and he offers to take Angel with him. Angel would love to start a new life there; but she is unable to due to her pregnancy and her agreement to marry Leland. She talks Sam into performing an abortion, and expects Leland to accept it and leave, despite Sam telling her how much it will hurt Leland. Unfortunately, Leland is upset and angry, resulting in the tragedy of his shooting and killing Sam.

Angel disappears for two weeks after Sam is killed; Guy and Delia make plans to go ahead to Paris. Delia says she wants Angel to say sorry, but when Angel returns and Delia meets her, she realises it won't change what's happened. At the end of the play, Angel is left in Guy's apartment alone, looking out on the street. However, she soon initiates a conversation with a 'respectable looking' man passing by, suggesting that she will carry on as before, relying on men to support her.

| Quotation | This suggests... | Quotation analysis |
|---|--|--|
| 'There aren't any jobs doing anything, especially singing for your supper.' (Angel) Act 1, Scene 3 | ...that Angel can't find paid work. This helps to explain why she is forced to consider Tony T's offer of being his mistress, and Leland's offer of marriage. | Discuss how this line reflects the economic challenges faced by artists during the Harlem Renaissance. Learners can research historical context to better understand Angel's situation. |
| 'I'm not going to be a broke old woman, begging up and down 125 th Street, dreaming about fine clothes and French champagne.' (Angel) Act 1, Scene 5 | ...the prospects of a life of poverty which Angel fears. | Learners write a monologue from Angel's perspective that expands on her fears of poverty and her dreams for the future. Question: How does this line reflect Angel's fears and motivations? |
| SAM: It doesn't have to be this hard. ANGEL: It already is, Doc. Just not for you. Act 2, Scene 3 | ...the hardship of Angel's life as a female. She feels she has to be selfish and take what chances come her way and chooses to ruin Leland's life by having an abortion so that she can start a new life in Paris. | Role-play this scene to explore the gender dynamics and personal struggles that Angel faces. Discuss how these lines reveal her resilience and determination. Question: What does this dialogue reveal about Angel's perspective on her life and the challenges she faces? |
| Learning focus | | |
| <p>Scene analysis: To help learners pay close attention to textual details and understand character development. Break down key scenes involving Angel and analyse her dialogue, actions, and interactions with other characters. Discuss what these reveal about her character.</p> <p>To encourage critical thinking and help learners explore multiple viewpoints Organise debates on key decisions made by Angel, such as accepting Tony T's offer or deciding to have an abortion. Learners can argue from different perspectives.</p> | | |

Guy Jacobs

Guy is a black man around thirty years old. He was a talented costume designer at the Cotton Club, but just before the play opens, he was fired because he defended Angel's behaviour there when she argued with her boyfriend during a performance. He has known Angel a long time; they arrived in Harlem together, seeking a better life than either of them had known at 'Miss Lillie's' in Savannah, where they were paid for entertaining men.

His dream is to design costumes for a famous singer in Paris, Josephine Baker, whose picture he displays in his apartment to inspire his designs. He carefully plans how to achieve his dream job, first submitting sketches of outfits, then sending some specially made samples; he skilfully crafts them into unorthodox designs with luxury fabrics and fancy stitching so that his work will be favourably judged.

Guy works hard, often sewing in his apartment even while his visitors are there. After he is fired, he is practical enough to take any sewing work there is, even if not very prestigious, so that he has enough money to live on, to take care of Angel and to produce first-class samples for Josephine Baker. When she offers him a job, he is ecstatic, and eagerly ends his commitments in New York ready to leave for Paris.

He and Angel are firm friends. He is used to taking care of her through her various crises, usually when she finishes with one man before taking up with another. Although she can be difficult, he cares for her because she appreciates him. He criticises her treatment of Leland, telling her Leland is too young and conventional for her to be happy with him, but he isn't angry when she ignores his advice. Even when his dream comes true, he thinks of Angel, and buys her a ticket to take her with him on the boat to Paris to make a new life there.

Guy has experienced prejudice because of his sexuality. He is part of Harlem's gay community, and we see him and Angel dressing up to attend vibrant parties. When he moved to New York, the first costumes Guy designed were for drag queens. Guy gets attacked in the street on the way home from the grocers at the start of Act 2, and later is called an 'abomination' by the orthodox and prejudiced Leland. This reinforces Guy's opinion that Leland and Angel are not suited to each other.

At the end of the play, when Angel has not been seen for two weeks, we learn that Guy has thoughtfully paid the rent on his apartment in advance for her, just in case she returns. He kindly invites Delia to go with him to Paris, as a way of helping her cope with Sam's death, and suggests Sam would have approved.

| Quotation | This suggests... | Quotation analysis |
|--|---|---|
| <p><i>'Throughout this scene, GUY works at his sewing while participating fully in the conversation. This is his habit, and his friends are all used to it.'</i></p> <p>(Stage directions, Act 1, Scene 2)</p> | <p>...how Guy works professionally and seriously designing costumes, and how hard he works to make it a success to earn a living, and then to achieve his dream of working for Josephine Baker.</p> | <p>Question: How does Cleage use stage directions in this moment to reveal aspects of Guy's character? In your answer, explore how this contributes to the audience's understanding of his work ethic, relationships, and ambitions.</p> |
| <p>'He's exactly the kind of small-minded, ignorant, judgmental bastard I left Savannah to get away from!' (Guy)</p> <p>Act 2, Scene 1</p> | <p>...how Guy reacts strongly to Leland's deep-seated prejudice to his sexuality – this is part of the reason Guy doesn't think Angel and Leland are compatible.</p> | <p>Question: Explore how Cleage uses language in this quotation to reveal Guy's feelings about Leland and his past. In your answer, consider how this moment contributes to the development of character and theme.</p> |
| <p>'Sometimes you wear me out, Miss Angel.' (Guy)</p> <p>Act 2, Scene 3</p> | <p>...his criticism of Angel's cruelty in ignoring Leland's feelings to abort Leland's baby in order to go with Guy to Paris.</p> | <p>Question: How does Cleage use tone and word choice in this quotation to show Guy's frustration and affection? What does this reveal about his character?</p> |
| Learning focus | | |
| <p>To build analytical skills and collaborative learning.</p> <p>Place key quotations about or by Guy around the room. Learners rotate in groups, annotating each with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What it reveals about Guy • How language is used • What themes it connects to | | |
| <p>To help learners understand narrative structure and character development.</p> <p>Learners create a visual timeline of Guy's journey in the play, annotating key events with quotes and analysis of how Cleage uses structure to build his character arc.</p> | | |

Sam Thomas

Sam is a forty-year-old black doctor at Harlem Hospital and a friend of both Guy and Angel, whom he affectionately calls 'Angel Eyes'. He makes a dramatic first entrance with a bottle of 'bootleg liquor' to celebrate his successful delivery of twins – making seven babies he has delivered in two days. He works hard and is often exhausted, falling asleep frequently when he sits and rests for a moment, and is known for sleeping during a show at the theatre. He cares deeply for his patients who are from Harlem's poor black people, and he does what he can to help them.

He relaxes from his emotionally and physically draining profession by going to clubs to enjoy music and dancing. He appreciates Angel's talent for singing and asks her to sing the blues for him. When Delia suggests he cut back on his nightlife, he refuses, because he says it helps rejuvenate him by reminding him that people are more than just their bodies, which he spends his time patching up.

Sam helps Delia put together her case for opening a family-planning clinic in Harlem to the local church to get their support. He takes her through some of the issues facing the people he sees as patients; their problems often arise from poverty. Sam supports the clinic because it will give people more choice; if families have fewer children, they may all be healthier and stronger. The church committee agree to give their support, in part because the Deacon is grateful to Sam for delivering his grandchildren! When the clinic premises are set on fire to by opponents to family planning, Sam kindly offers Delia the use of his old medical offices in his parents' house.

Sam and Delia are attracted to each other, despite the difference in their ages, and they grow closer through their work on the clinic. They talk of love and are teased about their blossoming relationship by Guy and Angel.

Sam's views on abortion rights are challenged by Angel, when she asks him to perform an illegal abortion for her, because she wants to go to Paris with Guy. Sam is reluctant because Angel has the opportunity to provide a family for the baby, with Leland, and he warns her how much it will upset Leland. Angel persuades him to go ahead. Leland is devastated, and in his pain and anger he tragically shoots Sam and kills him.

Delia is left to mourn Sam's death and remember their brief relationship. To help her cope with his death, Guy invites her to go to Paris with him, and she remembers what Sam would have said in encouragement: 'Let the good times roll!' as she accepts and leaves with Guy.

| Quotation | This suggests... | Quotation analysis |
|--|---|--|
| 'My patients clean me out the first of every month...' (Sam) Act 2, Scene 2 | ...how Sam cares deeply for his poverty-stricken patients to the extent of paying for their care himself. | Question: How does Cleage use language in this quotation to show the emotional and financial pressures Sam faces? What does it reveal about the social context of the play? |
| 'I don't want to work so hard on the body I forget about the soul.' (Sam) Act 1, Scene 3 'Let the good times roll!' (Sam) Act 1, Scene 3; Act 2, Scene 5 | ...how Sam recognises that he needs music and dancing to relax from his arduous work as a doctor. He repeats the second saying throughout the play, and at the end, it reminds Delia that Sam recognised the need for fun in life and that he would have approved of her going to Paris with Guy. | Question: How do these quotations help the audience understand Sam's character and his approach to life? In your answer, explore how Cleage uses language and repetition to highlight key themes in the play. |
| 'This will kill him, Angel.' (Sam) Act 2, Scene 3 | ...how Sam fully understands the hurt Leland will feel at the abortion of his baby. It is ironic that it is Leland who kills Sam. | In groups, learners rehearse and perform a key scene involving Sam (e.g., Act 2, Scene 3). Afterward, they reflect on how his language and actions reveal his values and emotional depth. Question: How does Cleage use this moment to reveal Sam's understanding of the emotional consequences of Angel's decision? Explore how language and context are used to highlight character relationships and the theme of emotional responsibility. |
| Learning focus | | |
| <p>To help learners understand character dynamics and thematic links. Learners create a visual web showing Sam's relationships with other characters. They annotate connections with quotes and explanations of how these relationships reveal his values.</p> <p>To encourage empathy, inference, and close reading of Sam's dialogue and actions. A learner takes on the role of Sam and answers questions from the class about his work, beliefs, and relationships. The class must ask thoughtful, text-based questions.</p> | | |

Create your own character summaries and quotation tables:



[Character name]


| Quotation | This suggests... |
|-----------|------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

3. Character animations








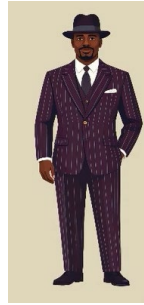
Can you identify the names of the different characters in the videos?

| Character name | Character image |
|----------------|-----------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| Character name | Character image |
|----------------|---|
| |  |

Here are the answers.

| Character name | Character image |
|----------------|---|
| Angel Allen |  |
| Guy Jacobs |  |
| Leland |  |
| Delia |  |
| Sam Thomas |  |

| Character name | Character image |
|----------------|---|
| Tony T |  |

4. Reflection and activities



Now you have read the text, reflect on your thoughts:

Consider the relationship between the ending and the rest of the play.

Did you find the ending surprising or shocking?

Were you able to predict the ending, and at what stage did the ending become clear?

Did you find the ending satisfying?

Did the characters get the ending they deserved?

What dramatic contribution did the ending make to the play as a whole?

To what extent does [author] make this a satisfying ending to the play?

[illegible]

Explore the dramatic impact of a key moment from the play

Read the extract you have selected and consider the points below:

- Explore the use of particular words or lines spoken by character.
- Were there any shifts in topic, tone and mood? Is it a moment of quiet pathos or one of dramatic intensity?
- How does the writer convey the mood at this moment in the play?
- What is the dramatic impact on the audience?

[illegible]

Explore the characters in the play

Create practice questions around the characters of the play, for example:

- Explore how [author] portrays the relationship between [character] and [character]?
- How does the writer memorably depict the life of [character]?
- Explore how [character] makes this moment in the play so memorable/entertaining/dramatic?

Choose **one** of your questions and complete the following activities:

Compile a QUOTATION + COMMENT table to record your ideas about specific characters.

Add notes to each quotation about what it reveals about the character and their relevant contexts.

Learn some key quotations.

Answer the question. Peer-evaluate each other's answers.

Note examples of:

- irrelevant points (which perhaps narrate or describe)
- repeated points (where no more credit can be given)
- unsupported assertions (which do not constitute analysis)
- long quotations (which indicate a lack of clear focus).

Tick:

- ✓ points that are valid and thoughtful
- ✓ quotations that are concise and relevant
- ✓ critical comments on key words or aspects of structure and form.

[illegible]

Explore the themes of the play

Create practice questions around a theme, for example:

- How does [author] portray [theme] in the play?
- In what ways does [author] convey [theme] in the play?
- How does [author] present his ideas about [theme] in the play?

Choose **one** of your questions and complete the following activities:

- Compile a QUOTATION + COMMENT table to record your ideas about specific characters.
- Add notes to each quotation about what it reveals about the character and their relevant contexts.
- Learn some key quotations.
- Answer the question. Peer-evaluate each other's answers.

Note examples of:

- irrelevant points (which perhaps narrate or describe)
- repeated points (where no more credit can be given)
- unsupported assertions (which do not constitute analysis)
- long quotations (which indicate a lack of clear focus).

Tick:

- ✓ points that are valid and thoughtful
- ✓ quotations that are concise and relevant
- ✓ critical comments on key words or aspects of structure and form.

[illegible]

5. Quiz



1. Why does Angel need Guy's help to get home at the start of the play?

- A) She is lost and doesn't know the way home.
- B) She has drunk too much alcohol and cannot walk without falling over.
- C) She has broken a leg and cannot walk.
- D) It is raining and she has not got a coat.

2. What does Delia suggest Angel should do, if she cannot get a job as a singer?

- A) Help Guy sew clothes.
- B) Take people's pet dogs for walks.
- C) Work in a hospital.
- D) Take a course in typing.

3. What type of song does Sam ask Angel to sing?

- A) Blues
- B) Rock and roll
- C) Rap
- D) Jazz

4. What is the name of the singer in Paris who offers Guy a job designing her costumes?

- A) Édith Piaf
- B) Florence Emery Jones
- C) Josephine Baker
- D) Aretha Franklin

5. What is Delia's job?

- A) A singer
- B) A teacher
- C) A secretary
- D) A social worker

6. What American state is Leland from?

- A) Alabama
- B) Arizona
- C) Arkansas
- D) Alaska

7. What happened to Leland's wife?

- A) She divorced Leland.
- B) She died in childbirth.
- C) She went to stay with her sister.
- D) She married another man.

8. What does Angel tell Guy that she sees in Leland?

- A) A charming honest man
- B) A good date for a night out
- C) An attractive and religious man
- D) A rent check that won't bounce

9. What piece of furniture does Leland make for Angel?

- A) A chest of drawers
- B) A rocking chair
- C) A bookcase
- D) A kitchen table

10. What does Delia think Sam would have said about her going to Paris with Guy?

- A) Don't go without me.
- B) You cannot afford it.
- C) Let the good times roll.
- D) It is too risky.

Quiz answers

1. Why does Angel need Guy's help to get home at the start of the play?

B) She has drunk too much alcohol and cannot walk without falling over.

2. How does Delia suggest Angel should do, if she cannot get a job as a singer?

D) Take a course in typing

3. What type of song does Sam ask Angel to sing?

A) Blues

4. What's the name of the singer in Paris who offers Guy a job designing her costumes?

C) Josephine Baker

5. What is Delia's job?

D) A social worker

6. What American state is Leland from?

A) Alabama

7. What happened to Leland's wife?

B) She died in childbirth.

8. What does Angel tell Guy that she sees in Leland?

D) A rent check that won't bounce

9. What piece of furniture does Leland make himself for Angel?

B) A rocking chair

10. What does Delia think Sam would have said about her going to Paris with Guy?

C) Let the good times roll.

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