

TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES THROUGH ENGLISH TEACHING

Introduction and Objectives

The aim of this activity is to connect students with transgender realities through the close analysis of a literary excerpt. Actively engaging the ideas presented by the text can contribute to enhance students' understanding of gender labelling and encourage them to challenge the misconceptions they may have around this topic. Additionally, this activity aims at fostering critical thinking and analytical attitudes in the classroom.

Context

This excerpt is part of the novel *If I Was Your Girl*, published in 2016 by Meredith Russo. The novel's protagonist is a transgender teenager, Amanda, who, in the excerpt, describes her feelings regarding being a transgender teenager and the decisions she has taken in the past in order to live the way she has always desired.

Instructions

1. Students are introduced to the topic of transgender realities throughout the use of pictures and diagrams which show different gender labelling such as woman, man, genderqueer, androgynous, transgender or transsexual.
2. Once students are familiar with the terminology used, they are asked to reflect upon it in relation to their own knowledge and context.
3. Students are given an excerpt from the novel *If I Was Your Girl* (chapter 3, pp. 37-38) and they are asked to read it in pairs (a brief glossary is provided so they can consult the words they are not familiar with).
4. After reading the text individually, they are asked to answer and reflect upon some questions that are content-related but that also aim at triggering empathy towards the protagonist of the novel.

5. Students orally discuss the questions with the rest of the class and note down the conclusions they have personally gathered.

If I Was Your Girl:

So when you wrote ‘I should have been a girl’, did you mean that you’re afraid to come out as gay, or embarrassed that you want to wear women’s clothes? [...]

[...] I could deal with just being gay or whatever. It feels wrong that I’m a boy, though. When my hair gets long and people mistake me for a girl, I feel happy. I try to imagine what kind of man I’ll grow up to be, and nothing comes. I think about being a husband or a father and [...] and I feel like I’m being sucked into a black hole (Russo 37-38).

Questions

- What are Amanda’s feelings when she thinks about the future?
 - Consider her tone, style, and selection of words.
 - Who do you think she is talking to? What may the role of the listener be in this fragment?
- Do you believe Amanda is a trans teenager? Why do people mistake Amanda for a girl?
- What are the difficulties and challenges that may be faced by a transgender teenager?
- Imagine that one of your friends ‘comes out’ as a trans teenager, how would you react?

Methodological Context

These questions were specifically designed taking into account Jean E. Brown’s Literature Response Model, modified by J.R.Kraver. The model is constituted by five steps:

- 1) Factual Level: Students get in contact with the text by reading it.
- 2) Empathetic Level: students are asked to put themselves in the place of the narration. A personal connection between the reader and the text is sought.

3) Analytical Level: the students analyze the text from a critical perspective and are provided with vocabulary that helps them to express their own opinion.

4) Applicative Level: (Brown also refers to this as the Sympathetic Level) the student is asked to consider situations that are beyond their own reality, and connect the knowledge that has been developed in the classroom to the text, this helps them to establish connections between the text and the world and connect these to their own realities.

5) Critical Level: students are asked to assess the material provided. This generates multiple interpretations and activates students' reflection enhancing their critical thinking skills.

Bibliographical References:

Brown, Jean, E., and Elaine C. Stephens, *Teaching Young Adult Literature: Sharing the Connection*, Belmont, Wadsworth, 1995.

Russo, Meredith. *If I Was Your Girl*. London, Usborne Publishing, 2016, pp. 37-38.

Kraver, J.R. "Endengering Gender Equity: Using literature to teach and learn democracy." *The English Journal*, vol. 96, no. 6, 2007.

This learning object was produced under the auspices of the Pedagogical Innovation Project NAPCED (Nuevas aplicaciones de la Pedagogía Crítica y la Educación para el Desarrollo al análisis de textos literarios anglófonos) funded by the Servei de Formació Permanent i Innovació Educativa (SFPIE) -Universitat de València 2018-2019. <http://napced.blogs.uv.es/>