



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane
Classe LM-37

Tesi di Laurea

THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER
Exploring the English Language and
Discovering Yourself Through Young Adult
Literature

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Anno Accademico 2021 / 2022

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0. Introduction

Teachers all around the world constantly face a great challenge, that is looking for new materials and resources to create more engaging and motivating lessons. Moreover, those who teach a second language also need to consider the authenticity factor. What is meant by this is that learning exclusively through textbooks often results in an extremely mechanical process that will not allow students to discover the beautiful nuances of a language and the cultural background of a country. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the reasons why Stephen Chbosky's novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, could represent a valuable resource for ESL teachers. Not by chance, the first five chapters, and the units that have been developed for the module in chapter six, intend to show the several benefits that teaching this book in class could provide to students. It could transform learning a new language into a more authentic, engaging, and memorable experience. Moreover, having this novel as the fulcrum of a module, will open up a discussion about important contemporary issues that teenagers might relate to, while also making learning a more fun and meaningful experience that will equip students with tools to face real-life challenges. What follows is a more detailed summary of the content of each chapter.

Chapter one will provide a general discussion about language acquisition that will help to better understand the purpose of this thesis, and frame Chbosky's novel in a didactic context. It will first examine the pros and cons of learning a second language in a country where it is not spoken, to then introduce the idea that teachers can still offer an authentic experience by using in their lessons different resources such as authentic materials and realia. Therefore, this chapter will also provide information on different types of materials that are meant to keep the class motivated, engaged, and offer a new authentic learning experience. Another important aspect discussed in this chapter concerns the different approaches to teaching languages that have been developed throughout the years. Discussing them will allow us to see how the role of the teacher and the student has changed over time, as well as the increasing attention given to communicative competence and cultural aspects. Finally, the last subchapter will discuss CLIL methodology, its benefits, and the reason why *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* could once again represent a useful resource for this type of lesson.

Chapter two intends to examine two fundamental aspects of teaching, that is tailoring lessons to meet the individual needs of students and turning learning into a

meaningful experience. In fact, this chapter will focus on a thorough discussion about Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, the VARK model, and Kolb's experiential learning theory. This discussion will be necessary to challenge the outdated idea that students are all the same, therefore, learn in the same way. Emphasis will also be put on the importance of creating lessons that consider student's needs and motivation. After this, the discussion will move on to the meaningful experience that teaching literature can offer. Moreover, a set of criteria will be presented to help teachers select the most suitable literary texts for ESL classes. In this chapter we will also get to see how *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* relates back to every idea discussed thus far. Due to the content of the book, this chapter will also include a final discussion on whether or not giving trigger warnings to students is necessary to create a safer class environment.

Chapter three will analyze different strategies and techniques that teachers can use when presenting literature to students, which will hopefully increase students' participation and engagement. These will also be implemented in the module. The first subchapter will discuss reading strategies which can be used before, during or after reading, such as previewing, predicting, summarizing, questioning, making inferences and visualizing. The reason for this is that it is extremely important to provide students with useful cognitive tools to improve text comprehension. The second one will present the basic tenets of the main literary theories that started to appear around the 1920s. Teaching them in class can ultimately prepare students to carry out a more thorough analysis and get a deeper understanding of literary texts and their meaning. Later on, role play and realia will be discussed. This teaching technique, with the help of realia, will stimulate their creativity, imagination, while also enhancing their language and communication skills. Creative writing and peer review are next. This next subchapter will discuss what is meant by these terms and show why they can be beneficial for students. In fact, the former is meant to make writing a more enjoyable and less monotonous activity. The latter is meant to make students improve their writing by learning from one another. Finally, different group discussion strategies will be examined, more precisely the ones known as gallery walk, hot seat, Socratic seminar, and think-pair-share. These are all used in class to increase students' participation and motivation.

Chapter four will provide a detailed analysis of the novel and its movie adaptation. For it to be as detailed as possible, it will examine the main themes and characters. *The*

Perks of Being a Wallflower deals with sensitive topics, in fact, the themes that will be discussed include mental health, suicide, strict gender roles, abuse, trauma, drug, and alcohol use. However, this is also a story about mutual help, healing, friendship, love, queer representation, and self-discovery. Therefore, a lot of emphasis will be placed on the joyful moments in the characters' life as well. This chapter will also include an analysis of the symbols that enrich the story, such as driving, music, books, and the tunnel. This lengthy discussion about the themes, the characters and the symbols will allow us to focus on crucial events that shape the story and never fail to bore the reader. One subchapter will also be dedicated to the harsh criticism that the novel received in the past from parents who refused to let their children read or discuss it in class. Showing opposing points of view will be helpful to introduce the reason why the book can offer more than just a touching story about a high school wallflower. In fact, it will be argued how it can help students to find comfort, hope and support in the words of a boy that went through a lot, but with the help of those around him, was able to find joy in life.

Chapter five can be seen as a separate piece from the rest of the chapters. In fact, the previous ones are fundamental to place the novel in a didactic context and discuss its content. This one, however, will be used as an introduction to the module itself, therefore, it will also include some technical aspects. First of all, the module rationale will be discussed to explain its purpose and introduce its content. Secondly, a list of the didactic goals, learning objectives and prerequisites will be presented to better understand what teachers and students who will complete the module can look forward to. Thirdly, the recipients and the didactic context will be discussed to clarify who this module is designed for. Next, there will be a detailed summary of the content of the units that will constitute the module. More precisely, activities related to the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, a discussion about the movie, the American culture of the early nineties, and the English language. After this, the structure of module and the units will be presented. The next two subchapters will describe the teaching methodologies and the didactic materials that will be implemented to make lessons more dynamic, motivating, and individualized. Finally, the essential parameters for assessment and evaluation will be discussed.

Chapter six will be divided in twelve subchapters that will constitute the units of the module. Each unit will include two tables and one or more handouts. The first table

will give useful information about the duration, prerequisites, learning objectives, contents, and materials needed. The second one will explain in detail each activity designed for each lesson, and the time it will approximately take to conclude them. The handout is the material designed to be distributed in class, on which the teacher and the students will work. The first subchapter will contain a unit dedicated to the introduction of the book and the different literary theories. The following nine subchapters will focus on part one, two, three, four, and the epilogue of the book with the exception of unit seven which will discuss the American culture in the early 90s, period in which the story is set. Finally, the last three subchapters will examine the movie and provide a conclusion for the module.

1. Background

1.1. Discussions surrounding second language acquisition and culture

A key point surrounding second language acquisition (SLA) is whether or not learning a foreign language in school can be as effective as learning it by living abroad. On one hand, some might argue that learning a language in school is useless or counterproductive since the only way to actually become fluent is through a “full-immersion” in the country of the target language. On the other hand, others could defend the idea that school is a valid institution which offers every student plenty of opportunities to allow them to finish their studies with a good level of proficiency in second language (L2).

It can be argued that students tend to be attracted by the idea of spending one or more semesters of their school years abroad to learn or improve a second language, as well as to witness firsthand a different culture. Not by chance, there is a plethora of documented studies which show the benefits that studying abroad entails. The most obvious one is that it leads to evident improvements in listening, and oral proficiency.¹ Moreover, it helps to develop leadership and communicative skills.² While these are certainly valuable outcomes that must not be overlooked, we must also consider the fact that not everyone gets the life-changing opportunity to study in a foreign country. Financial issues, apprehension towards crucial new challenges, or necessary achievement levels in order to apply for a mobility program,³ could all be some of the many valid reasons as to why a person might be unable to embark on this adventure. For these people, therefore, the only way to learn another language might be through schools’ language classes which play a key role in making sure that an increasing number of students are offered the possibility to become bilingual, if not plurilingual, from an early age.

When considering the case of English and why it is being learned as an L2 and spoken by an increasing number of people – according to John Knagg, a member of the

¹ Francesca Di Silvio, Diao Wenhao, and Anne Donovan. “The Development of L2 Fluency During Study Abroad: A Cross-Language Study.” *The Modern Language Journal* 100, no. 3 (2016): 611–12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44135009>.

² A. Harder et al. “Does Study Abroad Increase Employability?” *NACTA Journal* 59, no. 1 (2015): 44–46. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/nactajournal.59.1.41>.

³ Markus Lörz, Nicolai Netz, and Heiko Quast. “Why Do Students from Underprivileged Families Less Often Intend to Study Abroad?” *Higher Education* 72, no. 2 (2016): 157–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24756975>.

British Council, in 2019 there were 1.5 billion people learning English as a second language around the world, and 1.75 billion people speaking it⁴ – we should also give credit to schools’ language curriculum. Within Europe for example, English is the most studied language during primary and secondary education,⁵ therefore, pupils come in contact with it at a very early stage of their lives. Numerous studies in the didactic and neurological field have investigated the importance of age for becoming bilingual. Not by chance, it is by now well established that being continuously and actively exposed to an L2 before puberty, contributes to achieving nativelike abilities.⁶ Some might argue however, that even if schools contribute to giving their students a chance to learn a foreign language in a critical period which will most probably result in a higher success of becoming fluent, they might still be confronted with a problem. As a matter of fact, while studying abroad allows students to witness firsthand and learn about every single aspect of a foreign culture, schools are not entirely able to offer the same experience. The main evident reason being that the target language is confined within a classroom and the linguistic and cultural input ends as soon as the lesson is over. However, as we will see later on, teachers can resort to a vast number of resources that could, for the most part, help them and their students overcome this problem.

1.2. Purpose of the thesis

Discussing the benefits and issues that learning an L2 in school entails, was fundamental in order to introduce the purpose and relevance of this thesis. It is undeniable that an extensive knowledge of the culture surrounding a foreign language is an important asset to possess as it allows students to fully appreciate it and to actively engage with it. Teachers must understand and work around students’ needs, but if lessons are limited to learning grammar, practicing speaking, reading, or listening, they could soon feel demotivated. In fact, learning will eventually result in an extremely mechanical process

⁴ Kenneth Beare. "How Many People Learn English?" *ThoughtCo*, 2020. <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-many-people-learn-english-globally-1210367>.

⁵ “Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe.” *Eurydice*, 2017. <https://eurydice.indire.it/pubblicazioni/key-data-on-teaching-languages-at-school-in-europe-2017-edition/>.

⁶ Stefka H. Marinova-Todd, Bradford Marshall, and Catherine E. Snow. “Three Misconceptions about Age and L2 Learning.” *TESOL Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2000): 9–34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588095>.

in which students passively acquire knowledge. However, when teachers are able to place these different aspects of a language into a cultural context – hence, allowing students to learn how natives really communicate with one another and live – the end result might be a more interesting and engaging learning process. It becomes evident therefore, that teachers and students cannot exclusively rely on textbooks as they are simply not enough to get a deep understanding of a different culture and must depend on the support of other resources.

Nowadays, especially thanks to technological advances, we have access to an incredible number of authentic materials. By this, we usually refer to different kinds of materials – for instance, YouTube videos, podcasts, TV shows, books, newspapers – which are not originally meant to be used in class but are rather intended for a native audience.⁷ It is for this reason that they truly offer a window into how people of a foreign country think, speak, or act, thus becoming a motivating factor for students.

Based on the efficacy and importance of authentic materials, this study proposes to use Stephen Chbosky's novel, more specifically *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, as well as its movie adaptation, in an ESL (English as a second language) classroom. The module that will be introduced in the last chapter intends to push students to practice and learn English, as well as to learn about the culture surrounding this language through motivating and meaningful activities that students could benefit from. Not by chance, apart from recurrent themes such as love, friendship, and identity, the story told through the voice of the protagonist could represent a starting point to discuss other important and difficult issues such as suicide, rape, and drug abuse, which are unfortunately rarely discussed in High School.

This page-turning book follows the story of an American young man named Charlie who has just started his first year of High School, unfortunately, life is pretty tough for him. Just like the title preannounces, he is a wallflower, an outcast, trying to find his place in the world. Students might identify with his character, not by chance, being a teenager has never been easy for anybody. Adolescence is undeniably a critical stage of life, you are still in school but you cannot wait to grow older, at the same time you are trying to understand yourself, what your passions and interests are, and what you want your future

⁷ Paola Begotti. *Didattizzazione di Materiali Autentici e Analisi dei Manuali di Italiano per Stranieri*, (Venezia: Laboratorio Itals, 2006): 14.
https://www.italy.it/sites/default/files/Filim_didattizzazione_analisi_teorica.pdf

to look like. On one hand, you cannot wait to have the job of your dreams and be free from the rules that adults are setting for you. On the other, you just want to stay young forever and not think about the worries that come with adulthood. Charlie is the embodiment of these anxieties towards the past, the present and the future. Unfortunately, this journey into his life, which is shared with the reader through intimate letters, will eventually reveal a terrible truth, and we cannot help but feel for him. However, when everything seems lost, the protagonist learns that there is still a light at the end of the tunnel and that being a wallflower is not necessarily a bad thing, on the contrary, it has its perks.

This is surely a challenging book to discuss in class, and it is certainly not meant for lower-level classes. It requires teachers to sensitively handle delicate subjects, but if done in a suitable manner, they will be able to keep their students engaged and motivated. Moreover, the book and its movie adaptation, offer a creative outlet for teachers to actively teach English and for students to dwell into an exciting and in-depth discussion about the American culture. They are also both full of references to different musicians, historical events, philosophers, and this could be certainly used in prospect of a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) lesson. Overall, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* transforms modern literature into an experience, offering students plenty of opportunities to learn and practice English, while also allowing them to step into an immersive reading that they will hopefully remember for the rest of their life.

However, before going into more details about the novel, and the benefits that using literature as a way to teach English entails, it is important to better situate Chbosky's work in a didactic context, and to do so, different historical and technical aspects regarding foreign language acquisition should be highlighted.

1.3. Different approaches to teaching languages throughout history

1.3.1 Formal approach

Proceeding in a diachronic order, the first approach to teaching languages to be developed was the formal one. It began to take shape around the 1700s when Latin lost

its status as a lingua franca and gradually became a dead language.⁸ Initially, Latin was mainly taught by focusing on grammar structures, declensions, conjugations, and translation. This gave rise to the grammatical-translation method which was soon to be applied to the study of modern languages which were now part of European schools' curriculum.⁹ The problem with this highly deductive method lied in the fact that it did not aim to develop oral skills, thus making the pupils little, or not at all, skilled in using the language to communicate.

1.3.2. Structuralist approach

Consequently, in the 19th century there was a high demand for improving communicative skills. Therefore, a novel approach was established: the structuralist approach. Unfortunately, it was criticized by many, including famous linguist Chomsky. He believed that even though it paid more attention to spoken language by practicing structures that could be used in meaningful, real-life situations, it did not consider its creativity and uniqueness.¹⁰ In fact, it reduced language acquisition to a pure mechanical process. Not surprisingly, it was based on Skinner's theory according to which every behavior, including language, is learnt through the stimulus-response-reinforcement pattern.¹¹ The result is an audiolingual, audiovisual method according to which learning depends on pattern drills - that is structural exercises repeated many times with the aim of creating mental habits that should generate language in a spontaneous way¹² – as well as on the new didactic technologies of the fifties and sixties such as language laboratory,

⁸ “Approcci E Metodi Della Glottodidattica.” *Laboratorio Itals*, 2013. <https://www.italy.it/alias/approcci-e-metodi-della-glottodidattica>.

⁹ Jack C. Richards, and Theodore S. Rodgers. “A Brief History of Language Teaching.” Chapter. In *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2nd ed. Cambridge Language Teaching Library. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 3–17. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511667305.003.

¹⁰ Jack C. Richards, and Theodore S. Rodgers. “The Nature of Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching.” Chapter. In *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2nd ed. Cambridge Language Teaching Library. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 18–35. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511667305.004.

¹¹ Richards, Jack C., and Theodore S. Rodgers. “The Audiolingual Method.” Chapter. In *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2nd ed. Cambridge Language Teaching Library. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 50. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511667305.006.

¹² Frey, Herschel J. “Audio-Lingual Teaching and the Pattern Drill.” *The Modern Language Journal* 52, no. 6 (1968): 350. <https://doi.org/10.2307/322055>.

audio recordings, or film strips projectors.¹³ Therefore, this approach sees the student as a blank slate who learns by automation, and the teacher is seen as a linguistic model to be imitated.

1.3.3. Communicative approach

During the seventies a communicative approach was developed as a response to the inadequacy of earlier approaches. This new approach paid greater attention to communicative competence, hence to the practical use of language. Two methods derived from this: the situational method and the functional-notional method.¹⁴ They both aimed at the acquisition of communicative competence by giving priority to the different situations in which language appears, and by focusing on universal linguistic acts, known as “functions”, such as introducing oneself or asking the time.¹⁵ Formal accuracy was therefore put on the same level as socio-linguistic, extra-linguistic and paralinguistic aspects. Thanks to this approach, the student's role changes from passive to active by placing them at the center of attention. At the same time, the teacher guides and facilitates students in the learning process and takes more and more into account their needs. Moreover, the cultural aspect becomes increasingly important. As a matter of fact, cultural notions become indispensable to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication.¹⁶

1.3.4. Affective-humanistic approach

This approach began to take shape around the late seventies. Thanks to it, particular importance is given to psychological factors and emotional components within the language learning process. In this type of approach, as in the previous one,

¹³ Roby B. Warren. “Technology in The Service of Foreign Language Learning: The Case of The Language Laboratory.” In *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology*, ed. David H. Jonassen (New York: Routledge, 2004) 524–526.

¹⁴ Sandra J Savignon. “Communicative Language Teaching: State of the Art.” *TESOL Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1991): 261–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587463>.

¹⁵ Paolo E. Balboni. “I Principali Approcci E Metodi Del XX Secolo.” In *Le Sfide Di Babele, Insegnare Le Lingue Nelle Società Complesse*, ed. Paolo E. Balboni. (Torino: UTET Università, 2015) 237–38.

¹⁶ “Approcci E Metodi Della Glottodidattica.” *Laboratorio Itals*, 2013. <https://www.itals.it/alias/approcci-e-metodi-della-glottodidattica>.

communicative competence represents the main objective to be promoted.¹⁷ Among the affective-humanistic methods it is worth mentioning Stephen Krashen's Natural Approach, James Asher's Total Physical Response, Caleb Gattegno's Silent Way, and Georgi Lozanov's Suggestopedia. These have some characteristics in common. First of all, they take into consideration what Krashen defines as the affective filter or the "wall" that the student raises whenever he is faced with any element that he perceives as anxiety-producing.¹⁸ Consequently, even if the student is prepared and thinks he knows the answer, he will deliver a poor performance, moreover, the higher the affective filter, the lower the yield. Not surprisingly, this affective filter blocks the flow of information in and out because it sets in between long-term memory and medium and short-term memory. It is therefore essential for the teacher to try to avoid or limit everything that could trigger it as much as possible. Secondly, they pay particular attention to students' needs, who are believed to be the protagonist of their path. The teacher is a guide who must keep pupils' motivation always high, he is a counselor who helps them to overcome their difficulties. As Maples argued, this approach "moves beyond cognitive and intellectual education to let in the education of the whole person."¹⁹ Last but not least, they are inductive methods. This means that grammar is a point of arrival and no longer a point of departure. Grammar rules are no longer explicitly explained by the teacher, in fact, the aim is to discover the rules, to reflect on them.²⁰

1.3.5. Today's approach

To ensure that learning leads to satisfactory results, teachers should not only follow one approach and disregard the others. The frenetic succession of different approaches to teaching a foreign language should lead teachers to question which methods were found to be effective at a didactic level, and which not. It is important to understand that the previously mentioned approaches should ultimately complement and support each other,

¹⁷ Mohammad Khatib, Saeid Najafi Sarem, and Hadi Hamidi. "Humanistic Education: Concerns, Implications and Applications." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 4, no. 1, (2013) 45–46.

¹⁸ Xiaoyan Du. "The Affective Filter in Second Language Teaching." *Asian Social Science* 5, no. 8, (2009): 162-63. DOI:10.5539/ass.v5n8p162.

¹⁹ Mary F. Maples. "A humanistic education: Basic ingredients." *The Humanistic Educator* 17, no. 3, (1979): 107.

²⁰ "Approcci E Metodi Della Glottodidattica." *Laboratorio Itals*, 2013. <https://www.itals.it/alias/approcci-e-metodi-della-glottodidattica>.

for this allows a more complete and effective approach that is not limited to specific principles and methods which must be strictly followed.²¹ L2 teacher's end goal is to guide students to equally develop the four skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) while also introducing them to a different culture and giving them a more authentic experience. Teachers should also acknowledge the fact that students are not just vases that need to be filled with notions, but rather humans with valid feelings who might need help to overcome certain obstacles that they might face during their school years.

These are the aspects that should thus be considered when presenting Chbosky's novel to students. As already discussed, not only is the book meant to show students distinctive aspects of the American culture and to develop their communicative skills, but it could also be taught in class to actively involve them in the learning process. It should also be mentioned that the language used in the novel is easy to understand and that the story deals with subjects that are often close to teenagers' hearts. Therefore, students will hopefully be more prone to sharing their ideas, opinions, which will also lead to an improvement of their critical thinking skills.

1.4. Authentic materials

As previously mentioned, the communicative approach and the resulting situational method, as well as the affective-humanistic approach, all point towards language authenticity. This desire to expose students to real, authentic language demands for the use of different resources that in modern pedagogy are referred to as authentic materials. Let us first analyze what is meant by authenticity. This term alludes to the type of language that is created and used by native speakers to communicate with one another. It also alludes to the culture, and the capacity to think and act like the members of a certain community in order to be recognized and accepted by them.²² Considering these two definitions, it becomes clear that these materials reflect a type of language that is natural, unregulated – unlike the one used in school textbooks which always contains perfectly structured sentences, often too formal, and repetitive – and that are meant to be understood by and shared with a specific group of people. Therefore, as previously

²¹ "Approcci E Metodi Della Glottodidattica."

²² Sacha A. Berardo. "The Use of Authentic Materials in the Teaching of Reading." *The Reading Matrix* 6, no. 2, (2006): 61.

acknowledged, they are not initially designed for educational purposes, but are rather intended “to fulfil some social purpose in the language community”.²³ This does not mean, however, that they cannot be used in an L2 classroom. In fact, by thoroughly selecting them, adapting them to the class’s needs and level, and consequently ensuring that they meet the planned learning objectives, they become an excellent source of authenticity that foreign learners of every level can benefit from. Teachers act, therefore, as mediators between the authentic material and their students. This mediation is fundamental since it prevents a possible collateral effect, that is frustration that could arise from all the cultural references that students might be unfamiliar with.²⁴ Nonetheless, it is imperative that teachers’ intervention in authentic materials selection, does not show any biases in regard to the culture of the target language.²⁵ In other words, in order to prevent possible culture shocks, those materials that will eventually be used in class, should not present an idealized reality, on the contrary, they should display all the positive and negative aspects that shape a certain culture. We should always be reminded that cultures are never perfect and reality must be presented for what it truly is.

Choosing authentic materials that are stimulating and relevant for students, designing useful activities, and determining which contents should be covered in class is undoubtedly not an easy task, which also requires careful advance planning. However, considering the following aspects should guide teachers in the right direction.²⁶ First of all, it is necessary to always consider the skills that students should have already acquired by the time the planned activities are brought to class, as well as their level, and the educational objectives that teachers want them to achieve. Not by chance, if teachers want to avoid demotivation, discouragement, and boredom, they should avoid materials that are too difficult, too simple, or not enough significant for their students. Therefore, it is essential to determine beforehand what their interests are so that they can work with materials that are closer to their hearts, which will then make them more invested in the lesson. Secondly, it is important to make learners appreciative of the many facets of a language. Therefore, including audio-visual materials in a lesson would play a beneficial

²³ David Little, Sean Devitt, and David Singleton. *Learning Foreign Languages from Authentic Texts: Theory and Practice*. (Dublin: Authentik, 1993) 27.

²⁴ Alex Gilmore. “Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning.” *Language Teaching* 40, no. 2, (2007): 107. DOI:10.1017/S0261444807004144.

²⁵ Berardo, 65.

²⁶ Begotti, 18–21

role in eradicating the idea that there is only one correct way of speaking English and to, of course, heighten cultural awareness. Lastly, once the material is selected and tested in class, it is important to verify its effectiveness and correctness. This can be done by collecting feedback from students and being observant of their behavior during the lesson. This will help teachers to highlight weak points of the proposed work, revise it, and make it more effective for future uses.

Scholars have classified three main types of authentic resources.²⁷ Print materials, such as magazines, flyers, newspapers, literal texts, articles, menus, museum, or public transport tickets, to name a few. Audio materials which could include songs, audio books, radio, news programs, and so on. Video materials, such as films, TV series, YouTube videos, television programs, and many more. There are several benefits that each one of them can bring to the learning process.²⁸ Print materials are easily accessible and widely used. They can provide support for enhancing reading skills and increasing one's vocabulary. Audio materials are extremely helpful for improving students' listening and speaking skills. Not by chance, they allow them to hear the correct pronunciation of words and the different facets that characterize a language, such as accents, dialects, styles, and registers. Of course, this last aspect may add to the difficulty of understanding what is being said, but it also shows students how varied languages can be and teaches them a type of language that is truly authentic, providing additional enrichment of the cultural knowledge of a country. Video materials, unlike the previous two, offer further support in language learning and understanding as they allow students to grasp the general meaning of the linguistic message quicker. The reason for this lies in all the different extralinguistic aspects, gestures, and expressions, that the video displays, which then help to frame immediately the dialogue in a context.

Generally speaking, however, authentic materials are motivating and valuable resources for students because, provided that they are recent and close to their interests and needs, they will positively and enthusiastically be received by them. Not by chance, they are generally associated with the idea of leisure and cultural interest, which will then help to turn the stressful feeling of learning obligation into a more enjoyable one.²⁹

²⁷ Umirova Dilafruz. "Authenticity and Authentic Materials: History and Present." *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences* 8, no. 10, (2020): 130.

²⁸ Begotti, 15.

²⁹ Begotti, 16.

Furthermore, considering the globalized and fast-paced world that we are living in, textbooks can easily and quickly become outdated. Authentic materials, however, offer a real and updated image of the structure of the linguistic repertoire. Due to their great variety, they represent the perfect remedy for boredom. Moreover, they teach students to observe cultures and the changes within a language autonomously, thus allowing them to develop deeper sociolinguistic awareness and competence.³⁰

We have already assessed that by bringing *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to an ESL class, both in its novel and movie form, students will have the chance to work with both print and audio-visual materials that not only will be motivating and relevant for the aforementioned reasons, but they will also constitute a bridge between the language presented in class and the real one.

1.5. CLIL

The last aspect that is worth mentioning to frame Chbosky's work in a didactic context, is what is known as CLIL, which is the acronym for Content and Language Integrated Learning. Let us first discuss what is meant by this. Just like the name suggests, it is a methodological approach through which students can reinforce and expand their knowledge of a subject, usually taught in their mother tongue, by learning it in the foreign language that they are studying.³¹ Therefore, language and other disciplines teachers come together and carefully create a type of lesson that allows learners to understand both its content and the language it is taught in. The term CLIL was first introduced by David Marsh in 1994 at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, and the project rapidly extended to numerous EU countries, including Italy where it was established in 2010 thanks to the Gelmini reform for higher secondary schools.³² This approach is designed to promote multiculturalism and multilingualism so that students become more tolerant and open-minded towards a constantly changing and diverse world.

³⁰ Luisa María González Rodríguez, and Miriam Borham Puyal. "Promoting Intercultural Competence through Literature in Clil Contexts." *Atlantis* 34, no. 2, (2012): 107, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26453027>.

³¹ Myriam Met. "Integrating Language and Content in Novice and Intermediate Level Language Classes." *Hispania* 89, no. 3, (2006): 588–89, DOI:10.2307/20063364.

³² "CLIL." *Indire*, 2018, www.indire.it/progetto/clil-content-and-language-integrated-learning/#:~:text=Il%20termine%20CLIL%2C%20introdotto%20da,disciplinari%20in%20lingua%20straniera%20veicolare.

According to scholars, CLIL lessons should be based on what is known as the “4Cs Framework” (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture).³³ Content refers to the knowledge, understanding, and skills, related to a non-linguistic subject that students should acquire. Communication alludes to the time dedicated to oral or written production, where students should be able to use the target language and specific content-related vocabulary to communicate. However, communication is not strictly limited to the one between teachers and students, it also refers to the one that is established between pupils. Cognition relates to the critical thinking skills that should enable students to understand, interpret, and then reflect on the content and on what they have learned. It essentially uses acquired knowledge to generate new knowledge. Finally, culture refers to CLIL’s transcultural character which intends to promote intercultural awareness, as well as self and other awareness. These are therefore the four principles that must be considered when planning cross-curricular activities.

Scholars have identified several benefits that derive from using this approach.³⁴ First of all, it makes language learning more efficient by giving it a meaning and a purpose. Not by chance, when confronted with a real-life social interaction in the target language, learners are most likely going to talk about what they know, their interests and passions, not about language itself. Another important reason lies in the fact that there is a clear difference between the language that is learned in class and the one spoken in the actual foreign country. Therefore, this interdisciplinary approach increases foreign language authenticity and exposure by pushing students to learn how to communicate using specific registers and terminology which belong to specific subjects, thus positively affecting their L2 proficiency. In addition to this, linking language and subject-matter content could be a valuable and motivating experience for learners. Provided that the content chosen is of interest to the students, they will be using foreign language as a medium to have access to topics that they care about, thus giving it once again a meaning and a purpose and making them more prone to learn, internalize and use the target language. One last beneficial aspect to consider is what Krashen calls “the rule of

³³ Do Coyle. “Content and Language Interated Learning: Motivating Learners and Teachers.” *Scottish languages review* 13, no. 5, (2006): 9.

³⁴ Marguerite A. Snow, Myriam Met, and Fred Genesee. “A Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Language and Content in Second/Foreign Language Instruction.” *TESOL Quarterly* 23, no. 2, (1989): 202–03, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587333>.

forgetting”³⁵, it states that people are more likely to learn a language when they forget that they are learning it. This is what should happen during CLIL lessons as the attention is shifted from the linguistic form to the contents it conveys. In light of this, students might forget that they are learning a language and they rather use it as a mean to reach their goals. These are undeniably valid and optimal reasons to implement the CLIL methodology in every school. However, the enthusiasm that derives from this innovative approach, is soon to be confronted with several obstacles such as the misguided idea that by increasing language exposure, students will obtain immediate results, as well as the considerable amount of time that goes into lesson planning, and content teachers’ L2 competence. Nonetheless, scholars have given relevant recommendations that will help teachers improve their CLIL classes.³⁶ First of all, students should be given a lesson plan which explicitly indicates the order in which different topics will be discussed, provides some key words, their definitions, and includes any references to previously acquired notions. The lesson plan should be then read together aloud and students should be given time to pose questions or ask to clarify doubts. Secondly, the input should be provided in a redundant way to give students multiple chances to understand certain ideas. Redundancy can be verbal through the frequent use of repetitions, rewording, paraphrasing, synonyms, practical examples, as well as non-verbal through the use of realia, gestures, graphs, slides, handouts, tables, and pictures. Thirdly, learning should be made interactive by eliciting questions and doing warm-up and group or couple activities so that students can confront their ideas, share information, and check their understandings. Teachers are also required to pay attention to their students’ responses during class. Monitoring their facial expressions will help them to understand whether a message has successfully been conveyed or not, thus allowing them to intervene and summarize or quickly reexamine a specific concept. Moreover, while explaining, teachers should remember to constantly use markers of logical order, sequence, cause-effect, time, and so on, to make them easily comprehensible. In addition to this, they should also correct errors only when these are such as to prevent understanding. Last but not least, at

³⁵ Paolo E. Balboni, “L’uso veicolare della lingua straniera per insegnare altre discipline.” *Le Sfide Di Babele, Insegnare Le Lingue Nelle Società Complesse*, ed. Paolo E. Balboni, E. (Torino: UTET Università, 2015) 199.

³⁶ “La Lingua Straniera Come Veicolo d’Apprendimento.” *Laboratorio Itals*, 2013, www.ital5.it/alias/la-lingua-straniera-come-veicolo-dapprendimento.

the end of every section of the lesson, teachers may want to make students do a closure activity that will serve as a way to summarize and consolidate everything that was discussed up to that point, and to then move on to the next idea.

The reason why Chbosky's novel could be a resource for a CLIL lesson is because, as mentioned before, there are several literary and philosophical references, such as *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, or *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, historical references such as The Equal Rights Amendment, and finally, recurrent references to well-known songs which discuss the most varied topics such as *Blackbird* by The Beatles, *Smells Like Teen Spirit* by Nirvana, *Imagine* by John Lennon, and many more. Therefore, once the students' needs and interests have been assessed, it would be engaging and motivating for them to attend a class that is different than usual, a class which they can use to practice their target language while expanding their knowledge in a specific field.

Now that the novel has been framed in a didactic context and the many exciting possibilities that it could bring to an ESL classroom have been examined, the next pages will focus on a more thorough discussion, from a pedagogical point of view, on the impact of literature as a way of creating meaningful experiences.

2. Literature in the ESL classroom

2.1. Premise

It has been asserted that the best way for students to acquire knowledge without feeling bored or unmotivated, is to make memorable lessons that will also allow them to discover the diverse culture that make up our incredible world. Not by chance, the keyword that encapsulates every argument that has been discussed so far is “authenticity”. Authentic materials, the communicative approach, as well as CLIL classrooms, all stem from the desire to make students acquainted with what we previously defined as real language, and to make them tolerant towards different cultures. In the previous chapter, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, written by Stephen Chbosky, was also repeatedly mentioned as it is the focus of this thesis. It was not only chosen for its unique story, but also for the many exciting opportunities that it offers to bring this long-sought authenticity to ESL classrooms.

Everyone has studied, or eventually will, at least one of the many works written by major and influential writers such as William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, or Oscar Wilde, to name a few. It is undeniable that they are pillars of the English literature and should be rightfully taught and studied. Yet, it seems that teachers often find themselves confined to a type of syllabus that does not leave room for students to engage in activities which involve a kind of literature that is more recent and potentially closer to their interests. Chbosky’s novel is the perfect example of this, it was first published in 1999 and its story perfectly depicts the struggles of being a teenager. The numerous activities that could be designed by using not only the book, but also its movie adaptation, represent an engaging and memorable way of learning English as a second language as well as important life skills.

2.2. Individualized education and experiential learning

In the first chapter it was discussed how students’ minds are more than just containers of notions and facts, that is to say that they are human beings with very different personalities, interests, types of intelligences, and their uniqueness must be acknowledged and respected by teachers. Not by chance, it is hard, if not impossible, to find a class in which every student shows the same level of interest towards a certain topic

or acquires information in the same way. In regard to this last idea, several studies have investigated how students select different learning strategies that best suit them and their learning style. This selection is based on the type of intelligence that they possess, on their cognitive style as well as on personal experiences, psychological and social factors.³⁷

As far as the concept of intelligence goes, it is important to note that many studies have been conducted to examine and challenge the idea that there is only one type of intelligence among people. The most famous and eye-opening study was proposed in 1983 by Dr. Howard Gardner, father of the well-known theory of multiple intelligences.³⁸ It originally stated that there are eight different types of intelligences that characterize a person: linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligence. Gardner also noted that these intelligences do not exclude each other, on the contrary, every person has all eight of them but at varying degrees. On the grounds of the idea that not everybody learns in the same way, Gardner believed that different types of learning require appropriate strategies, specific tools, and resources.³⁹

The second aspect that is worth examining is that of analytic or holistic cognitive style. This means that people can either be analytic or holistic thinkers.

We define analytic/holistic thinking as two modes of thought that reflect cultural variations in perceptual and cognitive processes. Analytic thinking is characterized by a tendency to focus primarily on objects and their attributes. Analytic thinkers tend to distinguish focal objects or people from their contexts, ascribe causality to objects or actors, explain objects and social events on the basis of formal logic, predict future events in a clear manner, eschew contradiction (and favor synthesis), and categorize objects taxonomically. In contrast, holistic thinking is characterized as paying attention to relations among objects and their contexts. Holistic thinkers tend to attend to a whole field, attribute causality to contexts, rely on experience-based knowledge to explain objects and events, predict cyclic changes of events, and categorize objects on the basis of their thematic relations.⁴⁰

³⁷ Paolo E. Balboni. "Diversi tipi di intelligenza e diversi stili cognitivi." In *Le Sfide Di Babele, Insegnare Le Lingue Nelle Società Complesse*, ed. Paolo E., Balboni, (Torino: UTET Università, 2015), 44.

³⁸ Michele Marenus. "Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences." *Simply psychology*, 2020, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/multiple-intelligences.html>.

³⁹ Paola Iasci. "Uso creativo di oggetti e realia nell'aula di lingue straniere." *Bollettino Itals* 17, no. 80 (2019): 112.

⁴⁰ Koo Minkyung, Jong An Choi, and Incheol Choi. "Analytic versus Holistic Cognition: Constructs and Measurement." In *The Psychological and Cultural Foundations of East Asian Cognition: Contradiction*,

All these factors combined with social and personal variables contribute to shaping students' learning style.⁴¹ However, there is a heated debate surrounding learning theories. As a matter of fact, many scholars are trying to debunk them by proving that there is no direct correlation between accommodating teaching methods or class activities to students' learning style and achieving fast and desirable educational outcomes.⁴² Despite this, the VARK model is still the best known and widely accepted model in the educational field. VARK is an acronym for the four main modes of learning which are based on the senses: visual, aural, reading-writing, and kinesthetic. It was first designed by Neil Fleming in the late eighties.⁴³ According to him, visual learners best acquire knowledge when it is presented in a visual form. Therefore, graphs, diagrams, images, and maps might all be useful tools for them. Aural learners are better at learning through listening and group discussions. Students that are drawn to reading and writing learn best through written words and texts. Lastly, kinesthetic learners gain information by doing, that is by interacting directly with the world that surrounds them. Therefore, incorporating movement in class is fundamental for these types of learners. Despite the opposing views, there is concrete proof that students have different abilities and inclinations and process information in different areas of the brain.⁴⁴ It seems thus appropriate to reiterate the importance of what is referred to as individualized education which is done by designing exercises and activities and using didactic materials that consider each student's strengths, weaknesses, and preferences and by offering adequate support whenever is needed. Not by chance, nowadays there is not one school of thought which supports the existence of only one approach to teaching topics and skills to students.⁴⁵

Change, and Holism, eds. Julie Spencer-Rodgers, and Kaiping Peng. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) 105–134. DOI:10.1093/oso/9780199348541.003.0004.

⁴¹ Alice Y. Kolb, and David A. Kolb. "Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4, no. 2 (2005): 195. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40214287>.

⁴² Harold Pashler et al. "Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 9, no. 3 (2008): 105 – 119. DOI:10.1111/j.1539-6053.2009.01038.x.

⁴³ Norasmah Othman, and Mohd H. Amiruddin, "Different Perspectives of Learning Styles from VARK Model." *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 7, (2010): 655–657. DOI:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.088

⁴⁴ William, Furey. "The Stubborn Myth of 'Learning Styles.'" *Education Next* 20, no. 3 (2020) www.educationnext.org/stubborn-myth-learning-styles-state-teacher-license-prep-materials-debunked-theory/.

⁴⁵ Michele, Marenus. "Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences." *Simplypsychology*, 2020, www.simplypsychology.org/multiple-intelligences.html.

It is safe to say, that from a pedagogical point of view another important aspect to consider is that of turning learning into an experience to make it more memorable and effective. How we behave and speak, what we like or dislike, is regularly dictated by the valuable experiences that we have had - and will have - in our lives. Perhaps the best explanation of this concept can be found in David Kolb's book titled *Experiential Learning*.⁴⁶ In his work, the American psychologist states that effective learning takes place when a person goes through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and finally, active experimentation.⁴⁷ The first one occurs when a learner goes through new experiences or reinterprets previous ones in light of new events. The second stage consists in reflecting on the new experience to better understand its significance. This stage then leads to the third one which consists in formulating new ideas or adjusting them and then reaching conclusions. Finally, these ideas are tested by learners who apply them to the real world to evaluate their efficacy. The aforementioned stages do not work on their own as they are consequentially linked to each other.

It seems appropriate to note that Kolb's model of experience is based on several studies and theories designed to improve the learning process in education. One of them is John Dewey's theory of experience which considers the quality of the experience as the prime factor for its efficacy.⁴⁸ This quality is based on the principle of interaction and continuity. The former posits that people can grasp the meaning of an experience by interacting with its physical and social circumstances. The latter states that experience has a cumulative impact, meaning that each experience is affected by previous ones, which in turn, shape future experiences.⁴⁹ Therefore, when these ideas are applied to the educational context, it becomes clear that students best learn by doing, that is, they gain knowledge through first-hand experiences and reflection. Consequently, to make learning

⁴⁶ Reijo Miettinen. "The Concept of Experiential Learning and John Dewey's Theory of Reflective Thought and Action." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 19, no. 1 (2000): 55. DOI: 0.1080/026013700293458.

⁴⁷ Saul, McLeod. "Kolb - learning styles and experiential learning cycle." *Simply Psychology*, 2017. www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html.

⁴⁸ Roberts T Grady. "An Interpretation of Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory." *Eric*, 2022, eric.ed.gov/?id=ED481922.

⁴⁹ Margaret Schmidt. "Learning From Teaching Experience: Dewey's Theory and Preservice Teachers' Learning." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 58, no. 2 (2010): 132. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40666239>.

more memorable, activities and didactic materials which enable students to go through the four-stage cycle should be prioritized.

2.3. Literary experience

Now that the vital importance of experience in learning has been assessed and the value of individualized education has been reiterated, we shall focus on the great significance of literary experience. By definition, literature encompasses written works of different genres which have been created as a form of human expression.⁵⁰ Moreover, to be categorized as literature, these works must be more than just ink on a page. They must contain a particular beauty, style, be relevant and have the power to move or influence people.⁵¹ Not every reader enjoys the same type of literature, however, every person that appreciates the art of reading, relishes texts which tell stories that they can engage with. In other words, the joy of reading stems from the ability of a book and its author to transport the readers into a new world, to make them become part of the story, feel what the characters are experiencing, and appreciate language itself. As a matter of fact, literature provides people the opportunity to identify themselves with fictional characters and explore circumstances and sentiments that they have not yet experienced. The many events narrated in the stories that create the vast and constantly expanding body of literature, help readers to reflect on imagined situations that are often mirroring those of real life, therefore, allowing them to formulate their own opinions and conclusions which can then be applied to the real world.⁵² This is an important factor considering what has been discussed so far – specifically that we do not learn just by having direct experiences, but also by reflecting on them, which explains why literature could have a positive impact on students’ education and development. Its power lays in the fact that it can be used both as an instrument for experiential learning and as a more engaging way of teaching English in ESL classes. However, in order to enjoy and understand literature

⁵⁰ Kenneth Rexroth. "Literature." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/literature>.

⁵¹ Esther Lombardi. "What Literature Can Teach Us." *ThoughtCo*, January 30, 2020. <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-literature-740531>.

⁵² Ina V. S. Mullis, and Michael O. Martin. "Reading for Literary Experience." *Reading Assessment Frameworks*, 2019. <https://pirls2021.org/frameworks/home/reading-assessment-framework/purposes-for-reading/reading-for-literary-experience/>.

to its fullest, the reader needs to contribute by bringing his or her own impressions, love for language, literary knowledge, and personal experiences to the text. Not by chance, several psychological processes, such as unconscious fantasies, projection, introjection, and identification, take place when reading texts. Robert R. Hellenga adds two other types of literary experiences which he calls “articulation”, and “seeing through other eyes”.⁵³ The former occurs when the reader finds a passage or even a sentence of a text that precisely expresses what he or she needed or wanted to say. Sometimes feelings can be too intricate to articulate and that is the reason why finding the right words that truly reflect what someone is experiencing could give them a feeling of relief and consolation. The latter must not be confused with identification, in this case the reader finds pleasure in reading not because he or she identifies with the character, but rather because it is interesting to use the character’s eyes to look at the world from a different perspective. These literary experiences allow us to broaden our vision and sharpen our consciousness.⁵⁴

So far, this discussion on literature has focused on its experiential aspect to show why learners could benefit from it. However, what has not yet been addressed is that reading entails certain dispositions in the students that shall not be overlooked. Texts can often be linguistically, emotionally, and thematically challenging, thus requiring careful attention and mental preparation. They also demand for the ability to get through vague and odd passages without feeling too frustrated and the capacity to tolerate a sense of perplexity and disappointment that may arise from reading difficult texts. Negative feelings which can, nonetheless, be overcome through various re-readings and collective discussions. Such texts also require high metacognitive awareness, in other words, a close attention to what is being understood, as well as an eagerness to voice one’s doubts, questions, and opinions on the text.⁵⁵ Ultimately, while teachers should always be there to support and engage students through this literary experience, students should not play a passive role. On the contrary, active participation, self-awareness, close attention to what is being read, and flexibility are necessary components of this transformative

⁵³ Robert R. Hellenga. “What Is a Literary Experience Like?” *New Literary History* 14, no. 1 (1982): 105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/468960>.

⁵⁴ Hellenga, 108–110.

⁵⁵ Sheridan Blau. “Literary Competence and the Experience of Literature.” *Style* 48, no. 1 (2014): 44–46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.48.1.42>.

process.⁵⁶ These habits of mind need to be cultivated in order to make literary education a more enjoyable and gratifying experience.

2.4. Selecting the most suitable literary text for ESL classes

It is safe to say that language goes far beyond grammar and vocabulary. It is made of numerous exceptions and expressions. It is what people use to communicate and create their identity. It reflects how every community perceives the world, ultimately, language is also culture. Therefore, teachers are in charge of incorporating everything that it stands for in their lessons, because it is the only way to ensure that students feel more immersed in what they are studying. It is no doubt however, that with the aid of proper tools, one of them being literary texts, educators can do a lot more than teaching a language. In fact, literature can provide reassurance, challenge outdated ideas, open the floor for an exchange of opinions, and advocate for change. The case of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is particularly interesting because it is a type of literature that is especially created for young adults but, as it has already been established, it touches on issues that can be rather uncomfortable to read and address. However, this is exactly what teachers should look for in literature. Students might enjoy more books that highlight contemporary issues, and openly discussing about them may be propaedeutic to forging respectable and responsible citizens.

Some might argue that teachers should remain neutral and not become involved in the discussion of certain topics in their classrooms. In doing so, however, we may risk getting stuck in a society that is afraid to speak up and take a stand. We should remember that change cannot occur in silence. It is undeniable that choosing to teach these types of texts to a class of young adults can cause apprehension. It is a perfectly understandable feeling; however, teachers should learn not to rule out every book that might be deemed “unsafe”, without first considering how valuable it could be for the class, and the learning objectives that they want their students to achieve. This does not mean that teachers’ concerns are not valid, it simply means that they should always be considered in view of the wonderful opportunities that a certain literary work may offer to the class.

⁵⁶ Blau, 44.

What we can discuss now is how to help teachers navigate the process of selection of the best texts that fall into the young adult literature category. A set of criteria can be identified. First and foremost, curriculum relevance and teaching goals are fundamental aspects to be considered. It goes without saying that analyzing a book in class that is not in line with one's objectives, is simply a senseless decision. Teachers should thus ask themselves if the text they want to use offers transdisciplinary connections, and if its content is useful, suitable, and relevant for the students.⁵⁷ Secondly, they should always consider the difficulty level of a text. They should make sure that is not too complicated but challenging and interesting enough to enhance their vocabulary and cultural knowledge.⁵⁸ The previously mentioned importance of addressing and talking about serious matters in class, constitutes the third point of this list. Selecting books where adolescents can read about characters that are maybe dealing with their same problems and are voicing their concerns over social issues, can definitely be beneficial for them. Raising awareness among students on human struggles might prevent them from falling victim or becoming part of the problem. There is one last aspect that can be considered when selecting a book, and it only emerges if the text displays the theme of sexuality, which is often the case with young adult literature, including *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. It is no doubt that intimate experiences are part of our lives, so completely excluding books that deal with this theme or censoring explicit parts, might just contribute to reinforcing the stigma that surrounds it. What educators can do instead, is selecting texts that are age-appropriate, contain intimate interactions that are not eroticized and that the author decided to include for a specific reason.⁵⁹ Behind this set of criteria, stands the need to find a work of literature that is engaging and enjoyable enough for students. If a text is selected mainly for didactic purposes without considering their interests and needs, it may ruin their reading and learning experience.⁶⁰ As we will better see later on in the discussion, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* fulfills all the requirements needed to teach young adults not only language itself, but useful life skills too.

⁵⁷ Stephanie R. Logan, et al. "Criteria for the Selection of Young Adult Queer Literature." *The English Journal* 103, no. 5 (2014): 32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24484242>.

⁵⁸ Paola Begotti. *Didattizzazione di Materiali Autentici e Analisi dei Manuali di Italiano per Stranieri*, 19.

⁵⁹ Stephanie R. Logan, 34.

⁶⁰ Caroline T. Clark, and Mollie V. Blackburn. "Reading LGBT-Themed Literature with Young People: What's Possible?" *The English Journal* 98, no. 4 (2009): 30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503257>.

2.5. Trigger warnings in the classroom

To make the literary experience a positive one for each and every student, some argue that if a book or a text touch on delicate subject matters – such as sexual assault, eating disorders, or suicide – trigger warnings should always be provided. Others, however, believe that they are unnecessary and unhelpful as their only purpose is to avoid discomfort in the class, therefore, they can stop students from initiating discussions on important issues.⁶¹ In order to understand what the cause behind the opposing viewpoints is, we first need to establish what is meant by trigger warning. It essentially consists in giving an advance warning to the class, to make students aware of the fact that the material that they are about to examine might be upsetting and cause a traumatic response.⁶²

There are three main arguments against this practice. The first one is based on the idea that nowadays students are far too coddled, and trigger warnings only contribute to this by shielding them from ideas that might challenge theirs. The second one states that these warnings might take away the academic freedom of discussing difficult topics and that the classroom is not the right place to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, better known as PTSD. These first two arguments, however, show a clear misunderstanding of this practice. In fact, it simply consists in providing information on a difficult subject matter and does not intend to limit discussions, nor intends to treat issues that clearly need professional help. The third argument agrees with the idea that we should always show compassion to the people who deal with trauma but suggests that teachers use other practices which can be more beneficial.⁶³

Among those in favor of trigger warnings, we can find those who see them as a learning accommodation and those who believe in their efficacy only when combined with other strategies. The first ones see PTSD as a disability, therefore, believe that students who suffer from past trauma should be granted accommodations which include trigger warnings. The others prefer to use critical pedagogies and ethics of care, in addition to warnings, to make the classroom a safe space to share ideas while respecting everyone's boundaries. The purpose of critical pedagogies is to consciously approach

⁶¹ Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett, and Maribeth Geaman. "Untangling the Trigger-Warning Debate: Curating a Complete Toolkit for Compassionate Praxis in the Classroom." *Journal of Thought* 53, no. 3/4 (2019): 35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26898558>.

⁶² Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett, and Maribeth Geaman, 36.

⁶³ Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett, and Maribeth Geaman, 37–38.

difficult topics and collectively work to dismantle the oppressive frameworks of society. Ethics of care, as its name suggests, is a school of thought which aims to discuss certain issues and reflect on them with care and compassion.⁶⁴ Dickman-Burnett and Geaman carried out a case study which saw two 11th grade AP English classes as the protagonists. The study consisted in a six-week program centered on the book *The Mockingbirds*, a novel which narrates the story of a highschooler who was sexually assaulted and enlists the help of a group of students, the Mockingbirds, to seek justice.⁶⁵ Five moments played an important part in the success of this study. First of all, a warning was given to the class to inform students about the topic that they were about to examine. Shortly after, a sheet with a list of different types of resources was handed out to anyone who might have been struggling with these issues. The third moment consisted in discussing which needs, values and norms students wanted to be considered and promoted throughout the unit. As a result of the discussion students expressed that they wanted to see humility, compassion, self-awareness, open-mindedness, respect, and empathy in the classroom. Towards the end of the project a day for self-care was given to the students as the result of some of them expressing feeling worn-down by the subject. The last crucial moment consisted in a debriefing which summarized the unit, giving students a sense of closure, and left room for questions and discussions.⁶⁶ This project has shown that using warnings, does not limit the conversation on difficult subject matters but rather makes it possible because it prepares students for what lies ahead. Moreover, compassion and empathy are vital for a unit like this to succeed. Lastly, allowing students to share what needs, values, and norms they want to see during classroom activities, creates a safe space and allows them to critically think about problems and solutions to live in a better and safer society.

The way Dickman-Burnett and Geaman approached their six-week project is extremely helpful for teachers who might want to dedicate a lesson or an entire module to books that deal with important but complex issues, such is the case of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Some students might be triggered by certain scenes described in the book and it is important to prepare them and give them all the support needed.

⁶⁴ Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett, and Maribeth Geaman, 38–40.

⁶⁵ Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett, and Maribeth Geaman, 40–41.

⁶⁶ Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett, and Maribeth Geaman, 42–45.

3. Strategies and techniques for teaching literature

3.1. Premise

This next section will focus on how teachers can intensify the literary experience through a set of strategies and techniques that will lead to more dynamic and engaging lessons. Of course, using these strategies alone will not guarantee their effectiveness. The teacher will first have to understand the students and their needs and also delineate the learning objectives that they want them to achieve at the end of each class. The teacher will be in charge of explaining, modifying, selecting, or combining these strategies so that they meet students' needs. Of course, the teacher will also be in charge of monitoring the class activities and collecting feedback to see how things can be improved.

3.2. Reading strategies and literary theories

Being a good reader does not simply mean being able to read fluently, to understand the language and the main themes, or to identify the structure of the text. It also means being able to appreciate, critically evaluate, interpret, and understand the multiple facets of a literary work.⁶⁷

The first step to achieve this can be done by providing students with useful cognitive tools to improve comprehension which can be used before, during or after reading. After defining these tools and explaining their purpose, they can also be modeled by thinking aloud during the reading process so that it becomes easier for students to use them.⁶⁸ The main effective strategies include previewing, predicting, summarizing, questioning, making inferences and visualizing.⁶⁹ Previewing is a strategy which asks students to skim through the text to understand the way the information is organized, which also allows them to use their knowledge on the author, the text, or other similar works in order to get a better understanding of what they are about to read. Predicting, as the name suggests, consists in making educated guesses about the content of the text by once again

⁶⁷ Christina Haas, and Linda Flower. "Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning." *College Composition and Communication* 39, no. 2 (1988): 169–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/358026>.

⁶⁸ Maureen Early, et al. "Teacher to Teacher: What Activity Has Been Most Effective in Assisting High School Students to Read Successfully?" *The English Journal* 93, no. 5 (2004): 20. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4128930>.

⁶⁹ "Strategies for Reading Comprehension." *Readnaturally*, 2013. <https://www.readnaturally.com/research/5-components-of-reading/comprehension>.

tapping into their previous knowledge and experiences. Students will remember the predictions they have made as they read, allowing them to gain new information on the text. Summarizing requires students to recognize the main ideas and details of a story to provide a concise summary using their own words so that is not a mere repetition of the written work. Questioning refers to the ability of readers to ask themselves pertinent questions during the entire reading process to help them focus on the text. Sometimes the author of a text willingly detains from giving lot of information on an event or character of the story, this is why making interferences represents a useful strategy to discover a meaning that might be hidden between the lines. Students can learn to do it by looking out for clues and drawing on their prior knowledge. Finally, visualizing is a interesting strategy which asks students to create a rich mental image of what they are reading. If they are able to visualize the story, then it means that they are able to comprehend it, and they will be more likely to remember it.⁷⁰

The following step consists in discussing the different literary or critical theories which started to gain popularity from the first half of the 20th century. Knowing them, might help students to critique and make a more in-depth analysis of a text. In fact, these theories equip readers with tools and principles to better understand, interpret and appreciate literature and its meaning.⁷¹ There are many theories that have been developed throughout the years, and what follows is a brief summary of the ones which are still relevant to this day.

Proceeding in a chronological order, Formalism and New Criticism are two of the first approaches to literary criticism to be developed. They both provide an objective analysis of the text and its structure. However, Formalism solely focuses on one text at a time and excludes every single external factor in the study of the literary work. This means that the author, and the political, historical, geographical, religious, or sociocultural context are not essential for formalists who opt for a more practical approach to the literary text. They analyze formal elements such as structure, grammar, syntaxis, and literary devices, thus giving priority to form rather than content. On the contrary, New Criticism believes that form and content are inseparable and through a method called

⁷⁰ Elaine K. McEwan. "Teach the Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers." *AdLit*, 2022. <https://www.adlit.org/topics/comprehension/teach-seven-strategies-highly-effective-readers>.

⁷¹ Vince Brewton. "Literary Theory." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, iep.utm.edu/literary/.

“close reading”, they are able to find similarities between different parts of the text.⁷² These two approaches paved the way for Structuralism which once again carries out an objective analysis of the text and its structure. This school of theory, however, influenced by Saussure’s works, tries to see how signs and symbols are used in a literary text to create meaning, and believes that there is a universal structure that links together different works.⁷³ Moving forward, another popular literary theory is Deconstruction. It tries to find the meaning of the text by exposing its contradictions, oppositions, and complexity. Nonetheless, this is the reason why these critics believe that meaning of a literary work cannot be fully grasped.⁷⁴ The following approaches are New Historicism and Cultural Studies. As their name suggests, they pay close attention to the historical and sociocultural context of literary and non-literary texts. These critics believe that considering these elements during the reading process, will result in a better understanding and interpretation of the work, because literature will always be influenced by its environment.⁷⁵ Ethnic Studies is interested in the works written by specific ethnic groups that are either marginalized or in an inferior position to a certain culture. Another popular theory is Psychological Criticism. This one is strongly influenced by Freud’s theories. In fact, it claims that the characters of a text are projections of the author’s psyche. Literary works, similar to dreams, are just manifestations of the author’s anxieties, and unconscious desires.⁷⁶ In the late 60s, another theory known as Reader-Response criticism started to gain popularity. Unlike other existing theories which mainly focus on the author, the context and/or the text, this one argues that the meaning of a literary work arises from the bond that is established between the text and the reader. It is his or her personal background, experiences and previous knowledge that will influence the way a certain work is interpreted. However, it is important to keep in mind that Reader-Response critics can use different lenses to approach a text. For example, they can use the Structuralist, the Psychoanalytic or the Formalist lens, but at the same time they share

⁷² Ulf Schulenberg. “Formalism and Structuralism.” In *English and American Studies*, eds. Martin Middeke, et al. (Germany: Springer-Verlag, 2012), 181–183. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-00406-2_5

⁷³ “Literary Theory.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022. <https://iep.utm.edu/literary/>.

⁷⁴ “Literary Theory.”

⁷⁵ David O. Scheiding. “New Historicism and Discourse Analysis.” In *English and American Studies*, eds. Martin, Middeke, et al. (Germany: Springer-Verlag, 2012), 204–205. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-00406-2_9

⁷⁶ Ulla Haselstein. “Psychoanalysis.” In *English and American Studies*, eds. Martin, Middeke, et al. (Germany: Springer-Verlag, 2012), 214. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-00406-2_11

the idea that the meaning of a text is not passively presented to readers. On the contrary, they always play an active role since they are the ones who create the meaning while interacting with the text.⁷⁷ Feminist Criticism seeks to expose misogyny in literature by examining the way women and their relationship with men is portrayed. Feminist Criticism suggests that the dominant patriarchal ideology is the main cause for women's oppression and literature often reflects this.⁷⁸ Finally, two very recent approaches to literary criticism are Gender Studies and Queer Theory. These critics examine how literature displays issues of sexuality, gender, power, and marginalized populations. They also criticize and challenge those who perpetuate the traditional idea of sex- and gender-based binaries.

Based on the previous discussion of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Formalism, New Historicism and Cultural Studies, Psychological Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Gender Studies, and Queer Theory, seem to be the most relevant theories which could be used to analyze and better understand Chbosky's novel.

3.3. Role play and realia

A key component in student's learning is an activity known as role play. In this exercise, students become actors who are given a specific situation which they have to play out without any initial preparation.⁷⁹ Role play has several benefits. It can stimulate creativity and imagination, it enhances critical thinking and observation, speaking and communication skills, and enriches vocabulary. Most importantly, due to its dynamic nature, it serves as an engaging and motivating activity which helps to foster social and emotional skills.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ "Reader-Response Criticism." *Purdue Writing Lab*. 2018. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/reader_response_criticism.html.

⁷⁸ Linda Napikoski. "Feminist Literary Criticism." *ThoughtCo*, February 06, 2020. <https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-literary-criticism-3528960>.

⁷⁹ "Role Playing." *Northern Illinois University*, 2012. <https://www.niu.edu/citl/resources/guides/instructional-guide/role-playing.shtml#:~:text=Role%20playing%20exercises%20encourage%20students,a%20fun%20and%20engaging%20way>.

⁸⁰ Paul T. McCalib. "Intensifying the Literary Experience through Role Playing." *The English Journal* 57, no. 1 (1968): 41– 42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/812522>.

Literature is an excellent source of critical situations that could be used as starters for role plays. Using this tool in a lesson dedicated to literature, may be effective to further explore the theme and the meaning of a text, and gain insights on characters.⁸¹ A role play activity based on a novel such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, will give students the chance to enact real-life scenarios in which “actors” will use their skills and their knowledge to bring them to life. This will lead to different outcomes which might be similar to or very different from the ones described in the novel. Either way, these outcomes will still provide valuable material for discussions about the book.⁸² It is important to notice that while children are more inclined to this exercise, high school students may feel a little apprehensive about it and might need more time and guidance to understand its potential.⁸³

To really bring role plays to life, and contextualize them, teachers can resort to the use of realia. The term comes from the Latin and it translates to “real”.⁸⁴ In fact, it refers to the didactic and creative use of real objects that can be both typical of the country of reference or common objects used in the classroom to exploit their potential and their tactile and manipulative qualities.⁸⁵ L2 teachers can use realia to personalize their lessons and make them more memorable, to stimulate students’ curiosity, to motivate them and can also use them as a starting point for a collective discussion on the main topic of the lesson.

3.4. Creative writing and peer review

As we have seen so far, there are several strategies and activities that teachers can experiment with in their literature classes. These, of course, could be once again beneficial for students in order to get a deeper understanding of different literary texts and improve other personal skills.

Writing is yet another important exercise that should follow reading as they complement and influence each other. On one hand, literature offers numerous prompts

⁸¹ McCalib, 43.

⁸² McCalib, 42.

⁸³ McCalib, 44.

⁸⁴ “Realia.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/realia>.

⁸⁵ Paola Iasci. “Usò Creativo di Oggetti e Realia nell’Aula di Lingue Straniere.” *Bollettino Itals* 17, no. 80 (2019): 108–109.

that function as inspiration for writing original works. On the other, writing represents an ideal way of responding to literature. Writing can take different forms to ensure a more enjoyable and less monotonous activity. In fact, students could expand the original work by adding chapters, letters, epilogues, prologues, or finding an alternative ending to the story. Response journaling is another strategy in which the goal is for students to write about their observations, and feelings towards what they are reading.⁸⁶ This will, of course, make the literary experience more personal. Moreover, in order to make writings more interesting, students could also respond to the text by using different literary genres or even perspectives, such as that of the protagonist, or other characters who might have not been given enough time to voice their feelings and opinions.⁸⁷

Peer assessment could be used as a follow-up activity to the writing activity. Students will be asked to follow a set of criteria to give their personal feedback on each other's works. This evaluating process is predominant in academic research, however recent studies have found out that peer review is a valuable strategy for students, as it helps them to develop critical thinking skills, and improve their writings.⁸⁸

3.5. Literary discussion

As discussed in the first chapter, in order to learn a second language, students have to use it actively and productively, this means that along with practicing reading, writing, and listening, teachers should work on creating an environment where students are free and eager to improve their speaking skills. Group discussions are usually considered a useful activity for L2 acquisition. On top of helping students to improve their critical thinking, communication, speaking and listening skills, it increases their engagement and participation as they take on the role of the protagonists of the lesson.⁸⁹

Group discussions can be implemented in literature classes as well. The benefits remain the same, however, while “normal” discussions deal with the most varied topics,

⁸⁶ Christian Knoeller. “Imaginative Response: Teaching Literature through Creative Writing.” *The English Journal* 92, no. 5 (2003): 45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3650423>.

⁸⁷ Knoeller, 44–47.

⁸⁸ Keith J. Topping. “Peer Assessment.” *Theory Into Practice* 48, no. 1 (2009): 21–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071572>.

⁸⁹ Robert Stroud. “Second Language Group Discussion Participation: A Closer Examination of 'Barriers' and 'Boosts'.” *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education and Learning*, no. 1 (2017): 41.

literary conversations are based on literary works or other texts analyzed in class. In this setting, students usually discuss the themes, the characters, the setting, the plot, and the author of the text. It is important to notice that reading comprehension is facilitated by group discussions. In fact, by sharing their ideas and opinions, students collectively build the meaning of the literary work.⁹⁰

The main downside of group discussions is that sometimes students prefer not to speak aloud for fear of being judged, or simply because they are introverts and prefer engaging in individual activities. Before going into details about possible ways of contrasting this problem, it is important to reiterate the importance of creating a safe space for students to share their ideas and to diversify class activities. Modeling desirable behaviors and addressing bad ones, establishing ground rules for interactions between students, or directly asking them what needs, values and norms they want to be considered and promoted in class, is necessary for those teachers who want their students to feel free to voice their problems, doubts, or inquiries. Moreover, as previously stated, students are not the same, they have different needs, personality and learn and interact in different ways. Therefore, teachers should always make sure that each student is having fun while doing class activities. Returning to the issue of class discussions there are several strategies that teachers can use to increase participation and motivation, I will mainly focus on the ones that will be used in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* module. The first one is called “Gallery walk”. It will require teachers and students to do some preparation. In fact, to do this activity, the teacher will have to hang on the walls of the classroom paintings, pictures, or drawings, that students bring in from home. These “art pieces” will represent a theme, a scene or a significative object that appear in a specific chapter of a book. In small groups, students will have to go around the different “stations” and discuss them together. The next one is called “Socratic Seminar”. Students are asked to think several high-order discussion questions about a book or a chapter of a book. Next, students sit in circle and start a conversation where they ask each other questions and support their answers with textual evidence. The third one is called “Hot seat”. One student at a time will take on the role of one of the characters in a book and will answer his or her classmates’ questions while staying in character. The last one is called “Think-

⁹⁰ Blake Turnbull, et al. “The Effects of L1 and L2 Group Discussions on L2 Reading Comprehension.” *Reading in a foreign language* 29, no.1 (2017): 136

pair-share” and it is definitely the one that requires less preparation. Students are asked to think individually about their answer to a question, after a few minutes, they have to share their answers with a partner and finally share the ideas and information they have collected with the rest of the class.⁹¹ These discussion strategies will make students more comfortable with active participation and allow them to get a deeper and clearer understanding of the book and the characters that they are analyzing.

Now that the techniques that can be used for creating engaging and more individualized lessons have been discussed, the following chapter will focus on an analysis of the book in its entirety, with mentions of the differences between the novel and the movie adaptation.

⁹¹ Jennifer Gonzalez. “The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies.” *Cult of Pedagogy*. October 15, 2015. <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/>.

4. The Perks of Being a Wallflower – Book and movie analysis

4.1. Harsh criticism against the book and its themes

When talking about this novel, we also have to mention the constant criticism that it has received throughout the years for its provocative content. Unfortunately, this led to the book being banned from certain American libraries and schools' curriculum. It is undeniable that the story deals with some heavy topics such as depression, suicidal thoughts, abuse, sexual assault, bullying, drugs, and alcohol use, which might not be suitable for everybody. Because of this, many parents deemed the book inappropriate for their children and asked for it to be removed from public and school libraries.⁹² The author, upset by the criticism he was receiving, defended himself and his work by reiterating in several interviews the true aim of the book. He believes *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to be a "blueprint for survival",⁹³ a way for people to find comfort, hope and support in the words of a boy that has gone through traumatic events, and has decided not to give up on life. A way for readers to find at least a character that they can relate with and feel less alone. It is also important to notice that the story never wishes to promote, romanticize, nor glorify certain actions carried out by the characters, but rather wishes to bring awareness and give hope to those who might be suffering. On a positive note, many teachers now consider the previously criticized content necessary to remove the stigma which surrounds issues that young adults might deal with on a daily basis and that are not often talked about.⁹⁴ History has taught us that censorship has rarely benefitted anybody, on the contrary, the silence that comes with it, feeds people's minds with the idea that certain issues are non-existent and does not allow sufferers to be heard and understood by others.

Through Charlie's curious eyes the reader witnesses not just his struggles with high school and life in general, but also how other characters face their internal conflicts. His

⁹² "Banned Books 2019 - the Perks of Being a Wallflower." *Marshall Libraries*, 2022. <https://www.marshall.edu/library/bannedbooks/the-perks-of-being-a-wallflower/#:~:text=Challenged%20for%20drugs%2F%20alcohol%2F%20smoking,%E2%80%9Cdate%20rape%20and%20molestation.%E2%80%9D>.

⁹³ Eric Vo. "'Do I Want My Book Banned? No,' 'Perks of Being a Wallflower' Author Says after Wallingford Book Controversy." *NBC Connecticut*, 2015. <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/do-i-want-my-book-banned-no-perks-of-being-a-wallflower-author-says-after-wallingford-book-controversy/94672/>.

⁹⁴ Jen Scott Curwood, Megan Schliesman, and Kathleen T. Horning. "Fight for Your Right: Censorship, Selection, and LGBTQ Literature." *The English Journal* 98, no. 4 (2009): 37-43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503259>.

dear friend Patrick for example, is in a secret relationship with Brad, a closeted football player who is dating a girl to fool everybody into thinking he is straight. As he attempts to suppress his sexuality even more, him and his friends publicly bully Patrick for being homosexual. Charlie's sister has to deal with another type of problem. When she learns that she is pregnant of her abusive boyfriend, she decides to get an abortion and confides in Charlie to drive her to the clinic. Then there is Sam who just like Charlie, was sexually assaulted at the age of seven by her father's boss. She also finds out after dating a boy for quite a long time, that he was cheating on her.

It is clear that the themes discussed in this book can be triggering for sensitive readers and bitterly relatable for others. Unfortunately, they are rarely addressed, especially in school. However, this does not take away the fact that we should openly talk about them if we want to break the silence and make new generations heard and aware of the issues and injustices of the world that they live in. Therefore, what follows is a more detailed account of the main themes and symbols that the book focuses on, which can ultimately be the focal point of different class activities.

4.2. The plot

The coming-of-age novel was first published in 1999. The author, Steven Chbosky, also directed the 2012 movie adaptation, receiving enthusiastic reviews for both works from the general public.⁹⁵

The book is a cult classic and follows the story of Charlie, a rather quiet fifteen-year-old boy who narrates his life through a series of intimate letters addressed to a mysterious friend. The identity of his friend remains unknown to the reader until the end of the novel due to him never writing back. For this reason, the letters in the novel look more like personal journal entries. Just like the title anticipates, Charlie is a wallflower, a quiet person that does not engage in social activities and avoids drawing attention to himself. The letters that he writes, however, reveal that he is an extremely observant person, as he seems to notice every little detail of the world that surrounds him. This trait allows him to get a deeper understanding of people's feelings and struggles.

⁹⁵ "The Perks of Being a Wallflower." *SimonSchuster*, 2019, www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Perks-of-Being-a-Wallflower/Stephen-Chbosky/9781982110994.

The novel opens up with bitter revelations, Charlie's friend from middle school committed suicide in spring without leaving a goodbye note, a tragic death which causes him deep distress. Unfortunately, this was not the first time a person that was really close to him unexpectedly died. When he was seven, on Christmas Eve – which was also the day of his birthday – his dear aunt Helen tragically died in a car crash. Given his vulnerable personality, he is unable to fully process these two deaths and feels rather nervous and anxious to start a new chapter of his life – freshman year. However, these anxieties are somewhat appeased by the acquaintance of three people that will forever change his life. First, his advanced English teacher Bill Anderson. He recognizes Charlie's exceptional ability for writing and encourages him to read classic literary novels and write several essays throughout the academic year. Then, Patrick and his stepsister Sam, two warm-hearted, extroverted, and exuberant high school seniors who take Charlie under their wing. Once they become friends, Charlie does not miss any opportunity to follow them on exciting adventures. From the way he talks about them, it becomes clear that he admires and adores them, especially Sam for whom he develops an intense crush. As the year progresses, our protagonist becomes more mature, and starts dating Mary Elizabeth. However, their relationship ends pretty soon due to their clashing personalities and his long-standing crush on Sam. Mary is a self-centered and extremely loquacious senior. She likes the fact that Charlie always listens to what she has to say, but the reality of it is that he does not particularly enjoy her company, so he keeps quiet and ends up playing passive role in the relationship. Later in the story, when he is dared at a party to kiss the prettiest girl in the room, he stands up and kisses Sam. The two break up soon after and Charlie goes back to his “normal” life. Even though, these teenage experiences allow him to become more mature and feel less of an outsider, he is not able to ignore a feeling of despair and anxiety that rapidly grows and overwhelms him more and more every day. Unfortunately, he is not able to identify the source of his discomfort. He is not sure if it is due to his friends soon leaving for college or the fact that he is still heartbroken over the death of his middle school friend and especially of his aunt Helen, whom he missed terribly. Everything takes a turn for the worse when him and Sam engage in sexual activity which causes Charlie to panic and enter a catatonic state. The reader soon becomes aware that the reason behind his reaction stems from awful, repressed memories coming to the surface of his aunt Helen molesting him when he was a child. The final

letter that Charlie writes two months after the incident, is included in the epilogue. He explains that after being found in a catatonic state by his parents, he was taken to the mental hospital where he worked on his past trauma. He then tells his anonymous friend that, unlike the previous year, he is finally ready to start participating in life again. The letter ends with a message of hope, “so, if this does end up being my last letter, please believe that things are good with me, and even if they’re not, they will be soon enough. And I will believe the same for you.”⁹⁶

4.2.1. Music

Music is an important part of our daily lives. We listen to it in the car when we drive alone or when we are in the company of our friends and family. We often listen to music on our devices to wind-down and escape from the frenetic world that surrounds us. We listen to music when we feel sad, angry or when we feel happy. It is for many a comfort blanket and a universal language that has the power to connect people. Moreover, just like books, it might be helpful to better express our feelings when we struggle finding the right words to do so. Not by chance one of the first incidents where the book talks about music, is when Charlie’s sister gives him a mix tape that was meant for her. For this exact reason, he initially hesitates to listen to it because it perceives it as something personal. When he finally gives in and listens to it, he immediately adores it. He especially enjoys a song called “Asleep” by The Smiths. However, he does not want to reveal what it is about, but rather wishes for his dear friend to listen to it by himself.⁹⁷ Because the truth is that music is personal and every person identifies with a song in different ways, so the only way to truly understand it, is by taking the time to listen to it.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower does a great job of making music an important part of the story. The characters of the novel use it as a way to feel alive, cultivate and strengthen friendships, and as a sign of love and understanding. Music impacts the characters’ life and relationships because it allows them to share experiences that help them bond with one another. This is done in three different ways: through tapes, records, and the radio. Charlie likes to create mix tapes for his friends with specific themes so that

⁹⁶ Stephen Chbosky. *The Perks of being a Wallflower*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1999), 231.

⁹⁷ Chbosky, 12.

they can listen to them when they most need it. Records, just like mix tapes, are often gifted as a sign of affection. Finally, the radio is an important element which frames Charlie, Sam, and Patrick's friendship as they always listen to it while riding together in the car. It is exactly during one of these moments that Charlie hears what in his opinion is the greatest song of all time. This also inspires him to say the most emblematic and cited sentence of the book, that is "I feel infinite".⁹⁸

4.2.2. The Tunnel

Charlie, Patrick, and Sam often find themselves driving through Fort Pitt tunnel while listening to music. This tunnel connects their suburb to downtown Pittsburgh. Charlie gives a vivid description of what it is like driving through the tunnel at night. What makes it "glorious", as he defines it, is the fact that before entering it, everything is dark, there is wind, and the music coming from the radio is loud. Once you enter, the wind gets sucked away, your eyes try to adjust to the lights above you and the music is no longer playing because radio waves just cannot reach.⁹⁹ He then says that halfway through the tunnel everything becomes a "calm dream" and when you least expect it, you finally see the end of it. It is on the other side of the tunnel that radio finally comes back louder than ever, you can feel the wind again, and the million lights of the city make the whole experience exciting and unforgettable.¹⁰⁰

This tunnel, however, is not only worth analyzing because Charlie loves it, but because it hides a deeper meaning. In fact, it can be argued that it represents adolescence, that is the long, transitional period from the comfort of childhood, symbolized by the suburb, to the excitement of adulthood, symbolized by the city. Not by chance three crucial moments associated with the tunnel are described in the book. These moments also perfectly reflect the character's personalities and their journey towards maturity. The first one is when Patrick is driving Sam and Charlie to the city after their homecoming dance, and before they get to the tunnel, Sam decides to climb in the back of the pickup truck and stand up. As the song "Landslide" is playing on the tape player and her dress is

⁹⁸ Chbosky, 36.

⁹⁹ Chbosky, 206.

¹⁰⁰ Chbosky, 206

being caressed by the wind, she lets out a “fun scream.”¹⁰¹ Her carefree behavior, enthusiasm and joy reflect her attitude towards adolescence. She enjoys her years as a teen, she loves her friends and she loves participating in life. On the other hand, Charlie remains seated and observes everything that is happening around him. This, once again, mirrors his character. He is indeed a wallflower; he is not good at externalizing his feelings and prefers observing others embracing their teenage years. The second moment is when Charlie, after getting his driver’s license, drive by himself to meet his friends at a graduation party. This is when he describes what driving through the tunnel feels like and cannot wait to gaze in awe at the beauty of the city.¹⁰² This sense of anticipation might represent his eagerness to skip the awkward phase of adolescence and jump straight to adulthood. The last significant moment is when Charlie, after working through his trauma and forgiving those who hurt him, drives through the tunnel, once again, with Patrick and Sam after being released from the hospital. This time, however, it is him who climbs in the back of the pickup truck and stands up. Charlie cannot help but smile and cry at the same time because he feels grateful for his friends, his family, and for finally living in the moment.¹⁰³ He does not care anymore about reaching the other side, the city, adulthood, he only cares about focusing on the now and enjoying life.

4.2.3. Driving

Driving is another interesting motif that is worth examining. It marks important moments of the characters’ lives. For example, although Charlie becomes friends with Sam and Patrick almost right away, it is only when they are driving together through the tunnel that the bond between them really forms, signaling the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Another example, is when Charlie gets his driver’s license on his sixteenth birthday, being able to drive independently is a liberating experience which proves that he is growing into adulthood, something that he was truly longing for. However, driving also marks less fortunate events. In fact, Helen, Charlie’s aunt, tragically died in a car crash while heading to the store to buy him a birthday present.¹⁰⁴ This death changes his

¹⁰¹ Chbosky, 42.

¹⁰² Chbosky, 206

¹⁰³ Chbosky, 230.

¹⁰⁴ Chbosky, 98.

life, filling him with grief and guilt. Moreover, one of the first places that he visits alone after getting his license, is Helen's grave.¹⁰⁵ Still unaware of what had happened to him as a child, he visits his aunt in search of some kind of solace.

Therefore, if we were to analyze the story through the motif of driving, we would see that it represents Charlie's present, that is adolescence and friendships, it echoes his future, that is independence and adulthood, and his past, that is his emotional trauma.

4.2.4. Books

Just like what happens with mix tapes and records, characters often give each other books as gifts. They play an essential role in the friendship between Charlie and his English teacher Bill. In fact, Bill starts giving Charlie more books to read outside of class. This shows that Bill has recognized his natural talent for reading and writing and wants to invest in his student's personal and academic growth. This gesture gives Charlie more self-confidence, pushing him to participate in life rather than just observing it. Bill becomes not only a mentor for Charlie, but also a good and reliable friend.

Books also help Charlie deepen his relationship with his friends Patrick and Sam. After their graduation party, he gives them his personal copies of the books that Bill made him read during his academic year.¹⁰⁶ By carefully choosing which books to give to them, Charlie proves that he has paid attention to their interests, and by giving his personal copies, he is also giving a part of himself and his personal journey.

In the novel, sharing books always represents an act of kindness and friendship. Moreover, the different stories help characters to better understand themselves and others.

4.2.5. Queer representation

Patrick is the only character in the book who is openly gay. Unfortunately, he has always been an outcast which made him earn the nickname of "Nothing".¹⁰⁷ He is a quirky and loving character who suffers at the hands of the person he loves. The relationship that he maintains with Brad, the school quarterback, has to remain a secret between them since

¹⁰⁵ Chbosky, 99.

¹⁰⁶ Chbosky, 208.

¹⁰⁷ Chbosky, 15.

Brad has not outed himself yet, and is scared of other people's judgement. This situation makes him feel lonely and unloved, but the two continue with the farse until the day Brad's father catches them kissing and as a punishment, he is sent away to a place which the author does not specify. When he returns to school, he behaves differently. He keeps avoiding people's looks and completely ignores Patrick who, due to the situation, is feeling more and more upset and disappointed by him. From this moment on, their relationship only gets worse. One day at the cafeteria, Brad and his football teammates start bullying Patrick by calling him names and laughing at his face. The conflict soon escalates into a fight. A fight in which Charlie decides to intervene to protect his dear friend, which also costs him and Brad a month of detention.¹⁰⁸ Patrick at this point feels extremely hurt and goes into a downward spiral. In a reversal of roles, he relies on Charlie for emotional support. The two friends start hanging out a lot, but their company soon turns out to be deleterious for each other. Charlie first agrees to follow Patrick to a park where gay men usually met at night so that his friend could keep his mind occupied. Later on, they start smoking and drinking heavily to try numbing their feelings and coping with their respective problems.

Patrick's storyline shows the invisibility and the struggles that surrounds the LGBTQ+ community. Not only is he invisible to others at school, but everything that he does, is done in secret, and the stress and loneliness that derive from this, eventually take a toll on him.

4.2.6. Adolescence, trauma, and abuse

As previously discussed, this is a story about struggling adolescents who, apart from their normal teenager experiences like dating or going out with friends, have to deal with thorny issues and the consequences that these entail. We have mentioned Sam and Charlie's traumatic past, Patrick's struggles with being accepted for who he is and his toxic relationship with Brad, who on the other hand, refuses to accept his sexuality. We have also mentioned Charlie's sister unplanned pregnancy and her relationship with her violent boyfriend.

¹⁰⁸ Chbosky, 161–163.

What has not been mentioned yet is the fact that these early experiences can linger on for the rest of a person's life changing their perspective on life itself and their behavior. This is best shown through Charlie's dysfunctional family. His mom for example, is a very sensitive woman who always tries to protect his son from all that she considers inappropriate for his age. For example, she asks Charlie's older brother not to use words like "dyke", which is a derogatory term used to refer to lesbians, and not to talk about doing drugs.¹⁰⁹ Which is quite ironic considering the fact that Charlie is the only person in the family who has ever been high and has a gay friend. She unsuccessfully tries to shield him from minor issues without realizing that there is a bigger problem lying underneath ready to turn their lives upside-down. Charlie's reserved father on the other hand, believes that it is only fair to treat his son like the young man he is and to have serious conversations at the dinner table on topics such as the importance of consent. Living with parents that are very different in the way they act, makes Charlie question why they are the way they are, more precisely, which events shaped them into who they are now. It is later revealed that they are both college dropouts due to an unintended pregnancy which changed their lives overnight, forcing them to set aside the plans they had for their future.¹¹⁰ Another shocking fact that Charlie reveals at the end of the novel is that his mom and dad and their siblings were beaten by their respective dads when they were younger, which led to a cycle of abuse and self-destructive behaviors that carried on for years. His aunt Rebecca, for instance, had to get restraining orders from his husband, and his aunt Helen was molested when she was a child by a family's friend. When she told her parents what had happened, her dad did not believe her and her mom did not do anything about it and preferred to remain silent. As she got older, she started drinking, doing drugs, and went through abusive relationships.¹¹¹ Not being able to properly cope with her own trauma, she passed it on to Charlie by making him endure the same awful nightmare.

4.2.7. Strict gender roles

¹⁰⁹ Chbosky, 86–87.

¹¹⁰ Chbosky, 56.

¹¹¹ Chbosky, 92–93.

The novel touches on the theme of gender roles mainly through Charlie's family. The members seem to follow the idea of what are traditionally considered masculine or feminine activities and interests. His dad and brother for example never express their feelings, and their conversations mainly revolve around sports, women, and money. The socially rooted idea that men should always hide their vulnerability is clearly shown when Charlie's brother tells him to stop crying over his friend's suicide before their dad comes home, implying that he was either going to punish or tease him for doing so.¹¹² Nevertheless, the women of the family are allowed to externalize their emotions and openly cry for "silly" reasons, including the final episode of their favorite tv show. Charlie reveals that his father was crying for the episode too, but then again, he preferred to hide his feelings and went to cry alone in the kitchen.¹¹³ In addition to this, the novel shows that another difference between the men and women of the family stands in the fact that for generations, it was ingrained in their head that men can be violent, while women have to be loving, submissive to their men and acceptant of a love they do not deserve.

Thankfully, Charlie does not fully internalize these ideas of masculinity. Even if at one point he uses violence to defend himself, and later his friend Patrick against bullies, he admits that what he did made him cry and feel numb,¹¹⁴ which shows once again his emotional sensitivity. This indicates that he does not fit within the traditional gender role perpetuated by his family and understands that violence is not always the right solution. His sensitivity, gentleness and empathy for others does not make him any less of a man. Through this character Chbosky shows that anyone can choose to break free from social norms and expectations without changing themselves.

4.2.8. Mental health and healing

Luckily enough for the characters and the readers too, the story does not exclusively deal with heavy and sensitive topics. They are undoubtedly at the center of the novel, but they are also perfectly balanced with fun, exciting and touching moments shared by the inseparable trio who teaches us that the twists and turns of life are what make us stronger and shape us into the people that we want to be. Everyone can experience burnouts, losses,

¹¹² Chbosky, 4.

¹¹³ Chbosky, 19.

¹¹⁴ Chbosky, 9;164

and moments of great discomfort, but the first step that we can take is to turn to the people we love, ask for help and embark on our healing journey.

Unfortunately, not every character in the novel had the proper tools to cope with their feelings and trauma which for some, led to a cycle of abuse and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Such is the case, as previously discussed, of some of the members of Charlie's family. Another character who unfortunately was not granted a happy ending is Michael, the boy mentioned in the beginning of the novel, who we learn took his own life. Chbosky's decision to omit the suicide note may have to do with the idea that whether it is real life or fiction, we cannot always understand the reasons behind people's decisions.¹¹⁵ As human beings we are driven to find an answer to every difficult question that we may have and when we do not succeed, we feel frustrated and defeated, which is exactly how Charlie was feeling at the beginning of the story. He was unable to make sense of a complex situation that he could hardly fathom. The last character who was not able to heal properly is Brad. He was forced to suppress his true self, first because of his fear of judgment, and then because of what happened with his father. The other characters of the novel, however, managed through trials and errors, to build a better future for themselves.

Sam was molested as a child and as a teenager had a relationship with a guy who repeatedly cheated on her, but at the end of the novel she stood up for herself, broke up with him and promised herself to never let it happen again. She was finally ready to move on, do what she truly liked and be who she always wanted to be.¹¹⁶

Patrick felt trapped in an unhealthy affair and in a bigoted town that never fully accepted him for who he was. He tried to escape this situation by leading a detrimental lifestyle which consisted in sex, drugs, and alcohol, but it only made him feel numb. Luckily for him, he found Charlie in the process, a loyal friend, who always defended him and helped him to get through difficult times. At the end of the novel Patrick decided that the best solution for him was to move state and attend the University of Washington, hoping to pursue his dream of working for a record company.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Alison S. Monaghan. "Evaluating Representations of Mental Health in Young Adult Fiction: The Case of Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*." *ENTHYMEMA*, no. 16 (2016): 35. DOI:10.13130/2037-2426/7400.

¹¹⁶ Stephen Chbosky, 74; 216.

¹¹⁷ Chbosky, 180.

Charlie's sister is a smart girl, but in lack of good role models, she found herself trapped in a life that she did not deserve. Her healing journey began when she stopped seeing her violent boyfriend and found a new one who finally treated her right.¹¹⁸ Significant for her was also her relationship with her brother. Even though they did not always get along well, Charlie always stuck by her side, supporting her in every way without ever judging her.

Charlie's case requires a more in-depth analysis. Even though he never hesitated to give people a helping hand, he was the character that needed emotional support the most. His traumatic childhood, his losses, and the abuse that he saw his friends and family suffer, made him anxious, depressed, and relentless. His childhood trauma resulted in confusing and hazy memories of a past that he was not able to face for a long time. Thankfully, Charlie worked through his difficult situation with the help of his friends and family and other coping mechanisms which slowly made him realize what was really tormenting him. The personal letters that he wrote, which are addressed to an anonymous friend, acted as an outlet for him to process and make sense of everything that was happening in his life. Crucial for him was also his friendship with Bill, his English teacher, whom he regarded as a mentor and a dear friend. He was the one who recognized Charlie's potential from the start and gave him several books to read in which Charlie often found characters that he identified with. This, of course, made him feel less lonely, helped him to discover his identity and learn more about the world that surrounded him. Another pivotal moment for Charlie was meeting Patrick and Sam who gave him a new outlook on life and made him try new liberating experiences. Unfortunately, in a period of growing discomfort, he turned to drugs and alcohol to suppress his feelings just like his friend Patrick did. However, he later realized that that was nothing but a temporary solution for the bitter truth that was slowly trying to reemerge to the surface. In the last letter we learn that after his incident with Sam, he was sent to the hospital where he finally received professional help to support him in overcoming his trauma. However, he confesses that what helped him the most was receiving visits from his friend and family and that he was finally ready to leave his past behind to hopefully live a better life, because

¹¹⁸ Chbosky, 148.

“[...] even if we don’t have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there.”¹¹⁹

By openly talking about the struggles of adolescence in this fascinating novel, Chbosky shows the reader that teenagers’ experiences and feelings are valid and meaningful. Therefore, they should be acknowledged by everybody, starting from parents or teachers who quite often mistake their antisocial or rebellious behavior as mere teenager angst.

4.3. A few words on the movie adaptation

As previously mentioned, the novel was made into a movie in 2012 and it won worldwide critical acclaim. It stars Emma Watson, Ezra Miller, and Logan Lerman in the role of the inseparable trio, Sam, Patrick, and Charlie. Chbosky directed the movie and wrote the screenplay which consequently ensured that the story remained truthful to the book.¹²⁰ The viewer is still able to experience the same problems that Charlie and other characters find themselves dealing with in the novel – finding your place in the world, understanding yourself, establishing friendships, dealing with personal struggles, high school drama – and Chbosky does a great job of capturing the essence of the original story in the movie. Nevertheless, a few changes still had to be made to adapt it to the big screen. Moreover, some significant moments of the book did not make the final cut, but rather became deleted scenes which can still be found on YouTube and used for future class activities. For example, the scene in which Charlie reads the heart-wreaking suicide poem to his friends at the Christmas party is not in the movie, nor is the scene in which Charlie accompanies his sister to the clinic to get an abortion. Two very symbolic moments that might have given the viewer, who has not read the book, a deeper insight on the relationship between different characters. There are some other minor changes which I am not going to dwell on at the moment but can still be interesting and engaging discussion prompts for a more interactive class.

Considering what has been said so far, it can be argued that reading the book at home and then analyzing passages or doing activities related to it in class, might not be

¹¹⁹ Chbosky, 228.

¹²⁰ “The Perks of Being a Wallflower.” *IMDb*, 2013, www.imdb.com/title/tt1659337/.

enough to fully immerse students in the story and the lesson. Therefore, not taking advantage of the movie adaptation would be a wasted opportunity, not only to use another authentic material which will improve their listening skills, but also to increase motivation in the classroom.

5. The Perks of Being a Wallflower – The module

5.1. Using the correct nomenclature

Since we are diving more and more into the technical aspects of this thesis, it seems appropriate to spend a few words on different concepts and operating models used in the education process. The focus will first be placed on the key differences between curriculum and syllabus, then on the differences between module and unit. Using the correct nomenclature and understanding why their names cannot be used interchangeably is essential for those involved in the education process, whether we are referring to professors or students. Understanding these differences will also be useful for those who do not work in the educational field, but still want to read this thesis and be able to fully understand it.

Let us start by examining why the curriculum differs from the syllabus to understand why they should not be used as synonyms. It is true that they have something in common, that is that both documents are used in schools as guidelines for both educators and students to get a clear idea of how a studying program or a specific subject is structured and to make the studying process more organized.¹²¹ However, as already mentioned, they are not the same.

The curriculum is usually written and approved by institutional administrators or government authorities. It has multiple definitions but can ultimately be considered a guideline for educators which indicates essential aspects of teaching and learning to facilitate education. This document provides the overall content and structure of a course or a program, it is the same for every teacher and it cannot be easily changed. Its scope is wider than that of the syllabus. In fact, it refers to all those activities and experiences which are needed to pursue the intellectual, emotional, social development of students.¹²² Moreover, the curriculum usually includes a definition of the learning objectives, materials, contents, methods and assessment of a course or a study program.¹²³ The syllabus, on the other hand, is a more descriptive and detailed outline of the content of a specific subject. It is designed by the subject professor and because of this, it is also highly

¹²¹ Emilya Galstyan. "Curriculum and Syllabus: What Is the Difference?" ARMACAD. December 23, 2020. <https://armacad.info/blog/what-is-the-difference-between-curriculum-and-syllabus#:~:text=1.,plan%20for%20a%20particular%20subject>.

¹²² "Syllabus vs Curriculum: Differences, Meaning, Relationship." Leverage Edu. October 16, 2021. <https://leverageedu.com/blog/syllabus-vs-curriculum/>.

¹²³ Paola Begotti, 9.

flexible. It can be changed so that it can be adapted to the class's needs and the educator's creativity. It is usually presented to students at the beginning of the course or program, as it is useful for them since it provides information about the subject and the teacher, assignments and deadlines, evaluation system, and topics that will be covered.¹²⁴ Six different types of syllabi can be identified in language teaching.¹²⁵ The structural or formal syllabus is mainly focused on language forms and structures, in other words, it covers its grammatical aspects. The notional-functional syllabus consists in a collection of functions performed in language as well as notions. Examples of functions include informing, agreeing promising, and examples of notions are color, size age, and so on. The content of language teaching in the situational syllabus is a collection of real or imagined situations in which language is used. The skill-based syllabus refers to a collection of different abilities which are important to have to be competent in a language. These skills include writing well-organized essays, listening to a conversation for the main idea, giving oral presentations, and so on. The task-based syllabus consists in a series of purposeful activities carried out by students through which they learn the target language. Examples of tasks include applying for a job, renting a car, talking to an officer, and so on. The content-based syllabus' purpose is to teach some kind of content or information through the target language. Language is therefore subordinate to the content. Nowadays teachers opt for a multi-syllabus which includes several syllabi relating to the same language level and same type of users.¹²⁶

The next differences that are worth examining are the ones between a module and a unit. Nowadays, structuring higher education courses into modules plays an essential part in organizing school curricula. In fact, a module can be defined as a micro-curriculum which contains several units linked to each other needed for students to develop specific skills and knowledge.¹²⁷ Therefore, while units aim to achieve clearly defined, short-term objectives, modules aim to pursue long-term objectives which are defined beforehand by

¹²⁴ Emily Galstyan. "Curriculum and Syllabus: What Is the Difference?"

¹²⁵ Karl Krahnke. *Approaches to Syllabus for Foreign Language Teaching* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1987), 10–12.

¹²⁶ Paola Begotti, 11.

¹²⁷ Umberto Tenuta "Programmazione Didattica Modulare." Edscuola.it. 2022. <https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/didattica/promod.html#:~:text=PROGRAMMAZIONE%20DIDATTICA%20MODULARE&text=Le%20Programmazioni%20didattiche%20annuali%20possono,attenta%20ai%20vari%20processi%20apprenditivi>.

the teacher.¹²⁸ When developing modules, teachers should thus give a clear idea of how it is structured and what it will be about, by including the title, a description of the rationale, the recipients and the prerequisites needed to access the module, learning goals and objectives, contents, duration, teaching methods, materials, assessments, and evaluations. Another important aspect of the module is that it is not always limited to a certain syllabus, in fact it is certainly possible to create cross-curricular modules. Moreover, it is also highly flexible, allowing teachers to change it as the didactic path progresses.¹²⁹

5.2. Module rationale

Finding new and motivating ways of entertaining students during class has always been an important aspect of teaching. Studies have shown that authentic materials represent an effective tool to make lessons more engaging and meaningful, and to expose students to the everyday language that is spoken in a particular place. In fact, they represent real and spontaneous testimonies of a foreign culture and using them in the classroom allows students to discover the language in a more natural way. It cannot be denied that studying a second language in a context where it is not spoken makes it more challenging and the risk of running into demotivation is higher. However, text, audio and video authentic materials can inspire teachers to design interesting new activities. These activities aim to create an immersive experience through which students will learn and consolidate a second language, they will gain insight on a different culture, and develop other important communication skills, such as open-mindedness, confidence, active listening, clarity, and so on. In view of more motivating and immersive classes, teachers can resort to focusing modules or units on different literary works in which students can feel represented and understood. It is undeniable that students have different interests and different ways of learning, and that learning through experiences is more effective. Books have the capacity to make individualized education possible because they allow teachers to use all of their creative potential to design activities that are not monotonous and respect students' needs. Moreover, aside from all the benefits that come with reading,

¹²⁸ Tenuta.

¹²⁹ Tenuta.

written texts often examine themes that readers can relate to and reflect on, transforming the learning process into an experience.

This module intends to use Stephen Chbosky's 1999 novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, as the focus of several units which will make high school students consolidate the English language, discover the American culture, and discuss important themes, in an engaging and interesting way. It must be noted that the book often touches on delicate subject matters that are not often talked about as they are still stigmatized in our society. This should not refrain teachers from addressing them, because it is always better to equip students with tools that they can use to navigate through the challenges of life successfully instead of staying in our comfort zone. The characters' journey will hopefully make an impact on students' life and lead to open-minded and respectful discussions that will be beneficial in the long run.

Broadly speaking, the units of the module will focus on an in-depth, more traditional analysis of the book – themes, settings, figurative language, characters, style, author – as well as language-orientated activities such as writing, listening, speaking, and reading comprehension.

The idea behind this particular book's choice, stems from the efficacy of authentic materials to open a window into real language, and from the possibility to create cross-curricular activities. It also stems from the fact that this book will bring light on issues that teenagers might struggle with, while at the same time working on the English language, examining a foreign culture. It is no doubt that teachers should make the learning process easier for students and I believe that the first step is to create a safe environment where they feel comfortable enough to share their struggles, whether they are school-related or not.

5.3. Didactic goals, objectives, and prerequisites

Didactic goals:

- Instill enthusiasm for the acquisition of the English language.
- Instill enthusiasm for reading.
- Motivate students to express themselves in the English language.
- Consolidate and enhance students' language skills.

- Make students aware of social issues.
- Offer students tools to better understand themselves and face personal difficulties.
- Develop a sense of responsibility, autonomy, personal and social identity.
- Educate to be respectful towards other people's ideas and opinions.
- Increase intercultural knowledge, respect, and acceptance.

Learning objectives:

- Expand knowledge of the American culture.
- Understand the book's literary elements.
- Identify, analyze, interpret, and describe critical ideas, and themes that appear in the literary text.
- Understand how certain issues impact society and culture.
- Elaborate different types of written texts related to the subject.
- Maintain lengthy conversations with peers on the examined themes.
- Apply literary theories to critically analyze the text.

Prerequisites:

- Have a good knowledge of poetic terminology, and literary genres.
- Understand and respect the seriousness of the themes tackled in the book.

5.4. Recipients and didactic context

This module is designed for four- or fifth-year high schoolers. The passage from adolescence to adulthood that these students go through at the end of high school, creates the perfect didactic context to introduce such an emotionally charged book. It will not be suitable for lower-level students, not only for its content, but also for its language. In fact, even though the language used is fairly informal, it still falls under the B1-B2 CEFR level.

The work presented in this module can be part of a co- or extra-curricular project, or integral part of the curriculum. The English teacher will be in charge of its completion. However, collaborations with the music, art, history, or philosophy teacher may be useful to cover certain aspects of the book.

5.5. Overview of the module

The contents of the module will be organized around several related units so that students do not have a fragmentary and dispersed vision of the themes that will be examined. The choice of contents takes into account the need to stimulate and motivate students that are learning English as a second language. More precisely, the module will focus on the following aspects:

- Introduction to literary theories: introducing students to the different theories that are used in literary analysis, will allow them to get a deeper understanding of the text and better interpret it.
- Activities related to the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*: the story revolves around themes such as love, music, friendship, adolescence, trauma, mental health, and strict gender roles. These will provide the basis for many class activities and group discussions.
- American culture of the early 90s: students will focus on the period in which the story is set to better understand the cultural references that appear in the book and the movie.
- Discussion of the movie *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*: watching the movie will increase students' motivation and will allow them to further examine the story and its themes.
- English language: importance will be given to new expressions and words so that students can expand their vocabulary and improve their language fluency.

5.6. Structure of a unit

Every unit of this module will be preceded by an information sheet which will include:

Title	A title will be given to each unit.
Prerequisites	If required, the knowledge and skills needed for students to approach the unit will be indicated.
Objectives	The didactic objectives to be pursued with the development of the unit will be specified.

Duration	The time approximately required for the unit to be completed will be indicated.
Materials	Every material used in class for each unit will be indicated.
Contents	The contents covered in the unit will be specified.

The module will include twelve units which will follow the original subdivision of the book, that is, part one, two, three, four, and the epilogue. These parts represent different crucial moments of the protagonist's life and help build tension until the climax of the story is finally reached. However, the first unit will focus on literary theories to prepare students to better analyze and interpret the text, and it will also be used to introduce the book and its themes. The last two units will be dedicated to the movie and a follow-up discussion. The book also discusses politics, history, philosophy, and especially music, therefore, teachers of different subjects could work together in prospect of a CLIL lesson.

The module will take place over the course of a month with three lessons per week. After each lesson, students will be expected to read 20 to 30 pages of the book at home. They will have to read 68 pages only in preparation of part four. However, students will be given extra time to complete this task. Students must come to class prepared since the activities designed for the lessons are based on what they have to read at home each time.

5.7. Teaching methodologies

Generally speaking, it is best to diversify the ways in which lessons are taught, in order to encourage and facilitate learning by attempting to give students an active role in the learning process. Using different methods is also important in view of the fact that students have different learning styles. Therefore, the efficiency of teaching is achieved not only by presenting the ideas in a clear, comprehensible, and well-argued way, but by trying to maintain the involvement and interest of students high. For these reasons, different teaching methods which involve learners' participation have been considered. Moreover, given the fact that this is a module for an ESL classroom, the methods implemented will also promote authenticity and develop communicative competence.

Based on what has been said so far, this module will include the following teaching methodologies:

- Lecture: the teacher presents and explains information while students take notes and ask questions.
- Role play: students act out for a short time hypothetical situations to better understand the story of the book and its meaning.
- Interactive lesson: this method includes time for students to engage in different activities such as answering knowledge or comprehension questions, paraphrasing ideas, solving a problem, and so on.
- Group discussion and debate: both methods aim to push students to share ideas while being respectful of one another. This will help them develop important life skills. Discussions can be structured in different ways to make them more engaging and organized.

5.8. Didactic materials

This module intends to include several types of authentic materials to make lessons more dynamic and suitable for every learner. Of course, the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* will represent the fulcrum text on which students will work and do exercises. In fact, the majority of the class activities are based on the chapters of the novel, however, other multi-media materials will be implemented to make the module more interesting and suitable for each type of student. Moreover, if needed, students can choose to purchase the e-book or audio-book version.

The movie adaptation, as well as songs, and other videos related to the themes of the book will be shown to the class. In a didactic context these are considered audio and visual authentic materials and represent a good way of portraying real language and engaging students. Moreover, to make lessons more engaging, different tools will also be used, such as Kahoot, Mentimeter, YouTube, and PowerPoint presentations.

5.9. Assessment and evaluation

Assessment and evaluation constitute a fundamental moment in the teaching and learning process. As teachers, we need to continuously gather information to monitor students' learning achievements and to see whether or not the activities that we intend to do in class are effective. We then use this information to measure strengths or weaknesses in a particular skill, to see how students react to the educational program and to see if they are understanding concepts and acquiring knowledge.

As for evaluation, which refers to the practice of making value judgements about students' performance on a test, teachers can resort to oral or written tests. The essential parameters for evaluation are as follows:

- Knowledge of the themes, symbols, and characters of the book.
- Understanding of cultural and social issues.
- Ability to analyze and contextualize extracts from the book.
- Ability to analyze passages of the book by relying on different literary theories.
- Ability to synthesize and analyze important concepts and ideas that are dealt in the module.
- Ability to use clear, correct, and precise language.

This module will also include a midterm written test which will represent 20% of the final mark. This written test consists in writing an informal letter to one character of the book who is dealing with a problem. Students will write a letter to comfort them, give a piece of advice, or offer to help them.

6. Units

6.1. Unit 1. Literary theories and introduction to the book (Week 1)

Title	Literary theories and introduction to the book.
Prerequisites	None
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact with classmates and the teacher to discuss and share experiences on the concept of meaning and interpretation. • Identify and differentiate between Formalism, New Historicism and Cultural studies, Psychological Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Gender Studies, Queer Theory. • Discuss thoughtfully and respectfully in groups to identify the most appropriate literary theory to analyze a short passage from the book. • Observe the cover of the book and hypothesize the meaning of the term “Wallflower”.
Duration	Aprox. 60 minutes
Materials	Handouts, PowerPoint presentation, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the concept of literary theory. • Introduction to the basic tenets of Formalism, New Historicism and Cultural studies, Psychological Criticism, Reader-Response

	<p>Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Gender Studies, Queer Theory.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the book <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>. • Pre-reading activity.
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<p>Warm up – 10 minutes</p>	<p>To keep the level of motivation high from the very beginning and to introduce the topic of the lesson, the teacher will ask the following questions, “can books only be interpreted in one way?” and “how can we define the meaning of a book?”. This will open up a group discussion in which students will explore the concept of “meaning” and the idea that it is in fact impossible to find a single correct interpretation of a book.</p> <p>It is at this stage that the teacher can introduce the concept of literary theory.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will use a PowerPoint presentation to explain the basic tenets of the different literary theories that can be later applied to analyze passages from <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>. Students will be asked to take notes. At the end of the presentation the teacher will ask if students have fully understood the topic or if further explanation is needed.</p>
<p>Task 2 – 20 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will divide the class in groups of equal size. Students will have to match the questions that are typically used by literary critics of different approaches to</p>

	<p>analyze works to the corresponding literary theory. They will also have to choose one of the three given passages drawn from the book and discuss together which literary theory they would use to analyze it.</p> <p>At the end of the activity the teacher will ask each group to motivate their choices and correct the first exercise.</p>
<p>Task 3 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will set aside the discussion on literary theories to introduce the title of the book which is the focus of this module. The teacher can let students guess the meaning of the word “Wallflower” (if they are not familiar with it) by asking them to have a look at the cover of the book. On the cover there are pictures and sentences that suggest what being a “Wallflower” means.</p> <p>It is at this stage that the teacher can also warn students about the different themes that the book touches on to mentally prepare them for the reading. Apart from the warning, the teacher can further help students by giving them a sheet with different online resources that they can reach out to in case they need it.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 10 minutes</p>	<p>During the last 10 minutes, the teacher will go over everything that was done in class, and make sure to reiterate the importance of these theories given that for the final test, students might be asked to</p>

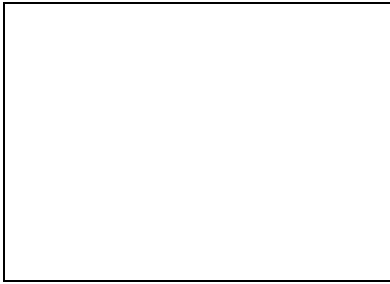
	<p>use one of them to interpret a passage from the book.</p> <p>The teacher will also give each student a table that they will have to complete as they read the book, this will be useful for an activity in unit 5. The teacher might also want to ask students to highlight every new word that they encounter to then discuss the meaning in class. Moreover, as a pre-reading activity students will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which they will have to complete again once they finish reading the entire book to see if their answers have changed.</p> <p>At home, students will have to read the first pages of the book (pages 3-23).</p>
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Literary theories

1. Read and match. Critics often use a set of questions to orientate themselves in the analysis of a literary work. Match the following questions to their corresponding theory.

Theory	Questions
1. Psychological Criticism	<p>a. What are the power relationships between men and women (or characters assuming male/female roles)?</p> <p>How are male and female roles defined?</p> <p>How is the relationship between men and women portrayed?</p> <p>What does the work imply about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy?</p>

2. Feminist Criticism	<p>b. How are the various parts of the work interconnected?</p> <p>How do paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension work in the text?</p> <p>How do these parts and their collective whole contribute to or not contribute to the aesthetic quality of the work?</p> <p>What does the form of the work say about its content?</p>
3. New Historicism and Cultural Studies	<p>c. What elements of the text can be perceived as being masculine (active, powerful) and feminine (passive, marginalized) and how do the characters support these traditional roles?</p> <p>What does the work contribute to our knowledge of queer, gay, or lesbian experience and history, including literary history?</p> <p>How does the literary text illustrate the problematics of sexuality and sexual "identity"?</p>
4. Formalism	<p>d. What language, characters, events present in the work reflect the current events of the author's day?</p> <p>Are there words in the text that have changed their meaning from the time of the writing?</p>
5. Queer Theory and Gender Studies	<p>e. How does the interaction of text and reader create meaning?</p> <p>What aspects or characters of the text do you identify or disidentify with, and how does this process of identification affect your response to the text?</p> <p>What experiences, thoughts, or knowledge does the text evoke?</p>
6. Reader-Response Criticism	<p>f. What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author?</p>



How do desires and wishes manifest in the text? How does their fulfillment, or lack thereof, affect the character's development?

What do the characters' emotions and behaviors reveal about their psychological states?

2. **Read and discuss.** Choose one of the following passages from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* you would analyze using one of the previously discussed literary theories. Discuss your choice with your group.

The fact that one of these ladies was my mom made me feel particularly sad because my mom is beautiful. And she's always on a diet. Sometimes, my dad calls her beautiful, but she cannot hear him. Incidentally, my dad is a very good husband. He's just pragmatic. After the dentist's office, my mom drove me to the cemetery where a lot of her relatives are buried. My dad does not like to go to the cemetery because it gives him the creeps. But I don't mind going at all because my Aunt Helen is buried there. My mom was always the pretty one, as they say, and my Aunt Helen was always the other one. The nice thing was my Aunt Helen was never on a diet. And my Aunt Helen was "corpulent."

(p.18)

I feel very ashamed. I went to the high school football game the other day, and I don't know exactly why. In middle school, Michael and I would go to the games sometimes even though neither of us were popular enough to go. [...] But this time, I went alone because Michael is gone, and Susan hangs around different boys now, and Bridget is still crazy, and Carl's mom sent him to a Catholic school, and Dave with the awkward glasses moved away. I was just kind of watching people, seeing who was in love and who was just hanging around, and I saw that kid I told you about

(pp. 20-21)

It's just hard to see a friend hurt this much. Especially when you can't do anything except "be there." I want to make him stop hurting, but I can't. So, I just follow him around whenever he wants to show me his world. One night Patrick took me to this park where

men go to find each other. Patrick told me that if I didn't want to be bothered by anyone that I should just not make eye contact. He said that eye contact is how you agree to fool around anonymously. Nobody talks. They just find places to go. After a while, Patrick saw someone he liked. He asked me if I needed any cigarettes, and when I said no, he patted my shoulder and walked away with this boy.

(p. 173)

Questionnaire

1. Before you read. Complete the questionnaire and say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Once you have finished reading the book, come back to the questionnaire and complete it again to see if your answers have changed.

Before Reading		After reading
	Even if being a teenager is not always an easy ride, life is overall easier because you don't have to think about adult problems (e.g., paying rent, taxes, going to work, raise your kids...)	
	Sometimes it is hard to express your feelings aloud, and using letters, music, or books may represent an easier way to do it.	
	Reading books has many positive effects, some of them being the capacity to make us experience more sensations, make us more empathetic, set positive and illuminating examples, and improve our mental health.	
	Giving gifts is always a good way of bonding with your loved ones.	
	There is still stigma associated with mental health, which makes talking about it more difficult.	

	I think that talking about issues such as suicide, abuse, or drug use is important to raise awareness and prevent them.	
	Ending a toxic relationship is easier said than done.	
	Abuse is genderless.	
	As people grow up, they tend to accept the life they have created for themselves and get stuck in a repetitive routine that does not leave any room for exciting new activities.	
	Accepting that you are hurting and reaching out to your loved ones are two important steps in your healing journey.	

While you read

1. While you read. As you read the novel, complete this table. In the book there are several mentions of abuse, some more explicit than others, every time you think abuse is mentioned write it down, this will be useful for a discussion we will have during unit 5.

Date	Type of abuse	Victim	Abuser	Charlie's reaction

6.2. Unit 2. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 1: introduction)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Introduction)
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having read pages 3-23. • Be acquainted with the concepts of epistolary novel and informal letter writing.
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recall previous learned information on epistolary novels and informal letter writing. • Identify different aspects of informal letter writing. • Describe the characters' personality. • Discuss thoughtfully and respectfully the first pages of the book.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write an original piece of writing using newly acquired vocabulary.
Duration	Aprox. 60 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of the main aspects of the epistolary novel. • Revision of the main aspects of informal letter writing. • Analysis and discussion of the main characters. • New vocabulary to describe people's personality.

Warm up - 10 minutes	The teacher will discuss with students their first impressions on the book and ask whether someone would be willing to share their favorite moments or letters with the rest of the class. The teacher will also ask students to share with the rest of the class the new words they found.
Task 1 – 10 minutes	Students will complete a series of exercises to revise the concept of epistolary novel and informal letter writing to prepare for the activity that they will have to do towards the end of the lesson and in future lessons.
Task 2 – 25 minutes	For this part of the lesson students will check their understanding of the first part of the book by discussing with a partner a set of questions and by doing different exercises that will help them get a deeper

	<p>understanding of the characters and learn new vocabulary.</p> <p>During the discussion the teacher can go around the tables to monitor the activity to see whether students need help or not.</p>
<p>Task 3 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>For the last activity the teacher will ask students to step in Charlie’s shoes and write an informal letter to an anonymous friend as an opportunity for them to express their feelings, to vent about their problems or to just share stories, just like Charlie does.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 5 minutes</p>	<p>To conclude the lesson, the teacher will go over everything that was done in class and ask students to read the last 20 pages of part 1 (pages 23-43).</p>

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Introduction)

1. **Read and complete.** Complete the text with the correct missing words.

Epistolary novel: a novel told through the medium of a)___ written by one or more of the characters. Originating b)___ Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), the story of a servant girl’s victorious struggle against her master’s attempts to seduce her, it c)___ one of the earliest forms of novel to be developed and remained one of the d)___ popular up to the 19th century. The epistolary novel’s reliance on e)___ points of view makes it the f)___ of the modern psychological novel.

The advantages of the novel in letter form are that it presents an intimate view of the character’s thoughts and feelings without interference g)___ the author and that it

conveys the h)___ of events to come with dramatic immediacy. i)___, the presentation of events from several points of view lends the story dimension and verisimilitude.¹³⁰

- | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| a) 1. Letters | 2. Stories | 3. Diary entries | 4. Poems |
| b) 1. In | 2. With | 3. From | 4. At |
| c) 1. Consisted of | 2. Had been | 3. Was | 4. Originated |
| d) 1. More | 2. Most | 3. Many | 4. Least |
| e) 1. Subjective | 2. Subject | 3. Objective | 4. Object |
| f) 1. Frontrunner | 2. Foreshadower | 3. Forecaster | 4. Forerunner |
| g) 1. From | 2. By | 3. On | 4. With |
| h) 1. Chain | 2. Shape | 3. Frame | 4. Form |
| i) 1. Nevertheless | 2. Likewise | 3. Also | 4. However |

2. **Expand your knowledge.** *There are three types of epistolary novels, **monologic**, **dialogic** and **polylogic**. Can you guess what is the difference between the three?*

Hint: The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a monologic epistolary novel.

3. **Complete.** *Have a look at some of the letters in the book. Can you name at least 6 elements that always appear in informal letter writing? Think about the structure, the tone, and the language used.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

¹³⁰ "Epistolary novel." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 21, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/art/epistolary-novel>.

4. **Think-pair-share.** Think individually about a possible answer for the following questions, then discuss your ideas with a partner for a few minutes. Finally, share your ideas with the rest of class.

- What makes Charlie a Wallflower?
- What do you think was Patrick and Sam’s first impression of Charlie?
- In your opinion, why did Charlie’s brother told him to stop crying at Mr. Vaughn’s office (p.4)? What does that say about his character?
- Which instances, in the first part of the book, highlight Charlie’s passivity? And which instances highlight his sensitivity?

4.1 **Vocabulary.** Match the adjectives of column on the left (1-8) with the definitions of the column on the right (a-i).

1. Approachable
2. Loving
3. Sensitive
4. Pragmatic
5. Outspoken
6. Introverted
7. Supportive
8. Kind-hearted
9. Ambitious

a. A person who deals with situations sensibly and realistically.
b. A person who provides encouragement or emotional help.
c. A shy person.
d. A person who is friendly and easy to talk to.
e. A person who cares about other people’s feelings and helps people in need.
f. A person who is easily upset by the things that people say or do.
g. A person with a strong desire to be successful.
h. A person who expresses their opinions without holding back.
i. A person who shows a lot of love towards other people and cares about them.

4.2. **Vocabulary.** Now write the opposite of these adjectives. Use an online dictionary if needed.

1. Approachable _____
2. Loving _____
3. Sensitive _____
4. Pragmatic _____
5. Outspoken _____
6. Introverted _____
7. Supportive _____
8. Kind-hearted _____
9. Ambitious _____

4.3. **Characters analysis.** Which adjectives of exercise 4 and 4.1 best describe the characters' personality? Complete the table.

Character	Adjective	Evidence from the text
Charlie		
Charlie's mom		
Charlie's dad		
Charlie's brother		
Charlie's sister		
Sam		
Patrick		
Helen		
Bill		

5. **Write.** Step in Charlie's shoes and write an informal letter to an anonymous friend. Try to use some of the new vocabulary learned in class. Use this activity as an opportunity for you to express your feelings, to vent about your problems or to just share stories. You will not have to hand the letter in.

Materials	Handout, YouTube, Mentimeter, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of the themes of adolescence and music. • Listening activities related to the video titled “Being a teenager today”. • Vocabulary related to the video. • Listening activities related to the song “Asleep”. • Discussion of the song “Asleep” by The Smiths. • Role-play

<p>Warm up – 10 minutes</p>	<p>For the first task of the lesson, the teacher will ask students to open <i>mentimeter</i> on their phones and introduce the code that the teacher will provide. This will allow them to enter a page in which they will have to write down at least 4 major themes that appear in the first part of the book. Once everyone has sent in their answers, the teacher will use the big screen to share the word cloud automatically generated by <i>mentimeter</i>. This will give a visual representation of all the words written by students, but the ones that were added the most will appear bigger. The class can then focus on these words and discuss together why they were the most popular.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 20 minutes</p>	<p>For the following activity the class will work on the first major theme of the book</p>

	which is being a teenager. The teacher will show students a video on YouTube called “Being a teenager today” and then they will answer a set of questions that are related to video and the book.
Task 2 – 10 minutes	Another major theme which appears from the very beginning is that of music. Numerous songs are mentioned throughout the letters, however, in the first part Charlie mentions “Asleep” by The Smiths several times. Therefore, for the following activity, the teacher will use this song to start exploring the theme of music.
Task 3 – 15 minutes	For the last activity of the day students will do a role-play.
Conclusion – 5 minutes	To conclude the lesson, the teacher will go over everything that was done in class and ask students to read part 2 (except for the poem at pages 75-77) in preparation of the following week’s lesson.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 1)

1. Listen and answer. Watch the video titled “Being a teenager today” and take notes that will help you answer the following questions.

- Do you agree/disagree with some of the statements made in the video? Which ones?

- What are some stereotypes associated with teenagers?

- What does “being a teenager today” mean to you?

- What are other problems that teenagers face today?

2. **Vocabulary.** Listen to the video again and try to explain with your own words the meaning of the following expressions.

- Floating in the wind.
- Not setting in life.
- To fit in.
- Peer pressure.
- To have an attitude.
- To be on the fence.
- To feel on top of the world.

3. **Think.** Based on the letters of the first part of the book, write “no” next to the statements made in the video that the protagonist of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie, would disagree with. Write “yes” next to the ones he would agree with.

- a. The best thing about being a teenager is “having the freedom to be who I am.”
- b. Some of the difficulties of being a teenager include “not having enough sense of trust from parents.”
- c. “One thing that I find very difficult is to be taken seriously.”
- d. It is not easy “to fit in, to make new friends.”
- e. Three words I would use to describe myself are “weird, random, loud.”
- f. “I do not believe in love at first sight.”

2. **Listen and complete.** In the first part of the book there are several mentions of the song “Asleep” by The Smiths. Listen to the song and complete it with the missing words. Next, discuss the following questions with a partner:

- What is the main theme of the song?
- What is the songwriter trying to communicate?
- Why do you think Charlie resonates with this song?

“Sing me to sleep

Sing me to sleep

I'm ___ and I

I want to go to ___

Sing me to sleep

Sing me to sleep

And then ___ me alone

Don't try to wake me in the morning

___ I will be gone

Don't feel bad for me

I ___ you to know

Deep in the ___ of my heart

I will feel so ___ to go

Sing me to sleep

Sing me to sleep

I don't want to wake up on my ___ anymore

Sing to me

Sing to me

I don't want to wake up on my ___ anymore

Don't ___ bad for me

I want you to know

Deep in the ___ of my heart

I ___ want to go

There is ___ world
 There is a ___ world
 Well, there must be
 Well, there must be
 Well, there must be
 Well, there must be
 Well, there must be
 Bye
 Bye
 Bye
 Bye, hmm”

3. **Role-play.** Act out with a partner the following situation.

In pairs, imagine that one of you, just like the boy in Charlie’s sister Earth Day Club, loves creating mixtapes for your friends. You’ve created one with a very specific theme for one of them. Unfortunately, you come to know that your friend has given it to another person. You decide to discuss the matter with your friend to understand the reasoning behind his or her decision.

6.4. Unit 4. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 2: part 2)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 2)
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having read pages 45-103. • Be familiar with poetic language.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe and interpret different images that relate to the characters and the story. • Discuss in groups the themes of secrecy, sacrifice, and mental health. • Reenact a scene from the book.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the impact of the poem.
Duration	Aprox. 55 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the themes of secrecy, sacrifice and mental health. • Reenactment, discussion, and analysis of the poem.

<p>Warm up – 5 minutes</p>	<p>For the first activity of this lesson the teacher will ask students to share their thoughts on what they have read so far. It is important that the teacher make sure that everyone is not feeling too overwhelmed by the story since part 3 and 4 will have a more dark and depressing tone.</p> <p>The teacher should also warn students that the poem that they will analyze at the end of the lesson is a suicide letter. It is important to create a safe environment in the classroom, therefore, if anyone needs to take a break, they can raise their hand and the teacher will help them in any way they can.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will show images to the class and ask students to give them a title. Next students will be asked to answer the questions related to the images in groups and then share their ideas with the rest of the class.</p> <p>These images represent three different themes which appear in part 2: secrecy, sacrifice, and mental health.</p>

<p>Task 2 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>For this activity students will have to do a true or false activity to check their understanding of the second part of the book.</p>
<p>Task 3 – 25 minutes</p>	<p>For the last activity, the class will work on the poem that Charlie reads to his friends on Christmas.</p> <p>The teacher will ask if someone is willing to stand up and read it aloud in front of the class. If nobody feels comfortable doing it, then the teacher will read it. The idea is to recreate the scene described in the book to better understand the characters' reactions and to discuss another major theme which is that of suicide.</p> <p>Since this is not a very lighthearted poem, the teacher will make sure that everyone is feeling ok and not too overwhelmed, before, during and after the reading.</p> <p>After reading the poem students will have to answer a few questions to check their understanding of the text.</p> <p>Finally, the teacher might want to take advantage of the poem to revise with the class different literary elements and poetic devices that can be identified.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 5 minutes</p>	<p>To conclude the lesson the teacher will go over everything that was analyzed in class and collect feedback from the students.</p> <p>The teacher will ask students to read at home pages 105 – 125.</p>

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 2)

1. Group discussion. Look at these pictures and give them a title. In groups, discuss the questions and then share your ideas with the rest of the class.

1. How does this image relate to Patrick and Brad’s relationship?



.....

2. How does this image relate to Charlie’s mom and dad’s story when they were younger?



.....

3. How does this image relate to Charlie’s character?



.....

2. **Reading comprehension.** Look at these sentences and write in the box if they are true (T) or false (F). Correct the ones that are false.

1. Charlie thinks that Craig is a gentleman and that he is very talented.	
2. Charlie has a dysfunctional family.	
3. Music and books help Charlie create a deeper connection with his loved ones.	
4. Music and books help Charlie to better understand himself and others.	
5. Charlie's last gift made everyone in the room feel uncomfortable.	
6. Sam kissed Charlie out of pity.	
7. The holiday season and Charlie's birthday have a negative impact on his mental health.	

3. **Act, reflect, and analyze.** In the second part of the book Charlie reads to his friends a very emotional poem. Let us try to recreate this scene in class to then analyze our reactions and better understand those of the characters.

"Once on a yellow piece of paper with green lines
 he wrote a poem
 And he called it "Chops"
 because that was the name of his dog
 And that's what it was all about
 And his teacher gave him an A
 and a gold star

And his mother hung it on the kitchen door
and read it to his aunts
That was the year Father Tracy
took all the kids to the zoo
And he let them sing on the bus
And his little sister was born
with tiny toenails and no hair
And his mother and father kissed a lot
And the girl around the corner sent him a
Valentine signed with a row of X's
and he had to ask his father what the X's meant
And his father always tucked him in bed at night
And was always there to do it
Once on a piece of white paper with blue lines
he wrote a poem
And he called it "Autumn"
because that was the name of the season
And that's what it was all about
And his teacher gave him an A
and asked him to write more clearly
And his mother never hung it on the kitchen door
because of its new paint
And the kids told him
that Father Tracy smoked cigars
And left butts on the pews
And sometimes they would burn holes
That was the year his sister got glasses
with thick lenses and black frames
And the girl around the corner laughed
when he asked her to go see Santa Claus
And the kids told him why
his mother and father kissed a lot

And his father never tucked him in bed at night
And his father got mad
when he cried for him to do it.
Once on a paper torn from his notebook
he wrote a poem
And he called it "Innocence: A Question"
because that was the question about his girl
And that's what it was all about
And his professor gave him an A
and a strange steady look
And his mother never hung it on the kitchen door
because he never showed her
That was the year that Father Tracy died
And he forgot how the end
of the Apostle's Creed went
And he caught his sister
making out on the back porch
And his mother and father never kissed
or even talked
And the girl around the corner
wore too much makeup
That made him cough when he kissed her
but he kissed her anyway
because that was the thing to do
And at three a.m. he tucked himself into bed
his father snoring soundly
That's why on the back of a brown paper bag
he tried another poem
And he called it "Absolutely Nothing"
Because that's what it was really all about
And he gave himself an A
and a slash on each damned wrist

And he hung it on the bathroom door
because this time he didn't think
he could reach the kitchen.” (pp. 75-77)

Poem discussion

1. How did listening to someone read this poem made you feel?/What did you feel while reading the poem?
2. Would you say that your reactions were similar to those of the characters?
3. How is this poem relevant to the story?
4. How does it relate to the themes in the novel?
5. Why do you think Charlie read it to his friends?

Poem analysis

1. How would you divide the poem? Give a title to each part.
2. Identify these figures of speech in the poem:
 - Anaphora
 - Hyperbole
 - Repetition
 - Onomatopoeia
3. Which rhetorical style is prevalent in this poem? Polysyndeton or asyndeton? How does this affect the tone and the meaning of the poem?

6.5. Unit 5. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 2: part 3)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 3)
Prerequisites	Having read pages 105 - 125.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss thoughtfully and respectfully the theme of abuse. • Work in groups to find a definition for the word “abuse”.

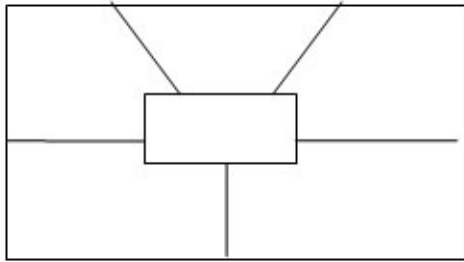
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen attentively to arguments of both the opponents and partner. • Support one's arguments with evidence. • Refute opposing arguments consistently.
Duration	Aprox. 60 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book, a piece of paper.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the theme of abuse. • Debate a given statement.

<p>Warm up – 15 minutes</p>	<p>For the first part of the lesson the teacher will divide the class into groups of four or five students to do a placemat activity. The teacher will ask students to take a piece of paper and divide it as illustrated in the handout. Each student in the group will take turns to write down in the outer boxes what comes to their mind when they think of the word “abuse”. Once everyone has written down their ideas, each group will have to discuss them and, as a whole, agree upon one single definition of abuse which they will have to write in the middle box. Next, each group will communicate to the rest of the class the definition that they have come up with. The teacher will then ask students to point out differences or similarities between the different definitions.</p>
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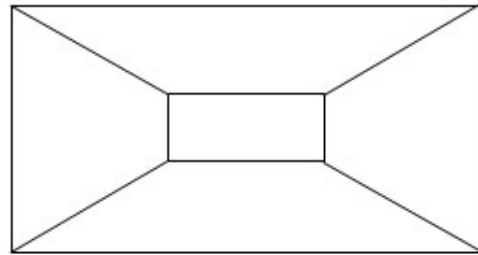
	<p>Hopefully this activity will help students to see that abuse comes in different forms and that sometimes, just as the book tries to show, it is not so obvious.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 20 minutes</p>	<p>For the following activity the teacher will divide students in groups of 4 or 5 and discuss and compare the table “while you read”, they will also have to answer the questions of the handout.</p> <p>The teacher will monitor the activity while going around the tables and when everyone has finished discussing their ideas, the teacher will ask each group to share with the rest of the class the ideas or information they have collected.</p>
<p>Task 2 – 20 minutes</p>	<p>Hopefully, at this point in their academic career, students are already familiar with the rules of debates, and they can start preparing for the activity right away. The statement students have to debate on is: “We accept the love we think we deserve”, a quote taken directly from the book which fits the context of this lesson.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 2 minutes</p>	<p>To conclude the lesson the teacher will ask students to read at home pages 125- 149 and will also tell them that during the last 25 minutes of the following class they will have write another informal letter which will then be evaluated. They will not have to study to do the writing.</p>

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (part 3)

1. **Placemat activity.** In groups take a piece of paper and divide it as illustrated. Take turns to write down what comes to your mind when you think of the word “abuse”. Once you have written down your ideas, discuss them and agree upon one single definition of abuse. Next, share your definition with the rest of the class. What lesson have you learned from this activity?



Placemat for groups of 5 students



Placemat for groups of 4 students

2. **Discussion.** Have a look at the table “while you read”. In groups of 4 or 5 discuss and compare with your classmates what you have written down. At the same time, try to answer the following questions: so far, how has Charlie dealt with the abuse he has witnessed? Do you think you would have reacted differently? How? At the signal, rotate groups and discuss again your ideas.

3. **Debate.** You are required to cite textual evidence to support your claims. You can, of course, look at the book to find the evidence.

“We accept the love we think we deserve” (p.27)

6.6. Unit 6. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 2: part 3)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 3)
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having read pages 125 - 149.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know how to give advice and suggestions.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find information online about books mentioned in the novel and draw conclusions as to why Charlie would find them relatable. • Write an original piece of writing. • Reflect on a critical situation.
Duration	Aprox. 60 minutes
Materials	Handout, Kahoot, PowerPoint presentation, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia Quiz on the book. • Discussion about some of the books mentioned in the novel. • Written test.

<p>Warm up – 10 minutes</p>	<p>The lesson will begin with a Kahoot activity. This time, students will have to do a trivia quiz about the book and they will have 15-20 seconds to answer each question. Once they join the game on their devices by entering the code provided by the teacher or scanning the QR code, they will have to put their name, but if students prefer to remain anonymous, they can use a different name.</p> <p>The quicker you answer, the more points you get. After each question, kahoot will automatically create a ranking.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>Students will have to find information about three books that Charlie mentions in</p>

	part 3 and then write at least one reason as to why they think he could enjoy them or find them relatable.
Task 2 – 10 minutes	Students will do a think-pair-share activity to discuss different events that take place in part 3.
Task 3 – 25 minutes	Students will do a writing activity, they will have 20 minutes to choose a character of the book who is dealing with a problem and write a letter to comfort them, give advice, or offer to help.
Conclusion – 2 minutes	During the last 5 minutes of class the teacher will tell students that the following lesson, instead of focusing on part 4, will focus on the American culture of the 90s which is yet another prominent aspect of the book. They will have the rest of the week to read part 4 which will be analyzed the following week.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 3)

1. **Complete.** Find information about these three books that Charlie mentions in part 3 and write at least one reason why you think Charlie would enjoy reading them or find them relatable.

ON THE ROAD

NAKED LUNCH

6.7. Unit 7. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 3: American culture)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (American culture)
Prerequisites	None
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on different cultural aspects that characterized America in the early 90s. • Use communication and critical thinking skills to participate in group discussions. • Listen attentively for words and ideas to complete the listening activities. • Read and understand a short text about grunge music.
Duration	Aprox. 60 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book, Youtube video, scissors, a small container, a stapler.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading comprehension on the history of grunge music. • Listening activities on the history of The Rocky Horror Picture Show. • Mixtapes craft project

Warm up – 10 minutes	To introduce the topic of this lesson, the teacher will write on the blackboard “early 90s” (the period in which The Perks of Being a Wallflower is set) and will ask students to
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	<p>brainstorm words or ideas that relate to this period.</p> <p>Then, the teacher will tell students that the following activities will focus on certain cultural aspects that characterized America in the early 90s and that are also mentioned in the book.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>For this task students will have to read a text on grunge music and then complete the exercises.</p>
<p>Task 2 – 20 minutes</p>	<p>For this second task, students will have to do a listening activity. They will watch a video on the cult classic musical mentioned several times in the book: The Rocky Horror Picture Show (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hefomj2O7PQ)</p>
<p>Task 3 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>For this last activity students will have to write on the printed image of the case of a cassette 8 tracks that mean something to them. They will also have to write the title of their mix tape on the second image. Once they have done this, they will have to cut the images out and staple them together. Next, they will put them in a small container provided by the teacher who will then close it and shake it.</p> <p>The teacher will then walk around the tables and ask students to randomly pick a “cassette”. At home they will have to listen to the songs and reflect on the lyrics.</p>

	To make the activity more immersive, students can also create a public playlist on Spotify or YouTube and give it the same title they gave to their mixtape so that at home students can directly search for the playlist instead of searching for each song separately.
Conclusion – 2 minutes	The teacher will go over everything that was done in class and remind students to read part 4 for the following week’s class.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (American culture)

Grunge music

1. Reading Comprehension. Read this text on grunge music and its influence in the early 90s. Next, complete the exercises.

	<p>Grunge Music was popular in Seattle, Washington in the 1980s, long before it reached mainstream popularity. Bands like Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam became popular playing locally and started to have some mainstream success by 1990.</p> <p>Nirvana’s second album in 1990 made the band, and grunge music in general, famous. Its success took an underground subculture music scene into the mainstream.</p> <p>A comprehensive grunge music definition is hard to narrow down to just a few words because it’s such a broad genre that the bands can have completely different sounds. But at its core, what is grunge music? Grunge is a mixture of punk rock that became popular in the 70s and 80s and heavy metal that peaked in popularity during the same years.</p>
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Grunge music features intense vocals, often angry like punk rock and sometimes using harsh vocals like in metal, with lyrics covering dark and depressing topics.

Distinctive, repetitive **guitar riffs** are common in grunge music, with simple drum lines. Bands relied on heavy guitar distortion to create a noisy “grunge” sound.

The themes often speak to things young people face, like hopelessness at the state of the world, uncertainty about the future, drug addiction, betrayal, impermanence, and angst.

Grunge musicians embraced the lower-middle-class aesthetic of ripped jeans, t-shirts, and a casual unkemptness that many of its singers became known for, like Kurt Cobain.¹³¹

1.1. Decide if these sentences are true (T), false (F), or doesn't say (DS)

1. Before becoming popular, bands like Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam used to do gigs in their hometown. ____
2. Punk and metal blended together to create grunge music. ____
3. The vocals and the sound of grunge music matches the lyrics of the songs. ____
4. Grunge means noisy. ____
5. Grunge music is a relatable genre for young people. ____

1.2. Look at the text and focus on the expressions in bold. Based on their use in the text, try to understand their meaning and try to explain them using your own words.

- Narrow down
- At its core
- Peaked in popularity
- Guitar riffs

1.3. Answer the following question: what elements described in the text can we find in the previously analyzed song “Asleep” by The Smiths?

¹³¹ Mark James. “What Is Grunge Music? With 7 Top Examples & History.” *Music Industry How To*. March 30, 2022. <https://www.musicindustryhowto.com/what-is-grunge-music/>.

Rocky Horror Picture Show

2. **Listening activities.** You will watch a short video on the history of the cult classic film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The following text is the transcript of the first two minutes of the video, read it before you listen to it, then fill in the gaps.



The Rocky Horror Picture Show _____
45 years ago. “I remember when I first saw
the movie I thought, are they really doing
that? Can they do that?” _____
screenings later, it's now the longest
_____ movie in cinema history. “It just struck, there's like an _____ in the heart.”

It's all thanks to the community of _____ fans who celebrate Rocky Horror's warped
perspective. The Rocky Horror Picture Show first hit theaters in _____, a big screen
adaptation of a successful theatrical production in London. The movie starred Susan
Sarandon, Barry Bostwic, future rock star Meat Loaf and Tim Curry who _____ the
role of Dr. Frank-N-Furter in the stage show.

Despite a meagre reception at the box office, Rocky Horror slowly _____ its way up
to cultural phenomenon. “The general public was not ready for anything like that, but the
kids were.” The _____ developed a fan movement unprecedented in cinema. “I mean
it happened, I suppose because four or five people were _____ one day and went
dressed as the characters and it just sort of took off from New York.” Weekly midnight
screenings evolved into an _____ theater experience and in short time they were
popping up across the country. “It went on to be the biggest cult film in history people
_____ to see it a hundred times, they dress like the characters and throw things at the
screen.”

2.1. Watch the rest of the video and answer the following questions.

1. What is a “Shadow Cast”?
2. Why is it considered a coming-of-age experience?
3. What is one of the most special things about Rocky Horror according to Annaleigh Ashford?

2.2. Discuss in groups.

Charlie reveals in his letters that his friend Patrick always plays the role of Frank-N-Furter in the local representation of the show. Do you think that there is a reason behind his affinity with this character?

Mix Tapes

3. **Get creative.** Mix tapes started to become popular in the 70s and remained popular all throughout the 90s. We have already seen how much Charlie loves creating them for his loved ones. Now it is your turn, write on the case of this cassette (first image) 8 tracks that mean something to you, and then give your mix tape a title (second image).



6.8. Unit 8. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 3: part 4)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 4)
Prerequisites	Having read pages 153 - 221.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand a short text about coping mechanisms. • Use critical thinking skills to come up with different questions to discuss in groups the events and themes of part 4.
Duration	Aprox. 55 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading comprehension on healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms. • Group discussion on part 4 of the book.

Warm up – 10 minutes	At the beginning of the lesson the teacher will ask students a set of questions that relate to the last activity of the previous lesson: Is there a song that you didn't know but you enjoyed listening to? Did you identify with any of the songs in your "cassette"? Did you like your mixtape?
Task 1 – 15 minutes	For the first activity students will read a text on unhealthy coping mechanisms and then complete the exercises.
Task 2 – 25 minutes	For this task students should think about at least 5 higher order discussion questions about part 4. The teacher can give students examples of such questions Next,

	students will sit in circle and start the discussion by asking each other the questions they came up with. Students will be asked to support their ideas with textual evidence.
Conclusion – 5 minutes	The teacher will ask students to find, print and bring to class a picture (or if someone wants to, they could paint/draw it) that could represent a scene or a theme which appears in part 4, in preparation for an activity called “gallery walk”.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 4)

Coping mechanisms

1. **Read and complete.** Read the text about unhealthy coping mechanisms and then complete the table.

Most people develop habits which then act as a way of coping with stress. Unfortunately, many of those habits are negative ones. These are called coping mechanisms, and they help us to get through difficult situations in which we find ourselves. However, by its nature, a coping mechanism is simply avoiding the issue in hand, and we all know that ignoring a problem doesn't make it go away.

Some people view a coping mechanism as a form of addiction. Coping mechanisms, like the majority of habits, have addictive qualities. We experience a compulsion towards them and often find it hard to resist them. Coping mechanisms are used as distractions, and a crutch to rely on to avoid stress. Therefore, a coping mechanism isn't really a true choice that you make, it is an unconscious habit which can be harmful to your well-being.

Most people have experienced stressful situations from time to time when we feel that we're unable to cope. Whether those situations involved something as serious as a

loved one dying or something as simple as breaking up with a partner, they can trigger us to use a coping mechanism to get over the feelings and emotions that we are experiencing.

Although a positive coping mechanism is a good way of overcoming a problem, many people choose negative coping mechanisms instead. This is because, while they don't offer long-term solutions to problems, negative coping mechanisms do produce an immediate effect, one that reduces your stress in the short term.¹³²

Here is a list of some of the most common unhealthy coping mechanisms:

- Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking.
- Binge Eating.
- Gambling.
- Isolating from Friends and Family
- Avoiding Emotions.
- Self-criticism.
- Doomscrolling.
- Toxic Positivity.
- Overworking.
- Over-relying on Others.
- Self-harm.
- Excessive Anger.

1.1. Try to name at least one reason as to why these coping mechanisms are considered unhealthy and one negative consequence that these could lead to.

1. Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking _____
2. Binge Eating _____
3. Gambling _____
4. Isolating from Friends and Family _____
5. Avoiding Emotions _____
6. Self-criticism _____

¹³² “What an Unhealthy Coping Mechanism Looks like – the Meadowglade.” 2022. Themeadowglade.com. 2022. <https://themeadowglade.com/what-an-unhealthy-coping-mechanism-looks-like/>.

- 7. Doomscrolling _____
- 8. Toxic Positivity _____
- 9. Overworking _____
- 10. Over-relying on Others _____
- 11. Self-harm _____
- 12. Excessive Anger _____

1.2. Which of the coping mechanisms cited in the text do these characters tend use?

Charlie	Charlie's sister	Patrick	Brad	Mary Elizabeth

1.3. Can you think of some examples of healthy coping mechanisms? How could they help these characters?

2. **Socratic circles.** Think and write at least 5 high-order discussion questions about part

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

6.9. Unit 9. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 3: part 4)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 4)
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having read pages 153 - 221.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display one's artistic skills and engage in a group discussion.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make connections between different pictures and the events described in the text. • Write an original piece of writing. • Use their knowledge on the characters and the story to come up with a possible ending for the book.
Duration	Aprox. 55 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gallery walk activity. • Creative writing.

<p>Warm up – 25 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will hang on the walls of the classroom the pictures/paintings/drawings brought in by the students and ask them to think of the class as a small art gallery. In small groups, students will have to rotate the different stations and discuss together the pictures/paintings/drawings on the walls. Students will be reminded the importance of notes on the ideas that come up during the discussion.</p> <p>As the teacher, it is important to monitor the stations while the students participate. At the end of the activity the teacher will ask to share the information or ideas they have collected.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 25 minutes</p>	<p>Students, in groups of three or four will have to do another writing activity. Since they have not yet read the epilogue, they will have to guess how the story ends.</p>

	<p>They can get creative by writing the last letter from a different character’s point of view or use another literary genre.</p> <p>One person of each group will be asked to re-write the letter in a word document and send it via e-mail to the teacher before next class.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 5 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will ask students to read the epilogue and the additional letter at home (pages 225-237)</p>

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Part 4)

1. Creative writing. How will the story end? In groups, write one last letter which will be the epilogue of the story, you can get creative and write it from the point of view of a different character or you can write it using a different genre. (250-300 words)

6.10. Unit 10. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 4: epilogue)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Epilogue)
Prerequisites	Having read pages 225-237.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give each other constructive feedback on how to improve their writings. • Give a more accurate description of characters' personality. • Draw upon one's knowledge of the story to answer questions posed by classmates from the perspective of different characters. • Observe and interpret different images that relate to the characters and the epilogue. • Discuss in groups the themes of abuse, freedom, friendship, and the motif of the tunnel.
Duration	Aprox. 60 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer review activity. • Analysis and discussion of the characters' personality. • Hot seating activity. • Discussion in groups of the themes of abuse, freedom, friendship, and the symbolism of the tunnel.

<p>Warm up – 20 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will divide the students in the same groups of the previous lesson and then give each group a copy of their classmates' writings (except the one they wrote). They will review them, correct any mistake they might find, and answer the guide questions.</p> <p>Next, the teacher will give back to each group their original writing (each group will have multiple copies of their own writing since every group peer reviewed it) and ask them to share their opinions on their classmates' texts.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will ask students to have a look at the handout of unit 2, more precisely at exercise 4.3, at that time they had to write the adjectives that best described each character's personality. Students will be asked to repeat the exercise to see if they would use the same adjectives to describe them now that they have read the entire book.</p>
<p>Task 2 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>Students will look at some pictures and in pairs will discuss how they could relate to the characters and the epilogue. To make the discussion more dynamic, after a few minutes, two pairs will join together to form a group of 4 and will continue to share ideas.</p>
<p>Task 3 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>For this activity one student at a time will be asked to play the role of one character of their choice, the other students will take</p>

	turns to ask him/her question. The student will answer while staying in character. This will allow students to think like one of the characters of the book and to expand or better understand the characters' nuances, at the same time, it will allow them to use their critical thinking skills and their imagination.
Conclusion – 5 minutes	The teacher will go over everything that was done in class and collect feedback from the students on the book.

The perks of Being a Wallflower (Epilogue)

1. *Peer review.* Read your classmates' writings and help improve them by correcting the grammar and answering these questions.

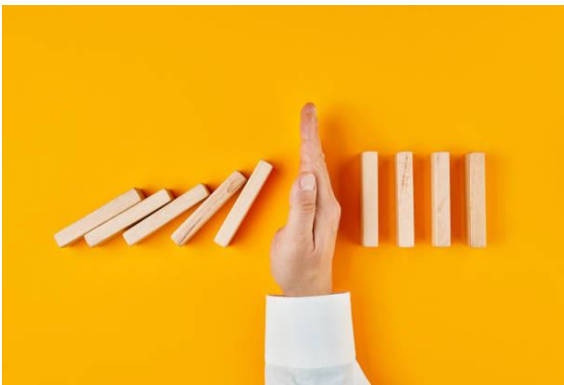
- ✓ Does the final letter logically connect to the previous one?
- ✓ Are the events told in what seems to be the proper order? (Yes or No...If you say they are not, indicate which changes you would make)
- ✓ Does the writer give you enough information to understand the event(s) described?

2. *Characters analysis.* Complete the table again. Which adjectives would you use to describe these characters' personalities now? You can use adjectives that have not been mentioned before.

Character	Adjective	Evidence from the text
Charlie		
Charlie's mom		
Charlie's dad		
Charlie's brother		

Charlie's sister		
Sam		
Patrick		
Helen		
Bill		

2. **Group Discussion.** Look at these pictures, how do they relate to the characters and the epilogue?





3. **Hot seating.** Choose one character you would like to interpret and answer your classmates' questions while staying in character.

6.11. Unit 11. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 4: movie)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Before you watch)
Prerequisites	None
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the questionnaire. • Identify key elements of the book in the movie trailer. • Reflect on the meaning of new expressions and words. • Use creativity and imagination to act-out imaginary situations.
Duration	Aprox. 55 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book, Youtube.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the movie trailer. • Vocabulary related to the video. • Discussion of the questionnaire. • Role play.

<p>Warm up – 10 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will ask students to complete the questionnaire that was handed out during the first lesson.</p> <p>Once students finish writing their answers, the teacher will ask students if their answers have changed at all and if anyone is willing to share some of them. If not, the teacher will move to the next task.</p>
<p>Task 1 – 10 minutes</p>	<p>Students will watch the movie trailer and take note every element (characters, settings, symbolic moments, and so on) that also appear in the book and then discuss them together.</p> <p>They will also do some vocabulary-related exercises.</p>
<p>Task 2 – 20 minutes</p>	<p>Students will have to do a role-play activity.</p>
<p>Task 3 – 2 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will give students a handout and explain the exercises that they will have to do while watching the movie.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 5 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will go over everything that was done in class and ask students to watch the movie at home (it can be found on YouTube and Prime Video) in case there is no time to watch it in class.</p> <p>The teacher will also provide a second handout with different questions that they will have to answer while watching the movie.</p>

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Before you watch)

1. **Examine and reflect.** Complete the questionnaire again to see if your answers have changed.

2. **Watch and identify.** Watch the movie trailer and take note of every element of the book (settings, characters, specific scenes, symbols, and so on) that you recognize.

2.1. **Vocabulary.** Match the expressions/words with the corrects meaning.

1. Turn things around	a. To some extent, in some way.
2. Sort of	b. A work that has received positive reviews from critics.
3. Misfit	c. Something that is considered normal, typical.
3. Stand out	b. Do something so that a bad situation turns into a positive one.
4. Average	c. Someone who is not accepted by other people because of their unusual behavior.
5. Critically acclaimed	d. To be very noticeable.

2.2. **Vocabulary.** Can you think of other collocations with the word “acclaim”?

2. **Role-play.** Act out with a partner the following situation.

Imagine that one of you is Stephen Chbosky, and the other is an interviewer. Which questions would you like to ask?/ How would you respond as the author of the book?

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (movie analysis)

*1. **Vocabulary.** While watching the film, select 10 or more words/expressions that you find particularly interesting or useful and provide a synonym for them.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

*2. **Movie discussion.** Key questions to consider while and after watching the movie.*

- Is there any moment or dialogued that you particularly liked/disliked? Why?
- Are the characters in the movie portrayed exactly how they were portrayed in the book?
- Did the filmmakers add new characters or leave out others?
- Which songs or books that appeared in the book also appeared in the movie?
- Is the movie faithful to the book settings-wise?
- What is the significance of the song “Heroes” by David Bowie?
- Do these themes and motifs also appear in the movie: mix tapes, books, the tunnel, mental health, queer representation, abuse, friendship?

- What is one lesson that the movie/book wants to teach?
- Which scenes did not appear in the movie?
- Would you make any changes to the movie?

6.12. Unit 12. The Perks of Being a Wallflower (Week 4: Conclusion)

Title	The Perks of Being a Wallflower (movie discussion)
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having watched the movie.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast the movie and the book. • Discuss and analyze the movie and the deleted scenes. • Revise the module’s content.
Duration	Aprox. 55 minutes
Materials	Handout, a copy of the book, Youtube, Kahoot.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and discussion of the movie. • Analysis and discussion of the deleted scenes. • Revision of the module’s content.

Warm up – 5 minutes	The teacher will start the lesson by asking students to share their thoughts on the movie.
Task 1 – 20 minutes	The teacher will discuss with students the questions of the “movie analysis” handout.
Task 2 – 15 minutes	The teacher will show students some of the deleted movie scenes which can be

	<p>found on YouTube, especially the one where Charlie reads the poem to his friends and the one where he drives his sister to the abortion clinic. Then the teacher will ask students to discuss in groups, and share to the rest of the class, the following questions: “Do you think these scenes should have been in the movie? Why do you think these scenes were not included? Do you think it affected the story or the relationship between the characters?”</p>
<p>Task 3 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>To review the entire content of the module, the teacher can do one final quiz about the book and movie. The teacher can use the Kahoot platform once again.</p>
<p>Conclusion – 5 minutes</p>	<p>The teacher will praise the effort of students for completing the module and will collect one last feedback on it to see if things can be improved.</p>

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine the several reasons why Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a valuable resource for ESL teachers who want to create more memorable lessons and provide a more authentic learning experience to their students. The preliminary discussion was fundamental to frame the novel in a didactic context, but it also shed light on various issues that language teachers cannot simply overlook. Reflecting on these issues led to several recurring ideas which were in part needed to prove the central point of this thesis.

The first issue that was raised refers to the idea that learning a second language by studying it abroad will certainly be an unforgettable experience for students. However, it is not particularly easy for teachers to replicate it in the classroom. The second issue concerned the increasing necessity, throughout the years, to find a way to facilitate the language learning process and give more importance to the study of different cultures. Another important issue which was later discussed, relates to the fact that creating lesson plans requires a lot of careful preparation. In fact, teachers cannot plan lessons without carefully considering their students' interests, learning style, and type of intelligence. Moreover, teachers need to remember that students best learn through experience. Therefore, they should engage in class activities that they can reflect on and gain valuable knowledge that can be later applied to out-of-school settings. Lastly, teachers who want to use literary texts in their classes, may need guidance on how to choose the most suitable ones for their students. The main ideas to emerge from this initial discussion, is that when teachers carefully choose and use the proper tools and resources, they can create motivating lessons that can still feel authentic and that may have a powerful and memorable impact on their students.

This last idea and the in-depth analysis of the novel and its themes, characters, and symbols, support the idea that ESL teachers should not refrain from their wish of adding *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to the syllabus for it might be a perfect tool for teachers to create meaningful and engaging lessons. In fact, during the initial discussion other important ideas emerged. First, teaching literature can have a positive impact on students' education and development. Moreover, it allows teachers to use different strategies and techniques that consider their individual needs and wants. Secondly, this novel and its movie adaptation, fall under the category of authentic materials, thus making related activities more fun, relevant, and stimulating. Moreover, the constant references to the

American culture and history, as well as the language used, will of course allow teachers to give their students a more authentic learning experience. Thirdly, due to its content, the novel offers a chance to discuss important topics that are not always talked about in school. However, when discussed in a safe environment, teachers might be able to offer students a place where they do not simply learn a new language, but use it to express their feelings, instead of bottling them up, or share their struggles. Finally, it would be impossible to discuss the book without mentioning the many references to music, literature, historical events, or philosophers' works. Therefore, the novel could also represent an excellent CLIL resource that will broaden students' vision on language and give them, once again, a more authentic experience. It is also important to notice that the lessons designed for the module constitute a visual representation of every single idea that emerged during the discussion and analysis of the book.

Overall, the entire discussion seems to suggest that Chbosky's novel, as well as the movie adaptation, could have a positive impact on students and their language-learning journey. Students will hopefully fall in love with this moving and inspiring story which Stephen Chbosky defines as a blueprint for survival. In fact, we can conclude that teaching *The Perks of being a Wallflower* will not only help to bring this long-sought authenticity to the classroom, but also to explore the complex world of teenagers and help them find their way in life just like Charlie does.

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II. Summary

Il mestiere dell'insegnante richiede che il professore o professoressa possieda diverse abilità, tra cui entusiasmo nell'insegnamento, pazienza, organizzazione, tolleranza, ma soprattutto creatività. Effettivamente, creare lezioni motivanti per gli studenti non è un compito da sottovalutare ed è per questo che gli insegnanti sono spesso alla ricerca di nuovi materiali che possano rendere le lezioni il più memorabili ed efficaci possibile. Inoltre, gli insegnanti di lingua si trovano spesso davanti a un altro importante compito, quello di creare delle lezioni che invece di basarsi solo sul libro di testo, possano mostrare la lingua in tutte le sue nuances in modo che risulti il più fedele possibile a quella parlata dai nativi.

Molti pensano che per imparare una lingua sia necessario andare all'estero e che il tempo passato ad impararla a scuola sia quasi inutile. È indiscutibile che vivere in un altro paese permetta non solo di impararne una lingua che è fondamentale diversa da quella più formale dei libri di testo, ma anche di vivere una diversa cultura in prima persona. È anche vero però, che non tutti hanno questa possibilità e che la scuola, o meglio gli insegnanti, possano comunque offrire una esperienza abbastanza autentica ai propri studenti. Il modo migliore per farlo è attraverso dei materiali e delle metodologie che permettano di avere una visione più ampia della lingua che si sta imparando, quindi più vicina a quella che viene parlata quotidianamente e che considerino anche diversi aspetti della cultura straniera. Un esempio è costituito dai materiali autentici e dai realia. I primi sono creati essenzialmente per un pubblico nativo e non sono pensati per essere didattizzati. Serie TV, film, volantini, biglietti del museo, libri, video di YouTube o podcast, sono tutti esempi di materiali che anche se non destinati ad essere utilizzati in una lezione, possono comunque essere propedeutici all'apprendimento di una lingua. I secondi sono considerati oggetti tridimensionali che appartengono alla cultura di un paese e che possono anch'essi essere utilizzati in classe per rendere le lezioni più autentiche e motivanti. Il CLIL, invece, è un esempio di metodologia che può essere sfruttata sempre nella stessa prospettiva. In effetti, insegnare i contenuti di una materia non linguistica in lingua straniera, permette agli studenti di ampliare l'uso di quest'ultima a diversi ambiti e contesti che potrebbero essere più di interesse per loro. Usare la lingua per parlare di argomenti che non sono strettamente legati alla forma, rende l'esperienza ancora più autentica ed utile. Ovviamente, usare questi materiali e queste metodologie porta con sé

delle sfide che non devono passare inosservate e l'insegnante ne deve essere consapevole. È però giusto menzionare il fatto che nel corso degli anni, gli approcci e le metodologie per l'insegnamento delle lingue si sono evolute con l'obiettivo di facilitare l'apprendimento e far sì che lo studente sia sempre più esposto alla cultura di diversi paesi, alla lingua autentica e più propenso ad utilizzarla per comunicare. Di conseguenza, l'insegnante non dovrebbe mai scoraggiarsi di fronte a queste sfide, ma dovrebbe vederle come una maggiore opportunità per i propri studenti di aprire i loro orizzonti.

È sulla base di queste idee preliminari che la tesi propone di utilizzare il romanzo epistolare di Stephen Chbosky del 1999, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, e il suo successivo adattamento al grande schermo, per insegnare inglese come seconda lingua. Effettivamente, il romanzo e il film potrebbero rappresentare dei materiali preziosi da sfruttare in classe, non solo per fare apprendere inglese in maniera più motivante e coinvolgente, ma anche per trattare degli argomenti che seppur importanti, spesso non vengono discussi a scuola. Il romanzo parla infatti di un ragazzo estremamente riservato di nome Charlie che ha appena iniziato il primo anno di liceo, ma proprio come succede a molti in questo periodo di transizione, si sente spesso fuori luogo e non riesce ad interagire con i suoi coetanei. Preferisce quindi osservare ciò che avviene attorno a lui e scrivere delle lettere ad un amico anonimo per raccontargli la sua vita e sfogarsi quando più ne sente il bisogno. Già dalle prime lettere si percepisce il dolore e il tormento che lo perseguitano causati principalmente dalla scomparsa di due persone a lui care. La prima, che lo ha segnato profondamente, è quella di sua zia Helen, morta quando lui era più piccolo in seguito ad un incidente d'auto dopo essere uscita per andare a comprargli un regalo di compleanno. La seconda, più recente, è quella di un suo amico morto purtroppo per suicidio. Fortunatamente, Charlie riesce presto a fare amicizia con due ragazzi più grandi e molto diversi caratterialmente da lui. Questi sono Patrick e Sam e l'amicizia tra i tre diventa un pilastro fondamentale nella vita di Charlie che, sempre attraverso queste lettere, ci rende partecipe di tutte le loro avventure e disavventure. Charlie instaura un buon rapporto anche con il suo professore di inglese che da subito vede in lui un grande potenziale e nel corso dell'anno lo spinge a leggere numerosi romanzi e a scrivere temi su di essi. Con il passare del tempo Charlie cerca di simulare la stessa fiducia che i suoi nuovi amici avevano in sé stessi e prende decisioni coraggiose ma spesso condizionate dal voler sentirsi parte di un gruppo e a volte governate dal voler sopprimere i suoi

chiassosi pensieri. Un esempio è quando decide di fidanzarsi con una ragazza nonostante non l'amasse o quando decidere di bere e fumare fino a stare male. Charlie è felice di aver trovato persone che lo aiutino ad essere più partecipativo e spensierato, nonostante ciò, le lettere che egli scrive mostrano che c'è qualcosa dentro di lui che lo frena e che non gli permette di godersi a pieno la sua vita procurandogli sempre più angoscia. Charlie fa fatica a trovare una connessione tra i suoi episodi depressivi e la causa di questi, cerca quindi di farsene una ragione e ricondurli al fatto di non aver ancora superato la morte di Helen e del suo amico o al fatto che i suoi amici se ne sarebbero presto andati via al college. Nel frattempo, i giorni passano e Charlie continua a raccontare ciò che succede nella sua vita rivelando anche i problemi che i suoi amici e familiari si trovavano ad affrontare. Patrick, ad esempio, viene sorpreso dal padre di Brad mentre i due si stavano baciando. Il padre, inorridito dall'accaduto, picchia violentemente il figlio e lo tiene lontano da scuola per una settimana. Patrick era stato costretto a tenere nascosta la sua relazione con Brad poiché quest'ultimo non voleva che il suo vero orientamento sessuale venisse scoperto per paura del giudizio altrui. Oltretutto, al suo ritorno a scuola, Brad decide insieme ai suoi amici di prendere in giro Patrick per la sua omosessualità. Patrick si sente tradito e ferito e si rifugia nell'alcol e nella droga per cercare di dimenticare i suoi dispiaceri. Sam invece si fida con un ragazzo che apparentemente sembrava perfetto, ma che poi si scopre la stesse tradendo. La sorella di Charlie, si ritrova intrappolata in una relazione tossica e quando scopre di essere incinta, opta per l'aborto. Infine, Charlie rivela che sua madre, suo padre e i loro fratelli erano stati picchiati dai rispettivi padri da piccoli e questo aveva dato il via a un ciclo di abusi, relazioni tossiche e comportamenti autodistruttivi per far fronte al trauma subito. Sua zia Rebecca, ad esempio, aveva dovuto ricevere ordini restrittivi nei confronti di suo marito e sua zia Helen era stata molestata quando era bambina da un amico di famiglia. Purtroppo, quando raccontò ai suoi genitori ciò che era successo, suo padre non le credette e sua madre non fece nulla per aiutarla. Charlie si rivela una persona estremamente empatica e sempre pronta ad aiutare chi ne ha bisogno, purtroppo però continua a fare fatica ad esprimere i propri sentimenti e continua a tenersi per sé il fatto che la sua salute mentale si stava rapidamente aggravando. Un giorno, in seguito ad un rapporto intimo con Sam, Charlie va nel panico ed entra in uno stato catatonico. Il motivo della sua crescente angoscia e della sua reazione in seguito a ciò che era successo con Sam, viene rivelato nell'epilogo. Tutto era collegato a dei ricordi

che Charlie aveva evidentemente represso di quando veniva molestato da sua zia Helen quando era più piccolo. Charlie confessa nell'ultima lettera al suo amico anonimo che nonostante il fatto che questa terribile verità sia tornata a galla, grazie all'aiuto di professionisti, amici e familiari, ora può finalmente iniziare a lavorare su sé stesso. Potrà guarire e dare inizio ad un nuovo capitolo della sua vita in cui sarà finalmente in grado di partecipare attivamente senza rimanere in disparte ad osservare ciò che avviene attorno a sé o senza ricorrere a comportamenti autodistruttivi.

È importante far notare che il romanzo non tratta solo tematiche sensibili come abuso di alcol, droga, relazioni tossiche, suicidio e abuso sessuale, ma presenta anche altri temi decisamente più allegri che rendono la lettura più leggera e bilanciata. Come è già stato accennato, l'importanza dell'amicizia è un tema ricorrente, come lo è quello dei primi amori, delle uscite in compagnia senza genitori, della musica e dei libri. Questi ultimi due hanno un ruolo principale nella storia perché oltre ad aiutare Charlie a rompere il ghiaccio e creare legami con altre persone, gli offrono conforto dato che ritrovandosi nei testi delle canzoni o nelle storie di altri personaggi si sente compreso e meno solo. Oltretutto, la storia per quanto triste, si conclude comunque con una nota di speranza poiché ci ricorda che con l'aiuto di chi amiamo possiamo superare ogni difficoltà a cui andiamo incontro. Con questo romanzo Chbosky mostra inoltre al lettore che le esperienze e i sentimenti degli adolescenti sono valide e significative, trasformandosi così in una storia nella quale gli studenti possono sempre trovare sconforto e sentirsi rappresentati.

Tornando ai motivi per cui *The Perks of Being a Walflower* potrebbe rappresentare un ottimo materiale per delle lezioni di lingua, in questo caso inglese, possiamo soffermarci su svariati aspetti. Se partiamo dal presupposto che il libro è un materiale autentico cartaceo e quindi non esattamente destinato ad essere didattizzato, possiamo anche affermare che il principale obiettivo dell'autore è quello di scrivere una storia che possa intrattenere il pubblico di futuri lettori. Di conseguenza, come nel caso di questo romanzo, verrà utilizzato un linguaggio adatto al contesto che viene descritto e che includerà anche vocaboli ed espressioni meno ricercate e più colloquiali. Sarà più facile anche trovare diversi riferimenti culturali e diverse tematiche che servono a rendere la storia più coinvolgente e verosimile, ma che difficilmente possiamo trovare all'interno di un libro di testo. Per questa ragione, mentre il libro che utilizziamo a scuola offre una

visione alquanto limitata della lingua, un romanzo come quello di Stephen Chbosky ne offre una visione più ampia e autentica, permettendo quindi di apprenderla in maniera più motivante. Inoltre, grazie anche ai numerosi accenni di musica, opere filosofiche, eventi storici e politica, gli insegnanti potrebbero anche utilizzare il romanzo come risorsa per delle lezioni di CLIL.

Questi però non sono gli unici motivi per cui *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* è un valido materiale che può essere sfruttato in classe. Per capirne il perché, occorre prima fare un passo indietro e discutere del fatto che, con il passare degli anni, si è giunti alla conclusione che gli studenti non sono semplici contenitori di nozioni e fatti, ma sono esseri umani con personalità, interessi, necessità e tipi di intelligenze diverse tra loro e questa loro unicità deve essere riconosciuta e rispettata da insegnanti di tutte le materie. Non a caso è difficile, se non impossibile, trovare una classe in cui ogni studente mostri lo stesso livello di interesse verso un determinato argomento o acquisisca informazioni allo stesso modo. A dimostrarlo sono il modello VARK, la teoria delle intelligenze multiple di Gardner e la teoria dell'apprendimento esperienziale di Kolb. È quando gli insegnanti riconoscono l'importanza di trasformare l'apprendimento in un'esperienza sulla quale si può riflettere e creano attività che tengano conto della diversità dei propri studenti, che gli possono garantire un buon percorso. Ciò premesso, la letteratura e i numerosi libri che la costituiscono, possono essere di estremo aiuto per insegnanti e studenti e offrire numerosi spunti per molteplici attività che siano coinvolgenti ed efficaci. Infatti, la gioia di leggere nasce dalla capacità di un libro e del suo autore di trasportare i propri lettori in un nuovo mondo, di farli diventare parte della storia e sentire ciò che i personaggi stanno vivendo un determinato momento. I libri offrono quindi alle persone l'opportunità di identificarsi in personaggi ed esplorare circostanze e sentimenti che forse non hanno ancora sperimentato. Aiutandole così a riflettere su situazioni immaginarie che spesso rispecchiano quelle della vita reale consentendo loro di formulare proprie opinioni e conclusioni che possono poi essere applicate nel mondo reale. Ovviamente, utilizzare libri come materiale didattico non è sempre semplice. Questi possono essere linguisticamente ed emotivamente impegnativi e quindi richiedere ai lettori, in questo caso gli studenti, una certa preparazione mentale e una costante attenzione. Gli insegnanti, invece, devono saper selezionare i giusti testi letterari per le proprie classi basandosi su diversi criteri. Ad esempio, durante la scelta gli insegnanti devono tenere conto degli

obiettivi didattici che si vogliono raggiungere, della difficoltà linguistica, delle connessioni tra diverse discipline che il libro può offrire e dell'utilità, efficacia e pertinenza che il contenuto può avere per gli studenti. Un ulteriore elemento da considerare riguarda il fatto di affrontare e discutere tematiche importanti in classe. Scegliere libri in cui gli adolescenti possano leggere di personaggi che stanno affrontando problemi forse simili ai loro e che esprimono le loro preoccupazioni su questioni sociali, può sicuramente essere salutare e vantaggioso. Aumentare la consapevolezza tra gli studenti su tematiche importanti come quelle trattate nel romanzo di Stephen Chbosky, può impedire loro di cadere vittime o diventare parte del problema.

È importante menzionare il fatto che utilizzare romanzi in classe per imparare una lingua permette anche di utilizzare delle tecniche e delle strategie che rendono le lezioni più coinvolgenti e adatte ad ogni tipo di studente. Gli insegnanti infatti, prima di far leggere un libro ai propri studenti, possono insegnargli delle strategie per sviluppare l'abilità di lettura e offrirgli così la possibilità di avere un'esperienza più piacevole. Possono anche discutere diverse teorie letterarie che possono essere utilizzate per aiutarli a fare un'analisi più approfondita e interessante del testo. Per di più, i diversi avvenimenti, temi e personaggi all'interno di una storia, permettono di dare il via a delle discussioni di gruppo e dibattiti utili a far sviluppare la capacità di pensiero critico, ascolto e comunicazione. Inoltre, queste discussioni possono prendere diverse "forme" come ad esempio *l'hot seat*, il *socratic seminar*, la *gallery walk* o il *think-pair-share*, per far aumentare il coinvolgimento e la partecipazione degli studenti. Altre tecniche che si possono utilizzare per rendere l'esperienza letteraria più memorabile sono il role play, la scrittura creativa e un successivo *peer review* per aiutare i ragazzi ad essere più consapevoli di ciò che scrivono. Il role play richiede agli studenti di recitare situazioni ipotetiche per spronarli ad utilizzare la lingua in diversi contesti e sviluppare le capacità di *problem solving*. Ovviamente i libri offrono numerosi spunti per questa tipologia di attività. Attraverso la scrittura creativa invece, gli studenti possono liberare la loro immaginazione e divertirsi scrivendo testi dal punto di vista di altri personaggi, utilizzando un genere letterario diverso, aggiungendo una introduzione, un epilogo, altri capitoli, o cambiando il finale della storia. Per di più, spesso succede come nel caso di *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, che sulla base delle opere letterarie vengano tratti dei film che possono essere a loro volta utilizzati in classe per permettere agli studenti di

comprendere la storia più a fondo, di sviluppare le loro capacità di ascolto, di migliorare la loro pronuncia e di stimolare la loro creatività.

È sulla base di queste idee che è stato creato un intero modulo focalizzato sul romanzo di Stephen Chbosky per avere una visione ancora più chiara del perché potrebbe rappresentare un buon materiale didattico per gli insegnanti di lingua inglese. Il modulo ha una durata di quattro settimane, per un totale di dodici unità didattiche, ed è pensato per delle classi di quarta o quinta superiore, dati i temi trattati nel libro e il livello B1-B2 di lingua inglese richiesto per poter leggerlo e comprenderlo al meglio. Per far sì che le lezioni all'interno del modulo non siano ripetitive e il più motivanti e coinvolgenti possibile, verranno alternate diverse tecniche e strategie didattiche, come quelle menzionate anteriormente e utilizzati diversi strumenti e materiali, come Mentimeter, Kahoot, Youtube e presentazioni PowerPoint. Il modulo si focalizzerà su cinque aspetti principali. Il primo riguarda un'introduzione alle teorie letterarie per permettere agli studenti di fare un'analisi più approfondita del testo e interpretarlo al meglio. Il secondo fa riferimento alle attività relative ai temi e ai personaggi del romanzo. Il terzo riguarda le attività relazionate alla cultura americana dei primi anni 90, ovvero il periodo in cui è ambientata la storia. Il quarto riguarda la visione del film e la sua successiva discussione. Infine, l'ultimo aspetto fa riferimento alla lingua inglese, più precisamente alle nuove espressioni e vocaboli che possono aiutare gli studenti ad avere una maggiore padronanza della lingua. Come unico compito per casa, gli studenti dovranno leggere dalle 20 alle 30 pagine del libro dopo ogni lezione. Infatti, in classe le attività si baseranno di volta in volta su ciò che hanno letto. L'unica eccezione riguarda la quarta parte del libro che gli studenti dovranno leggere per intero, nonostante ciò, gli verrà dato più tempo per portare a termine il compito. Per quanto riguarda la valutazione, oltre a monitorare costantemente che gli studenti stiano raggiungendo gli obiettivi didattici e che le attività svolte in classe stiano funzionando, l'insegnante potrà optare per una verifica orale, scritta o un progetto di gruppo. Ovviamente, verranno presi in considerazione diversi parametri per dare una valutazione adeguata. Per di più, il modulo includerà una prova scritta a metà percorso che rappresenterà il 20% del voto finale in cui gli studenti dovranno scrivere una lettera a un personaggio del libro che sta attraversando un brutto momento e offrire consigli e confortarlo.

III. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special thanks to my professor and supervisor, Alberta Novello, for supporting my decision to undertake this journey, and helping me by sharing expertise and offering advice.

I am extremely grateful to Ambra, she is more than just my little sister, she is my strength, my pride and joy. Without her and her good heart my life would not be the same.

I am also extremely grateful to my mom for her encouraging words and contagious smile, to my dad for our exciting adventures around our beautiful land, and to my grandparents for their heart-warming kindness. I am deeply indebted to my family for making me the person I am today, for always supporting me financially and emotionally, for their unconditional love, and timely encouragement. Without them none of this would have been possible.

I am once again grateful to my high school English teacher, Cinzia Donnini. She is the reason why I chose this path a few years ago, and I know that I can always count on her.

I would like to thank Silvia, Xavi, Irene, Andrea, and Adrian. You welcomed me into your beautiful family with open arms and gave me love and support. I wish you all the best and I hope to see you again soon.

I would also like to thank my friends, Juana, Alice, Cecilia, Alessandra, Cresh, Gabri, Piero and Barto. I am grateful for every milestone we got to celebrate together and for all the lovely memories we have created.