

II.B.2.31

Literatur – Novels

Bonnie Garmus's "Lessons in Chemistry" – Auseinandersetzung mit Rollenklischees in den USA der 1950er Jahre anhand eines Bestsellers

Inge Kronfeldner



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Wie wird eine Wissenschaftlerin zur Moderatorin einer Kochshow für Hausfrauen? In den patriarchalisch geprägten USA der 1950er Jahre mit Elizabeth Zerkon Chemikerin und alleinerziehende Mutter, keine andere Wahl. Ihre Schülerinnen und Schüler befassen sich mit den Geschlechterklischees der damaligen Zeit, mit Diskriminierung und Machtmissbrauch durch Vorgesetzte sowie mit *female empowerment*. *Pre-reading, while-reading* und *post-reading activities* unterstützen das Textverstehen und ermöglichen sowohl einen analytischen als auch einen kreativen Zugang zum Roman. Die Lernenden erschließen die Handlung und die Erzählperspektive, analysieren die Figuren und Symbole und setzen sich mit dem historischen Kontext auseinander.

KOMPETENZPROFIL

Klassenstufe/Jahrgang: 11–12 (G8) bzw. 12–13 (G9)

Dauer: 13–16 Unterrichtsstunden + LEK

Kompetenzen: 1. Textkompetenz: literarische Texte verstehen, analysieren und deuten; 2. Interkulturelle Kompetenz: fremde und eigene Werte, Haltungen und Einstellungen kritisch reflektieren; 3. Medienkompetenz: mit digitalen Hilfsmitteln eine Präsentation erstellen

Thematische Bereiche: *USA, traditions, gender relations, identity, equality, discrimination*

Medien: *LearningApps, Trailer, Video(link)s*

Zusätzlich benötigt: Roman „Lessons in Chemistry“ von Bonnie Garmus



Auf einen Blick

Vorbemerkungen

Vor der ersten Unterrichtsstunde der vorliegenden Einheit haben die Schülerinnen und Schüler den Roman noch nicht gelesen.

1. Stunde

Thema: Introduction to the novel

M 1 **First impressions – The protagonist and the setting** / die Romanfiguren und den Handlungsort kennenlernen und Überlegungen zur Situation der Protagonistin anstellen (PA, PL); Informationen zum *reading log* und zu den Präsentationen einholen (PL)



Hausaufgabe: Kapitel 2 bis 4 lesen und das *reading log* ausfüllen; ein Präsentationsthema wählen (EA)

Benötigt:

- Laptop/Beamer/Whiteboard mit Internetzugang
- ZM 1 Presentation topics

2./3. Stunde

Thema: The working world of the 1950s

M 2 **“Don’t work the system. Outsmart it” – Looking back at male and female stereotypes in the 1950s** / die Arbeitsbedingungen von Männern und Frauen skizzieren (EA, PL); sich mit dem Thema „Sexualisierte Gewalt“ auseinandersetzen (EA, GA, PL)



Hausaufgabe: Kapitel 5 bis 8 lesen und das *reading log* ausfüllen (EA)

Benötigt:

- Laptop/Beamer/Whiteboard mit Internetzugang

4. Stunde

Thema: Characters in the novel

M 3 **Major and minor: The characters of the novel – A partner puzzle** / Calvin und Elizabeth analysieren (EA, PA, PL); weitere Romanfiguren anhand einer digitalen Aufgabe untersuchen (EA)



Hausaufgabe: Kapitel 9 bis 12 lesen und das *reading log* ausfüllen (EA)

Benötigt:

- Laptop/Beamer/Whiteboard/Handy oder Tablet mit Internetzugang
- Papierbögen in zwei Farben

M 2



"Don't work the system. Outsmart it." – Looking back at male and female stereotypes in the 1950s

"Look," he said, "life has never been fair, and yet you continue to operate as if it is – as if once you get a few wrongs straightened out, everything else will fall into place. They won't. You want my advice?" And before she could say no, he added, "Don't work the system. Outsmart it." (Calvin Evans, chapter 3, p. 26)

Tasks

1. Think – Pair – Share: Explain what Calvin means by advising Elizabeth to "outsmart the system".
2. Outline the injustice of the system by comparing what life was like for working women and working men in the 1950s. Look through chapters three and four again, make a grid and fill it in.
3. When at UCLA, Elizabeth becomes the victim of a sexual assault. Read the text providing an explanation on the reasons for sexual assault. Why does Sexual Violence Occur?
 - a) Discuss in how far this explanation applies to Elizabeth's experience as a student.
 - b) Think – Pair – Share: A student today would suffer the same consequences as Elizabeth did in the 1950s. Do you agree? Discuss.

Why does Sexual Violence Occur?

There are many factors that contribute to the occurrence of sexual violence. It is important to understand that perpetrators, not victims, are responsible for sexual violence happening. Perpetrators have a strong sense of entitlement and use power and control to commit acts of sexual violence. Most perpetrators adhere to rigid "traditional" gender roles that focus on the inequality of women. This allows them to treat women and the targeted victim with no regard or respect. It is also important to look at other factors that contribute to sexual violence occurring such as those that are used to justify or excuse sexual violence. Gender-based stereotypes reinforce inequality between genders. For example, in a society where men are portrayed as being aggressive and women are seen as passive, a man who pressures a woman for sex is often perceived as behaving acceptably. Gender-based stereotypes are reinforced throughout society and can be seen in pop culture and media. [...]

© Rutgers University <https://vpva.rutgers.edu/info-resources/sexual-violence/why-does-sexual-violence-occur> [last access 19/05/2025]



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4. Watch the video "What difference has #MeToo made?": <https://raabe.click/metoo> [last access 19/05/2025]
 - a) While watching, take notes on the most important facts given there.
 - b) Milling around: Walk around in the classroom with your notes. At a signal of your teacher, share the information you wrote down with a partner.
5. Extra task: Based on what you know about #MeToo, write a short comment on an English-speaking website for teenagers and young adults.



M 8



“The Good Wife’s Guide” – A critical assessment

Tasks

1. Read “The Good Wife’s Guide”: <https://raabe.click/guide-good-wife> [last access: 19/05/2025]

a) In class, briefly state what the article deals with.
 Note: “The Good Wife’s Guide” is a fake, not serious, magazine article that was allegedly published in the May 13, 1955 issue of “Housekeeping Monthly”, describing how a good wife should act, containing material that reflects a different role assignment from contemporary American society. The text has been widely circulated via email.



Neutrie/iStock/Getty Images Plus

b) Think – Pair – Share: Discuss your first reactions. State which of the “advice” given in the text you think is the worst or the most degrading for women.
 c) Copy the grid onto a sheet of paper. Work with a partner and note down parallels between “The Good Wife’s Guide” and what the main characters of “Supper at Six” expect from Elizabeth Zott. Re-read chapters 24 and 25.

“The Good Wife’s Guide”	“Supper at Six”

2. Imagine that this article really appeared in “Housekeeping Monthly”. Take on the role of either Elizabeth Zott or of a different character from “Supper at Six” (Mr. Donatti – Miss Frask – Harriet – Phil Lebensmal). Write a short letter to the editor, commenting on the content of the article. Your comments should be typical of the character you chose. Read out your letters in class or have your teacher read them.



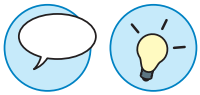
Skills file: Letter to the editor

A letter to the editor is a formal letter (today often sent by email). Your letter should be brief; you start with *Sir* or *Madam* (leave out *Dear*), you also leave out the closing remarks (*Yours faithfully/sincerely*). Give your name, address and phone number.

Language help:

- With reference to your article on ... / I am referring to your article of ...
- In his/her article dated from ..., the author stated that ...
- After carefully studying the article, I am sorry to say that ... / I would like to express my doubts about ... / I would like to point out that ...
- I definitely support the author’s opinion on ... / agree with the author’s opinion on ...
- I am very glad that this topic has finally been ...
- I was hoping for a more impartial treatment of / would appreciate more objectivity when ...
- An option the author did not consider would be to ...

M 12



Rounding it off – Symbols, ending, book covers and blurb

Info box: Symbol

A symbol is a word, action or object that represents a certain idea and does not only stand for itself. The meaning of a symbol goes beyond its literal meaning. Example: The dove is often used as a symbol of peace.

Tasks

1. Speed dating: The use of symbols in the novel:

Before you start the speed dating exercise, think briefly about the aspects:

- a) How might the following terms be used symbolically in the novel?
Chemistry – Elizabeth's pencil – rowing – Commons, California (as a place name) – Mad's name – Elizabeth's sign-off line after each episode – Elizabeth's chemistry class
- b) Now sit in two rows facing each other (see sketch):



Your teacher will give you a sound signal and will name one symbol to be discussed per speed dating round. Share your ideas with your partner when move on one seat.

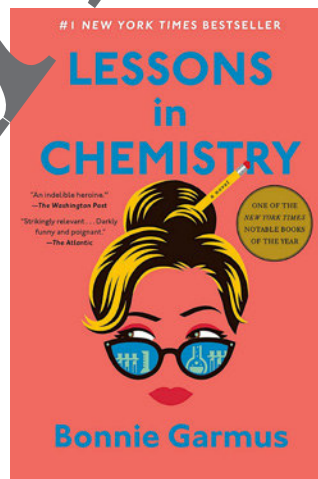
- c) Share your answers and ideas with the rest of the class.
2. The ending of the novel: All is well and all is good to be true?
Discuss how you judge the ending. Compare Elizabeth and Avery Parker.
 3. The book cover:

You probably know the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover". However, the book cover design is decisive and tells you what to expect from a novel. Take a look at these covers from different countries and discuss which of them you think best represents the book:



© Penguin/Random House UK

British cover



© Penguin/Random House USA

U.S. cover



© Piper Verlag

German cover

4. Write a short reading recommendation or a blurb for the novel in about 100 words.

Tip: Remember that blurbs are teasers designed to arouse curiosity but are not a summary of the entire content of the book. Avoid too many details and leave room for speculation and curiosity. But do not forget that your text should convey a clear message.



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