

**Connecting Landscapes of Marginality:
AIDS and Sexuality Issues in the English Classroom.**

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Abstract

This paper explores the positioning of the English classroom as a site of deconstructionist and interventionist strategies when challenging/resisting dominant discourses of marginalisation and prejudice.

It argues for the inclusion of homophobia, heterosexism and AIDS-discrimination in English studies alongside other prejudices such as racism, ethnocentrism, classism and sexism. They are all specific forms of prejudice that situate and marginalise difference from some socio-culturally constructed oppressive norm or centre.

I will propose that a new form of hierarchical dualism and binary opposition is now located within most English classrooms, with the "safe-to-challenge" and "appropriate-to-challenge" social injustices and marginalities on one side, and the "unsafe-to-challenge" and "inappropriate-to-challenge" prejudices and marginalities on the Other.

This paper explores strategies for transcending this hypocritical binary categorisation through textual analyses of **Someone You Know**, **Two Weeks With the Queen**, and **To Kill a Mockingbird**, plus related texts. It discusses the significance of three aspects of textual selection in connecting the landscapes of marginality and inviting students to explore personal identity, subcultural group identity, and connect with the identities of peoples around them: choice of text, choice of writer, and choice of student response.

Three points need to be considered: the need to integrate AIDS and homosexuality studies into "mainstream" English studies rather than adopt a "separatist" or "afterthought" approach; the significance of the teacher's position as facilitator and subjective interventionist; and the reality of resistance from some students, parents and staff.

Examples from student responses to the texts are used to illustrate how students can be positioned as empathic and be assisted to connect disparate marginalities to their own life experiences in terms of prejudice and ignorance/fear of difference.

CONNECTING LANDSCAPES OF MARGINALITY:
AIDS AND SEXUALITY ISSUES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

The English Classroom as a Terrain of Intervention and Resistance

*A book or poem must be an ice-axe to break open
the sea frozen inside us.*

Franz Kafka

*Can I write the word "gay" in my essay or will I
get into trouble?*

Student in my Year Ten English Class

Today's children are living in a world which is increasingly acknowledging the realities of its multiracial, multicultural, multisexual composition, "a world struggling to free itself of AIDS and apartheid"(Orchard, 1994:4). The hierarchical dualism of mainstream and marginal is being challenged. Marginal groups and individuals are becoming more vocal and more politicised about their locations within a network of social relations and cultural practices(Barrett, 1987;Bottomley,1987;Pettman,1992; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1993c). Centred hegemonic groups and individuals are realising that their positions are socio-culturally constructed through discourses of power and privilege rather than being naturally/biologically determined(Weeks,1985; Weeks, 1987).

Students in our classrooms may be socially ascribed positions of marginality due to their personal and/or group identities. They may also be actively and/or passively situating themselves within specific racist, sexist and homophobic discourses as a means of self-ascription and group definition that necessitates the maintenance of the construction of an inferior Other(Farley,1985; Edwards,1988; Lather,1989). From a pedagogic perspective, we need to recognize the dual nature of discrimination in which both the aggressor and the `victim' require equal consideration in our curriculum and school structures, and where the aggressor instead of the `victim' comes to be perceived as marginal.

As Orchard states,

*the problem is that many of the values
passed to today's parents by their own*

*mothers and fathers embodied the beliefs
and prejudices of earlier generations*

where the mythology of an homogeneous society with its stringent binary delineation between 'normality' and 'deviance' was carefully nurtured via social, political, legal and educational institutions, discourses and practices(1994:4; see also Tajfel,1982; Schur,1983; Kitzinger,1987). With the ongoing deconstruction of these public sites of regulation of meanings comes the gradual, perhaps generational, shifts in private thinking and behaviour.

For example, educational institutions are acknowledging that the abstract concept of prejudice does not signify only racial prejudice; that sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism and homophobia are all specific forms of prejudice that situate difference from some socio-culturally constructed oppressive norm. Difference is thus positioned as deviant, inferior, wrong, and justification for economic, political and other inequities(Pettman,1992). Ethnic, gender, racial and sexual landscapes of marginality are increasingly being acknowledged as connected within the frameworks of social justice and anti-discrimination.

*Today we recognize the value of
strengthening self-esteem in young
adults no matter what their race,
class or disability might be. So too
should we seek to strengthen self-esteem
with regard to sexuality*

(Human Rights Foundation, 1984: 5).

Deconstructive and interventionist strategies have been and are being advocated and implemented in educational institutions in relation to disability, race, ethnicity, class and gender. What appears to be occurring, however, is what I define as a new construction of binary opposition and hierarchical dualism. On one side, there are:

a) the prejudice considered "safe-to-challenge"(the majority agrees this is an unjustifiable prejudice so there is minimal personal, social, professional risk) and;

b) the prejudice considered "appropriate-to-challenge" (the major public institutions including religious institutions have finally arrived at a point of understanding and support in challenging these prejudices).

These prejudices constructed as "safe-to-challenge" and "appropriate-to-challenge" can be incorporated without repercussion in classroom curriculum and methodology and as part of the school structures and culture. Indeed, the

challenging of these prejudices is now considered so mainstream that an educator is not seen to be fulfilling important pedagogic objectives unless those prejudices are adequately voiced and analysed.

On the Other side, there are:

a) the "inappropriate-to-challenge" prejudice(the major institutions have not yet understood or supported the challenge to this prejudice and indeed may still be justifying its maintenance) and;

b) the "unsafe-to-challenge" prejudice(proponents are risking social, personal and professional ostracism and ridicule and thus becoming marginalised).

I am proposing that this new form of hierarchical dualism can and should be resisted and challenged. Using the English classroom as a site for resistance and interventionist strategies, this paper will illustrate how homophobia and AIDS-phobia can be addressed alongside and integrated within the overall thematic landscapes and narrative treatments of prejudice and social injustices. Martino's position in relation to sexism in English education can be extended to incorporate sexuality and AIDS education:

through the types of texts that teachers choose and through the reading[and response] practices that they promote, an attempt can be made to address the sexual politics involved in the positioning of men and women as binary opposites(1994:2).

Providing a "cultural space" for the analysis and dismantling of both mainstreamed and marginalised prejudices, and the provision of alternative systems for making meaning, can render the English classroom a site of resistance and empowerment. Multiple ways of knowing, feeling and experiencing the world's landscapes of marginality and the basic interconnectedness between them in terms of human oppression, suffering, and modes of resistance, can be accessed for children. Students' own issues of personal identity and subcultural group marginality can be examined and connected to those of others as socio-cultural constructions and historical formations.

In establishing one's English class as interventionist and deconstructionist in relation to prejudices, three processes of textual selection can be considered: the choice of text, the choice of writer, and choice of student response. All three are catalysts to making available to students reading, reflecting and self-mapping positions on the landscapes of marginality and prejudice.

a)Choice of text: does the text position the reader to be critical of characters, language and plots that represent and normalise oppressive marginalisation and discrimination; does the text position the reader to sympathise and empathically connect with characters and situations of experiencing, as victims and/or resisters, marginality and discrimination?

b)Choice of writer: what is known of the writer's subjectivities as producer of the text; what connections can be made between the writer's lived experiences within a particular historical, socio-cultural landscape; the historical and socio-cultural landscape of the text; and the historical and socio-cultural landscape of the reader?

Ignoring the sexuality of a literary figure destroys "*legitimate cultural recognition of alternative modes of living and loving, and perpetuates cultural lies and misleading literary interpretations*"(Follett in Harris, 1990:53). It has become standard practice to discuss the significance of a writer's gender, race, ethnicity, geographical and historical location and yet a writer's sexuality is often silenced or seen as of no textual relevance(Pallotta-Chiarolli,1993a).

c)Choice of student response: how can the invitations to respond to the text be constructed in ways that will enable the reader to embark on a journey into one's own emotional, psychological and social landscape; how can the invitations to respond to the text be constructed in ways that provide a comfortable context within which students can undertake such self-exploration without necessitating self-disclosure.

Harris believes written responses provide the widest range of possibilities as writing is predominantly a personal task where knowledge of the written material can be restricted to a dialogue between teacher and student, thus making it easier "*to neutralize the potency of peer pressure*" that can become problematic in oral work(1990:51). Nevertheless, structured and distancing oral activities such as role plays and oral media analyses can also be useful.

Before these questions can be examined by using specific examples of textual analysis in relation to sexuality and AIDS, three further points need to be addressed. First, it appears that the integration of AIDS and homosexuality into the English curriculum as part of and connected to the wider framework of prejudice and social justice is a more successful strategy than a separatist approach based

on specific lessons and a specific thematic focus to a text:

our aim in deciding to tackle concepts of sexuality in our teaching can never be fulfilled merely by choosing to read a play with a lesbian theme...if it is the sole occasion when that issue is raised and if the underlying basis of all their other work is...[heterosexist]. The task is surely to develop a perspective which reflects upon all the work we do, so that countering and diffusing heterosexism and homophobia become, as with racism and sexism, a principle and an objective upon which all our practice should be rooted. Clearly, this does not mean it has to be mentioned constantly. But once it forms part of the philosophy underpinning our pedagogy, it will inform what we teach, why we are teaching it and the methods used in that teaching

(Harris, 1990:38-39).

As I will demonstrate with **To Kill A Mockingbird**, a text does not even have to have a gay or AIDS-related theme to be useful in exploring these socially-constructed marginalities.

Students are encouraged to situate AIDS-phobia and homophobia within the parameters of human experience of oppression and marginalisation rather than positioning these prejudices as outside or deviant from the 'usual' prejudices and thus being able to detach themselves from these 'alien' people. It also means that students who may not have intimate knowledge or experience of persons who are HIV positive and/or homosexual/bisexual are still able to empathise through the commonality of human experiences. Harris also points out another benefit of raising issues of homosexuality through the novel as being

the intimate thoughts and emotions of a lesbian or gay person can be presented and discussed without a real person risking the possibility of any kind of negative responses(1990:50).

Thus, students have access to these thoughts and emotions and are able to make connections in relation to the wide spectrum of human feelings such as love, sadness, grief, anticipation, fear, joy, warmth.

The second point that needs to be addressed is the position of the teacher. "As educators, your own feelings and beliefs will have a great influence on how your students respond to discussions of homosexuality" and

AIDS(Human Rights Foundation, 1984: 10). In his study of school counsellors and prospective teachers, Sears found that many often expressed the feeling that they should be *"more proactive and supportive as professionals"* but due to their own countervailing *"high levels of personal prejudice, ignorance, and fear, the realities of their professional intervention and support were negligible"*(1992:29). As with any prejudice or other theme explored in the English classroom, recognition and articulation of one's subjectivities, lived experiences and present position along the explorative journey act as sign-posts and pit-stops for students along the way. The teacher is situated as facilitator fostering educational interchanges and a context in which students can express individual and collective identities. However, a teacher who offers no opinions or information, thereby adopting an extreme position of supposed objectivity, will not make for freedom of debate and is ignoring the clear responsibility to articulate anti-discriminatory views. Comments and actions of some students which may adversely limit the space of other students to participate and contribute require interventionist strategies on behalf of the teacher.

Third, resistance from students, parents and other staff may be forthcoming, particularly framed in the accusations of "promoting homosexuality" and being "anti-heterosexual". The first two points above will assist in dealing with these, especially if the emphasis is on discussing the general themes of social injustice, marginality, prejudice and discrimination, and lesson plans exemplify this integration through a variety of texts and student response activities. Thus, as Harris explains,

such a stance in no way involves becoming 'anti-heterosexual', any more than the adoption of an anti-racist position requires or, indeed, benefits from becoming 'anti-white'. It is merely those dominant attitudes of exclusivity and tacit supremacy of heterosexuality which are under fire, not those who themselves are heterosexual(1990:38).

Thus, exploring and resisting one marginality is not intended to construct another marginality(Pallotta-Chiarolli,1993b). Another factor which makes the introduction of AIDS and sexuality issues into the curriculum less problematic is the teacher having already established his/her credibility with the administration, peers, students and parents, and sound working and personal relationships having been established with students. This often takes a few years at one school and

I realise that in today's economic and administrative circumstances, being at one school for several years is not the kind of "luxury" available to many teachers. Nevertheless, what also appears to be helpful is the coming into a new environment establishing one's goals and expectations, such as a non-sexist, non-racist, non-heterosexist classroom environment, from the start.

Students can also be encouraged to clarify the difference between voicing a personal opinion or preference, and voicing a prejudice and oppressing others.

He[Colin] knew that men sometimes fell in love with each other and that it was called being gay. The idea had never worried him that much, though he didn't think he ever would himself

(Gleitzman, 1989:103).

This quotation provides examples of language use and attitude construction in verbalising one's own position in terms of gay sexuality. Colin acknowledges the reality of gay relationships without adopting a condemnatory or persecutory stance toward others while simultaneously acknowledging that it is not a personal need, desire or inclination. Students must feel free to voice a personal opinion and be taught how not to allow that personal opinion to become destructive and persecutory- a prejudice. Resistant parents and staff members can be assured that AIDS and sexuality issues will be presented under the common educational framework of: respect for others, the need to be validly informed before adopting a position, and understanding the difference between holding a personal opinion or value and the condemnation and persecution of others who do not adhere to our opinion and value. I found that very few parents, staff or students actually resisted my implicit and explicit incorporation of AIDS and homosexuality into my classes if framed by these common pedagogical aims for students' personal and social development.

I will now present three examples of textual analysis that illustrate how homophobia and HIV/AIDS-phobia can be integrated into the English classroom as part of the study of prejudice and marginality. I will discuss the use of a main reading text, possible related texts and student responses. The texts are quite different in style and emphasis in relation to positioning AIDS and sexuality in the narrative, in the lives of the writers, and in the sorts of spaces they provide for student response and identification.

For the purposes of this paper, I have not discussed available reference and factual material that can augment

literary studies. Useful materials prepared for other subjects such as Health are available (e.g. Human Rights Foundation, 1984; Catholic Education Office, 1987; New Internationalist, 1989; Rensch, 1990; Clyde and Lobban, 1992).

Someone You Know (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991), recommended for senior secondary students, is a biographical/semi-autobiographical contemporary multicultural and multisexual Australian narrative dealing overtly with AIDS and homosexuality as the main focus while exploring the themes of interpersonal relationships, death and dying, and social marginalisation. Issues of gender and ethnicity are also raised.

Two Weeks With the Queen (Gleitzman, 1989), recommended for junior to senior secondary students, is a fictional narrative of contemporary Australia and England dealing with AIDS and homosexuality as a significant sub-plot to the main narrative of a boy searching for the best doctor in the world to cure his younger brother from terminal cancer. The themes of familial relationships, friendships, death and dying, and the experiences of childhood frame the narrative.

To Kill A Mockingbird (Lee, 1960), recommended for middle to senior secondary students, is a classic novel studying racism and social hypocrisy in the southern United States of the Thirties. HIV/AIDS is beyond the time frame of the novel and homosexuality is not overtly addressed. However, elements of its characterisation, when connected to the biography of its writer, and further connected to the Nineties context of its present readers, provides an inviting landscape upon which to situate homophobia and AIDS-phobia within a textual reading and interpretation.

Someone You Know: Connecting Differences

The autobiography/biography **Someone You Know** is a journey across the landscapes of two supposedly different people. Jon is in a gay relationship, from an Anglo-Saxon, Seventh Day Adventist background. Maria is a feminist, married, and from an Italian-Catholic background. They are teachers at a single-sex Catholic boys' school in Adelaide, South Australia.

Despite, and perhaps because of, their uniting and yet specific differences from the mainstream, and their uniting and yet specific differences from each other, and framed by the religious setting of the school and the ethnic and gay subcultural settings of their worlds outside the school, they become strong friends. Their various landscapes of marginality begin to connect and interweave. This interweaving becomes a far more complex tapestry as Jon discovers he has AIDS, and Maria discovers she is pregnant. The book follows their interwoven journeys to birth/death (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994).

Thus, **Someone You Know** is certainly about AIDS-phobia and homophobia situated alongside other marginalities based on gender and ethnicity within the wider, more commonly discussed thematic frameworks of marginalisation and subcultural identification, ignorance and discrimination, love and friendship, death and dying, parents and children, teachers and students, religious dogma and spirituality.

Students are invited to consider the injustices of AIDS-phobia and homophobia as seriously and sympathetically as they are encouraged to consider racism and sexism. Homosexuality and AIDS are dealt with as specific themes as well as being incorporated into daily classroom discussions and activities on the other abovementioned themes. A major connection of the marginalities of sexuality, ethnicity and gender can be explored in the theme of personal identity and agency against restrictive norms. Many students will empathise with the fears and questions inherent in challenging social, familial, institutional prescriptions and ascriptions of what one is meant to be, of how one is meant to think, feel and behave. Should one "come out" and be one's true self and risk social alienation? Does one maintain a constructed identity in order to "fit in"? Girls and boys who resist limiting gender stereotypes, students of non-English-speaking and Aboriginal backgrounds who resist the negative stereotyping of their background cultures, can

locate themselves as having experienced some form of marginality and prejudice. Indeed, **Someone You Know** presents examples of challenges to gender stereotypes and challenges to negative ethnic images. The links between ethnic and gay-identity formations are quite significant, as the protagonist Jon states: "*We're a couple of chameleons, changing colours to survive*"(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991:21; see also Epstein,1987). Matteo, a gay man of Italian background, is a character who explores the successful intersecting of ethnicity and sexuality in his personal identity, albeit at the cost of having chosen not to come out to his parents. The book also presents alternative and diverse perspectives to the stereotypical images of migrant cultures and ethnicity, as in presenting some Italian migrant parents as non-homophobic and indeed respecting and caring for the gay friends of their daughter(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1992).

The following extract from the book introduces a related text that can be used by teachers.

Jon sat on the desk, picking up my anthology of Eliot's poetry. 'I can identify with so much of what he wrote. Especially Prufrock.' He leafed through the book until he found the poem. 'I feel like Prufrock sometimes: restless, afraid, misunderstood.'(Pallotta-Chiarolli,1991:12-13).

For senior students, the poetry of T.S. Eliot, particularly his character J. Alfred Prufrock, is a powerful analysis of marginality and social alienation that can be imbued with diverse specific meanings. As a gay man, Jon often felt the eyes fixing him "*in a formulated phrase*", often felt himself "*sprawling on a pin...pinned and wriggling on the wall*", as his sexuality was used by many to define, objectify and deny him fundamental human rights such as the right to love and be loved, the right to family unity, the right to self-integrity and social acceptance, the right to a meaningful vocation in life. How many other marginalised persons in our society, indeed how many of our students, can relate to Eliot's metaphoric representation of social scrutinisation and judgment?

The constant "*decisions and revisions*" regarding whether to disclose his homosexuality and later his AIDS status or construct identities palatable to others were summarised by Prufrock's question, "*Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?*"(Eliot, 1974:13-17). Again, this analogy of "disturbing the universe" is one that many readers can relate to in terms of personal identity construction and resistance to societal and other norms.

Other texts that allow for the connecting of marginalities may include **To Sir With Love** by E.R. Braithwaite(1992), an autobiographical narrative that was also made into a successful film of a black teacher in a London school in the Sixties who challenges his students' many prejudices borne out of ignorance; and **Night Kites** by M.E. Kerr(1986)where the brother of the main character is gay. When Pete is diagnosed as having AIDS, Erick, his parents and his friends all have to make adjustments in their thinking and their attitudes.

The forthcoming film **Philadelphia**, starring Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington, about an HIV-positive gay man fired from his employment, and his lawyer's need to come to terms with his own homophobia and AIDS-phobia, also promises to be a worthwhile visual text of connection. It would be interesting to situate the film historically: AIDS and homosexuality are marginalised in the Eighties whereas earlier decades would not have seen an Afro-American and a woman as lawyers in the film. Thus, shifts in socio-cultural constructions of what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable could be examined here.

Michael Callen's songs on his album **The Flirtations**, "Everything Possible" and "Love Don't Need a Reason", examine the ideal situations of raising children without prejudices and with much self-esteem. No matter in which form it manifests itself, love is presented as an emotion and form of inter-connecting that should be celebrated.(See Appendix A for song lyrics). Madonna's songs from her album **Erotica**, "Why's It So Hard" and "In This Life", examine the issues of AIDS and sexuality and can be effectively related to **Someone You Know**.(See Appendix B for song lyrics).

Here is a list of questions related to **Someone You Know** that can be presented to students in various forms and which successfully allow them to situate themselves in positions of empathy:

- * What are the ethnic, gender, gay and AIDS stereotypes the book challenges?
- * What could have been said, done or changed by others at various points of Jon's life to prevent his suffering as a gay man and as an HIV-positive man? Explain what you would have done as some of these characters.
- * Are there differences between homosexual and heterosexual love and relationships? What are the common anxieties, joys, fears and expectations?
- * Analyse Maria's feelings as she realises she is "sleeping in a room with a person who probably has AIDS". How would you feel? Why?

- * What sorts of parent-child relationships are presented in the book? Is your situation reflected in the book? How?
- * Who do you think will cope best with Jon's death? Is it his parents or his friends? Explain your answer.
- * How did you feel reading about Jon's death? Has someone you loved died? How did you feel? Do you think there is something particularly significant about AIDS-related illnesses and death?
- * What questions have arisen for you from this book? What have you learned? Is there something troubling you?
- * Why did Maria write this book? Why did the other "characters" allow her to tell their stories?
- * Why is the book called **Someone You Know**?
- * How do you think AIDS might impact upon your life?
- * Do you have prejudices against some people in our society? Why or why not? What do you think will shift those prejudices?

Students' written responses showed how valuable the text had been in providing space to become informed about and empathise with issues rarely discussed sensitively or seriously. Many could also make connections between various landscapes of marginality, including their own. The following quotations are samples from my own Year Ten and Eleven students, and from letters received from students from other South Australian schools:

I have never had a father but I certainly wouldn't argue if Jon was my Dad.

*I can now relate the prejudice that Anne Frank was subjected to for being Jewish, the prejudice Steve Biko felt from the white South Africans in **Cry Freedom**, to how Jon felt about his disease and his sexuality. He, like Anne Frank and Steve Biko, was faced with society's negative views about differences.*

I think it's great that books like this are written for it gives naive people like myself an insight into another person's life and how society's views affect them.

I am now more aware of what is happening around me. I don't regard homosexuality as a disease anymore or a disorder. I just see it as a characteristic of a person, like black skin or being Vietnamese.

I was a bit afraid of speaking about this topic in front of the class but once you got used to using the words and no one was paying you out or using

the words to crack pathetic jokes, it was good.

The novel was a true story and happening here in Adelaide so it's like in your own backyard, not far away.

When we are about to die there is no different colour, races or beliefs, majorities and minorities. We are all on an equal footing, no matter what walk of life we came from.

After I finished the book, I wondered who do I know that is going through a secret hell?

Coming out is not only relevant for gays and lesbians. It's about all of us saying who we are. Coming out about many things like sexual abuse, rape, etc. I grew up with a secret too but I'm slowly coming out of the shadows.

I have a gay teacher and the book's taught me about some of the hurts he's probably going through- we're not supposed to know he's gay.

Made me think of this poem in one of my mum's ancient books- 'Before you shake your head/ Think if it was your child instead.'

I must admit, I had a pretty different picture of Italian families. You know, American mafia types.

My father recently died of cancer. I could really relate to the book because it was about my feelings and those of my Dad's that some people can't understand or don't want to talk about.

It made me think twice about the way I talked and joked about AIDS sufferers.

I didn't think much about gay people before, I didn't want to think about AIDS before, but this book made me want to think more and talk to my friends about them. It even made me think that I don't have to have a marriage like everybody else's if it doesn't suit me. I was always worried about what feminists were like too. I think I'm one and that's why some of the guys don't want to know me.

And I must add the anonymous message on my answering machine at about midnight when a gruff, adolescent boy's voice declared:

I'm ringin' cos I just finished yer book about AIDS and poofers- uh, gay men- and it's made me do a lotta thinkin' and I feel like a fuckin' shit for havin' bashed one. It sure won't happen again. Yeah, well, thanks.

Two Weeks With the Queen: Simplifying the Complexities

Colin Mudford's younger brother Luke has terminal cancer and Colin's parents decide to send him to London, England to protect him from the sadness of Luke's imminent death. Colin wants to save Luke, so he appeals to the Queen, tries to contact the best cancer doctor in the world, and comes to realise that being with Luke and loving him is the best he can do. His friendship with Ted brings him to this realisation. He meets Ted in a London hospital where Ted is visiting his lover Griff, dying of AIDS. When Ted is bashed for being a 'Queen', it doesn't make sense to Colin:

All the blokes in the world doing really mean and cruel stuff and getting away without even a smack in the ear and here's a bloke getting bashed up for being in love with another bloke(Gleitzman,1989: 103).

He supports both men with his simple unquestioning friendship and Griff's death shows him he wants to be home with Luke when he dies.

Homophobia and AIDS-phobia are both specific themes and part of the wider themes of love and friendship, death and dying, gender constructions of masculinity, childhood and growing up, perseverance and resistance, and parent-child and sibling relationships. As Dunne writes, the book

covers AIDS, homosexuality, gay relationships, poofster bashing and the politics of health in a manner that even the most Stalinist of the politically correct would have to admit is spot on(1992: 55).

The book simplifies complex issues for younger readers particularly through Colin's simple and often humorous wisdom of the ways of the world.

Peter by Kate Walker(1991) is the story of a fifteen year-old boy feeling pressured by his peers and society to conform to stereotypical male images. When he finds himself attracted to his older brother's gay friend, Peter is confused and horrified until he arrives at a point of self-acceptance, unsure of his sexuality but content to accept whatever it will eventually be.

Marginality due to gender constructions and adolescent acceptance of gay sexuality are two obvious connections to **Two Weeks With the Queen** as well as exploring parent-child and sibling relationships. In speaking at the Inaugural Queerlit Conference, (NSW Writers' Centre, July 1993), about how "a middle-aged heterosexual woman" could write about gay sexuality, Kate Walker stated that one need not be gay or black or disabled to understand how members of those groups feel as the feelings of pain, frustration, anger, alienation and other emotions are universally human, just situated within specific contexts. Thus, it was while her marriage was "breaking up" and she found herself sitting in a public toilet panicking over a future alone that Walker wrote about the confusion and panic Peter experienced when facing a future as a gay man, and she has him suddenly affronted by this vision of the future in a public toilet.

Reflections of a Rock Lobster by Aaron Fricke(1981) is an autobiographical account of growing up gay. His experiences of prejudice at school and in the wider community are detailed, as are his successful challenges and resistances. Adolescence, family relationships, and gender constructions of masculinity are connecting themes.

The film **My Girl** with Macaulay Culkin and Anna Chumsky is also useful in relation to love and friendship, death and dying, gender constructions of femininity and masculinity, and children's visions and understandings of the world, life and death. Although there is no gay or AIDS-related component in this film, and although some of the other stereotypes it perpetuates also make for worthy deconstruction, it is successful in making connections in the abovementioned framing themes. It explores various constructs of marginality: Vada and Thomas resist gender-appropriate constructs; Vada's father is a mortician; Shelly, like Ted, is a "radical" adult who knows how to respect and value children.

Carly Simon's song, "It Was So Easy Then" and Adrian Mitchell's poem "Back in the Playground Blues" provide contrasting views of childhood- as blissfully innocent and carefree, and a painful time when marginal persons in the playground are targets for the school bullies. The experiences of Colin, Ted and Aaron can be related to these texts.(See Appendix C for lyrics and poem).

The teaching of **Two Weeks With the Queen** with a class of "low-achiever" Year Ten boys at a single-sex Catholic school proved how useful and necessary the incorporation of AIDS and sexuality into the English curriculum can be.

First, it is an easy novel to read and therefore accessible to students who would not see themselves as readers. Second, it provided opportunities for the students to ask questions and raise issues that did not have space in any other schooling context. Here is an example from my daily recordings of lessons:

Student: But why would a gay man need a condom if he's not having sex?

Teacher: explains the various meanings and methods of the term "having sex".

Student: Yeah, but they don't have anything to put, you know, it into.

The rest of the class is silent. It's obviously a genuine question and probably bothering a few others.

Teacher: Well, some gay men and some bisexual men, like some heterosexual men and women, and lesbian and bisexual women- well, basically some men and women in this world have anal sex.

The 'simple' explanation is greeted with genuine appreciation for the clarification.

As with **Someone You Know, Two Weeks With The Queen** was also useful in assisting students to articulate their own experiences of marginalisation, death and dying, childhood reminiscences. The honesty with which students discussed forms of harassment, parents with terminal diseases and gay members of family and friendship networks encouraged peer affirmation and the nurturing of a safe space in the classroom.

To Kill A Mockingbird: Making Boo Radley 'Come Out'

This is one of the greatest novels on childhood, prejudice and the damage created by social hypocrisy. The story is told through the eyes of Scout Finch, a six year-old girl whose father, Atticus, defends a black man accused of raping a white woman. As Grant writes, the "*love that dared not speak its name, in Alabama, was the truth that the white woman sexually desired the black man*"(1992:118). The novel also explores sexism as Scout is confronted by and challenges various feminising constructs. The themes of social hypocrisy, persecution and alienation when one does not conform to culturally inscribed norms frame the entire novel.

English is a "*good place in which to recreate and imagine experience*" said Medway(Harris, 1990:30). Today, **To Kill A Mockingbird** can be read, recreated, experienced and responded to in the exploration of the Other prejudices, homophobia and HIV/AIDS-phobia. There are two elements

that encourage this line of interpretation. First, the author Harper Lee is a lesbian writer and indeed Scout Finch is an autobiographical description of herself as a child. Recent research into Lee's life and associates such as Truman Capote examines Lee's sexuality as providing her with a great understanding into prejudice, marginality and social persecution (Grant, 1992). Truman Capote, the openly gay male writer, publicly stated that

Dill, the precocious boy who came to stay for the summer, was himself...Next door was a tomboy called Nelle Lee, and the two children would drag an old typewriter up a tree and pretend they were grown up, and writers (Grant, 1992: 117).

Second, the character of Boo Radley and the children's game of making him "come out" are open to interpretations that can raise the issues of homosexuality. Boo is referred to as the "phantom"- invisible, denied life and ordinary existence. The children hear gossip of Boo Radley having been part of "*the nearest thing to a gang ever seen in Maycomb*". The youths "*hung around the barber-shop*", went to nearby towns to attend "*picture-shows*" and dances; they gambled and experimented with "*stumphyhole whisky*".

One night in an excessive spurt of high spirits, the boys backed around the square in a borrowed flivver, resisted arrest by Maycomb's ancient beadle, Mr Conner, and locked him in the courthouse outhouse.

(Lee, 1960:16).

Was there more to Boo's homosocial activities with the boys? Why was it suggested "*a season in Tuscaloosa [mental asylum] might be helpful to Boo*"? Why did his father isolate him from the rest of society rather than allow him to do spend time in the industrial school? What did his father mean when he said Boo "*wasn't crazy, he was high-strung at times*"? What theme and symbolic representation could Harper Lee have been following in the narrative of the children wanting to force Boo Radley's "outing"? Was she really presenting another issue of sexuality that was also taboo in her day, her town? Just like a white woman desiring a black man was social taboo that needed resistance, was Lee covertly hinting that the sexual and emotional desiring of someone of the same sex, as she and some of her childhood and adult peers desired, was another taboo that also needed resistance? Yet, how could she weave such a theme into a book that was already on the cutting edge in its blatant portrayal of the injustices of racism and classism?

Certainly, there is no substantial evidence of Lee's specific intentions in the characterisation and narration of Boo Radley, and biographical research into her life is still in its early stage. Nevertheless, there is adequate material for introducing this interpretation of the text. In her attempt to make Harper Lee "come out", as she had "never given an interview" and lived as a recluse after writing the book, and in piecing together the biographical background to the story, the researcher/journalist Grant concludes:

the book's secret heart was not the trial of Tom Robinson or the racism of the old South but the obsession of Scout and Jem with drawing Boo Radley from his house. To be grown-up is to learn that ...some people have their own reasons for staying indoors(1992:121).

When introducing these issues as part of the study of **To Kill A Mockingbird**, students have been able to understand and make the connections, indeed enjoying the biography behind the narrative and seriously engaging in the debate over how feasible is it that Boo Radley could be positioned as a boy growing up gay. They have been able to connect between the landscapes of marginality and oppression as historically constructed in the southern United States of the thirties with their own contemporary world. Questions about how far society has progressed or not progressed in who it chooses to persecute and who has now gained hard-won acceptance make for interesting discussion. A creative re-writing exercise in terms of how would a writer like Harper Lee construct the story of Boo Radley as a homosexual youth if she were writing today, and would HIV/AIDS occupy a significant textual space, are useful and have proven successful. For example, would children today have a vocabulary that incorporates terms for homosexuality?

Here are some examples of student responses from a Year Ten English class:

From an early age our parents direct us to the group of people they want us to be like, and teach us who we should dislike. When we're older, we choose our own friends, and those friends tell us who to like and who to dislike. So your parents scare you about homosexuals molesting boys and then your friends make poofter jokes all the time and you have to laugh along.

Most of the time, prejudices and stereotyping is out of fear although most people are afraid to admit it. Why were the children afraid of Boo

Radley? Because of what they'd heard which must have been very exaggerated over time and because they might not have used the word gay or homosexual, the children never know what it was about Boo that people were afraid of.

I think Boo Radley could've been gay and even after his father stopped hiding him, he probably wanted to keep hiding himself. I think many gay people hide their feelings from the public and their friends. Most gay people feel left out of the community, not being allowed to participate, and yet wanting to. For example, in some communities homosexuals aren't allowed to go to church or play sports with other members of that community. Maybe Boo wanted to be friends with the children because he thought the children wouldn't know what being gay was so they couldn't stereotype him. And he only came out at night when he wouldn't have to face people.

People have prejudices because of the limited or bad experience they have. Whatever Boo did when he was young, he's been stuck with that stereotype all his life and they won't let him outgrow it. They may have only ever met one gay person, or seen stuff about the spread of AIDS on TV, and they judge everyone.

If Boo went to the boys' home, his ignorant father thought he'd meet more guys and become more gay. So he isolates him also because he's ashamed of his son. Like Jon's parents were ashamed of their son in your book.

I think Atticus knows about Boo but he doesn't explain it to the children. He just says 'there were other ways of making people into ghosts'. I guess you didn't talk about those things then. My Mum's explained to me about my Uncle and he and I are good friends.

I know it's another stereotype but even before we discussed it in class, I thought Scout was a lesbian because she doesn't like girlie things. And Dill is so short and puny and not masculine so I guess he fits the stereotype of a gay kid.

If Boo was gay, I don't think the Maycomb society would have known. That's why his father keeps him away from society. He doesn't want them finding out. But maybe he isn't gay. Maybe he's mentally

retarded. But then for some people that would've been the same thing.

Students were also able to connect their own experiences of marginality and as recipients of prejudice to those of the text:

I'm prejudiced against because I'm a teenager. Old folks and shopkeepers hate us because they think we're all out to rob or bash them. I always feel like I'm suspected wherever I go.

Yes, I am Italian and proud of it but it doesn't mean I have to act the way everyone expects Italians to act.

Students also gave perceptive insights into what was needed to shift their prejudices, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS and homosexuality:

I think it will take a little time but I think I will somehow get rid of my prejudice against homosexuals by trying to see what it would be like to be one and have the world against you. Like Atticus said, we have to get into their shoes to find out how life is really treating them.

If I were to get to know someone with AIDS or who is gay, I think I would be able to change my prejudice. Like Scout and Jem finally meeting Boo and seeing he's alright after all.

If somebody I really like told me they were gay and I never knew it before, that would prove to me that you can't tell who is homosexual and that they are no different to heterosexuals.

It's good to talk seriously about gays and AIDS and it helps break down my prejudices.

Students Come Out as Gay or Gay-Friendly

Ex-student: Your English lessons were so important to me. It was the first time I ever heard an adult say something good about how I was secretly feeling. But I couldn't tell you then. I was too shy and I thought the other guys might find out. But I kept reading and learning and now everything's alright.

Thanks for telling me about that book **Peter**. I like girls and I like boys. I think it would be great being bisexual but it's how everyone else will feel that worries me. I'm not going to say anything while I'm still at school here. I'm already a minority. I'm one of eight girls in a school of seven hundred boys, and I'm Asian. I think I'll leave my coming out till I get out.

Student 1: But if a boy is brought up with two lesbians as parents, how's he going to develop into a real boy? Who'll teach him football? You need a man around.

Student 2: (popular champion school soccer player) My mother raised me all by herself because my Dad left her when I was a baby. And I'm the school's best soccer player and I grew up with mostly women and that's why I reckon I'm also a nicer guy.

Student 1: I don't mind gays and lesbians but I don't think they should be parents. Their kids grow up weird.

Student 2: (a popular boy highly respected amongst peers) My auntie's a lesbian and she's raised my three cousins and some of yous hang out with them. Are they weird?

Student 1: I don't want to get close to anyone who has AIDS or knows anyone whose got it because I might catch it.

Student 2: (sitting next to him in class) Then it's too late, wacker. My mum nurses people with AIDS and I've been to her work and helped her. So you reckon I got it? Then you got it too!

Student 1: It's a poofers' disease. Aids-carriers should be shot.

Student 2: Just shut up! My sister's best friend is HIV positive. She got it from the first time she had sex with a boy. My sister's really upset. How would you feel if it was your friend?

These five examples from my own classes illustrate the power of interventionist strategies within the classroom. As the environment is made a safe space to discuss issues and affirm alternative ways of knowing and being, students begin to intervene into each other's discourses and "come out", permanently situating themselves in a

landscape that challenges the other students to re-situate themselves as well.

But Why English? How Does This Fit In?

English is the subject pre-eminently concerned with what it means to be a human being in relationship with other individuals, growing within a culture. By language we create the world that we need to know about, we come to know ourselves and others, we discover how to learn and how to make choices or judgments, and at the heart of these processes is responding to literature (Protherough,

Atkinson, Fawcett(1989) quoted in Harris, 1990: 27).

Many students see the English classroom as a place where "concepts and ideas of a contemporary nature can be aired and examined"(Harris, 1990:28). Thus, as I have illustrated from the above student responses, they tend to be ready for open discussion and positioning themselves in multiple alternative sites, particularly as English requires much personal and autobiographical work.

English teaching is never a neutral activity. As this paper has illustrated, in our choice and treatment of literature, we are making and communicating assumptions and judgments. We are representing, implicitly and explicitly, through what is voiced and what is not voiced, centre and marginal discourses and positions which may be social, cultural, political. An anti-heterosexist perspective must not only benefit lesbian, gay and bisexual students in the classrooms but also give heterosexual children the opportunity to examine themselves not only in terms of their attitudes and values toward sexuality but also to connect with their own landscapes of marginality in their own personal and social lives.

As Harris states,

If English is to be seen as 'encompassing the whole spectrum of human experience', then to consign any discussion of[HIV/AIDS and] homosexuality solely to the subject areas of Biology, Personal and Health Education or even Religious Education is to imply that it must somehow fall outside the scope [or on the margins] of 'normal' experience(1990:40).

To continue to ignore the relevance and importance of homosexuality in both the overt and covert school curriculum is to continue to allow lesbian, gay and

bisexual students to suffer from silence, isolation, and verbal, emotional, psychological and physical violence to one's personal identity formation. It is to stand back and allow the lived realities of a marginalised group in our society to be excluded, distorted and trivialised, even while as educators we engage in the discourses of anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, pedagogic responsibility. The specific application of those abstract discourses and ideologies reveal how we have internalised the socio-cultural constructions or feel disempowered to challenge them at this historical point in time, and we can compare our experiences to those of past educators who excluded or felt disempowered to challenge the marginalities based on race, ethnicity and gender. Unless we continue to collectively resist and intervene, the denial of basic human rights to people who are not heterosexual will continue to be constructed as the norm well into the next generations.

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See also:

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