

Experiences of female migrants in Great Britain and the USA as portrayed in literature

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf

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Competences and skills

By working with several extracts, the students enhance their **reading comprehension** and learn to approach texts in various ways. Competences such as **analysing, interpreting, presenting** and **writing** are trained. Additionally, the students practise their **speaking skills** in class discussions and broaden their knowledge of vocabulary. Students are also encouraged to express their opinion and **comment** on several issues.

M3 Worksheet – a vulnerable female existence

Annotations

- 1 **verging**: bordering, coming close to – 2 **(to) flounder**: have difficulties – 3 **gobbledygook**: incomprehensible jargon – 4 **OUP**: publisher Oxford University Press – 5 **flummoxed**: confused, perplexed – 6 **recusancy laws**: imposed punishments for those who refused to attend Anglican services

Language and style

1. Read the extract from *The Tortilla Curtain* by T.C. Boyle. Draw up a list of words, expressions and phrases denoting the hostile environment América is confronted with. Briefly explain the meaning of these phrases and what their connotations are.

Words, expressions, phrases	Explanation

2. Describe the style employed by the narrator and its effect on the reader.

Working with the text

3. Briefly describe the situation América finds herself in after having crossed the Mexican-American border. Use your own words as far as possible.
4. State which of the following character traits refer to América. Give reasons for your choice.



Feedback sheet for peer feedback of short presentations

Criteria	+++	++	+	Needs improvement (give reasons)
Content (comprehensive, detailed, convincing examples)				
Discourse (coherent, appropriate for the audience)				
Language (vocabulary, grammar, intonation and pronunciation)				
Body language (gestures, facial expression)				

Topic 5: Racism on a London bus

M8 Shereen Pandit – *She Shall Not Be Moved*



In the following excerpt from the short story 'She Shall Not Be Moved' the protagonist describes her experience as an immigrant woman on a London bus. The narrator is accompanied by her young daughter Mariam.

Anyhow, this bus finally comes, I put Mariam up alongside me, while I pay. Then I try to move her along into the bus ahead of me. Oh, we can't move. The aisle's¹ blocked by this huge woman, with a pram² in the middle of the aisle. She seems to be Somali, from her clothes – long dark dress, hair covered with a veil, like nuns used to wear, arms covered to the wrists, hands but face and hands showing. The driver shouts at me to move down the bus, only I can't because of the pram. I'm about to say to him, Well, get this woman to move out of the way – it's one of those modern buses with a special place for prams – when I see what the problem is.

There are these two women, sitting in those fold-up seats in the pram space. White, fiftyish, wrinkles³ full of powder and grey roots under the blonde rinse, mouths like dried-up lips – both of them. One of them's wearing a buttoned-up cardie like Pauline⁴ in East London. The other one's wearing a colourless crumpled and none-too-clean mac of some kind. The big-breasted, big-bottomed type. Both are strong enough in the arm to lift a good few down the pub every night.

They're sitting right under that notice which says: Please allow wheelchair users and those with prams priority in using this space. Which means these two are supposed to get up so the Somali woman can put her pram in the space left when their seats fold up. Only they're staring hard out of the window, pretending⁴ they haven't heard a word of what's going on, and if they did, it's nothing to do with them. [...]

There are two empty seats right opposite the women. They can just move over the aisle. I look hard at them, trying to will them to look around. They finally can't resist looking round to see the havoc they've caused. They're still trying

M9 Worksheet – racism on a London bus

Approaching the topic



1. Do research on the different ethnic groups living in London. Use the following questions as guidelines for your research:
 - Which ethnic groups live in London at present?
 - Which professions do they have?
 - How many of them are unemployed?
 - What are their living conditions like?
 - Are there many/not many interracial marriages?
 - Are most women employed or do they work as housewives?

Language and style

2. Name all adjectives and expressions describing people in the extract and describe their function.

Working with the text

3. Outline the conflict conveyed in the extract. Use your own words as far as possible.
4. a) Describe the constellation of characters in the extract. You are free to use a diagram with boxes and symbols to illustrate the relationships and attitudes of the different characters.
b) Discuss the constellation of characters with the help of your diagram and symbols.

Creative writing



1. Put yourself in the situation of the Somali woman. Imagine that she tells a friend of hers what she has experienced on the bus. Act out the conversation between the Somali woman and her friend in front of the class.

Discussion



1. Discuss the positive effects of tolerance and open-mindedness in a globalised society.

Topic 7: Discussion

M12 Task



Prepare a discussion in your class on the following question:

Being a female immigrant – what does it mean?

Imagine that the different female characters of the extracts in this material participate in the discussion. Decide which woman you would like to represent. The following role cards can be used during the discussion:

A) América (*The Tortilla Curtain*)

You talk about your fear of being raped by the men at the Mexican-American border and your life under the bushes. For you, being a female immigrant represents a nightmare compared to the peaceful life in your Mexican village back home. You have lost faith in the realisation of the American Dream. You would rather go back to Mexico than go on living like a rat in a hole.

B) Laylor (*Loose Change*)

You talk about the strange meeting at the National Portrait Gallery. You cannot understand why the young woman left abruptly without saying a word. She seemed a nice person full of empathy but turned out to be completely unreliable. You don't really know how to find your brother in London if everyone is so hostile towards you. For the moment, you have to get on sleeping rough.

C) Lulu (*God Help the Child*)

You talk about your childhood as an unloved daughter and about how hard life was for you as a black teenager in a household with a single mother. At school, you were bullied and insulted. You cannot understand why people are rejected on the basis of their skin colour. As you were born in the USA, you feel like an American and not like an African woman. All in all, you are traumatised by your experiences as a dark-skinned female African American.

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