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Heartstopper: Using Young Adult LGBTQ+ Literature in the EFL Classroom

Marta Revilla Rivas

Tutora: Sara Medina Calzada

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Marta Revilla Rivas   Universidad de Valladolid

ABSTRACT

Literature is one of the many useful tools that learners of a foreign language, English, in this case, have had at their disposal throughout history. Its position as a teaching tool of EFL is not firmly established, especially in the Spanish education system. This dissertation aims to showcase the benefits of using literature with teenagers, not only as a means to teach the language, but also as a way to teach values of acceptance, respect and diversity. Working with literary texts entails being able to introduce a great variety of activities and topics that can motivate students in the process of learning a new language and to mature as young citizens. Through the selection of a popular Young Adult comic book, *Heartstopper*, the present proposal aims to promote critical thinking, to teach students that there is beauty and richness in difference, and to firmly proclaim that everyone's gender and/or sexual orientation is valid and accepted in our society.

Keywords: literature, EFL teaching, language skills, values, LGBTQ+

RESUMEN

La literatura ha sido, a lo largo de la historia, una de las herramientas más utilizadas a la hora de aprender un idioma extranjero, en este caso, el inglés. Su posición como herramienta didáctica dentro de la enseñanza del inglés no está consolidada. Esta tesis pretende mostrar los beneficios de usar la literatura con los adolescentes, no solo como un medio para enseñar el idioma, sino para inculcar valores de aceptación, respeto y diversidad. Trabajar con textos literarios conlleva introducir una gran variedad de actividades y de temas a tratar, lo cual puede ser motivador para los alumnos que se encuentran en proceso de maduración personal y de aprender un nuevo idioma. La presente propuesta tiene como objetivo, a través del uso de *Heartstopper*, conocido cómic dentro del subgénero de literatura juvenil, promover el pensamiento crítico, enseñar a los alumnos que hay belleza y riqueza en nuestras diferencias y afirmar que la identidad sexual y de género toda persona es válida en nuestra sociedad.

Palabras clave: literatura, enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, destrezas lingüísticas, valores, LGTBQ+

Contenido

1. Introduction

"That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong."

F. Scott Fitzgerald.

English is one of the most spoken languages in the world and is taught in many different countries around the globe. There are many different ways in which language instructors carry out their lessons, but most of them nowadays coincide that English instruction is not merely teaching grammar, but also fostering communication among students of the language and native speakers, as well as portraying the culture of English-speaking countries. Furthermore, regardless of the education stage, English is part of an academic formation that aims to prepare students as people who will have to play a part in a larger community. Teachers, therefore, have an obligation to provide them with tools to navigate this journey successfully. Hence, the promotion of ethical values, such as respect, rejection of prejudices, and acceptance of diversity.

Literature, as a cultural product and as a medium through which values can be explored obviously seems like a gift for the EFL teacher, a perfect means to not only discuss these two features, but also to promote the use of the language while doing so. Surprisingly, literature still tends to remain outside the EFL curriculum. This dissertation aims to propose a way to introduce it into a class of fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Education. It is at this critical stage of teenagers' lives where educators can effect change. Teenagers are shaping their personalities at this point and dealing with complicated issues that, in many cases, are not discussed at home, so presenting certain topics can be crucial in their development.

By working with literary texts, the EFL teacher can work with students on some controversial topics, in the safe space that the classroom provides. Many issues are generally dealt with in educational contexts: race, ethnicity, sexism… However,

LGBTQ+ issues seem to be still strangers to the classroom. Not only that, but recent pieces of news also report instances of homophobic students boycotting talks dealing with LGBTQ+ issues in a high school (Rico, 2021). Spanish classrooms are still a place where homophobic slurs run rampant, as other recent piece of news has shown (Esteban, 2021). Furthermore, and in light of recent reports of violence against people of the LGBTQ+ community, teachers must take a stand and combat these noxious attitudes and behaviors issues from within the educational institutions.

Following these considerations, the following dissertation aims to show the importance of implementing literature in the EFL language instruction, as a means to develop both linguistic competencies as well as personal values. A series of activities that use literary texts as their main resource have also been included.

An overview of the objectives that this dissertation aims to achieve are the following:

1. To deviate from the traditional approaches that are currently being followed in EFL instruction, and to explore the possibilities that the introduction of literature can bring in the students' academical and personal growth.
2. To enhance teenagers' learning experience with the use of authentic resources—literature, posters, videos, among others—so that the students can see the importance and usefulness of learning English in order to establish effective communication with others.
3. To design a didactic proposal based on Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper,* in which students will consolidate grammatical and lexical aspects of the English language, as well fostering attitudes of respect of LGBTQ+ people, and ethical values that will prepare them to become more open-minded to differences, an essential attitude for their future.

In order to do so, the present dissertation will be divided into five parts. In the first chapter, a theoretical background that explores how to use literature in the EFL classroom will be provided. Its benefits and drawbacks will be discussed, as well as the criteria that should be followed when selecting an adequate text for the class. This section also offers a brief literature review of other works that deal with the same issue, that is, the use of literature

in EFL instruction. Following this section, a justification of the selection of the materials for this didactic proposal is included, with especial emphasis in how they can be used as tools to teach not just the language, but social values as well. The fourth section will be devoted to the contextualization of the didactic proposal, with different subsections for the objectives, curricular justification, evaluation, and methodology. Finally, a detailed description of each of the sessions is given in section four (an appendix containing the mentioned materials can be found at the end of the paper). To close this dissertation, some final considerations about the implementation of literature in the EFL classroom will be included, as well as some ideas for future development.

2. Theoretical framework

This first section of the dissertation will provide the theoretical framework with which the didactic proposal will be constructed. Here, the various approaches to language in literature teaching in recent years will be discussed. It will also explore the benefits that its introduction can bring into the EFL lesson as well as the difficulties that doing so might entail. A detailed explanation on how the texts should be selected will also be provided, as well as an overview of some recent studies that deal with the issue of literature use in the language lesson.

a. Approaches to literature in language teaching

The question that first arises is: what is "literature"? If we were to follow the Cambridge Dictionary, literature is defined as "written artistic works, especially those with a high and lasting artistic value." Merriam-Webster defines it as "writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest." Both definitions allow for different genres to be included within the field: poems, drama, novels, short stories, comic books, song lyrics and even newspaper articles. McRae (1991), in an attempt to clarify the subject, distinguishes between Literature (with a capital L) and literature (with a small l);

- Literature. For him, works of Literature would only include classical or canonical texts written by well-known authors and whose quality cannot be disputed.

- literature. By contrast, literature would encompass other types of writings that do not belong within the canon (e.g. song lyrics, articles, or comic books).

In earlier days, the main reason behind learning English, as well as many other foreign languages, was to be able to understand literature that was originally written in this language (Broughton et al., 1993). The English language was, therefore, a tool necessary to achieve a greater goal, and the only communicative intent was to establish a one-way conversation between reader and text. No expectation of communicating with real people—maybe some of those students fantasized about meeting the authors—played

a part in the language learning process. One of the traditional methodologies in language teaching that benefited from the use of literary texts was the Grammar Translation Method (Bobkina & Domínguez, 2014). Teachers following this approach introduced excerpts from literary works, chosen because of their authors' excellent use of grammar. In this type of approach, the only exploitable literature is that within the canon, and not any other type of text.

Literature remained somewhat present in EFL learning until the mid-part of the twentieth century, when its benefits began to be questioned. The study of classic texts started to be regarded as an ineffective method when used to teach modern languages. The fact that literary texts did not, in many cases, adhere to conventional grammatical rules rendered it useless as a learning tool for some authors. Students could not rely on it to achieve linguistic proficiency. At that time, a more utilitarian view of language learning was established, and curriculums began to be developed with linguistic studies as their bases, removing literature from the picture (Bobkina & Domínguez, 2014).

Specialists developed new methodologies, such as the Audiolingual Method (mid-twentieth century). This approach originated during World War II, within a military context, and the emphasis of language acquisition shifted. Understanding of words was no longer the main interest of a language learner, but rather being able to acquire structures and patterns that could be useful in a common situation, specially in a spoken linguistic exchange (Alami and Tavakoli, 2016).

It was not until the mid-1980s that the role of literature in language teaching was revisited and reconsidered. Bobkina and Domínguez allude to a general concern regarding the basic knowledge and reading skills exhibited by language students (2014). Gradually, basic literary texts were introduced. They were used as tools to teach study habits and the necessary strategies that the students would need for some of the courses, which were highly demanding (Gilroy-Scott, 1983). However, there was no consensus on whether the implementation of literature was beneficial or detrimental for the learners of a language. In her work, McKay (1982) provides a summary of some of the arguments that the opposing side brought forth in the debate. Some language teachers only regarded literature as a hinderance, an obstacle that prevented students to focus on grammatical aspects. For others, literary texts were considered to be too difficult, not only in terms of language, but also in the sense that it presented a new culture for language students. These negative views against the use of literature in the EFL classroom will be explained and debated in the following pages of this dissertation.

In recent times, education and teaching experts have advocated the study or use of literature as part of the foreign language curriculum, since "the reading of culturally authentic texts has become one of the central claims for curriculum reform in EFL teaching" (Bobkina & Domínguez, 2014, p. 248).

The question that consequently arises is: how should the teacher of EFL implement literature in their lessons? According to Paran (2008) there are four different approaches that can be followed, depending on where the emphasis is placed. This intersection illustrates clearly the four situations proposed by him:

Language learning focus

(1) *Literary knowledge and skills are focused on, but there is also a conscious focus on the lexis, grammar etc.*

(2) *Literature is used just as a text with no focus on literary values, literary knowledge, or literary skills*

Literary focus

No literary focus

(3) *Literature is discussed only as literature; any focus on language is on its literary effects*

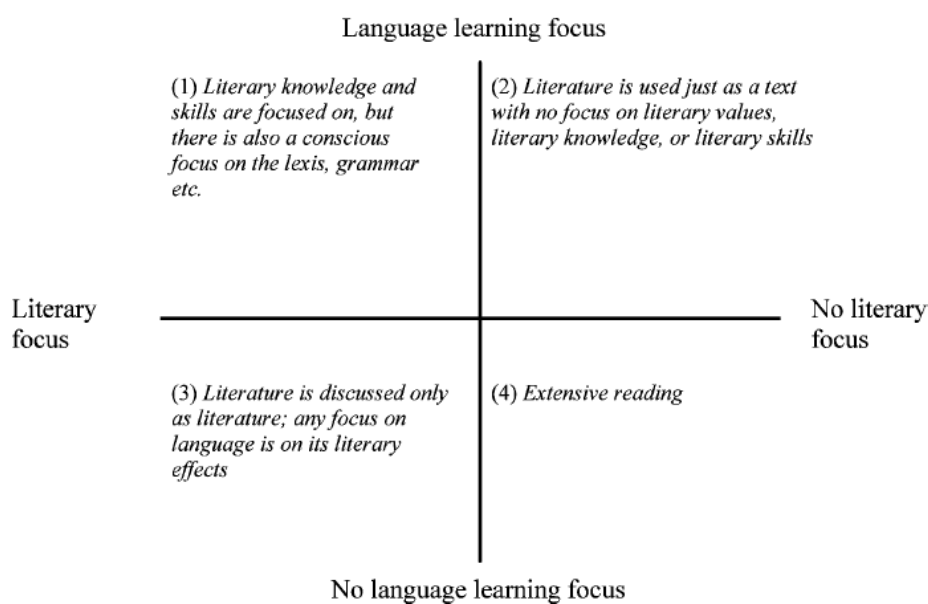(4) *Extensive reading*

No language learning focus

Figure 1. Paran's Intersection of Literature and language teaching (2008, p. 467)

As Paran explains, quadrant 1 includes an approach that seeks to focus both on literature and on language learning. In this type of instruction, both are equally important. Quadrant 2 considers literary text as any other type of text and no emphasis is put on their literary qualities. Quadrant 3 shows a situation where there is no language teaching intent, and the learner is assumed to be proficient enough in the language to be able to discuss it without difficulty. Finally, quadrant 4 exemplifies a situation of extensive reading, in which there is neither literary nor language learning focus. In these cases, students read so as to develop written text comprehension skills. Ideally, this would involve learners reading texts for their own personal enjoyment. According to Paran (2008, p. 467) "there

is often no reference at all to what is being read, and indeed, the reference may be to 'reading' or to 'books' rather than 'literature'."

The didactic proposal that will be developed in the following pages fits within quadrant 1, since it seeks to teach English as well as to discuss literary aspects and values. This seems to be the most comprehensive approach. Ideally, through the aid of proposals like the following one, students would develop a taste for literature and would choose to read extensively in their free time, thus developing reading skills on their own.

b. Benefits and difficulties of using literature in language teaching

As with any other methodology, there are different opinions regarding the effectiveness of using literature in language teaching. Although many scholars are not convinced that literary texts can be used as a tool to teach a foreign language, there are also many others that challenge those views and demonstrate the benefits that the introduction of literary materials can bring. Both beliefs should be considered when contemplating their use in the EFL classroom. In this section, the difficulties of doing so and its benefits will be explored.

Among the drawbacks of introducing literature in the EFL curriculum, Edmonson (1997) include the claim that literary texts have no advantage over other texts. He goes on to say that, if our aim is to teach students about culture, there are other types of texts that are better suited for this purpose. Furthermore, he adds that, since not all pupils have developed a taste for literature, what the teacher might consider a motivating methodology might be regarded as the opposite by some students. While this certainly might be the case in those instances where the teacher is out of touch with their students' interests, the reality is that, by asking their pupils, the teacher can in fact select a piece of literature that motivates most students.

Another difficulty considered by Lima (2005, p. 186) is that, in many cases, students will not have the linguistic, cultural and literary competence to understand the text selected by the teacher. Several scholars have also referred to the deviation from the linguistic conventions of standard English as one of the obstacles that might hinder students' understanding and enjoyment of literary texts, but Lazar (2009, p. 104)

interestingly sees this potential downside as an opportunity for teachers to help our students to "decipher (and enjoy!) many of the figurative uses of language."

In many cases, teachers, however, lack the necessary training to successfully implement literature in the foreign language classroom according to Paran (2008, p. 480). As Khatib and Rahimi (2012, p. 32) have noted, "some teachers use literature as a filler type activity and not as an integral part of the instruction." That is, in many cases, teachers decide to use a poem or an excerpt from a story as a way to introduce their lesson, or even as a type of activity to be carried out "for fun" and definitely not to be evaluated by the teacher.

In consonance with this view, Sánchez Herández and Peñate Cabrera (2003) have also argued that teachers should establish clear instructions for the students on how to approach the text. Additionally, instructors should also determine clear objectives, so that the pupils know what is expected of them. Unless these two aspects are considered, students will not feel obliged to read a text, or will do so begrudgingly. In this case, the only necessary requirement to solve the issue is that teachers invest their time designing a strategic lesson plan.

The two aforementioned difficulties of using literature go hand in hand with the scant instruction that teachers receive regarding the successful implementation of literature. In many cases, teachers only do their best with the tools that they have. Sometimes this results in teachers not feeling confident or even inadequate to use literary texts in the classroom. This seemed to be an issue in the early 2000s, and Paran seems optimistic in that the situation is changing and that newer generations of teachers are less concerned about their ability to use literature in the foreign language classroom.

In spite of the many obstacles that some authors see in the introduction of literary texts in the EFL classroom, there are also many advantages to be considered.

Paran (2008, p. 468-469) utterly rejects the utilitarian approach to language instruction, whose proponents claim that only the language business should be taught in the classroom. According to him, this type of methodology does not see the learner as a complex person, with interests, needs and motivations, but rather as a "language learning machine." Nowadays, the tendency seems to be appreciating any subject or methodology depending on whether it is useful or not when trying to find a job. This leads to the devaluation of many areas, such as humanities, and it is our job as teachers to eradicate

this view. One of the many ways in which we can do that is by making literary texts more accessible to our students in the EFL classroom.

Many authors have expanded on the importance of considering the language learners as individuals with varied personal life circumstances. For example, Bobkina and Domínguez (2014) highlight that the use of literature is an essential pillar in the personal development of student as individuals. This view is also supported by Langer (1997), who acknowledges that literature is a tool that students can use to make sense of their lives and their context, "allowing them to question, interpret, connect, and explore" (p. 607) and by Ghosn (2002, p. 176), who sees "the potential power of good literature to transform, to change attitudes, and to help eradicate prejudice while fostering empathy, tolerance, and an awareness of global problems." In this day and age, we daily receive a flood of news of hate crimes, gender-based violence and LGBTphobic aggressions, among others, and our role as mentors must be to combat those harmful views and tendencies in the best way we can, which is in the classroom. Therefore, the use of literature could bring benefits not only in the EFL context, but also in many areas of our students' lives.

What might be of special interest for language teachers is that literature also offers the opportunity of introducing authentic materials in the classroom. Teachers who use it, except in those cases where students are asked to read graded readers, challenge students with texts which are usually aimed at native speakers. Bobkina and Domínguez (2014, p. 250) see this as one of the main advantages of using literature, since it faces the student with a multiple linguistic registers, styles and genres, and is, therefore, an excellent way of approaching different social communicative functions. Through literature, the learners can be exposed to real language in a meaningful context, as underlined by Hill (1992) and Lazar (1993), among others, and they may receive valid and quality input.

For Lazar, and in relation to this point, the use of literature encourages language acquisition (2009). Since that type of texts usually is rich in meaning and interpretations, students will have the urge to share their opinions and feelings with their peers or teaching, thus having an authentic motivation to improve their linguistic skills. Furthermore, all literary texts offer the possibility of learning new vocabulary in context, while also encouraging students to infer the meaning of unknown words instead of using the dictionary to look up new meanings.

Moreover, if the texts are appropriately selected, they should be challenging but understandable, which is clearly connected with Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis.

Krashen (1982) argues that the input the learners receive should be i+1, that is, it should be comprehensible but slightly more advanced to their level. Definitely, literature can be an example of easily accessible input that is both challenging but understandable for our students.

Lazar also affirms that literature can expand students' language awareness (2009, p. 18). As we already saw, some of the detractors of the use of literature are not in favor of its use because grammatical or syntactical rules are often broken in literary texts. For Lazar, this offers an opportunity to encourage students to reflect and to be aware of norms of language use and what the author is trying to convey by not following said rules.

According to Lazar, literature can also help to develop students' interpretative abilities (2009, p. 19). The fact that literary texts can normally be interpreted in multiple ways requires that students be actively involved in deciphering the meaning of the text. This is a skill that can be useful for other aspects of students' lives.

Finally, and of special interest for this proposal, the use of literature in the EFL classroom offers a multitude of possibilities to teach students the language and to educate them as people (Lazar, 2009).

c. Selecting the texts

As it has been mentioned in the previous section, introducing literary texts in the language classroom can bring multiple benefits. Not only are we able to use novels, poems, short stories, comics, etcetera, to teach the language and foster communicative competence among students, but they can also be employed to teach culture, as well as attitudes and values that will accompany the students throughout their lives. In spite of the various gains that can be obtained through the use of literature, teachers must be careful when selecting a text, choosing an adequate piece of writing that allows students to fulfil their true potential as young learners of the language and citizens of the world.

Before beginning to consider what text to introduce to the EFL classroom, the students and their own personal circumstances should be considered. As Bobkina and Domínguez (2014) observe, the most important factor in the equation should be the

learner, not the text. Students are the ones who will have to engage with the texts and the teacher is merely a guide that will help them to fulfill their true potential.

One of the few things that most students of a group have in common is their **age**, which will be a decisive factor to take into consideration when selecting a literary text. Age is often linked with other factors such as interests, motivations, and level of reading expertise. Paran (2008, p. 488) notes that "learners might react well to literature that had been written specifically for their own age group." For learners of Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato, works of Young Adult Literature might be the perfect option. as it normally addresses issues that are pertinent to their interests and lives. Other variants that will also play a part in the choice of texts are students' intellectual and emotional maturity, the language employed in the text, and the cultural background necessary to be able to understand said text. It should be challenging enough for students to be motivated to continue reading and not feel discouraged or defeated.

One of the most relevant aspects to take into account when selecting a text is **whether or not it will resonate with the students**. If the teacher chooses materials that the students do not like or that do not seem interesting to them, they will not be able to connect with those texts and will not be motivated to engage with them in a critical way. The teacher should abandon the utopian belief that a single text will please the whole classroom and should, instead, try to reach a democratic consensus with the students and select materials with their approval. In addition, complementary texts or resources can be included in the intervention, as these can help reach all students.

Lazar (2009) mentions several aspects to bear in mind and that, in many cases, teachers overlook. Firstly, and, although it might seem obvious, it is important to consider how **available** the text that the teacher selects is. Students should be able to access the text easily online, buy a copy online or in a bookstore, or borrow it from the library.

Secondly, Lazar (2009, p. 55) mentions the **length** of the text. The teacher should determine how to implement the selected piece of literature: should it be a stand-alone session or a long-term project instead? Furthermore, the teacher should also be able to gauge how long the students will take to read the text, be it in class or at home.

Thirdly, **exploitability** is another aspect that the instructor should consider before the deciding upon a text, according to Lazar (2009, p. 55). The piece of literature selected should lend itself to various language activities as well as classroom discussions.

Lastly, the teacher should also consider how the text fits with the **syllabus** and what goals are being pursued when implementing a piece of literature (Lazar, 2009, p. 55). In the following section of this essay, I will illustrate how the selected graphic novel suits the curriculum.

As it has already been explained, literature can be a useful teaching resource in the learning of a foreign languages. In spite of the challenges, the multiple benefits that can be achieved are indisputable. If the teacher selects the texts appropriately and with a clear purpose, students will have the opportunity to develop their linguistic skills as well as their personal skills. All in all, this deviation from the conventional teaching can become an extremely enriching experience, not only for the students, but for the teacher, as well.

d. Some Previous Studies on the Use of Literature in EFL Teaching

The use of literature as a tool in language teacher has been studied by many researchers in the field of education. Researchers in this area are constantly trying new methodologies or approaches as the interests and necessities of students change and evolve. After all, the main aim of these scholars is to aid students in their learning process so that they can obtain better results and learn the language in a motivating way. Although the literature on this topic is vast and varied, providing an extensive review would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, three different studies will be illustrative of some of the approaches to the use of literature in EFL teaching:

In his study, "The use of comic book style reading material in an EFL extensive reading programme", Jones (2010) proves how the use of literature can enhance students' motivation to learn English. This experiment was undertaken in a course of EFL in a Japanese women's university. In this study, the texts used were selected from the Oxford University Press Graded Readers selection. The participants of this study read three starter level comic books, and were given freedom to progress to higher levels, if they felt confident enough. In order to discuss the texts, participants met once a week and shared their views in class for 20-30 minutes. The role of the teacher in these sessions was to observe and to answer student questions. In addition, students were instructed to complete a separate reading log for each of the texts that they had read, so as to engage with the

texts in a critical way. They were asked to write a summary of the text, with a brief description of how they had connected with the story.

What Jones's findings show is that the use of comic books did, in fact, increase students' motivation to learn English. In a survey conducted before the beginning of the extensive reading program, many of the students claimed that reading was "depressing because I'm not good at it" (2010, p. 233). In a latter survey, conducted after the study, the respondents stated that the use of comic books had helped them to understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Furthermore, the students also claimed to have enjoyed the experience and were motivated to read more books in English.

Ortells's study (2013) "Teaching English as a foreign language in Spanish secondary schools: The value of literature" aims to reflect on the situation of literature as an EFL tool in the Spanish education system, and to insist on its value as an instrument to teach young students. In her study, she interviews a group of teachers of Compulsory Secondary Education and asks them whether they use literature in their EFL courses regularly or not. Many of them state that they use it occasionally, and the minority of them inform her that they do not. After this initial stage, Ortells conducted a lesson with a group of teenagers, using diverse materials: poetry and excerpts from well known Young Adult Literature books, and a selection of excepts from canonical texts that dealt with issues such as ethnicity, sex, beauty, among others. What Ortells notes is that students showed great interest in her lesson. She reports: "they were entranced by all of [the texts] and extremely curious about what was going to ensue" (2013, p. 97). One of the weaknesses of this study, however, is that a single session is conducted and many more would be necessary in order to see whether the students' interest and excitement would last or whether this was merely due to the novelty of Ortells's didactic intervention.

Finally, Floris (2004) brings the attention to the EFL classroom in an Indonesian context. Her proposal uses poetry, more specifically "A Child's Sandal" (1998) by Agnes Lam. Her aim is to present a lesson plan with five different activities so as to aid EFL teachers who feel insecure about implementing literature in their lessons. A summary of each of them would be:

- Activity 1: students are asked to infer the content of the poem after reading the title.
- Activity 2: students are proven right or wrong after reading the poem.
- Activity 3: students must answer a series of questions about the narrative style of the poem.
- Activity 4: students are asked to link the contents of the poem to their personal circumstances.
- Activity 5: students are asked to produce a written piece in which they answer a series of question proposed by the teacher.

Each of these studies deals with the issue of using literature in the EFL classroom but approaching it in a different manner: using graded readers, poetry, reading journals, short excerpts, etc. What these studies have in common, nonetheless, is that they highlight the importance of teaching literature in the EFL curriculum, not only as a means to increase students' linguistic competence, but as a successful tool to increase motivation and to give them an opportunity to reflect on values. This is also the aim of the didactic proposal described below.

3. Introduction to the didactic proposal

This section will be devoted to the didactic proposal to be implemented in an EFL class, taking into consideration the aspects aforementioned. This section is subdivided into six sections: the context in which this proposal is to be implemented, the objectives that it seeks to achieve, a description of how it fits within the curriculum and the methodology to execute it, why the text has been selected, and a description of the sessions.

a. Selection of texts: why H*earstopper*?

In the first section of this dissertation, we established the difference between Literature (with capital L) and literature (with a small l). According to our definitions, comic books belong within the second category and are, thus, exploitable in the EFL classroom. One of the main advantages of allowing the students to engage with graphic novels and to work in follow-up activities is that,

> students will arrive at a better understanding of someone else's attitudes and opinions—even when intercultural issues are not directly present in the text itself. By changing their perspectives, students can attain socio-cultural knowledge, develop respect, learn to understand divergent opinions or habits … and eventually master intercultural interaction. (Hecke, 2011, p. 655)

The series of comic books that will be used for this didactic proposal is *Heartstopper*, by British author Alice Oseman. In September 2016, Oseman began self-publishing her comic strips in Tumblr and Tapas, where they can still be read for free. *Heartstopper* has, since then, become an internet phenomenon among readers of young-adult fiction. So great was, and still is, its success, that the comic began to be published as a series of printed graphic novels in 2018. Its adaptation into a Netflix show has been announced, and its release is expected sometime in 2022. Although the comic book series will be 5 volumes long, only the first four have been released so far. For this didactic proposal, students will be asked to read the first three, one per term. Since one of the aims

of the following didactic proposal is to promote reading for pleasure, it is my hope that students feel motivated to pick volume 4 and read it for pleasure on their own.

Heartstopper, volume 1, tells the story of two British boys, Nick and Charlie, who attend the same grammar school. Although they apparently have no interests in common—Charlie plays drums in the band and Nick is part of the rugby team—, they eventually become close friends and lovers. Charlie, a popular boy who is in year 10, is openly gay and is trying to quit an unhealthy relationship with another boy from school, while Nick, year 11, is slowly discovering that he is, in fact, bisexual and that he has feelings for Nick. His coming out journey is permeated with doubts regarding his orientation and, at the beginning it is not easy to show his affection in public.

Volume 2 elaborates on Charlie's and Nick's relationships, showing the reader how each approaches their families and friends to share the news about their romance. Both of them have supporting and encouraging families. Nick, however, has problems with his friends, who start to make homophobic remarks once they know that he and Charlie are friends. The reader is also introduced to Tara, Ellen, Aled, Darcy and Tao, Charlie's friends, with their own lives and stories to tell.

Volume 3 takes place at the end of school year, with the boys going on a school trip to Paris. Their relationship is established, and the reader starts to get a glimpse into their lives outside school, with their own personal issues and worries. Furthermore, this volume turns the spotlight on other LGBTQ+ characters, their friends, and other identities and sexualities are explored.

Having established that this graphic novel contains topics that will be pertinent top students' lives and concerns, it should also be mentioned that this graphic novel follows the criteria that Lazar put forth for selecting texts to work in the EFL classroom.

One of the reasons for choosing this story is its length. *Heartstopper* is an unfinished series, with four volumes published so far. The books are over 200 pages long, but they are not crammed with text, since most pages include few speech bubbles and not lengthy passages of text (see appendix 8). Furthermore, the language used is conversational, with easy vocabulary and grammatical constructions, and students with a good command of English should be able to read a volume in one sitting.

Hearstopper is also easily accessible. The graphic novel selected for this proposal can be found online for free as a webcomic so that students would be able to read it in an electronic device—tablet or smartphone—in class or in a computer at home. For those of pupils who have the means and who prefer reading in paper, the printed book version is easy to purchase online or in a physical bookstore.

Another criterion to bear in mind is the emotional and intellectual maturity of the students who will read this story. A group of 4º ESO has been chosen for this proposal. They would very much be able to connect with the topics explored in this graphic novel, since the protagonists of *Hearstopper* are the same age as them and probably share some worries and experiences.

As explained in the previous section, there are multiple ways of introducing literature in the EFL classroom and different approaches that a teacher can follow when designing and implementing activities. The goal of this proposal is not only to teach the language and foster communicative competence, but also to combat LGBTQ phobia, dispel stereotypes of LGBTQ people, show models of healthy friendships, and teach about consent in relationships, among others. Some of these topics are usually dealt with in school via occasional health and sexuality workshops. However, there are not enough talks dealing with LGBT issues in high school, and in some cases, these have been boycotted by homophobic students (Rico, 2021, April 21). All in all, sexual diversity does not have enough representation in Spanish high schools. LGBT students are often bullied and, although teachers try to foster an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance by carrying out symbolic acts, such as men wearing skirts to class (Esteban, 2021, May 2), this is not enough.

Since LGBTQ students often feel disconnected from school and consider it a place which does not welcome them (Clark & Blackburn, 2009, p. 26), one of the ways in which teachers can foster an atmosphere of acceptance among students is by the inclusion of LGBT literature in the classroom. The way in which the class and the texts are positioned will determine how the students interact with the texts and the results that they obtain. According to Clark and Blackburn (2009, p. 28) "when LGBT-themed literature is read and discussed on a single day or even in a single unit of the school year, such literature is positioned as nonnormative." For this proposal, students will read *Hearstopper* throughout the whole year, with several sessions planned throughout the three terms.

In addition, texts can be positioned as windows or mirrors. Positioning of texts is a complicated subject, as Clark and Blackburn (2009, p. 29) explain:

> when a text focuses primarily on an LGBTQ character, it is positioned by LGBTQ readers as a mirror, a way of seeing themselves. The same students, however, may position a text written from the perspective of a straight person struggling with his or her homophobia as a window into people who have the potential to affect their lives dramatically, positively and negatively. This same text, of course, may be positioned by non-LGBTQ students as a mirror.

What these authors propose is that students are encouraged to regard texts as possible windows and mirrors, to shift their perspective while working with the text, in order to foster tolerance and acceptance and fight heteronormativity and LGBT phobia. This will be done throughout the different sessions within this proposal.

As it has already been mentioned, it is important that the texts selected by the teacher resonate with the students so that they feel motivated and are willing to engage with the story. As I will explain in the subsection devoted to the context, this proposal could not be implemented with the group of students for whom it was originally designed. Therefore, no consultations regarding the reading materials were made. Instead, I have followed Clark and Blackburn's typology of LGBT stories and their reception among young students in order to select the texts for the hypothetical group.

According to Clark and Blackburn (2009, p. 29) there are three main ways of characterizing LGBTQ characters in literature. Firstly, the authors refer to stories of "homosexual visibility" in which the plot revolves around a character who comes out or is outed as non-heterosexual. These stories present homosexuality in contrast with a homophobic world and, in many cases, the characters experience negative backlash, bullying at school or rejection from their families and friends. The second type of LGBT narratives, described by Clark and Blackburn, are "gay assimilation" stories. In those instances, a LGBTQ character is depicted as being non-different from the rest of the characters in the story, apart from their sexual orientation. The third and final category proposed by Clark and Blackburn encompasses those stories which portray multiple LGBTQ characters with healthy relationship and supportive friends or families. In this case, the authors talk about "queer consciousness/community" or QC literature. According to the same study (Clark & Blackburn, 2009, p. 29), queer community stories

are usually those preferred by young-adult readers and students, since those help to "dispel the myth that being gay means being alone."

Although part of the plot of this comic book revolves around a boy who has never been attracted to other boys and who has never questioned his sexuality before, this story could be considered QC literature, since the overall feeling that the reader of this graphic novel experiences is rather positive. Negative experiences and hardships, such as bullying or rejection, are but not depicted in great detail in the book, and exploring the negative backlash that LGBT people face when coming out is not the main goal of the story. The focus of the author lies in showing how the relationship of these two teenagers grows from friendship into a romantic one, and how they support each other through all the insecurities and fear.

The final criterion to consider when selecting a text was to consider how it fits within the school curriculum. According to the core curriculum section of the REAL DECRETO 1105/2014, where the basic curriculum for Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato is established, educational administrations will foster the development of effective equality between men and women, the prevention of gender-based violence or against disabled people and will also promote values of no discrimination due to any condition or personal or social circumstance (p. 147). Although no specific mention is made to discrimination based on gender identity—understood as a binary in this gazette— or to sexual orientation in this section, it should be included within this list.

Furthermore, some of the Compulsory Secondary Education objectives, as stated in Article 11 (p. 176) are:

a) To responsibly assume their duties, to know and exercise their rights of respect towards others, practice tolerance, cooperation and solidarity among people and groups, to dialogue reinforcing human rights and equality between men and women as common values of a plural society, and to prepare themselves for the exercise of democratic citizenship.

c) To value and respect the difference between the sexes and equal rights and opportunities between them. To reject discrimination against people based on sex or any personal or social condition or circumstance. To reject stereotypes that represent discrimination between men and women, as well as any manifestation of violence against women.

d) To strengthen their affective capacities in all areas of their personality and in their relationships with others, as well as to reject violence of any kind, sexist behaviors and to peacefully resolve conflicts.

There is no specific mention of discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation in this section either. However, this should be considered as one of the obligations that we all have when promoting human rights, values of a plural society, rejection of stereotypes or violence of any kind.

b. Context

The circumstances that surround the teaching-learning process are very different depending on the number of students, the teaching hours received by the target group and the characteristics of the school. In order to plan a successful lesson or even a single activity, all should be taken into account. The following section describes the hypothetical context in which this didactic proposal would be implemented.

The state school selected is the IES Juan de Juni, located on the border between the city center of Valladolid and two residential districts—La Rondilla and La Victoria. Although most students attending this high school live in those neighborhoods, this center also attracts pupils from other areas, such as San Pedro Regalado or Barrio España, even Santovenia de Pisuerga, Cabezón de Pisuerga, and Valoria la Buena, according to the school website. This creates a very diverse student group, with pupils coming from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

The school prides itself in its interest in fostering language learning and offers two languages: English and French. IES Juan de Juni allows students to join a Bilingual Program (*Programa Secciones Bilingues*), which includes the allotted weekly sessions of EFL classes plus three other subjects being taught in the English, in this case. Students attend a total of 32 hours of classes in which English is the language of teaching. Teachers in charge of these groups must be in possession of a B2 certificate following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Furthermore, language assistants from English speaking countries are present to help both students and teachers in the lessons.

The present didactic proposal has been designed with a group of students of 4º ESO belonging to the bilingual program. This is not a very numerous group, with only 15 students of 15 or 16 years of age. None of them have learning difficulties and one of them is of Moroccan descent, with both Spanish and Arabic as her mother tongues. The classroom in which they receive their instruction contains an interactive digital board as well as a computer and a good sound system. Students are asked to bring their laptops, tablets, or to use their mobile phones when working on online projects.

This group was selected for this intervention because of their high degree of proficiency in the language, which would allow them to understand texts more easily and to be able to discuss them without much issue. In addition, the number of students in the classroom would also permit relaxed groupwork and whole class debates in which all pupils can participate equally.

Although this didactic proposal was designed before beginning the compulsory internship period of this master's degree, and with the intention of implementing one of the sessions with this group, its implementation was not possible. Nevertheless, it could be very well implemented in other groups.

c. Objectives

The two essential and general aims of this proposal are, firstly to improve students' proficiency in English and, secondly, to discuss issues of sexuality, gender, among others, to foster diversity and tolerance inside and outside the classroom. These two aims can be broken down into the following elements:

In terms of the students' **language training**:

- To broaden students' vocabulary. Although this story takes place in a British Grammar School, students will have the chance to acquire new vocabulary. This will become handy in their everyday conversations.
- To become acquainted with colloquial English. Although most grammatical constructions will already be known by the students, they will be able to see how many of them are broken when used in a spoken and, especially, colloquial context.

- To enhance students' communication skills. This proposal will include diverse activities which will tackle the four linguistic competences: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- To confront authentic materials. As it has already been mentioned, one of the assets of introducing literature in the EFL classroom is that it provides a unique opportunity to work with authentic materials. Students will be able to experience the "real" language. Since the materials suggested for this proposal are not adapted texts—unlike graded readers—students will be challenged with a piece of literature that has been written by a native speaker and with native readers in mind.

In terms of the students' **personal development**:

- To promote values of acceptance of other people's identities in terms of gender and sexual orientation. The comic book selected depicts the love relationship between two boys of the LGBTQ community and shows how their identities shape their relationships with their friends and family. It is of utmost importance for students to adopt a mindset in which discrimination against people who are different is not allowed, and instead people are celebrated for who they are.
- To teach students about healthy relationships. That is, not only in the romantic sense, but also with friends and family. Taking examples from the book, students will be able to reflect on their own behaviors and what makes someone a supportive parent, a good friend, how consensual relationships work, etc.
- To foster a habit of reading literary texts, both inside and outside the classroom. If the comic book suggested for this proposal is motivating and engaging enough, students might develop a taste for reading other comic books or other types of literature. Some of them might have always considered reading as homework and reading for pleasure can be a refreshingly new experience for them.

d. Legal Framework and Curricular Justification

The following didactic proposal has been designed according to the requirements for the curriculum of Secondary Education of Castilla y León, as specified in the ORDEN EDU/362/2015. The activities have been designed according to the learning requirements that appear in the section of this document devoted to 4º ESO. As it has already been

mentioned, this didactic proposal will be implemented in a group belonging to the Bilingual Program. The specifics of this type of group can be found in the ORDEN EDU/6/2006.

According to the ORDEN EDU/362/2015, the foreign language must be the instrument in the communicative learning process and the following didactic proposal has been designed with this conception in mind. According to the BOCYL speaking different languages is a key skill in our globalized world, and it shapes the way in which we understand it. Furthermore, it allows people to accept other traditions and beliefs, therefore enriching students' lives. The way to achieve this, in this specific context, is through the reading of a comic book, which is contemplated in the government gazette: "el uso de canciones, películas, historias y relatos que formen parte de la identidad ligada al idioma serán muy provechosos" (p. 32233). This is one of the few instances in which literature is suggested as a tool to teach the English language by the ORDEN EDU/362/2015.

The activities have also been planned with the intention of motivating students, as BOCYL mentions the importance of motivation in the foreign language classroom. The four linguistic competences will be considered in a varied list of activities: debates, watching videos, writing essays, roleplays, among others. By placing students in the center of the teaching and learning process, they become the protagonists of their own language acquisition journey. As a result, the teacher will remain as a guide, in the background, accompanying students and aiding them wherever necessary.

Finally, the activities proposed in this didactic proposal also seek to prepare students for their future as citizens of the world. Autonomy, creativity, and imagination will be encouraged throughout the different sessions. Critical thinking and an adequate use of technologies will also be fostered, so as to prepare them for their future, not only in the academic sense, but also in the professional and personal spheres.

The specific contents, evaluation criteria and learning standards for the comprehension and production of written and oral texts, as stipulated by the ORDEN EDU/362/2015 are as follows:

CONTENTS	EVALUATION CRITERIA	EVALUATION STANDARDS
Block 1. Comprehension of oral texts.		
• Formulation of hypotheses about content and context. • Sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects: social conventions, standards of courtesy, customs, values, and beliefs. • Communicative functions: formulation of interest, approbation, affection, sympathy, satisfaction, hope, trust, surprise and their opposites.	• To identify the general sense, essential information, and main points in short oral texts. • To know and use sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects of everyday life, life conditions, interpersonal relationships, behavior, and social conventions. • To recognize vocabulary pertaining to quotidian topics and general topics or related to own interests, studies, and occupations.	• 4. Understands, in an informal conversation, explanations or justifications of opinions and points of view of different matters of personal interest, everyday or less common affairs, as well as the formulation of hypotheses, expression of feelings and descriptions about abstract topics. • 6. Understands, with visual support, main ideas and relevant information in presentations or well-structured talks about known topics.
Block 2. Production of oral texts.		
• Expression of the message with	• To know and know how to apply the	• 1. Delivers short, well-structured

clarity, coherence and structuring it adequately, and adjusting, in this case, to the conventions of each type of text. • Narration of past events, present situation and future occurrences. • Establishment and continuation of communication and discourse organization.	adequate strategies to produce oral monologues or dialogues of short or medium length and simple structure. • To show good command of an ample repertoire of common syntactical structures, and to select the adequate elements of textual coherence and cohesion to organize the discourse in a simple but effective manner.	presentations, previously rehearsed and with visual aid, about specific topics organizing the basic information in a coherent way, explaining the main ideas briefly and clearly and replying to short easy questions. • 3. Participates in informal conversations face to face about habitual, or less common, affairs, in which information is exchanged and opinions and viewpoints are expressed and justified.
Block 3. Comprehension of written texts.		
• Sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects. • Written vocabulary of common use pertaining to	• To identify the general sense, essential information, and main points in short written texts.	• 3. Understands personal correspondence, in any platform, including blogs or online forums, where facts,

personal identification.	• To know and use sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects of everyday life, life conditions, interpersonal relationships, behavior, and social conventions. • To recognize vocabulary pertaining to quotidian topics and general topics or related to own interests, studies, and occupations.	experiences, impressions and feelings are described with a certain detail. • 7. Understands the general aspects and the most relevant details of fictional and short contemporary literary texts, which are well structured and in a standard variant of the language, with a lineal and easy to follow argument, and with clearly depicted characters and relationships.
Block 4. Production of written texts.		
• Planification: to mobilize and coordinate general communicative competences in order to effectively fulfil a task.	• To write, in paper or in an electronic device, short or medium-length texts. • To know and to use written vocabulary pertaining to everyday affairs and general issues, or related to	• 4. Takes notes and writes down messages with simple and relevant information about habitual affairs and specific aspects in the personal, academic and occupational spheres.

	personal interests, studies, occupations.	• 5. Writes, in a conventional format, brief and simple reports in which essential information about an academic or occupational topic is delivered.

e. Methodology

The didactic proposal explained in this dissertation consists of six sessions distributed throughout the school year. Depending on the reading progress of the students, activities will be accordingly distributed in each term. All the activities within this didactic proposal have been designed following two main methodologies: the communicative method and the ESA pattern.

- **Communicative method**. It is important to note that communication will be the main objective and basis of the teaching and learning process. The students will be encouraged to use the target language in the lesson and the teacher will act as a guide and a motivator. Students will be required to produce written and oral texts, and should feel that their contributions matter. Accordingly, they will also receive linguistic input with the teacher only speaking in the target language and with audiovisual materials in English, as well.
- **ESA pattern**. The Engage, Study, Activate method was proposed by Jeremy Harner (1998) as an effective way to teach English. Each lesson will consist of three phases. More than one activity can be proposed for each of the stages if the teacher deems it necessary.
    - o Engage. This first stage should include short activities that motivate students, in order to situate them in the context of the lesson. It should also

captivate the students' attention, so materials such as short videos, images or excerpts of recent news can be used.

o Study. This second phase is devoted to theoretical explanations. It is at this stage where students notice specific aspects of the target language: grammar, phonetics, etc. The teacher can choose to adopt an active role, leading the activities, or to allow students to investigate and find their own answers.

o Activate. Although students are always encouraged to use the target language, it is here where the students' communication skills are enhanced. They are encouraged to use what they have learnt during the two previous phases.

Although these are the two proposed methodological approaches, the teacher should, if necessary, adapt each session and activity to the needs of their students so as to achieve the best results.

f.   Sessions and Activities

In this intervention plan, the emphasis will be placed on literature as well as language learned, as suggested by Paran (2008) and explained above. Values, personal-growth and language will be considered when designing each of the activities. Furthermore, the four linguistic competences—speaking, listening, reading and writing—will also be developed. Finally, all activities will be undertaken following a communicative approach, and the ESA pattern will be followed, as discussed in the Methodology subsection.

i. Session 1

This session is meant to be implemented before asking the students to read *Heartstopper*. This should be done in the first term of the year, in September. The objective is to prompt reflection and discussion that might increase their interest when reading the comic book. This session also aims to make students aware of the little **representation** that LGBTQ+ characters have in media and why it is not enough. This session also fosters creativity, as they are asked to make up an introduction sheet for the two protagonists in the story.

Engaging Stage Timing: 10 minutes. Resources: digital whiteboard, smartphones, https://padlet.com/ Class organization: individual work.	**Description**: The teacher displays the following selected page of *Heartstopper* for the students to see on the board. Then, they inform their students that this will be a set reading for the course that year. In order to grasp their attention, students are asked to make predictions about the contents of the story. They are asked to share their views with the teacher writing a couple of short sentences and sending them to the teacher via Padlet. These will be displayed on the board, so that the teacher can inform them whether they are right or wrong.

Study Stage Timing: 5 minutes. Resources: pen and paper. Class organization: students work in small groups of three people.	**Description**: Once the teacher informs the students that the plot of the set reading is about two boys falling in love, they will be asked whether they know of any books, series, films, etc. with LGBTQ+ representation. This will be intended as a competition. The group that can name more examples wins. The aim of this quick competition is that they consider how much LGBTQ+ representation there is in media and how much of it they consume. This will be an interesting exercise of reflection for all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.
Study Stage Timing: 15 minutes. Resources: - Class organization: whole-class discussion.	**Description**: After summing up all the examples provided by students in the previous exercise, the teacher will have the students reflect on the following issues: - Do you see many TV shows with LGBTQ+ characters as protagonists? - Do you think there are many examples of LGBTQ+ protagonists? - Do you think that is enough? Why? Why not? - Do you think it is important to have LGBTQ+ representation in media? - What are the benefits of having LGBTQ+ characters?
Activate Stage Timing: 20 minutes.	**Description**: Students are asked to create character profiles for Charlie and Nick, the protagonists of the story. They will be

Resources: laptop, tablet or smartphone, https://www.canva.com/es_es/ Class organization: individual work.	asked to use Canva. Using this website, students will have to include the following information: - age - likes / dislikes - hobbies - preferred subjects at school - family - pets - fun fact about yourself There are no wrong answers in this activity. The aim is that students mobilize easy vocabulary that they learnt in previous years and that they increase their motivation to read the comic books.

ii. Session 2

Students should have already read the first volume of *Heartstopper* before implementing Session 2. This session should be carried out before the first school term ends, ideally around October or November. This second session will tackle **stereotypes** and assumptions of people's gender and sexuality. As it was already explained, combating them is one of the main objectives in Compulsory Secondary Education.

Students will use their critical thinking skills and will revise their own prejudices and assumptions. Furthermore, the four linguistic competences will be developed in this session.

Engaging Stage	Description: Students are shown an image where a girl is playing with stereotypically masculine toys and a boy with stereotypically feminine toys (see appendix 2). Students are encouraged to share their thoughts on this picture with the rest of the class.
Timing: 10 minutes. Resources: digital whiteboard. Class organization: whole-class work.	
Study Stage	Using volume 1 of *Heartstopper*, students are asked to find the different stereotypes that can be found in the book. Some will be stereotypes of gay people (p. 46 – "Does he even like sports? Everyone knows he's gay…"), of straight people (p. 122-123 – Tao Xu thinks Nick is straight because he likes rugby), etc. Students will be asked to produce a list of words or expressions of the stereotypes they can find. They will be asked to put them into a word cloud and to share them with the rest of the class. They are also encouraged to share other stereotypes that might not appear in the text but that are common in our society. A whole-class discussion on how those prejudices are harmful and dangerous for our society ensues.
Timing: 20 minutes. Resources: *Hearstopper* volume 1, digital whiteboard, laptops or tablets, https://www.wordclouds.com/ Class organization: group work (4-5 students per group).	

| **Activate Stage**

Timing: 20 minutes.
Resources: digital interactive whiteboard, computer, audio system.
Class organization: students work in pairs. | Students are shown the following YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCLoNwVJA-0
In this video, young Audrey tells an audience mostly comprised of adults about many experiences that they (Audrey) has lived as a non-binary person. They also talk in great detail about gender stereotypes, since people interact with Audrey in a different way when they read them as a boy or as a girl.
In pairs, they must take notes on the points explored by Audrey Mason-Hyde. They will be given a worksheet with questions on the video (see appendix 3). The teacher will collect the sheets at the end of the class and mark them. This grade will be part of the continuous evaluation. |

iii.   Session 3

Session 3 is devoted to one of the most important concepts that teenagers need to learn about relationships, be them homosexual or heterosexual. That is, **consent**. Since this session involves physical contact and a certain intimacy among students, it should be made very clear from the beginning that consent is not an issue to be debated and that no immature behavior or actions towards classmates will be tolerated in this session.

Engaging Stage Timing: 10 minutes. Resources: digital interactive board, smartphones, https://padlet.com/, *Heartstopper,* volume 1. Class organization: individual work.	**Description**: Students are asked to consider pages 78 and 79 of Heartstopper (see appendix 4). In these pages, Ben is kissing Charlie without his consent, and the latter is visibly uncomfortable with the situation. The whole class is asked to write a short paragraph or a few sentences explaining how Charlie is feeling in that moment. Students share their texts with the teacher and the rest of the class via Padlet. **Description**: The answers will be shown on the board and the whole class will comment on the issue of consent. The teacher will take this as an opportunity to teach new vocabulary (emotions that the students might not know how to name in English) and to introduce the grammar to be practiced in this session.
Study Stage Timing: 10 minutes. Resources: digital whiteboard, audio system. Class organization: students work in pairs	**Description**: Students are shown this YouTube clip on consent: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raxPKklDF2k Students will be given a worksheet to with questions on the video and are asked to complete it individually, although they are encouraged to work in pairs. (See appendix 5). Students will see the clip twice.

Study Stage	**Description**: Students are asked to produce a list
Timing: 10 minutes.	of things you should do and should not do in a
Resources: whiteboard.	healthy relationship, in terms of consent. They are
Class organization: students	asked to use **modal verbs** to produce sentences,
work in groups of 5.	such as: "you must always make sure the other
	person is comfortable with what you are doing" or
	"you can say no if you don't want to go on."
Activate Stage	**Description**: The teacher will pick students to
Timing: 10 minutes	work in pairs. They should be careful when
Resources: cards with	placing two people together, having into account
instructions.	whether they are friends or whether they have a
Class organization: students	tense relationship.
work in pairs (a group of three	Description: student A is given a card (see
people will have to be made).	appendix 6) that ask them to touch certain parts of
Half of the class will have an	student B's body. For example:
active role while the other half	- Touch your partner's shoulder.
watches. This will take 5	- Touch your partner's elbow.
minutes, then they will switch.	- Touch your partner's hair.
	Student B will have to show whether they are
	comfortable with what student A is doing. They
	will be asked to do so in a non-verbal way and in
	a verbal way.
Activate Stage	**Description**: Students are asked to write a short
Timing: 10 minutes – to be	paragraph responding to the prompt "Yes doesn't
finished at home if students need	always mean yes and no always means no."
more time.	These will be handed in to the teacher at the end
Resources: notebooks.	of the session (or at the beginning of the next
Class organization: individual	session, if students need extra time) and will be
work.	graded. The mark will account for a small
	percentage of the continuous evaluation.

iv. Session 4

The following session in the present didactic proposal should be implemented during the second term of the school year, once students have read volume 2 of *Heartstopper*. Since the second part of this comic series deals with Nick's coming to terms with his bisexuality, the following session will aim to present students with two of orientations that receive less attention in the LGBTQ+ paradigm: **bisexuality and asexuality**.

Students will develop their learning to learn competence by looking up information online in groups. They will also develop three of the four linguistic competencies—speaking, reading, and listening—while working in group discussions.

Engaging Stage Timing: 10 minutes. Resources: digital whiteboard, student mobile phones. Class organization: in pairs.	**Description**: Students are shown an image of the flags for the different orientations within the asexual spectrum (see appendix 7). They are asked to share their knowledge on the topic. They are given a couple of minutes to, in pairs, look up online the definition of those orientations they are unfamiliar with. The teacher will then check answers with the rest of the class.
Study Stage Timing: 10 minutes Resources: - Class organization: whole-class discussion.	**Description**: Students are asked about the lack of representation of asexuality in media. The teacher will ask them the following prompts: "Are there any asexual characters in Heartstopper? (None of them have been confirmed to be. If they say yes, the teacher should bring back what the students learnt about stereotypes in previous sessions and ask them what stereotypes are making them assume that a character is asexual). Can you think of any asexual characters in

	books, films, series, etc.? Why do you think so few examples exist, while there are more L/G/B/T/Q examples in media? How do you think being asexual in this society feels like?"
Engaging Stage Timing: 10 minutes. Resources: *Heartstopper* volume 2. Class organization: students work in groups.	**Description**: Students are shown the scene of *Hearstopper* in which Nick comes out to his mother as bisexual (see appendix 8). She ensures him that his identity is valid and that she loves and supports him. Students also asked to talk in small groups about the struggles that Nick faced when coming to terms with his own sexuality. Students are asked to consider why he felt so many doubts and insecurities. As an introduction to the next activity, they are also asked to discuss if bisexual people face biphobia or not.
Activate Stage Timing: 20 minutes. Resources: photocopied text (see appendix) Class organization: students work in pairs.	**Description**: Students are given a text about biphobia and bi-erasure (see appendix 9) and are asked to read it individually, highlighting all the unknown vocabulary. They are asked to prepare a glossary containing all the words and expressions that are unfamiliar to them. Some of them, in bold, have been suggested for them.

v. **Session 5**

In order to implement session 5, devoted to discussing the experiences of **transgender people**, students must have read volume 3. Consequently, this session will be implemented in the third and final term of the school year.

While working on the following activities, students will have the opportunity to develop the four linguistic competencies. Furthermore, these activities will also foster empathy and critical thinking, since they will have to put themselves in the shoes of transgender people in order to understand what their experiences might be like.

Engaging Stage Timing: 10 minutes Resources: digital whiteboard, computer, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lQnKs7uges, https://kahoot.com/ Classroom organization: individual work.	**Description**: Students are shown the following video on YouTube. In this video, two contestants of Drag Race Season 9 discuss their transphobic experiences while being in Russia. Students are asked to complete a Kahoot so as to show that they have understood the video. The teacher will play the video twice.
Study Stage Timing: 15 minutes. Resources: - Class organization: whole-class discussion.	**Description:** After watching this video, students are asked to reflect on the hardships that trans people face around the world. A whole-class discussion follows where the teacher leads with questions, such as: - Do you think trans people can have a safe and carefree life in Spain? Why? Why not? - What are some of the difficulties that trans people

	experience that cis people do not? - How do you think trans people feel in those cases?
Study Stage Timing: 10 minutes Resources: digital whiteboard, computer. Class organization: whole-class discussion.	**Description**: Students are asked to have look at the following panel of Heartstopper 3 (see appendix 11), where Tao Xu talks about Ellie and how the difficulties that she faced after coming out as trans. They are also asked to, verbally, explain Tao Xu and Ellie's relationship (they have been friends for a long time before he decides to confess his feelings for her. After that, they start dating in Paris.)
Activate Stage Timing: 15 minutes. Resources: WhatsApp, smartphones. Class organization: students work in pairs.	**Description**: in pairs, students are asked to roleplay a conversation as if they were Ellie and Tao Xu. They must reenact a conversation in which Ellie talks to Tao Xu about how she is feeling when she is coming out as trans in her school. Students can use their own WhatsApp and phones to have this conversation. Once the activity is finished, they must take screenshots of their phones and send them to the teacher's email. The teacher will mark

	them and take this grade into consideration for the continuous evaluation.

vi. Session 6

This is the final session of this didactic proposal. Students must have read Heartstopper volume 3, planned for the third term. This session could be implemented in June, Pride Month. They should be encouraged to share the products of this session with the rest of the school by hanging their creations in the school entrance hall or corridors.

Session 6 aims to discuss the topic of **LGBTQ-phobia around the world**. Students will have the opportunity to develop the four linguistic competencies in this session, having to debate with their peers and to create a final infographic to show what they have learnt. Furthermore, the following activities will also promote empathy and critical thinking.

Engaging Stage Timing: 10 minutes Resources: *Heartstopper* Volume 3. Class organization: individual work.	**Description**: Students are asked to complete a Google Form with questions on volume 3, so that the teacher can ascertain that they have read it (see appendix 12).
Activate Stage Timing: 20 minutes Resources: - Class organization: whole-class debate	**Description**: Students are given the following prompt: "Spain is currently not a safe travelling destination for LGBTQ people." The teacher will create two groups, one in favor of the motion and one against. Students will debate on this issue for 20

	minutes. The teacher can take notes on their oral performance and use them as a means of evaluation.
Activate Stage Timing: 20 minutes (to be completed at home or in a different session, if necessary). Resources: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/ https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurabegleybloom/2019/11/25/most-dangerous-places-safest-lgbtq-gay-travelers/?sh=31e111d81169 https://ilga.org/ilga-world-releases-state-sponsored-homophobia-December-2020-update https://venngage.com/ Class organization: students work in small groups (3-4 people).	**Description**: Teacher explains to the class that LGBTQ-phobia is a very real issue in many countries across the globe. They will be asked to work in small groups and to have a look at the following websites, which include information about countries where being LGBTQ is criminalized, what actions can be problematic in each country, etc. Each group is asked to prepare an infographic with the information learnt, using Venngage. This can be printed and displayed in the classroom or around the school.

g. Evaluation

According to the ORDEN EDU/362/2015, the evaluation should not consist of a single final exam. The teacher who implements this teaching proposal will, consequently, assess the students' performance, effort, and attitude.

Firstly, the teacher will have into consideration students' proficiency in the four linguistic skills: writing, reading, speaking and listening. Each will be graded individually in each of the activities conducted in class and as homework. The teacher will gather the different marks and consider them for the final grade of this didactic intervention.

Furthermore, attitude and effort will also be taken into consideration. When discussing topics like the ones proposed in this intervention, it is essential that the teacher establishes that certain views, attitudes or behaviors will not be tolerated. All students will be free to express their opinions, but never in a disrespectful or harmful way.

One of the aspects that the teacher will evaluate is whether or not each of the students has made progress in the acquisition of key competences, as explained in BOCYL. For this proposal, the following competences will be considered:

- **Literacy competence**. Students will be asked to read three volumes of a comic book over the course of the academic year. Their continued exposure to written language will indubitably lead to an improvement in their literacy skills.
- **Multilingual competence**. Students will be reminded that all the activities should be carried out using English. They will also receive daily input (the teacher will only speak in English and all the materials will be in English, as well), which will help them develop their linguistic competence in the four areas: writing, reading, listening and speaking.
- **Digital competence**. Throughout this proposal, students will be asked to produce materials using various apps and websites, thus promoting digital literacy. Although most students are indeed digital natives, it is our role as teachers to ensure that they are using these tools in a safe and adequate way.
- **Personal, social and learning to learn competence**. Students will learn how to use their critical thinking so as to find necessary information for a project.

Furthermore, students will also reevaluate their views on issues like LGBTQ-phobia, thus developing the personal and social aspects of this competence.

- **Citizenship competence**. Students will discuss values of respect and acceptance in this proposal. These will challenge their views of what a fair society should be like, thus, enhancing this competence.

- **Cultural awareness and expression competence**. Students will be asked to create posters, pieces of writing and other types of materials. By doing so, their expression competence will be fostered.

4. Conclusion and further research

As it was established in the beginning of this dissertation, the use of literary texts in the EFL classroom has been controversial as of late. The aim of this proposal is to be of aid to the English teacher who seeks to work with young students of Compulsory Secondary Education and who seeks to work on both the English language as well as ethical values.

In order to introduce literature effectively into the ELF classroom, a careful selection of the texts is necessary, since an incorrect choice might lead students to feel demotivated, which could hinder the successful implementation of the whole intervention plan. Numerous studies showcase that, when working with teenagers, Young Adult Literature is the most adequate option. The topics dealt with in these stories often resonate with the students, and are able to connect with them easily, which allows them to reflect on real life issues. Overall, if the teacher decides to introduce literature in the classroom, the selected works must be attractive for the students. Unless this need is met, students will not be engaged, and will probably not perform at their best.

One of the ways in which we can engage students' attention is through the inclusion of texts that deal with current controversial topics. Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* is, indeed, a text whose exploitability makes it essential to be used in class. By reading this comic books, students can revise their conceptions regarding homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender people, bullying, or consent. It is crucial that students reflect these issues if we want them to become accepting and respectful adults. Most of these topics can be controversial and, in many cases, also hard to be discussed in class. However, this is precisely why they should be tackled in the classroom, in an educational context. Students must be informed that LGBTQ+ rights are human rights, and that no one should be discriminated in any form because of their identity. This might seem obvious in our day and age, but this discussion is as relevant as ever, especially when we consider the recent news that report homophobic aggressions throughout Spain.

In order to enhance this proposal, other literary genres could be included as added materials. For instance, poetry or songs can touch students' hearts in a different way than a comic book can, while also being challenging, entertaining and exploitable in the EFL classroom. This selection of materials will depend on the teacher, and the objectives that they are trying to pursue.

As it has already been established, through the right use of literature, we have the potential to arouse our students' interest and to help them see the necessity of learning a different language in order to open their minds and to connect with others. In addition, teachers must also make a stand and position themselves as promoters of behaviors and values based on equality and acceptance. It is our duty as teachers, and might I say our privilege as well, to accompany our students in their journey towards adulthood. We should give them all the tools at our disposal so that they can become better adults and lead the change towards a more accepting world.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Image extracted from: https://tapas.io/series/Heartstopper/info

APPENDIX 2

Image extracted from: https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/opinion/sunday/gender-based-toy-marketing-returns.html

APPENDIX 3

According to Audrey, what are some the issues that non-binary/genderfluid/gender non-conforming/agender people experience?

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What are some of the ways in which people Audrey mentions when people assume they are a boy? And a girl?

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APPENDIX 4

Image extracted from: https://tapas.io/series/Heartstopper/info

APPENDIX 5

According to the video, what is 'consent'? Don't be afraid to use your own words.

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What do you need to do to know you have consent from the other person?

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Does consent depend on the age? Can you think of an example?

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What are the situations in which a person cannot give consent?

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Can you drop consent or is it permanent?

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APPENDIX 6

Student A

Place yourself before your partner and, after the teacher says "Start!" carry out the following actions, in order, without speaking. If your partner's attitude, or non-verbal answer shows that they are not comfortable with what you are doing, stop. If they are comfortable, continue. Before carrying on with the next action, make sure that they are comfortable.

Actions:

1. Take their hand.

2. Touch their face.

3. Touch their shoulder.

4. Touch their elbow.

5. Touch their hair.

6. Grab their waist.

Student B

Place yourself before your partner, and wait for student A to carry out their action. You must show verbally, or non-verbally whether you are comfortable or uncomfortable with each action. You should follow this order:

1. Non-verbal communication (action or gesture)

2. Non-verbal communication (action or gesture)

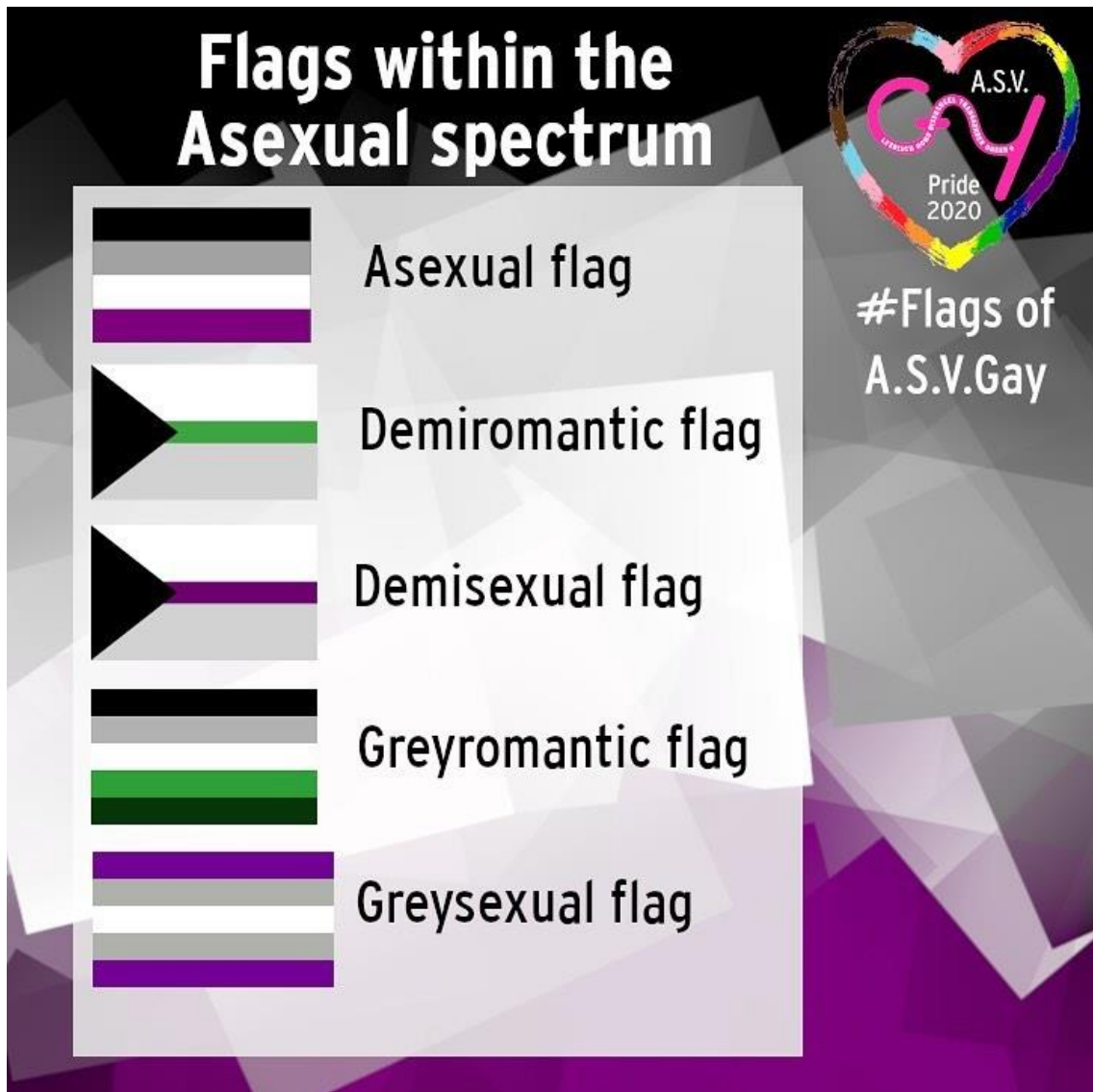3. Verbal communication (yes or no)

APPENDIX 7

Image extracted from: https://www.facebook.com/asvgay

APPENDIX 8

Image extracted from: https://tapas.io/series/Heartstopper/info

APPENDIX 9

One of the most concerning things I have found from speaking with others within the bi community is that some of the worst **biphobia** and **bi-erasure** they have experienced has come from within the LGBTQIA+ community itself. Here, too, exist the beliefs that bi people will cheat with a different gender because they can never be satisfied with one partner. This is not only unfair and untrue, but it also invalidates any who choose a polyamorous lifestyle. There are also many who claim bi people don't belong if they are in a relationship with someone of a different gender to themselves as they have "**straight passing privilege",** meaning they don't face the same discrimination as an openly and obviously gay couple would as they can pass as a straight couple. This further separates bi people from a community that is supposed to accept us, and has left a lot of bi people questioning if they want to date outside of the bi or straight community as they feel they will get less judgement.

The attitude towards bisexuality from both straight and LGBTQIA+ people is that it is a stepping point to "**picking a side**"; they ignore the huge expanse of no man's land between straight and gay where all the bi's live. Also, both straight and LGBTQIA+ people try to dictate what bi means, assigning descriptions without discussing it with those it concerns. For example, bi people are often told that identifying as bisexual is **transphobic** and/or doesn't include non-binary people and, that if you are attracted to trans/non binary people, you are automatically pansexual. The basis is that "bi" means "two" and is interpreted as two genders; this is not the true definition of bisexuality which is romantic or sexual attraction to more than one gender.

Biphobia and bi-erasure should not be as prevalent as they are. In the last fifty years, we as a society have made great strides in acceptance for those within the LGBTQIA+ community, and we are in a much better position than our predecessors. That's not to say that there isn't more still to do; bi people are still fighting stereotypes, misconceptions and ignorance from all corners when we should be banding together. We need to unite to show that, regardless of our spectrum, all flags are valid, seen, respected, valued, and loved.

Adapted text, extracted from: https://www.mungos.org/biphobia-and-bi-erasure-should-not-be-as-prevalent-as-they-are/

APPENDIX 10

Kahoot questions on the Drag Race Season 9 episode where Sasha Velour and Peppermint discuss transphobia in Russia.

1. According to Sasha Velour, what is one of the most challenging aspects of a language?

   a. Humor.

   b. Irony.

   c. Love.

   d. Grammar.

2. When Peppermint got stuck in Moscow, what was she presenting?

   a. Male.

   b. Female.

   c. Non-binary.

3. What was the problem that Peppermint had?

   a. Her ID said male and she was presenting female.

   b. Her ID said female and she was presenting male.

   c. Her ID had expired.

4. What about Sasha Velour, what problems did she have in Russia?

   a. She couldn't find a job.

   b. She couldn't be herself.

   c. Her husband couldn't be with her.

   d. She didn't understand the language.

APPENDIX 11

Image extracted from: https://tapas.io/series/Heartstopper/info

APPENDIX 12

Google Form with reading comprehension questions:

Where do Nick and Charlie go for their school trip?

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Do they have a good time? Are there any problems during the trip?

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Why is taking Nick a bit longer to be open about his relationship with Charlie?

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What advice does Tara give Charlie about coming out as a gay-bisexual (lesbian in her

case) couple?

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