Literature and Democracy (1)

Materials and Methods for Developing Critical Thinking and Cultural Awareness through the Teaching of Literatures in the English Language

Unità formativa CIDI - Inglese
Perugia 2018-19
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Why Democracy Needs the Humanities: From Martha Nussbaum to Azar Nafisi

1° incontro in presenza: 11 dicembre 2018, martedì h. 15.30-18 (2 ore e trenta minuti)

- Conoscenza degli altri corsisti e della formatrice
- Presentazione del corso: motivazioni, obiettivi, contenuti, metodologia
- Approfondimenti su Nussbaum,Todorov, Nafisi, Pradl
- Iscrizione e familiarizzazione con la piattaforma Moodle del CIDI di Perugia (propedeutica al lavoro online).

Why this theme, Literature and Democracy?

A step back: why should we care about teaching literature in our "Lingua e civiltà straniera: inglese" course at all?

- Why should we?
- After all:
- we have few lessons per week and large classes
- Rumour has it that English *language* is important and useful
- INVALSI has now introduced a language test in the 5th year
- *CLIL* is useful!
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Why should we care about teaching literature in our “Lingua e civiltà straniera: inglese” course?

AS TEACHERS, CAN YOU THINK OF OTHER REASONS WHY WE SHOULD NOT TEACH LITERATURE?

Various people (including politicians) say that studying humanities, by and large, makes it more difficult to find a job (>ref video nussbaum)

- Brainstorming

- Novels, short stories, poems project the students into a fictional world which has nothing to do with concrete reality

- Studying literature is old-fashioned

- Certification exams – which give marks or contribute to our CV -
- Focus on *language* (and take an awful lot of time and effort
- to prepare!)

- there is no time for reading / discussing /revising full books…
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Let’s play
the DIAMOND 9 game...

Read the cards and talk in your group:

Can you try and prioritize (from 1 to 9)

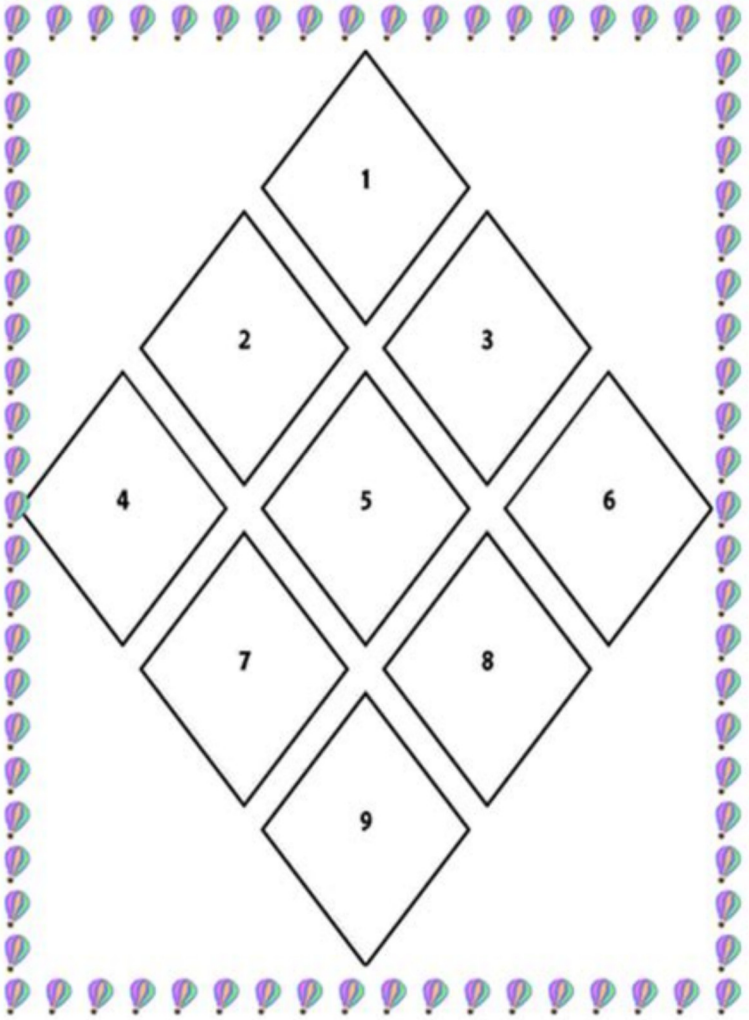
the reasons why literature **should** have

a (relevant) role in the English classroom?

Did your group reach an agreement on the

ranking?

Add more / change reasons if you want.



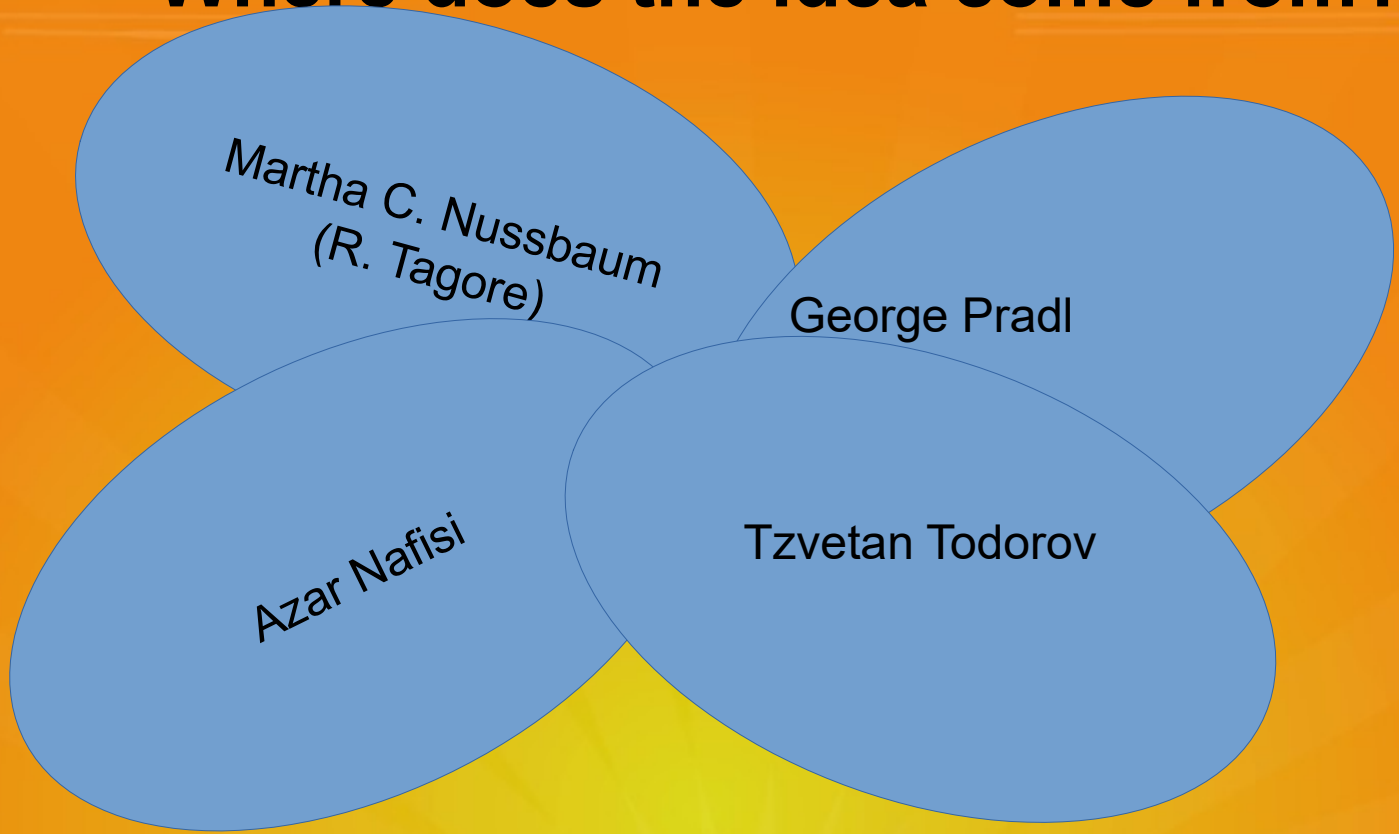
As regards usefulness, learning for material gain, job finding...

While making use of [material] possessions, man has to be careful to protect himself from [their] tyranny.

If he is weak enough to grow smaller to fit himself to his covering, then it becomes a process of gradual suicide by shrinkage of the soul.

Rabindranath Tagore, Indian educator, 1917

Where does the idea come from?



Martha C. Nussbaum



Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics, The University of Chicago Law School

Not for Profit.
Why Democracy needs the Humanities.

(Her latest book: “The Monarchy of Fear”)

Not for Profit, new 2016 edition (5:39)

What points does M.C.Nussbaum make in support of Humanities?





'Liberal Arts: A Universal Education Model' - Martha Nussbaum - WISE Channel 2012

Martha Nussbaum, in ***Not for Profit***

(and other books and speeches…)

sees a “world-wide crisis in education”as in the long run damaging to the future of democratic self-government

-trend to produce “useful machines” rather than “complete citizens”

To Nussbaum complete citizens appear to be individuals who can
“think for themselves
- criticize tradition
- understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements”

The methodology question: approaching literature democratically in order to build democracy

(also looking back at John Dewey…)

Gordon M. Pradl, **Literature for Democracy**

the teacher as listener

the teacher as s.o. able to renounce control or lead to

‘correct’ final interpretation…

LET’S TRY! 2 poems: 1. Spoken conversation 2. Written conversation

“Entering the Dance of Conversation”

- “Grandmother’s Ring, by Kathleen Jamie
- Coming Down to Kuskokwim, by Peter Stillman
- "Child’s Pose" by Brionne Janae (in poem-a-day)

"No Ruined Stone" by Shara McCallum

(make them do an activity on then another poem or text in groups or pairs or individually baased on the idea: what would it have been like if…. [democracy means think of the possibility of different scenarios from reality and how you can create them]

Advantages of this method

- Would you use this method in class or as homework?
- Why yes? Why not?

Literature and Democracy
Azar Nafisi

- What has literature to do with democracy (and citizenship)?
- Azar Nafisi, professor of aesthetics, culture, and literature at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC



- Who is she? **Watch…**(8 mins) **And more…** (
- **And more… at Pordenone Legge 2105**(cf. Also http://azarnafisi.com)

Literature and Democracy
Azar Nafisi



- “A great novel is essentially democratic”:
- the structure of a novel itself it is, since it is …. poliphonic!
  - To give voice to every single character

Why this theme (2) ?

What has literature to do with democracy and citizenship?

Nafisi

the power of dialogue - Pride and Prejudice

when do we best see this: in moments of crisis of democracy: Nafisi (the 1979 coming to power of the Islamic ‘revolution’)

the power of discussion and debate (see trial in The Great Gatsby in Nafisi, reading…)

the democratic message of Huckleberry Finn: (the Republic…)

Back to the initial question:
Should we keep teaching lit today?

Yes, we should. Now more than ever.

Why?

- the general cultural value of literature ((Nussbaum)
- the present risks (Todorov)
- ‘great’ novels are structurally democratic and this they teach (Nafisi)
- Both novels AND poems can teach democracy, provided a ‘democratic’ teaching method is pursued (Prald…and me!)
- The specific present ‘risks’ in our school system (cf. the new ‘esame di stato’: what is the impact?)

Hence…
and Moving Forward...

- **Rethinking an epistemology for English**
- in the light of:
- the requirements of the national syllabuses
- freedom of teaching (Constitution, art.33)
- the (young) citizens'right to education (Constitution, art.34)
- the need to educate individual to become 'citizens' (citizenship)

and - connected to these - education to democracy

How can
we apply
all (or a part of) this
to our educational scene?

And what about assessment and evaluation?