

**Instituto de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje**

**Facultad de Filosofía y Educación**



**A critical approach to *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk:**

**A workshop on the topics of masculinity, consumer culture and identity crisis.**

An elective workshop for 11<sup>th</sup> graders

**TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN**

para optar al Título de Profesor de Inglés y al Grado de Licenciado en Educación

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## **Introduction**

Several studies on the use of literature in the ESL classroom have argued against using literature as a pedagogical tool in teaching English. Sandra McKay (1982) argues that because of its structural complexity, literature does not contribute to the achievement of academic goals since it is an exceptional use of the foreign language. Another argument against using literature inside the classroom deals with literariness; Radhika O'Sullivan (1991) states that "literary language is seen as not providing the conventional and appropriate kinds of language required to convey, practical, everyday messages". This idea basically states that literary authors make use of the language system, but provide differing meanings from the non-literary discourses in the communicative purpose.

Despite these arguments that position themselves against the use of literature as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, there are some scholars who favor its use as they relate literature with the production of imagination and creativity, together with the enhancement of tolerance. O'Sullivan quotes Northrop Frye (1964:77) who states that leaning through literature you may study the world of imagination "where anything is possible and anything can be assumed, where there are no rights or wrongs and all arguments are equally good. One of the most obvious uses, I think, is its encouragement of tolerance". In other words, literature provides a broad vision and elements of what the world is, where the reader can make use of its imagination and creativity to build up its own vision without being judged.

Another argument that supports the inclusion and use of literature in the instruction of a second language is that it provides a vision of other cultures different from your students' one. According to O'Sullivan, the reader is examining a "foreign culture through literature;

this may increase their understanding of that culture and perhaps spur their own creation of imaginative works”, reasons that have fostered the use of literature inside the classroom as a significant tool.

O’Sullivan exposes that all students can potentially improve their cognitive processes and levels of tolerance through the act of reading and the discussion of literary topics. These are the reasons why educational systems around the world include literature in the instruction of English as a foreign language.

Regarding the presence of English literature in the EFL classroom, the current MINEDUC EFL program objectives state that students at this level should read and understand long authentic texts and develop a positive attitude towards the topics presented in a literary text. Furthermore, the National Curriculum also points out that these texts should be interesting for students according to their needs and likes.

This graduation project focuses on promoting the use of literature as a pedagogical tool in teaching to EFL students and presenting themes that may be influential to the formative processes of students, especially in terms of identity construction and the development of critical thinking and the approach to a culture other than their own. All of the above will be achieved through an in-class workshop designed for 11<sup>th</sup> graders of a Semi-Private school on the best seller *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk.

The selection of the novel is related to the students’ needs of being exposed where current uses of English language are presented. Palahniuk uniqueness and genuineness relates to the way he presents his novel as a reflection on how he understands contemporary society. The author takes it upon himself to reveal the inhumanity of our living conditions. In the light

of the novels description of contemporary life, teenagers may contrast the experiences represented in the text with their own and develop a critical approach to realities that are presented as given or unchangeable and where the youth is excluded from debate that may threaten the status quo.

Another reason for choosing this novel for the elaboration of a language-learning workshop is the contribution that this novel might provide to the discussion of identity issues that resonate with students experiences. The MINEDUC program tends to recommend texts that are completely foreign from the adolescents' reality. *Fight Club* deals with the process of maturity from one stage in life to another and triggers discussions on topics such as overconsumption and masculinity.

The approach that will be used in this in-classroom workshop, the novel may be taught through a Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman, 1976) because of Palahniuk's straightforward spirit in writing. The author purposely works with the language so as to emphasize a message which is better understood through images, produce emotions and empathy; an expert domain of the language is secondary to the message.

The main objective of this workshop is to teach English through literature; in addition, to develop and encourage critical thinking in students through the themes embedded in the novel such as masculinity, identity, anarchism, social discontent and emotional attachment, through the use of communicative strategies.

One specific objective included in this project is to lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1982) among students as a way of creating a favorable atmosphere for learning inside the classroom. This will be achieved through interactive activities and tools such as games,

relaxation music, yoga exercises, and breathing exercises, among others. These activities may positively help to the class atmosphere since they are connected to students' playful and relaxed side.

Another of the specific objectives of this project is to evoke enjoyment of literature by using other resources such as music, films and news reports to complement the reading itself and raise critical thinking among students on *Fight Club's* controversial themes. At the same time, create a habit of reading among students through an interactive workshop focused on the teenagers' opinions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Definition of Literature**

Defining what literature is has always been a challenge. Some scholars define literature as written works—whether a novel, poem, biography, memoir or a short story that are considered of a superior or lasting artistic merit. However, nowadays definitions of literature are not stable and have gone through a constant change in meaning over the years; the only thing we are certain is the versatility of the concept and its multiples definitions.

Terry Eagleton, prominent British literary theorist quotes the Russian critic, Roman Jakobson (1989) who defines literature as a kind of writing that represents “an organized violence committed on ordinary speech”.

According to Jakobson, literature has to do with the peculiar way language is used in these pieces of written work. Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary, common, daily language; we can identify literature because of its texture, rhythm and words’ resonance.

Despite the Russian formalists’ point of view on literature, Eagleton (1989) criticized their definition of literature as a “particular organization of the language” which basically means that it could be compared to any type of organization since it has its own specific rules, laws, structures and devices which could be studied, but leaving behind the reflection of ideas and its comparison to social reality.

In other words, this movement stated that it is an error to believe that literature is the expression of the author’s feelings since literature was just built up with words. Eagleton exposed Don Quixote as an example of this formalist’ view: “is not ‘about’ the character of

that name: the character is just a device for holding together different kinds of narrative techniques”. Don Quixote is merely a part of the whole literary expression, but it is not the essential piece since the author gives character life through the literary mixture of elements needed in the literary text.

Even though Eagleton came up with some possible definitions of what literature is, he also exposed that because of its nature, literature cannot be objectively defined. Actually, many written works belong to certain type of genre in literature, but that does not assure readers will comprehend and understand the piece of work in the same way the author wanted. In fact, readers tend to fall into subjectivity when reading any literary piece of work since anything could be called great or poor literature; it has to do with what any person may consider a good or a bad literary work.

Jim Meyer (1997) states that there are plenty of definitions on what literature is, but they must follow the *Criterial Approach*, also known as the *Checklist Approach*. This approach basically appeals to a list of criteria which must be met in order to be considered as a word in English; the previous named criterion is defined by a community through the course of history.

Meyer and Eagleton converge into one point: if the academic institutions stick to a certain idea of what literature is, the reading community will settle this idea right away and identify what literature is, but having in mind what has been defined by those academic voices as the most suitable idea of what literature is; academic communities along the history have created a variety of value/ethic-judgments regarding literature.

The direction of the concept of literature in this project is focused on the function of the literary work rather than form or correct use of the language. The aim or spirit of this work is to exchange and express ideas—more specifically develop critical thinking rather than paying attention on the different ways language is used along the book.

In order to develop the objectives of this project it is necessary to define and clearly state what is understood as critical thinking and its main characteristics. Micheal Scriven and Richard Paul (1987) defined critical thinking as the “intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action”. In other words, when you think critically you are able to develop cognitive processes at the highest level since you are linking what has been acquired to the reflection embedded in that acquisition. But how is it that literature promotes critical thinking?

According to Chi-An Tung Shu-Ying Chang (2009) “literature reading is a complex process that requires readers to recall, retrieve, and reflect on their prior experiences or memories to construct meaning of the text”. This complex process must to be fulfilled with a wide diverse of capacities like differentiating facts from opinions and applying what they have learned from this process of acquirement. Chi-An Tung Shu-Ying Chang (2009, p.5) quotes Lazere in her work and he states that “literature... is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking”

One of the goals of this project is not only oriented to the comprehension and understanding of adolescents of a literary work, but also the development of critical thinking. Therefore, the use of critical thinking as part of the reading process will be essential throughout the entire project because as it leads to reflection and production. Students will be able to state their opinion and think critically on the themes embedded in the book through this workshop.

## Content and Themes

### **1. Author**

As the objective of this workshop is to focus on the themes and problems presented by the novel, the perspective of the author needs to be considered. The literary representation we will be working with emerges out of a specific context that a description of some aspects of the author biography will illuminate.

Born in Washington on February 21, 1962, Charles Palahniuk grew up with his parents who suddenly got separated and divorced during his puberty. After high school, Palahniuk graduated with a BA in journalism; he got a job regarding in his field, but he got bored of the working routine and decided to spend his days fixing trucks. Some say that this aspect of his life inspired some of his works, specially, one of his masterpieces: *Fight Club*. At the time he was fixing trucks, Chuck joined The Cacophony Society which was created in order to perform large-scale pranks or jokes in public places and to experience things outside the mainstream.

After a couple of years, Chuck started to write and brought to light *If You Lived Here, You'd be Home Already* which was highly criticized since he used a very violent and raw language. In his pursuit of making and creating something even darker in language use and content, he wrote *Fight Club*.

### **2. Synopsis**

In the very first pages of "*Fight Club*", Palahniuk pictures a very violent and borderline moment in which the anonymous narrator and Tyler are involved; the narrator

goes back in time to understand which situations led them to that point of their lives. The author presents an anonymous narrator who is very unsatisfied with himself and his role in the neoliberal system in which he is into; a man who is disappointed on the way men are intended to be and act in society.

This feeling of disappointment and disconnection leads the narrator into a severe insomnia. As part of his medical treatment, his doctor tells him to join therapy groups, in order to discover what “real pain” is. In this search to overcome this illness, he finds out that these groups bursting emotions fulfilled him as drug to defeat his own odd narcoleptic disease. But all of sudden, Marla and Tyler appear in his life and everything changes.

Marla regularly attends these therapy groups, but she is not sick like the narrator; on the other hand, Tyler who makes a living with several low paying jobs, first appears at a nude beach. After a series of situations such as narrator’s home gas explosion, Tyler and the protagonist move in together and together create “Fight Club” as a way of reacting to a dehumanizing and sick system by fighting each other and following the Fight Club’s rules. They fight as a therapy for the ones who felt powerless and hopeless in this sick system based on power rather than common good.

Suddenly Marla’s, Tyler’s and the protagonist’s stories, thoughts and feelings converge into a free fall of psychological and physical violence. The novel poses questions such as: What would happen if you release your hidden instinct from one day to another? What would you do if you had in your hands the power to distort all the things you know including yourself?

### 3. Themes

Chuck Palahniuk has always been considered as a very outspoken writer because of his violent way of writing and representing the world. Palahniuk exposes the book's topics as his own feeling of relief due this sick American society that exploits people as consumer goods. He shows and puts in paper the working-class citizens' frustrations that are tired of a slaving system where he belongs too. This representation is an identification of his own thoughts and feelings towards the unfriendly neoliberalism that he characterizes in his book.

In addition to that, some of the themes embedded in *Fight Club* are just as polemical and controversial as his author's way of writing and life; masculinity, violence, consumer culture and identity crisis are the main themes covered by Palahniuk in this novel.

#### 3.1 Masculinity

In *Fight Club*, the narrator is trying to fulfill this feeling of masculinity that has been consumed by contemporary society; a pursuit based on violence and primitiveness as a way of recalling what men supposedly were in the past and should be lived in the present.

Regarding the manhood's classification, R. W Connell states that there is a "hegemonic masculinity" present in nowadays society; a hegemonic masculinity that can be seen in *Fight Club* where men are the center of the story, the ones who are awakening from the fear and, at the same time, the working-class men who are deciding to rise up against the power that has unnecessarily enslaved them throughout the history to work for and with the Establishment.

Fighting in *Fight Club* is an example of the previous named type of manhood present inside the novel. A club where men can be men without being judged, a club where men are seeking for their manhood's roots. In other words, men who are looking for power and control of their own lives.

### **3.2 Violence**

Throughout this novel, Palahniuk exposes different and variant raw scenes, but violence is not the solution for the character's conflicts; actually, violence in *Fight Club* is shown as an awakening from what society has done to petrify us with fear. As a response to the violent and alienation of consumption based on social order, the characters of the novel react with ferocity.

Fighting is understood as a way to reach their men's essence. In the same way fighting can be interpreted as a reaffirmation of the members' masculinity, it is more connected to the idea of awakening from what they have been told for masculinity and go back to the core of their own manhood.

### **3.3 Consumer Culture**

Palahniuk criticizes consumer culture in which the American society has fallen into and he ironically portrays this social illness by showing the narrator buying products he does not need in a compulsive way. As an example of it, the material good were considered by the characters as "clever" items for the improvement in life through the purchase of things that are offered by the market as essential things to live in the void of what we understand as advanced society.

The author presents a protagonist who over consumes to fulfill his own emptiness in his life as a possible answer to reach happiness and success, but the only thing he gets is a unreal domination over his life expressed through the purchase of material goods.

### **3.4 Identity Crisis**

It is essential to state that this novel is considered as a formative one since it deals with a protagonist that feels incomplete and disoriented with his life and his role in society; same feeling that can be related to the adolescence's formative process of growing up.

Part of the formative process of most teenagers is to deal with the pursuit of identity. Actually, this idea of this searching is not foreign from what happens in *Fight Club*. The narrator realizes that he is surrounded by people who are identical to him: "Everyone is a copy of a copy of a copy" (Palahniuk, 21) with that statement, Palahniuk shows that the narrator is in a constant search of his identity, situation that may be projected towards the realities of the participants of this workshop.

## Coming of Age genre and Teenagers

In order to read *Fight Club* as a coming of age story, a definition will be delivered of what this project understands by the genre and how it applies to the workshop. I would first like to explore the question of why scholars tend relate this particular genre to teenagers, and furthermore, what is the purpose of reading a coming of age book?

Coming of age has been defined (Payette, 2009) as “a story that relates and adolescent’s movement toward adulthood and the corresponding awakening to a new understanding of his or herself and the world around him or her”. The coming of age genre’s main purpose is to show the world as it is and how adolescents face this reality while they are living an internal process of growth toward the impending adulthood. In addition, Deborah Boughton (2008) explains that “the journey from innocence to experience is well documented in literature as a manual for adulthood”. Boughton postulates that literature—especially the coming of age genre may help young readers to guide through this critical process of growing up and interact for the first time with the adult world.

The general topics that may be found in teenager’s literature are experiences of a youth set in the past, present or future; in fact, Boughton goes beyond the time issue and explains that “while individual characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity or family background will influence a story, certain aspects of growing up are universal” This means that it does not matter in which context/époque the book is set in; the process of growing up is lived by every person in the world, but it differs from others regarding the socio-cultural elements in which people are involved in.

By reading a coming of age book, teenagers not only can use it as guidebook of youth's emotions, problems and situations, but also as a representative source of the cultural characteristics of the society in which the book is situated in.

According to what Nancy Pearl (2003) states, "coming of age books describe a search for understanding, not only one self, but of the often mysterious, contradictory and sometimes frightening adult world". This quote means that the stage adolescents are attempting to be strongly marked with self-questioning ideas about the adult world they are getting involved in, especially with doubts based on their own values.

Some scholars (Payette, 2009) have stated that this genre must meet certain characteristics in order to be considered as a coming of age piece of work; "moral challenges, confrontation with the adult world, individual needs and desires v/s external pressures/expectations/norms, acceptance of the complexities of the world and awareness of the self" are part of the features involved in this genre.

To teach *Fight Club* may be appropriate in this in-class workshop for 11<sup>th</sup> graders since it fits perfectly to the stage the teenagers are living, because of its coming of age nature; in that way, students may feel more identified to the contents and themes covered by Palahniuk along the novel.

Another reason to use *Fight Club* inside the classroom is that it exposes the growth of a protagonist as a formative process in life; the idea of this coming of age genre is to make the reader feel identified with this growth as its own. Despite the fact the protagonist of *Fight Club* is an adult, this book exposes a formative process that has been moved towards

adulthood in which he feels incomplete and disoriented; same feeling that can be evoked and related to the adolescence's formative process of growing up.

Another reason to work with Palahniuk's book is because of the exposure of polemic themes that may be debated among students and inside the classroom; by reading *Fight Club*, young learners may be able to enquire themselves regarding these controversial topics as an introspective interrogation on their values and points of view inside this society.

Finally, *Fight Club* is a representation of the American society and, at the same time, a coming of age book that may help students to get in touch with the world they are getting involved with: the adult world. Having this in mind, this novel is considered to be an illustration of a powerful culture, together with its controversial topics, miseries and expectations. The students of this workshop will have the opportunity to approach the reality through the reading of this American novel in which they may feel identified with.

## **The Affective Filter and the Communicative Approach**

Before the discussion of the ways in which this workshop will be covered and taught to 11<sup>th</sup> graders, I want to make a note on the importance of an appropriate work atmosphere inside the classroom and present some strategies on how this project intends to motivate students in the learning of English through literature. In other words, the objective of this section is to explain how a positive disposition towards in-class work may be created.

One of the most common scenarios in the EFL classroom, is the lack of motivation and attention of students who may feel that what is being taught and discussed does not impact their lives. Jim Scrivener (2011) echoes this sentiment with adolescent learners that are likely to feel more engaged if “they have chosen what to do and how to do it”. Even the last idea sounds as a suitable solution, some scholars have complemented this idea with lowering the affective filter among students.

The major exponent of this concept is the linguist and educator Stephen Krashen who published in 1982 his theory book called “*Principles and practice in second language acquisition*”. According to Krashen (1982), the affective filter “accounts for the influence of affective factors on second language acquisition”. These affective factors are understood as the non-linguistic variables in the process of a second language such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Regarding Krashen’s, it is important to state that affect has effects on the students’ process of acquisition, but not the learning process itself.

In other words, these affective variables can affect the acquisition of a second language learner by blocking the information about the new knowledge from reaching the

language areas of our mind. But what techniques, procedures or activities may help teachers and students to work cooperatively in an adequate atmosphere?

Timothy Robertson (2011) states that “tools that have been suggested to reduce affective filter are movies, games, and music, as these can reduce anxiety while increasing motivation and self-confidence” These elements improve the acquirement of language; when students are anxious, input may not be able to reach the acquisition part of the brain.

The resources that have been selected to lower the affective filters in this project are: games, relaxation music, yoga exercises, and breathing exercises, among others. All of which are oriented towards lowering the affective filters among students as a way of breaking the daily routine and predispose themselves to learning in a friendly atmosphere where they may be able to freely express opinions and debate on the different themes.

As it was exposed in the beginning of this section, lowering the affective filters may perfectly help to apply the approach which is intended to be used, in this case, the Communicative Approach.

The Communicative Approach (CA) was developed by Diane Larsen-Freeman (1975 p.17) who states that CA “is an approach to language learning as the emphasis shifted from knowledge of language forms, meanings and functions to the use of language, the ability to apply the knowledge acquired”.

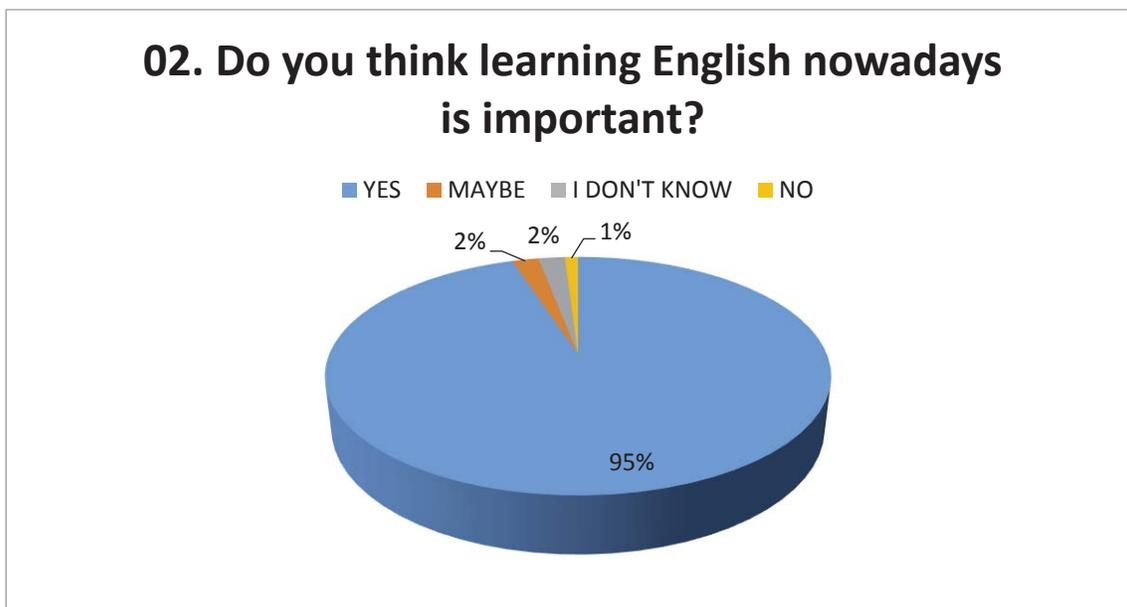
This approach is characterized by different principles such as using authentic materials inside the classroom and students should be given the opportunity to express their opinions. That is why the novel’s selection fits with some of the intentions of this project

which deals with developing critical thinking among students through contemporary and authentic novel, in this case, *Fight Club*.

Lowering the affective filter is something which will be achieved through different techniques, tools, and exercises as a way to overcome these non-linguistics variables together with the application of Communicative Approach among students; in that way, students will feel more comfortable since they already know that the project is focused on meaning rather than on form.

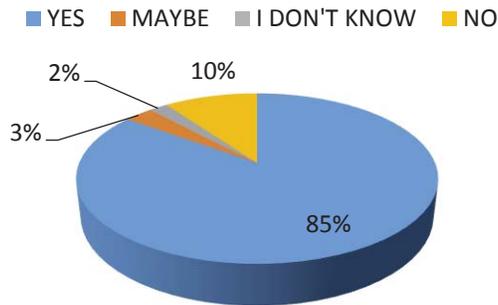
## Needs Analysis

A 12-question survey was conducted among 11<sup>th</sup> graders (3°Medio) at the semiprivate institution Colegio Inglés Altazor in Concón. The main purpose of this questionnaire was to find out students' point of view about learning English and thoughts on learning English through lit. In addition, this survey was conducted as a way of representing students' interests and reading habits. Thirty-two students answered the questionnaire (15 questions), and the most relevant data collected is presented below.



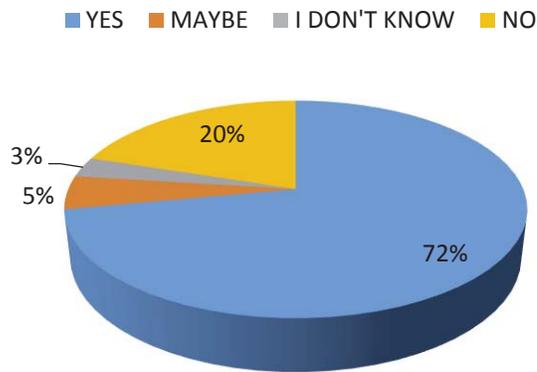
Regarding the importance of learning English nowadays, 95% of the students answered that it is important. This means that students may be conscious that English is a powerful tool in this globalized society which can be used in different scenarios, for example, seeking for a job or studying abroad.

### 03. Do you like to read?



Students were asked if they liked to read or not. Eighty-five percent of them said that they enjoyed reading while 10% answered that do not like reading; however, something very special happened when students were asked if they like reading in English or not.

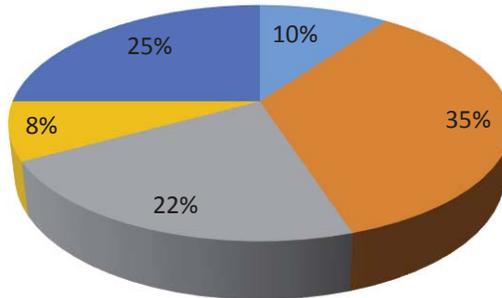
### 04. Do you like to read in English?



72% of the students insisted that they like to read in either Spanish or English, but those who are against reading in English represent twenty percent of the preferences. Taking into account these two last questions, it is clearly stated that English and reading in this foreign language represents a threat to some students, specially, for those who do not like reading.

### 05. Where is your favorite place to read?

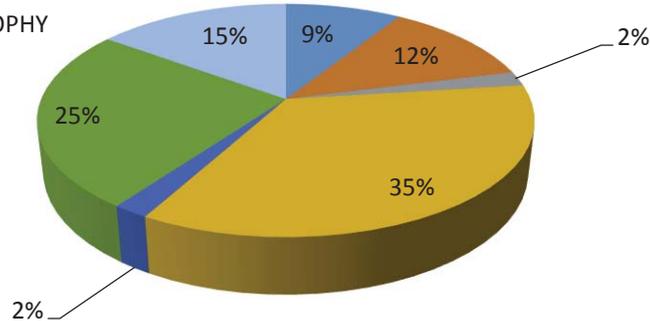
■ School ■ Home ■ Bedroom ■ Library ■ Other



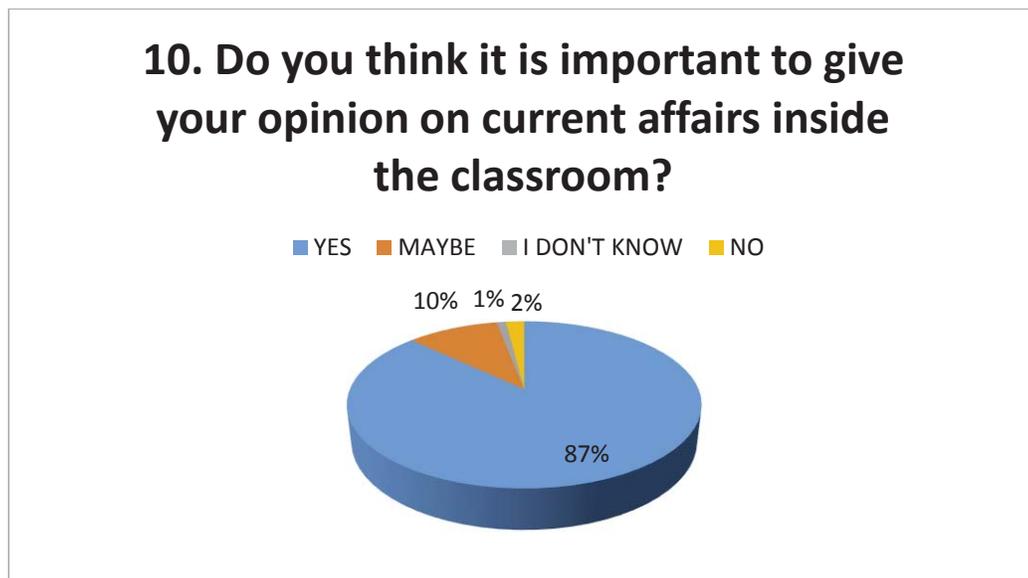
When asked where their favorite place to read is, the results show a variety of opinions. Only 10% of the students prefer reading at school and thirty-five percent of the surveyed students enjoy reading at home. These exposed results state that it would be a total waste of time trying to read the book inside the classroom since students feel more comfortable reading at home or other places.

### 05. Tick TWO things you like to read about

■ BIOGRAPHIES ■ HISTORY ■ PLACES  
■ SOCIAL CONTROVERSIES ■ WAR ■ LOVE  
■ PHILOSOPHY



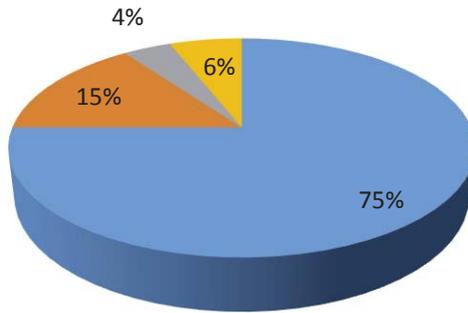
When it comes to the things students like to read about, social controversies and love are the most voted with a 35% and 25% of preferences, respectively. This result indicates that most of students feel more likely to read about things that are more debatable instead of reading something without any strong content/topic implied.



The survey also inquired if students think it is important to give their opinion on current affairs inside the classroom, and the answers “yes” and “maybe” total 97%, which clearly shows that students are aware of the importance in giving their opinion on topics, events that are discussed in nowadays society.

### 11. Do you like to express your opinion, feelings and thoughts among your classmates?

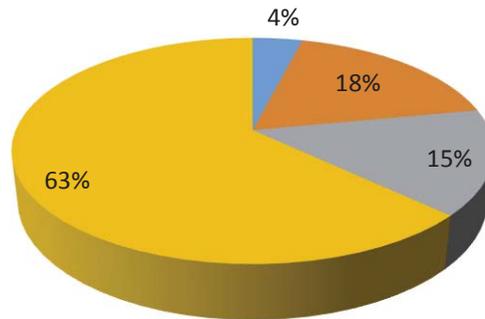
■ YES ■ MAYBE ■ I DON'T KNOW ■ NO



An important question had to do with students' point of view and their willingness in sharing their opinions, feelings and thoughts among their classmates. Seventy-five percent states that they like it, while 15% "maybe". Only six percent of students do not like giving their opinions and sharing them with their classmates, and 4% "don't know". This information can be interpreted in different ways. On one hand, it is very clear that most students like sharing ideas with their classmates; on the other hand, some students expressed that it might be interesting to expose their opinions, but they are too shy or introverted to show their point of view among their learning partners.

## 12. Have you ever heard about the book or film *Fight Club*?

■ YES ■ MAYBE ■ I DON'T KNOW ■ NO



Finally, the students were asked if they have ever heard about the book or film *Fight Club*. Sixty three percent answered “no”, 4% answered “yes”, 18% answered “maybe” and the rest do not know. That 63% of negative answers may be interpreted as both a possibility and a challenge to discuss *Fight Club* themes and how they can construct identity and express opinions among the society, especially, their classmates.

## Course Syllabus

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Type of course: Elective workshop

Grade: 11<sup>th</sup> graders (*Tercero Medio*)

Level of English: Upper-intermediate

Duration: 10 sessions

Class hours: 90 minutes each session (1 session per week)

Instructor: Pablo Gamboa Figueroa

Email: [p.gamboafi@gmail.com](mailto:p.gamboafi@gmail.com)

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### Rationale

A **critical approach to *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk** is an elective workshop oriented to 11<sup>th</sup> graders at a Colegio Altazor from Concón, Chile. It is based on both content-based and task-based syllabus whose main objective is to develop identity construction through the development of critical thinking both through the exchange and analysis of ideas inside the classroom regarding the themes embedded in the book, *Fight Club*. In addition, the approach to a culture other than their own and lowering the affective filter among students.

Regarding the educational importance, this workshop aims to cover controversial and universal themes that are not included in the MINEDUC programs. Students are expected not only to learn English and broaden their knowledge on *Fight Club's* themes, but also connect the information and opinions to what happens nowadays in our world. Simultaneously, students will learn English as they develop all four skills through different activities that include analyzing news report, songs and movies.

### **Course Description**

This course will be developed as an elective workshop oriented to 11<sup>th</sup> year students with an upper-intermediate English level. Students will be able to discuss and reflect on the themes embedded in the book among their classmates; furthermore, they will connect and contrast *Fight Club's* themes to the events that take place in nowadays' society. Students will study them through a sequence of in-class activities that will let them debate and share different points of views as a way of exchanging ideas, emotions, feelings and thoughts inside the classroom.

By the end of the in-classroom workshop, students are expected to have an informed, wide and rich knowledge of these topics which will allow them to construct identity through the development of critical thinking. Besides that, students will be able to get to know a different culture different from their own, in this case, U.S. culture.

### **Course Organization**

This workshop is organized around 8 theme-related learning units. In the first units, the students will be introduced to the book, author and literary genre involved in this work. In the remaining units, students will study, discuss, debate on the themes embedded in the

book. The first theme students will cover is masculinity; what was understood before for masculinity and the way it is present in nowadays society. Then, violence throughout history until today's violence and its connection to the feeling of fear which will be presented to students. Afterwards, consumer culture will be covered by students through the concept of overconsumption and its psychological and social implications. Finally, students will discuss on identity crisis which is part of their current formative process during adolescence. By the end of the workshop, a lesson will be considered to do a wrap-up of the most controversial topics and opinions made by the students throughout the whole workshop.

Students will work with authentic material during the whole workshop such as film extracts, news report, article and other media sources. This material will be studied as a way of discussing and sharing different point of views on *Fight Club*'s themes.

### **General Objective**

Students are expected to create the habit of reading and learn to enjoy reading in English. One of the main goals is to develop identity construction through the development of critical thinking both through the exchange and analysis of ideas inside the classroom regarding the themes embedded in *Fight Club*. This purpose will be achieved through different themes and themes-relates activities, which are going to be introduced and discussed during most of the workshop. Important themes to be covered: masculinity, violence, consumer culture and identity crisis.

## **Specific Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- Improve all the 4 skills through the activities/tasks presented in this workshop.
- Lower the affective filter among students.
- Analyze the characters and author's intentions throughout the story.
- Improve pronunciation and fluency by giving opinions on the book's themes.
- Work effectively within groups.
- Express different opinions, ideas, feelings and thoughts regarding the book.
- Debate on controversial current affairs.

## **Course Policy**

Required Materials: - *Fight Club* book.

- Additional Material: Markers, color pencils.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

First Written Assignment: 20%

Second Written Assignment: 20%

First Oral Presentation: 20%

Second Oral Presentation: 20%

Class Participation: 20%

## Course Calendar

### A critical approach to *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk:

A workshop on the topics of masculinity, consumer culture and identity crisis.

Units	Sessions	Content
<b>3, 2, 1... FIGHT!</b>	<b>1</b>	- Fight Club's Plot
<b>Coming of Age and Adolescence</b>	<b>2</b>	- Definition Coming of Age - Coming of Age main's characteristics
<b>Fight Club's themes</b>	<b>3</b>	- Themes embedded in the book
<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>4</b>	- Masculinity: before and nowadays
<b>Violence</b>	<b>5</b>	- Violence throughout the human history
	<b>6</b>	- Violence and Fear in 2014
<b>Consumer Culture</b>	<b>7</b>	- Overconsumption
<b>Identity Crisis</b>	<b>8</b>	- Sense of identity
	<b>9</b>	- The adolescent search of identity
<b>Guys, Fight Club is over...</b>	<b>10</b>	- Further reflections and comments

# **SAMPLE ACTIVITIES**

**3, 2, 1... FIGHT!**

**Session 1**

**IT'S FIGHT CLUB, DUDE!**

**BEFORE WE START!**

Follow the instructions

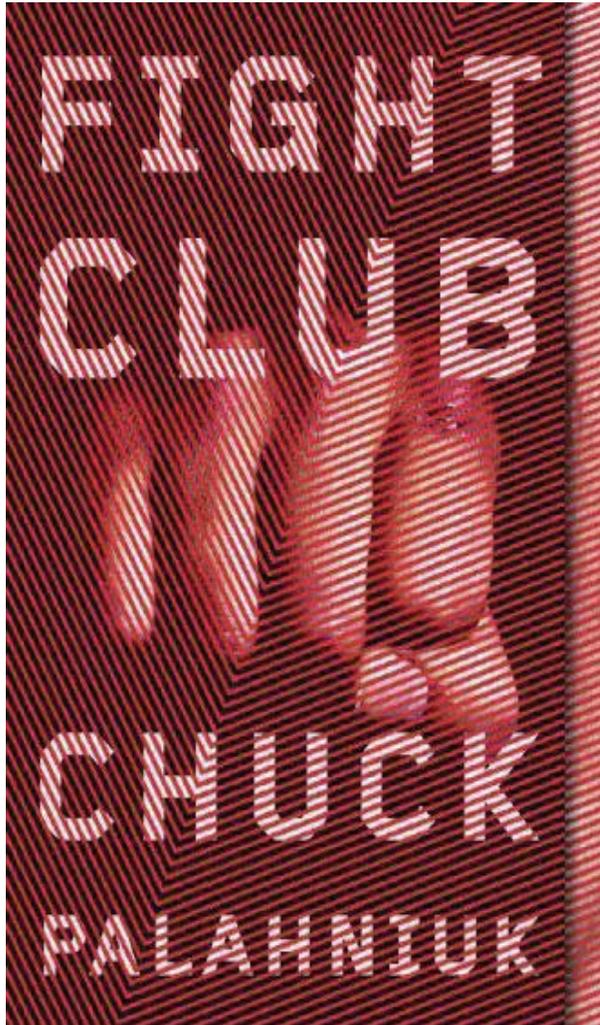
1. Stand up.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Inhale softly.
4. Exhale softly.
5. Inhale softly.
6. Exhale softly.
7. Inhale again. When inhaling feel like you are accumulating all your stress in an energy ball between your hands.
8. Exhale now. When exhaling feel like you are throwing this energy ball far, far away.
9. How do you feel now? 😊
10. Did you know that deep breathing increases blood circulation, the oxygen, and glucose that reach your brain? ¿Weird? Isn't it? (Adapted from: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/361716-how-to-increase-oxygen-to-your-brain-with-exercise/>)

**BEFORE WE READ**

Answer the following questions on your own.

1. What do you know about *Fight Club*?
2. Do you know which its main themes are?

Read this *Fight Club* book's synopsis. Underline the words you do not know and look them up in the dictionary



## Fight Club: Synopsis

In the very first pages of “*Fight Club*”, Palahniuk pictures a very violent and borderline moment in which the anonymous narrator and Tyler are involved; the narrator goes back in time to understand which situations led them to that point of their lives. The author presents an anonymous narrator who is very unsatisfied with himself and his role in the neoliberal system in which he is into; a man who is disappointed on the way men are intended to be and act in society.

This feeling of disappointment and disconnection leads the narrator into a severe insomnia. As part of his medical treatment, his doctor tells him to join therapy groups, in order to discover what “real pain” is. In this search to overcome this illness, he finds out that these groups bursting emotions fulfilled him as drug to defeat his own odd narcoleptic disease. But all of sudden, Marla and Tyler appear in his life and everything changes.

Marla regularly attends these therapy groups, but she is not sick like the narrator; on the other hand, Tyler who makes a living with several low paying jobs, first appears at a nude beach. After a series of situations such as narrator’s home gas explosion, Tyler and the protagonist move in together and together create “Fight Club” as a way of reacting to a dehumanizing and sick system by fighting each other and following the Fight Club’s rules. They fight as a therapy for the ones who felt powerless and hopeless in this sick system based on power rather than common good.

Suddenly Marla’s, Tyler’s and the protagonist’s stories, thoughts and feelings converge into a free fall of psychological and physical violence. The novel poses questions such as: **What would happen if you release your hidden instinct from one day to another? What would you do if you had in your hands the power to distort all the things you know including yourself?**

## **AFTER READING (Discuss)**

**Get in groups of four and answer the following questions**

1. Comment on the TWO last questions of the read synopsis of the book.

2. Would you add another question to the end of this synopsis? Why?

3. Did you feel engaged to read the book? Why?

4. Can you think of any “possible ending” of this story?



**Write your groups’ “possible endings” in a sheet of paper and pass it to the group next to you. See if you have something in common or not.**

## Coming of Age and Adolescence

### Session 3

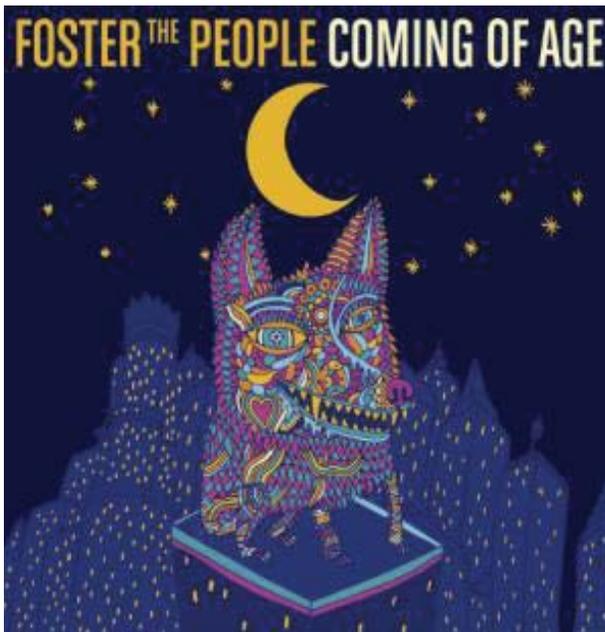
One of the most challenging stages of life: Adolescence

# Coming of Age



### BEFORE YOU LISTEN

Answer these questions and share them with your partner



1. Do you know the group Foster the People? Have you ever heard their music?
2. Based on the title of the song (Coming of Age), write 5 ideas/concepts that might be involved in this song.

## Foster the People – Coming of Age

Well, I see ya standing there like a \_\_\_\_\_  
And you got those crying eyes  
Makes me wanna \_\_\_\_\_ and wrap you in my arms  
You know I try to live without \_\_\_\_\_  
I'm always \_\_\_\_\_ and not looking back  
But I tend to leave a trail of dead, while I'm moving ahead  
So I'm stepping away  
'Cause I got nothing to say

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

And when my fear pulls me out to sea  
And the stars are hidden by \_\_\_\_\_ and my enemies  
I seem \_\_\_\_\_ the people that I care the most  
Just like an animal I protect my pride  
When I'm \_\_\_\_\_ to fight  
And even when \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to think I'm right

Well I'm bored of the game  
And too tired \_\_\_\_\_

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

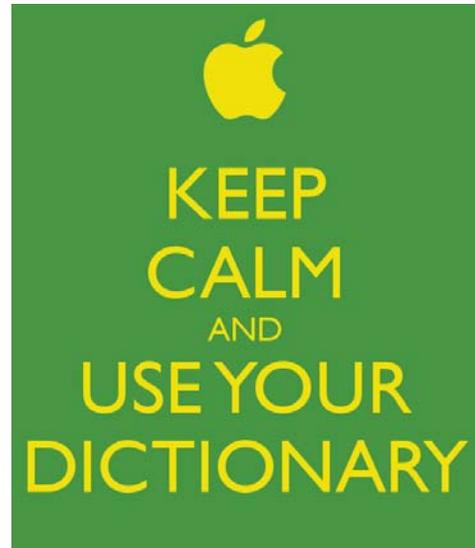
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

(See transcription of the song attached in the appendix)

## WHILE YOU LISTEN

1. You will listen to the song once. Fill in the gaps with the words you hear while you listen to the song. Then exchange information with a partner and try to complete together the lyrics as much as possible.
2. Underline the words you do not know and find their meaning in a dictionary.



## DISCUSS

**Answer these questions on your own and share your answers with your partner.**

1. Did the song have an effect on you? Did you feel identified with the song? Why?
2. What is the main message or idea of the song?
3. Which is the intended audience of this song?

## TEAM WORK

1. Form groups of 4 people and create your own definition of what is coming of age and which are the main characteristics of this concept. In addition, you have to make the connection of this concept to *Fight Club*. Create a “catchy” card on the topic.
2. Deliver a 5-minutes presentation to your classmates of what you came up with.

## Violence

### Session 6

# Violence: Awakening from the fear

## BEFORE YOU READ

Discuss the following questions in pairs.



1. According to you, what is violence?
2. Do the characters see violence as something positive or negative? Why? Discuss with the whole class.
3. Name some recent events where violence has taken place around the world.

4. Do you have any idea where the second picture was taken from?
5. What do you know about violent attacks in our country?
6. What words do you expect to read in the news report? Write them down



9 September 2014

## Chile condemns 'cowardly bomb attack' in Santiago



The blast happened at lunchtime at a shopping centre in the capital, Santiago

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet has condemned a bomb attack on a shopping centre in a busy metro station in the capital Santiago on Monday.

The attack, in which 14 people were injured, is one of the worst since democracy was restored in 1990.

Ms Bachelet called it a "terrorist act, one of the most cowardly we have seen".

There have been around 200 bomb attacks in Santiago in the past decade, with anarchist groups claiming responsibility for many of them.

No-one has so far admitted carrying out this latest bombing.

'Safe country'

The president said she would convene a meeting of her security committee on Tuesday to decide how to proceed.

"What's happened is horrible, an abominable act, but Chile is and will continue to be a safe country," Ms Bachelet said.

The explosive device went off at lunchtime at a fast-food restaurant in an underground shopping centre at the Escuela Militar metro station.

About 150,000 people pass through the station daily.

Joanna Magneti, who works in the centre, described the scene: "I was having lunch when I felt the bang. When I went to see what had happened, I saw lots of smoke, people running and shouting, a youngster who was badly injured and a woman with an injured hand."

Three people were badly wounded in the blast, and another 11 are also being treated.

Ms Bachelet said it was "one of the most cowardly acts we've seen because it had as its objective to maim, spread fear and even kill innocent people".

Chile's Interior Minister said Ms Bachelet mother, Angela Jeria, had been in the area at the time the bomb went off.

He said she had been shopping in the centre, but had not been injured. However, he did not indicate whether she may have been the target of the attack.

'No rest'

Police said the explosive device had been planted in a rubbish bin. Metro officials said they would remove bins from key stations as a precautionary measure.

Interior Minister Rodrigo Penailillo said the government "would not rest until those responsible are behind bars".

Bombs regularly explode outside banks and other targets in the capital, such as police stations, army barracks, and the headquarters of political parties.

But the BBC's Gideon Long says most have been timed to go off at night when the streets are largely empty, and only a handful of passers-by have been injured, none seriously.

Ms Bachelet said she would invoke Chile's anti-terror laws which allows for the extended detention of suspects without charge and longer sentences on conviction.

Mr Penailillo said security at metro stations would be increased and called on residents to report anything unusual.

(Taken from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-29124307>)

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Work individually. Read the text again and answer the questions

1. Has anybody claimed as the author of this bomb attack?
2. Where did this attack take place? How many people go injured in this attack?
3. What is Ms. Bachelet's (President of Chile) opinion on this attack?

### STATE YOUR OPINION (Discuss and write)



Discuss in groups of four people. Read the following questions.

1. Do you think that people who committed this attack have something in common with the characters in Fight Club? What?
2. According to you, is violence a justified way of reacting against the prevailing system? Why or Why not?

Write a three-paragraph text to justify your opinion.

State your main idea in the **1<sup>st</sup> paragraph.**  
Provide examples in the **2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph.**  
Wrap-up of all the info in the last **paragraph**

**TEACHER'S ADVICE**

# Overconsumption: Do we really need that?

## BEFORE YOU LISTEN

Discuss with a partner. Take some notes and get ready to share your answers with your classmates

THE STORY OF STUFF (2007)

(Video taken from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=9GorqroigqM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9GorqroigqM))

1. What is the very first thing that comes to your mind when listen to the word “overconsumption”?
2. Do you consider yourself as a person who normally over consumes?

Watch a video where Annie Leonard describes the whole story of stuff until nowadays.

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Work on your own to answer these following questions



1. According to textbooks, which are the stages where stuff goes through before getting into our hands?
2. What is happening with the natural resources today?
3. Which is the country that exploits more natural resources than others?
4. What did President Bush suggest after the 9/11 attack? Why?

### AFTER YOU LISTEN (Discuss and Write)

Get together with three classmates and answer the following questions.

1. Do you think people are compulsively buying things as a way of overcoming frustration?
2. Is Fight Club a suitable copy of what society is living regarding overconsumption?



**“;Don’t forget we are in Fight Club men!”**

Write a 4-paragraph argumentative essay stating your own opinion on this issue, taking into account the video’s data.

## Identity Crisis

### Session 8

# Sense of Identity

#### BEFORE EVERYTHING

SIMON SAYS: Let's listen and dance this popular song by Pharrell Williams, but you have to follow your classmate's moves and gestures. Let's have some F.U.N. Guys!

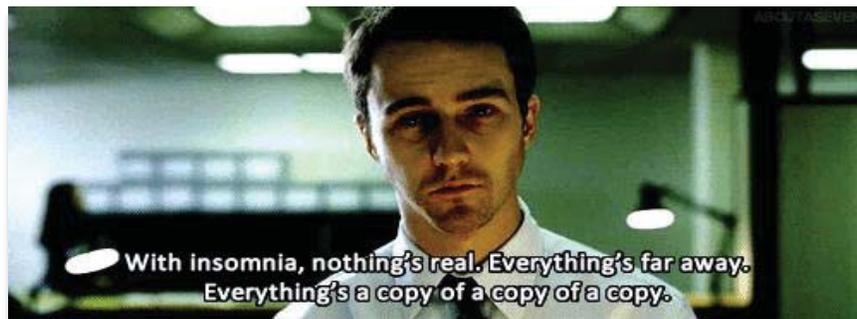
Did you know that participating in dance can help increase your self-esteem and confidence through mastering new skills?

(Taken from <http://www.dance-teachers.org/dance-styles/the-benefits-of-dance.aspx>)

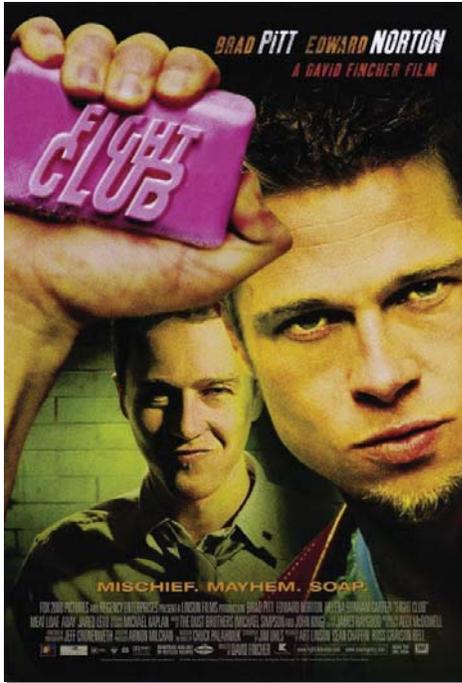


#### BEFORE YOU WATCH

**Discuss with a partner. Take some notes and get ready to share your answers with your classmates**



1. Do you think people are just following fashion patterns nowadays?
2. Do you feel that you already have set your own identity in this society? Would like to live and experiment in other countries? Why or why not?



Watch an extract of the film “Fight Club” (1999) filmed by David Fincher and starred by Brad Pitt and Edward Norton.

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on your own

1. What emotions can you identify in the protagonist?
2. Do you think he feels identified with the society he is inserted in?
3. What’s the doctor’s solution for his rare insomnia?

### AFTER YOU LISTEN (Discuss)

Get together with three classmates and answer the following questions.

1. Do you think people worldwide feel identified with their own society? What about your own case? Do you feel identified with this country?
2. Do you feel you can act and behave the way you want without being judged? Why or why not?
3. Do you really care about what other people say about you?



Write a two-paragraph reflection about yourself. Write about the thing you feel identified the most with and why

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Needs Analysis: Questionnaire

Circle the alternative that best represents your opinion

**1. Do you enjoy learning English?**

- a. Yes                      b. Maybe                      c. I don't know                      d. No

**2. Do you think learning English nowadays is important?**

- a. Yes                      b. Maybe                      c. I don't know                      d. No

**3. Do you like to read?**

- a. Yes                      b. Maybe                      c. I don't know                      d. No

**4. Do you like to read in English?**

- a. Yes                      b. Maybe                      c. I don't know                      d. No

**5. Where is your favorite place to read?**

- a. School              b. Home              c. Bedroom              d. Library              e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Which ones are your favorite books?**

- a. Classical English Books (E.G. Hamlet)  
b. Modern English Books (E.G. Frankenstein)  
c. Contemporary English Books (E.G. Great Gatsby)  
d. Post – Contemporary English Books (E.G. Fifty Shades of Grey)

**7. Tick the things you like to read about:**

- a. Famous People's Life (Biography)

- b. History
- c. Places
- e. Social Controversies and Problems
- f. War
- g. Love.
- h. Philosophy

**8. My favorite types of book are ... (Circle two)**

- a. Fantasy
- b. Thriller
- c. Mystery
- d. Myths and Legends
- e. Science Fiction
- f. Realistic Fiction

**9. Do you think you are a good reader?**

- a. Yes
- b. Maybe
- c. I don't know
- d. No

**10. Do you think it is important to give your opinion on current affairs inside the classroom?**

- a. Yes
- b. Maybe
- c. I don't know
- d. No

**11. Do you like to express your opinion, feelings and thoughts among your classmates?**

- a. Yes
- b. Maybe
- c. I don't know
- d. No

**12. Have you ever heard about the book or movie *Fight Club*?**

- a. Yes
- b. Maybe
- c. I don't know
- d. No

## Appendix 2

### Transcript of the song (session 3)

Foster the People – Coming of Age

Well, I see ya standing there like a rabid dog  
And you got those crying eyes  
Makes me wanna surrender and wrap you in my arms  
You know I try to live without regrets  
I'm always moving forward and not looking back  
But I tend to leave a trail of dead, while I'm moving ahead  
So I'm stepping away  
'Cause I got nothing to say

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

And when my fear pulls me out to sea  
And the stars are hidden by my pride and my enemies  
I seem to hurt the people that I care the most  
Just like an animal I protect my pride  
When I'm too bruised to fight  
And even when I'm wrong I tend to think I'm right

Well I'm bored of the game  
And too tired to rage

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age  
Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like a coming of age

Feels like, feels like it's coming  
It feels like, feels like  
Like a coming of age

## Appendix 3

### Oral Presentation Rubric

	Criteria				Points
	1	2	3	4	
<b>Organization</b>	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	
<b>Content/ Knowledge</b>	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student is at ease with content, but fails to elaborate	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) with explanations and elaboration.	
<b>Visuals</b>	Student used no visuals	Student occasional used visuals that rarely support text and presentation.	Visuals related to text and presentation.	Student used visuals to reinforce screen text and presentation.	
<b>Mechanics</b>	Student's presentation had four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation had three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	
<b>Delivery</b>	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.	Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly.	Student used a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms.	
<b>Total</b>					

(Adapted from <http://www.teach-nology.com>)

## In-class Participation Rubric

	Criteria				Points
	4	3	2	1	
<b>Attendance/ Promptness</b>	Student is <b>always</b> prompt and regularly attends classes.	Student is late to class <b>once</b> every two weeks and regularly attends classes.	Student is late to class <b>more than once</b> every two weeks and regularly attends classes.	Student is late to class <b>more than once</b> a week and/or has poor attendance of classes.	
<b>Level of Engagement in Class</b>	Student proactively contributes to class by offering ideas and asking questions <b>more than once</b> per class.	Student proactively contributes to class by offering ideas and asking questions <b>once</b> per class.	Student <b>rarely</b> contributes to class by offering ideas and asking questions.	Student <b>never</b> contributes to class by offering ideas and asking questions.	
<b>Listening Skills</b>	Student <b>listens</b> when others talk, both in groups and in class. Student incorporates or builds off of the ideas of others	Student <b>listens</b> when others talk, both in groups and in class.	Student <b>does not listen</b> when others talk, both in groups and in class.	Student <b>does not listen</b> when others talk, both in groups and in class. Student often interrupts when others speak.	
<b>Behavior</b>	Student <b>almost never</b> displays disruptive behavior during class.	Student <b>rarely</b> displays disruptive behavior during class.	Student <b>occasionally</b> displays disruptive behavior during class.	Student <b>almost always</b> displays disruptive behavior during class.	
<b>Preparation</b>	Student is <b>almost always</b> prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	Student is <b>usually</b> prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	Student is <b>rarely</b> prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	Student is almost <b>never</b> prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	
<b>Total</b>					

(Adapted from <http://www.teach-nology.com>)

## Written Assignment Rubric

	Criteria					Points
	5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Depth of Reflection</b>	Demonstrate a conscious and thorough understanding of the writing prompt and the subject matter. This reflection can be used as an example for other students.	Demonstrate a thoughtful understanding of the writing prompt and the subject matter.	Demonstrate a basic understanding of the writing prompt and the subject matter.	Demonstrate a limited understanding of the writing prompt and subject matter. This reflection needs revision	Demonstrate little or no understanding of the writing prompt and subject matter. This reflection needs revision	
<b>Use of textual evidence/support</b>	Use specific and convincing examples from the workshop's classes to support claims in your own writing, making insightful and applicable connections with the book.	Use relevant examples from the workshop's classes to support claims in your own writing, making applicable connections with the book.	Use examples from workshop's classes to support most claims in your writing with some connections with the book.	Use incomplete or vaguely developed examples to only partially support claims with no connections with the book.	No examples from the workshop's classes are used and claims made in your own writing are unsupported and irrelevant to the topic at hand.	
<b>Language Use</b>	Use stylistically sophisticated language that is precise and engaging, with notable sense of voice, awareness of audience and purpose, and varied sentence structure.	Use language that is fluent and original, with evident a sense of voice, awareness of audience and purpose, and the ability to vary sentence structure.	Use basic but appropriate language, with a basic sense of voice, some awareness of audience and purpose and some attempt to vary sentence structure.	Use language that is vague or imprecise for the audience or purpose, with little sense of voice, and a limited awareness of how to vary sentence structure.	Use language that is unsuitable for the audience and purpose, with little or no awareness of sentence structure.	
<b>Conventions</b>	Demonstrate control of the conventions with essentially no errors, even with sophisticated language.	Demonstrate control of the conventions, exhibiting occasional errors only when using sophisticated language	Demonstrate partial control of the conventions, exhibiting occasional errors that do not hinder comprehension.	Demonstrate limited control of the conventions, exhibiting frequent errors that make comprehension difficult.	Demonstrate little or no control of the conventions, making comprehension almost impossible.	
<b>TOTAL</b>						

(Adapted from <http://sites4teachers.com>)

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