

Growing up – Under difficult circumstances

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf



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Eines haben alle Menschen gemeinsam: sie werden – früher oder später – erwachsen. Doch der Prozess des Erwachsenwerdens kann sehr unterschiedlich verlaufen. Abhängig von Land, Kultur, sozialem Status, Familie oder zeitlicher Epoche kann der/die Jugendliche die Phase des *coming of age* sowohl positiv als auch negativ erleben. Die Unterrichtseinheit zu diesem abiturelevanten Thema legt den Fokus auf den Aspekt *growing up under difficult circumstances*. Anhand von fiktionalen Texten sowie einer Verfilmung setzen die Schüler sich mit den Umständen auseinander, in denen die Romanfiguren aufwachsen. Dabei trainieren sie nicht nur ihr Leseverstehen, sondern schulen gezielt das Schreiben von *summaries* sowie *characterisations*.

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Competences and skills:

By working with the material, students enhance their **reading comprehension**. They also develop their **writing skills** by writing various summaries and characterisations. Furthermore, by watching the film *Precious* and by focussing on the plot, a key scene of their choice, the characters and the message/intention of the film, they improve their **viewing skills**. Students **analyse** and **discuss** the difficult situations in which the protagonists of fictional texts grow up. Finally, they practise their **speaking skills** by presenting their favourite text and its literary qualities to the entire class.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A Analysis	C Comment	CH Characterisation
CT Creative Task	D Discussion	IN Interview/Survey
GP Group puzzle	LVC Listening/Viewing comprehension	
PR Presentation	RC Reading comprehension	S Summary
T Working with the text	TPS Think–Pair–Share	V Vocabulary

Topic	Material	Method
1: Growing up – an introduction	M1–M2	IN, RC, T, V
2: The luxury of going to school	M3–M5	A, CH, RC, S
3: Growing up and migration	M6–M7	A, C, CT, RC, S, TPS
4: Family life can be hell	M8–M9	A, C, CH, GP, LVC, PR, RC
5: Psychological problems in childhood	M10–M12	A, CH, D, PR, RC, S, TPS

Expression	Definition
1. puberty	A. an element, an aspect
2. binge drinking	B. problems between young people and older people
3. mood swings	C. aims an individual intends to pursue in his/her life
4. generational conflicts	D. to have sexual intercourse with somebody against his/her will
5. ambitions	E. sudden changes of emotions without any exterior cause
6. facet	F. the problems/conflicts somebody is confronted with in the course of his/her life
7. neglect	G. the conditions referring to social status and financial means an individual lives in
8. challenges	H. lacking the necessary food, attention, love, education in everyday life
9. rape	I. something one has to go through while growing up
10. socio-economic circumstances	J. consumption of large quantities of alcohol within a short period of time

Working with the text



3. Read the text *The challenges of growing up* and write down examples based on your own experiences to illustrate the following statements from the text.

- “During childhood, a young person usually enjoys a carefree time.” (l. 1)
- “Adolescence is also the time during which individuals feel the strong desire to emancipate themselves from their parents.” (ll. 13–15)
- “Adolescents have to start making decisions about their careers.” (ll. 21/22)

Further activity

- Do a quick survey in your class about your classmates' plans, ambitions and projects for the future. Write down the answers. In a flash feedback, present your answers and give reasons for your choices.

Topic 2: The luxury of going to school

M3 Francisco Jiménez: *The Circuit*

Panchito, the eleven-year-old narrator, is the son of a Mexican-American migrant worker and, thus, constantly on the move. Whenever his family moves on, he has to attend a new school. In the excerpt, he narrates his experiences.



It was Monday, the first week of November. The grape season was over and I could now go to school. I woke up early that morning and lay in bed, looking at the stars and savoring the thought of not going to work and of starting sixth grade for the first time that year. Since I could not sleep, I decided to get up and join Papá and Roberto at breakfast. I sat at the table across from Roberto, but I kept my head down. I did not want to look up and face him. I knew he was sad. He was not going to school today. He was not going tomorrow, or next week, or next month. He would not go until the cotton season was over, and that was sometime in February. I rubbed my hands together and watched the dry, acid stained skin¹ fall to the floor in little rolls.

When Papá and Roberto left for work, I felt relief. [...]

Two hours later, around eight o'clock, I stood by the side of the road waiting for school bus number twenty. When it arrived I climbed in. Everyone was busy either talking or yelling. I sat in an empty seat in the back.

When the bus stopped in front of the school, I felt very nervous. I looked out the bus window and saw boys and girls carrying books under their arms. I put my hands in my pant pockets and walked to the principal's office. When I entered I heard a woman's voice say: "May I help you?" I was startled². I had not heard English for months. For a few seconds I remained speechless. I looked at the lady who waited for an answer. My first instinct was to answer her in Spanish, but I held back. Finally, after struggling for English words, I managed to tell her that I wanted to enroll in the sixth grade. After answering many questions, I was led to the classroom.

Mr. Lema, the sixth grade teacher, greeted me and assigned me a desk. He then introduced me to the class. I was so nervous and scared at that moment when everyone's eyes were on me that I wished that I were with Papá and Roberto picking cotton. After taking roll³. Mr. Lema gave the class the assignment for the first hour. "The first thing we have to do this morning is finish reading the story

M5 Info sheet: summaries and characterisations



Guidelines for writing a summary

- Your summary should contain about one third of the word count of the original text.
- Use your own words.
- Do not include direct speech or quotations in your summary.
- Write your summary in the present tense.
- Be neutral: Do not include your own thoughts or opinion.
- Mention only the most relevant facts or incidents.
- Mention the events of the original text in chronological order.
- Begin your summary with an umbrella sentence: title and author; general topic of the extract.

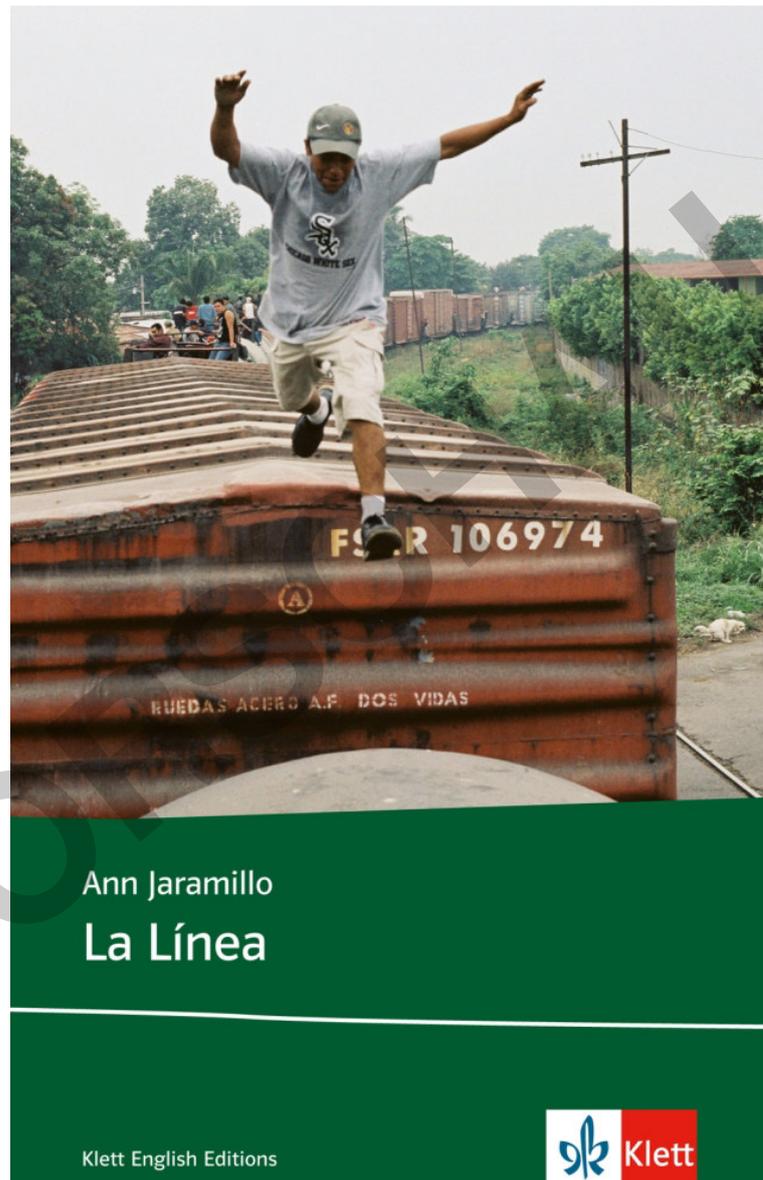
Guidelines for writing a characterisation

1. Mark the revealing sentences/passages regarding a person's character in the given text.
2. Write a brief introduction for your characterisation.
3. Deal with the following aspects of the character in question (if possible). Use one paragraph for each aspect. Prove your statements about the character by referring to and quoting from the text.
 - outward appearance
 - occupation/social and financial status
 - his/her actions and implications for his/her character
 - his/her opinions and/or attitudes and implications for his/her character
 - his/her emotions and implications for his/her character
 - his/her relationship with other people and implications for his/her character
4. Write a brief conclusion summarising the mentioned aspects.

M7 Worksheet – Ann Jaramillo: *La Línea*

Pre-reading activity

1. Think – Pair – Share: Describe the photo of a young Mexican migrant. Speculate on his reasons for leaving his home country, his dreams, hopes and fears concerning his new life. Share your ideas with a partner. Then, discuss the photo with the entire class.



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Reading comprehension



2. Summarise the extract from *La Línea* by Ann Jaramillo.

M9 Worksheet – Sapphire: *Push*

Pre-reading activity



1. Work with a partner. Think about the role and responsibility of parents. Then, write down on a piece of paper one thing that parents should not do. After this, exchange your answers with your partner and give your opinion.

Reading comprehension



2. Outline the situation in which Precious from *Push* lives.
3. Name the reason for Mr Wicher's anger during the maths lesson.
4. Explain why the schoolmates are scared of Precious.
5. Describe what happens in Mrs Lichtenstein's office.
6. Explain why the principal intends to suspend Precious from school.

Analysis



7. Analyse the style of the excerpt and describe its function and effect on the reader.
8. Characterise the protagonist, Precious. Again, take into consideration the guidelines for writing a characterisation.

Creative writing



9. Write a diary entry from Precious's point of view after the suspension from school.

Working with the film

10. Watch the film, *Precious*.



- a) While watching, take notes on the following points: content, plot and topics. Afterwards, use your notes to create a viewing log. You can also use the application Book Creator.

