

# The Handmaid's Tale

## LES



**Table de concertation féministe**  
GASPÉSIE · ÎLES-DE-LA-MADELEINE

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Target audience</b> | Grade 11  |
| <b>Duration</b>        | 6 periods   |
| <b>Description</b>     | This LES has been adapted from activities and content developed online. The resources can be found at the end of this document. |

## Sexuality education content

Recognize the signs of violence in a dating relationship

- Warning signs: feeling that something is not right, feeling controlled or manipulated, feeling cut off from the outside world
- Occurrences of violence: verbal, psychological, sexual, physical
- Mutual violence
- People concerned, regardless of gender: victims, perpetrators or witnesses of violence
- Search for solutions to prevent or stop violence in the context of a dating relationship
- Social support: seeking help from people close to you, listening to a friend who confides in you, reporting a situation of violence
- Empowerment: listening to yourself and trusting your intuition, taking your time before entering into a relationship, considering ending a relationship, ending the relationship

Become aware of factors important to sustaining emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy

- Emotional intimacy between partners: sharing your secrets, communicating, trusting the other person, sharing activities and interests, sharing points of view, taking care of yourself and of the other person, ability to be assertive and to negotiate
- Capacity for sexual intimacy: sexual relations considered as a measure of a relationship, ability to learn from past experiences, decisions about how to express your sexuality, comfort with your sexuality, whether or not you are in a couple, whether or not you are sexually active

# Culture and Citizenship in Québec

## Identify the ethical dimension of a situation

Describes a situation • Mobilises relevant information and concepts • Detects tensions at play • Formulates an ethical question

## Examines a variety of viewpoints

Considers different viewpoints and experiences • Compares reference points • Puts reference points into context by situating them in time and space, and linking them to the social and cultural environment • Evaluates the reasoning presented by identifying various errors in reasoning

## Elaborates a viewpoint

Selects most relevant reference points • Identifies possible answers • Assess the effects of responses on oneself, others, relationships, and society • Justifies choices by explaining one's reasoning

## General Overview

| Group 1                    |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Purpose</b>             | In this lesson, students will learn to use their historical and cultural knowledge to critically examine issues of gender and power in <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> .  |
| <b>Goals</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Help students recognize different ways of looking at the future of humanity with regard to how human beings and the environment relate.</li><li>● Draw upon various ways of looking at the future of humanity in order to help students examine various contemporary situations.</li><li>● Help them analyze current challenges and consider possible actions or options</li></ul>   |
| <b>Learning objectives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Analyze the social stratification of women, explaining specifically the roles, duties, and significance of each group of woman.</li><li>● Demonstrate the ability to reason critically and recognize what are the factors that make a totalitarian society</li><li>● Explore how characters find subtle ways to take back power and social standing.</li><li>● Connect the society portrayed in the novel to real-life repressive regimes.</li></ul> |

## Lesson plan

|           | Activity                    | Development  | Material   | Format  |
|-----------|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| 5 mins    | <i>Pre-reading activity</i> | <p>The historical, social and cultural context is very important to understand for this novel.</p> <p>Atwood has said that everything that happens in the text has actually happened in history!</p> <p>Show this video to students to help them understand why reading the book is important.</p>   | <p>Video:</p> <p>Why should you read "The Handmaid's Tale"? - Naomi R. Mercer - YouTube</p>  | Whole class   |
| 2 periods |                             | <p>Then, before reading the novel, have students research the following topics. They can either add their ideas to a Word or Google document, write down the information in their notebooks or add them to a presentation. Once this activity is completed, it is important for students to share their feedback with the class during a class discussion.</p> | <p>What is speculative fiction?</p> <p>Societies that have practiced polygamy.</p> <p>Examples of patriarchal societies in history.</p> <p>Religious conservatism in 1980's America.</p> <p>Biblical references: The story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah.</p> <p>The second wave feminist movement of the 1980s.</p> <p>The society of the Puritans in New England.</p> <p>Birth control and fertility issues in Romania under President Ceausescu</p> <p>Environmental factors that may impact fertility</p> | <p>Duo or trio</p> <p>Presentation to the whole class</p> |
| 2 periods | <i>Reading the book</i>     |  |  |   |

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| <p><b>1 period</b></p> | <p>Post-reading activities</p> <p>Hierarchy in the novel</p> | <p>A very strict social hierarchy is a common feature in dystopian literature and <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> is no exception. Have students create a diagram to illustrate the social hierarchy in the text which should include the following categories: Commanders, Handmaids, Eyes, Martha's, Wives, Economies, UnWomen, Angels, Aunts, and Guardians. The diagram should have the most powerful at the top and the least powerful at the bottom and include a brief explanation of the role of each group and any color which is associated with them.</p> | <p>Document:</p> <p>Diagram – hierarchy, printed for every duo</p> <p>Presentation:</p> <p>Hierarchy in <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Kristen Fader (prezi.com)</p>   | <p>Duo, then whole class with the presentation</p> |
|                        |  | <p>Then, focus on women's roles.</p> <p>In the Republic of Gilead, women are stratified: the Wives run the households; the Handmaids bear the children for the Wives; the Marthas are housemaids; the Aunts train and keep order over the Handmaids. Each role centers itself around the reproduction cycle of the Handmaid. Women are seen as vessels for bearing children; those who willingly gave this duty up were sent off to hard labor in the Colonies as Unwomen. Their very womanhood was stripped from them once they could not bear children.</p>   | <p>What are women reduced to?</p> <p>Where are their spheres of influence?</p> <p>What about their freedom of will?</p> <p>How would you describe the relationships between:</p> <p>The commander and Offred?</p> <p>The commander and his wife?</p> <p>Serena Joy (wife) and Offred?</p> |  |
| <p><b>1 period</b></p> | <p>A Failed utopia</p>                                       | <p>As the narrative demonstrates, Gilead is a failed utopia for everyone. Everything is in short supply – evident in the rationed</p>   | <p>What about choice?</p> <p>What about freedom?</p>  | <p>Whole class</p>                                 |

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|  |  | <p>foodstuffs and goods, and the lack of sexual choice for both women and men. Most important is the sharp decline in the birth rate and reproduction; women are reduced to their biological function as child-bearers and denied any sexual freedom at all at any age.</p> <p>In Gilead, the crisis in reproduction has affected men's lifestyles too. Any male practice which inhibits reproduction is severely punished, so that male doctors who formerly practised abortion, or homosexuals, or Roman Catholic priests (as well as nuns) who took vows of chastity are all executed and their bodies hung on the Wall. Pornography, sexual violence and infidelity are all outlawed, but so is falling in love.</p> <p>Have a discussion with the students on the following topics:</p> | <p>What about rebellion?</p> <p>Who rebels and why?</p>  |                    |
|  |  | <p>Have a discussion with your students around these questions:</p> <p>Discuss their response to the themes of the novel and what they feel the message of the novel is to the current generation.</p> <p>Find examples of women rebelling to fight for their rights in the world.</p>   | <p>What would happen if women's rights were taken away?</p> <p>What would happen if environmental issues seriously impacted our fertility?</p> <p>What would happen if we returned to a radical patriarchal society?</p> <p>How does the novel relates to current events in the society today?</p> | <p>Whole class</p> |

## Resources

- 10 Great Handmaid Tale Activities | by EduHup | Medium
- How to Teach The Handmaid's Tale (prestwickhouse.com)
- Why should you read "The Handmaid's Tale"? - Naomi R. Mercer - YouTube
- The roles of women in 'The Handmaid's Tale' explained | amNewYork (amny.com)
- Themes A failed utopia The Handmaid's Tale: A Level (yorknotes.com)
- Hierarchy in The Handmaids Tale by Kristen Fader (prezi.com)
- Observations from a simple life: The Handmaid's Tale: a classic novel we should all read