

Aunty Lee's Delights Lesson Plan 5

“Scene Scrubber” (adapted from “Script Doctor”)

Created by Emily Crider, Carri Jane Tenniswood, and Sidney Ducleroir

Overview: This lesson is built to act as a conclusion to the previous lessons. In the first lesson, we were introduced to Singaporean culture and the cozy mystery genre. The second lesson further developed the class's understanding of Singaporean culture and its relation to food. Finally, the most recent lesson looked at intersectionality represented through the characters within *Aunty Lee's Delights*. Now, this lesson works to combine these elements in order to investigate the conclusion to the novel.

This lesson prompts students to consider the significance of identity in character interactions and plot development. To accomplish this goal, students will use what they have learned about characterization in Ovidia Yu's *Aunty Lee's Delights* to rework sections from original scenes, inverting and subverting characters' identities, in order to highlight the broader impact of said identities on the novel's plot. This lesson will require students to think critically about the authorial choices underlying character development with the goal of fostering an appreciation for how identity shapes perspectives, motivations, and power dynamics within a story and the cozy mystery genre more broadly.

Part of this lesson has been adapted from the “Script Doctor” exercise included in Diana Fuss and William A. Gleason's *The Pocket Instructor, Literature: 101 exercises for the college classroom* (Fuss and Gleason 85-87).

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe characters' cultural, ethnic, gender, economic, and sexual identities.
- Illustrate how identity plays into character interactions within the dialogue, behavior, and scope of specific scenes of the novel.
- Compare how genre constraints determine how information is conveyed (e.g. how drama presents information vs how fiction presents information).

Class Structure:

10 minutes: Intro and review

1. Introduce this as the conclusion of the novel.
2. Review content from the previous classes, looking at the definition of intersectionality as well as the lessons about food and culture from previous days, scaffolding and connecting each of the three elements within the context of the novel itself.
3. Ask students to **recall** the following points:
 - Genre of the novel
 - Cozy mystery: Takes place at an unconventional location, with an amateur protagonist, and uses a convention (or gimmick).
 - Cultural identity
 - Themes of tradition, modernity, family, and community while highlighting Singaporean society.
 - Intersectionality

- The overlapping or interdependent systems of discrimination and privilege.
- 4. Introduce the activity as a means of connecting each of these three elements, asking students to consider the significance of characters' identities—in this case, the novel's social outsiders—in the text. Each group should ideally consist of 3-4 students.
 - Instructions:
 - Working with your group, read your assigned passage carefully.
 - As you read, analyze the identities of the main characters.
 - In the first column, describe each character based on the intersectional elements we discussed previously (e.g., race, gender, class, etc.).
 - In the second column, alter the identities of these characters in ways that will fundamentally shift how they act in the passage.
 - Read through the passage again and revise sections to incorporate and reflect the identity shifts you brainstormed
- 5. After explaining the instructions, model the activity with a character pairing that has already been discussed in previous classes. Here is an example using Carla Saito.
 - Point students to the worksheet so that they can understand the example in context.

	Identity: Text Version (Think back to intersectionality)	Identity: Your Version (Altered character identities)
Carla Saito	Middle class (comfortably so) Foreign tourist (American w/ Japanese heritage) Lesbian— outsider	Wildly wealthy Foreign tourist (American) Lesbian— accepted/insider
Selina Lee	Grew up middle class; aspiring to a “Tai Tai” upper-class lifestyle Singaporean Snobby/judgey social climber	Grew up middle class; aspiring to a “Tai Tai” upper-class lifestyle Singaporean Snobby/judgey social climber

- Using this chart in the slideshow, **show** why the change in Carla's character (from being a Lesbian in a place where she has to be defensive about that to feeling accepted or at ease in her identity) makes sense for the activity by **connecting** the identity to aspects of Carla's character and how other characters respond to her.
- Then, show how this change might be reflected in the selected passage from page 73:
 - Original (changed parts bolded)
 - Selina could see that Harry was also studying Carla Saito thoughtfully. She wondered if he had reached the same conclusion as she had. Surely it was obvious (to everyone except Aunty Lee) **what kind of relationship this woman was having with Marianne Peters**. Selina felt a throb of glee. **It was not only her duty to warn Aunty Lee that this might not**

be the sort of person she wanted to encourage as a customer; it was also Selina's duty to warn Mycroft Peters what kind of company his little sister had been keeping in America, and whom she had been making plans with. Selina had always felt that Mycroft Peters looked down on Mark and herself in spite of his stewardess wife. Well, she thought, at least Mark didn't have a perverted sister.

- Altered version (changes underlined)
 - Selina could see that Harry was also studying Carla Saito thoughtfully. She wondered if he had reached the same conclusion as she had. Surely it was obvious (to everyone except Auntie Lee) **what kind of relationship this woman was having with Marianne Peters, Carla Saito just might soon be a powerful person in Selina's social network.** Selina felt a throb of glee. **She needed to befriend Carla, and fast. Mycroft Peter's may have married a penniless stewardess, but his little sister wasn't about to make the same mistake, and Selina didn't need another Tai Tai wife looking down on Mark and herself.**
- Read through the example and discuss how this change in identity and associated character behaviors impact the context of the scene and novel more broadly. This illustrates the impact that character identities have on seemingly small moments in a text. Ask students to answer the following questions:
 - How do these changes to aspects of identity alter or affect the characters' relationship, both within each specific scene and in the novel as a whole?
 - In what ways might these changes affect the novel's outcome and how we read it (i.e. plot, themes, framing, etc.)?
 - Thinking about intersectionality and the various textual elements that we've discussed since we began the novel, how do you think Ovidia Yu's use of identity functions within or contributes to the cozy mystery genre?

25 minutes: Scene Scrubber: [Group 1](#), [Group 2](#), ([Excerpts only](#))

- Put students into groups and distribute the worksheet (attached at end of lesson plan).
- Provide students with the following instructions:
 - Read over their assigned passage and focus on the identities of the characters therein.
 - Use the chart on the worksheet to describe the characters based on the elements of intersectionality that were discussed in our previous class.
 - Consider how the scene would play out were you to alter these identities (e.g., a character who is part of the upper-class is now part of the lower-class)
 - Guide Rails:
 - Clarify that students must change **only** relevant parts of the characters' identities as they relate to the provided passage, as well as maintain realistic parameters for the context of the novel (i.e., students should not turn characters into dogs).
 - Students should consider aspects of character personality associated with their identities. How would changes to these personality traits be reflected in the chosen passage? (i.e., how might a scene play out if a character's insecurity related to their outsider status is subverted by them)

attaining insider status?)

- Read through the passage again and change sections of the text to reflect these shifts in identity that you imagine.

15 minutes: Discussion and debrief

- After students have scrubbed their scene, each group will walk through the revisions they made and elements/identities they have changed, explaining why they made these choices and what effect they have.
- Then, move into a class discussion and ask students to consider the same questions from earlier:
 - How do these changes to aspects of identity alter or affect the characters' relationship, both within each specific scene and in the novel as a whole?
 - In what ways might these changes affect the novel's outcome and how we read it (i.e. plot, themes, framing, etc.)?
 - Thinking about intersectionality and the various textual elements that we've discussed since we began the novel, how do you think Ovidia Yu's use of identity functions within or contributes to the cozy mystery genre?

Sources:

Fuss, Diana, and William Gleason, editors. *Pocket Instructor: Literature, 101 Exercises for the Classroom*. Princeton University Press, 2016.

Yu, Ovidia, *Aunty Lee's Delights: A Singaporean Mystery*. Harper Collins, 2013.

Scene Scrubber Worksheet
Group 1: Frank Cunningham and Lucy Cunningham

	Identity: Text Version (Think back to intersectionality)	Identity: Your Version (Altered character identities)
Lucy Cunningham		
Frank Cunningham		

Passage: (201-202, 223-225)

The Cunninghams were kept overnight in the hospital and treated for shock and minor burns. Frank had a broken arm, and Aunt Lee went to see him first so that she could tell Lucy how he was. And also so she could spend more time with Lucy.

“Tell me why you and Frank are in Singapore, dear,” Aunt Lee began. “Do you remember what you said just before the explosion?” she asked. Lucy shook her head. She looked exhausted and resigned

“I don’t know. I don’t care. I’m just so tired.”

“Do you need anything?”

“Oh no. We’re very well looked after here.”

“Is there anyone I can call for you? Who should know you are there?”

Lucy shook her head. “We’re both going to be all right, they said...?”

“Oh yes. It’s just that if anybody tries to reach you and gets worried...”

Lucy Cunningham motioned for her purse and wrote something in her notebook before tearing out the page to pass to Aunt Lee.

“It’s not really a secret, but please don’t mention it to my husband yet. Just call this number and tell him that Frank and Lucy Cunningham are in hospital here. And please tell him we’re all right. Don’t tell him to come to see us or anything, just let him know where we are. I think he should know.”

“Who is the message for?”

“Joe, of course. Joseph Cunningham.”

It was a local number, Aunt Lee saw. “Of course I will.”

“But don’t tell Frank. I’m not asking you to do anything wrong, but please...don’t tell Frank.”

...

They were talking in Lucy Cunningham's room. Her natural warmth had already broken through her prejudice against gays, and while her son talked to Aunt Lee, Otto was sitting by her bedside listening to her stories about Joe as a child. Now and then she looked over to Joe and Aunt Lee with a big smile on her face. In spite of the angry-looking red-and-white burn blisters visible on her arms and legs (fortunately, she had instinctively blocked her face in time), Lucy Cunningham looked better than Aunt Lee had ever seen her.

“And how is your father taking it?” Aunt Lee asked Joe.

“Do you know why they came to Singapore without telling me? They—or rather my father—wanted to meet up with Otto’s parents to try to enlist their help in breaking us up. That was what Laura Kwee was helping them with.

“Actually she told them that since same-sex relationships are illegal in Singapore, they could threaten to have Otto arrested if I didn’t swear never to see him again. But my mother refused to go along with that. So Laura said she would link them up with Otto’s parents if they came out here. She told them that if both sets of parents confronted us together, we would have to give in and they could bring me home. But then she never showed up. Anyway it wouldn’t have worked. Otto’s father is dead and his mother totally accepted me. It didn’t happen overnight, of course, but she was helping us plan the commitment ceremony. Or rather she’s organizing everything.”

“Looks like she’s going to have some competition...”

They both looked across the room as Lucy Cunningham laughed. “What does he mean there are no photographs—I have hundreds, thousands of photographs of my Joe. We can go through them and pick out what you’ll use for the montage...”

Otto grinned at the others as Joe Cunningham made a wry grimace. This family would go on relatively unscarred, Aunty Lee thought. And she said precisely that.

“I always thought they’d come round,” Joe responded. “People who really care find a way to deal with it. Even my dad will, given time. The people who get most upset are those crazies in LifeGifters—you know, the ones who want to save people from being gay? Laura Kwee was involved in it.”

...

Frank Cunningham was alone in his room when Aunty Lee went in. She had brought him some of her brightly colored little cakes but he only stared at them glumly. Like his wife, his arms and legs were bandaged, and in addition he had a black eye.

“Don’t you find it hard to accept people like them?” Frank asked Aunty Lee. “Don’t you people have any decency here? It’s supposed to be against the law. It’s unnatural.” But perhaps due to painkillers, he wasn’t as vehement as before.

Scene Scrubber Worksheet
Group 2: Aunt Lee and Harry Sullivan

	Identity: Text Version (Think back to intersectionality)	Identity: Your Version (Altered character identities)
Aunt Lee		
Harry Sullivan		

Passage (pp. 247-254):

“We can’t choose our relatives,” she agreed. She poured out more tea for them both. Her hand seemed quite steady. Harry wondered whether too much tea would dilute the effects.

“You didn’t mean to kill Marianne Peters either, did you?”

“I didn’t kill Marianne! You see, I knew that’s what people like you would think. Everything’s my fault. Let’s pick on someone to blame, someone who nobody is ever going to listen to or believe. We’ll put the blame on him and string him up for it, why not. Why bother to find out what really happened? Who cares what really happened! I knew it. I knew that’s how it was going to come down.”

...

He was getting tired. All these women were so stupid. “I came for the wine dining that night, remember? That was the night Miss Laura decided to surprise us all with her bloody cupcakes after the dinner. If it hadn’t been for her, I would have got back to Marianne earlier. I might have been able to do something to help her, the poor girl. It’s all that stupid slut bitch’s fault that Marianne died. The way she was going on and on about her cupcakes as a bloody art form. If you’re looking for someone to blame for what happened to poor Marianne, you put the blame on that one!”

...

“Why did you kill Laura Kwee?” Aunt Lee asked him sharply.

He had to search his brain to remember who she was talking about.

“She was a bitch.”

Aunt Lee nodded agreeably. She had brought a bowl and a round, wooden chopping board back to the table. “Perhaps. But why did you kill her?”

“It’s none of your fucking business.” He would go to sleep for a while, he decided. Then, when he woke up, he would kill this old woman who was standing in front of him taking things out of her bowl and putting them onto the chopping board. He told her so. “Because she’s just like you. Fucking busybody bitches. What are you doing?”

“Pig’s foot,” Aunt Lee said sweetly. “You want to know what human beings taste like, all you have to do is eat pork.” She lifted a chopper and expertly whacked the long, pale-skinned leg. “Very sweet. You and the pig are both red meat. Your muscles about the same size. You eat your junk food, the pig eats what is left over from making your junk food, so same taste, same texture, only difference is your meat is juicier.”

He stared at her blearily, trying to work out what she was saying.

Aunty Lee brought her chopper down and cleanly dismembered a section of the pig's foot. "I tell you, most people cannot tell the difference whether they are eating pig meat or human meat—" She peered at the meat through her spectacles, poked at something, then reached for an enormous pair of tweezers. "Nina is supposed to pull out all the hair for me first. But sometimes they are extra hairy—like you. Look at your hands!"

"Nothing wrong with my hands." He stretched out his hands and looked at his good strong fingers with their curly ginger hair.

"Do you know how long it would take me to get all that hair off your fingers?" The thwack of Aunty Lee's chopper startled him. "Same like people's hands, you see—" Thwack. "If you chop at the right place, you can cut up the fingers clean through. No chips. People don't like to bite into bits of bone. But very hard to teach people to chop nowadays. Hard to get fresh meat to practice on—"

He curled his fingers protectively in his palms as Aunty Lee thwacked again.

"Why did you kill Laura Kwee?" she asked again, holding up the chopper.

"You're mad," he said. He tried to get up, but his legs seemed strangely detached from the rest of his body.

"You don't need to be very strong. You don't even need a very sharp knife as long as you know where to chop."

"She's the one that was coming after me," he whined. "I didn't want to have anything to do with her."

Aunty Lee came around the table and moved toward him, nonchalantly hefting her chopper. She picked up one of his limp hands and shook it as he watched helplessly.

"Really? What happened?"

"She was trying to blackmail me. She was saying how she saw me and Marianne together, how well we got along. She kept asking if Marianne told me where she was going. I know her type. She was trying to scare me out of everything I had, then after that, she would have sold me out. I know her type I was only trying to stop her, that's all. It was self-defense!" He could barely speak, but what was left of his conscious brain told him to say whatever he had to in order to get this madwoman away from him.