

***Aunty Lee's Delights* Lesson Plan 3**

Exploring Sexuality Studies and Dialogue

Created by Olivia De Young, Emily Crider, Sidney Ducleroir, Alex Anderson, & Emily Pearson

Overview: This lesson prompts students to consider the significance of dialogue in the literary forms of fiction and drama, thus connecting *Aunty Lee's Delights* to Yu's history as a playwright. This lesson also expands on the first lesson by providing further cultural and legal background on Singapore, specifically its recently repealed antisodomy laws.

To connect these goals, students will draft original dialogue inspired by important scenes in the text concerning gay or lesbian characters. This exercise requires students to craft new scenes of dialogue as a means of reimagining the novel as a stage play, thus focusing on and expanding dialogue between characters, and also find new ways (such as tone, stage directions, etc.) to convey what the novel does in dramatic form. This exercise will require students to reimagine elements of the texts that are conveyed through exposition or internal dialogue as explicit dialogue. It will also give students the opportunity to imagine new scenes that we don't get to see in the novel.

Objectives:

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

- Define sexuality studies and articulate how legal and cultural attitudes toward sexuality influence the plot of *Aunty Lee's Delights*.
- Define dialogue as a literary device and articulate its importance in literary texts.
- Reimagine fiction as a stage play, relying on stage directions, blocking, and dialogue to convey information. (To expand, instructors might also prompt students to think about set design, lighting, costumes, sound design, etc.)
- Understand how genre constraints determine how information is conveyed (e.g. how drama presents information vs how fiction presents information).
- Understand how dialogue contributes to tone, mood, and pacing.

Class Structure:

8 minutes: Framing Activity

- Ask students to quickly review the conversation between Carla and Aunty Lee in which they discuss Carla and Marianne's relationship (pp. 87-88). [This passage was chosen because it relies primarily on dialogue to further the plot.] Ask students how they know what they learn about characters in this scene. What is unsaid? What is unspoken but clearly understood? Guide them toward dialogue.
- Ask students to generate a class definition of dialogue using the following questions and recording student answers on the board:
 - What is dialogue?

- What do we learn from dialogue?
- What makes dialogue work well? What are some signs that it isn't working well?
- Where do you expect to see dialogue (e.g. in what genres, situations, or kinds of literary texts)?
- Provide students with the following formal definition of dialogue: “conversation between two or more characters in a literary work” (Murfin & Ray 93). Compare the formal definition against the class-generated definition.

15 minutes: Lecture

- Begin the lecture by providing students with some background on Ovidia Yu's career.
 - Yu was born and raised in Singapore, and has had a long career as a writer. *Aunty Lee's Delights*, Yu's second mystery novel, achieved international acclaim. But Yu had already established herself as a renowned Singaporean author and playwright for two decades before then. Yu's career writing for theater was prolific and successful; she wrote over 30 plays, many of which were staged internationally. Yu's plays, like her novels, were known for their focus on women's perspectives and for their exploration of the queer experience in contemporary Singapore.
- Provide students with recent historical information on gay rights issues in Singapore.
 - Singapore legalized same-sex sexual activity for men in 2022; until that point colonial-era antisodomy laws criminalized same-sex sexual activity between men (although the laws did not consider sexual activity between women). Singapore had previously decided in 2007 not to prosecute based on the antisodomy laws. Still, Singapore still had a lot of hostility toward homosexuality: “A 2007 survey of Singaporean public opinion found that the majority (68.6 percent) of Singaporeans held negative views of lesbians and gay men, and were uncomfortable with media portrayals of homosexuality” (Obendorf 238). When sodomy was decriminalized in 2007, the new interpretations of the law aimed to move the debate away from a focus on sexual activity itself, and more toward a censorship on queer representations that affected people of every gender. For example, television broadcasters were not permitted to “in any way promote, justify, or glamorise male homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender lives or issues and must bear in mind the family as the basic unit of society in Singapore” (qtd. In Obendorf 240). Even when the antisodomy laws were fully repealed in 2022, the Singaporean legislature simultaneously voted to define marriage as inherently between a man and a woman, thereby ensuring that gay marriage would remain illegal in Singapore. All this to say, gay rights are still debated and evolving in Singapore.
 - With this in mind, it is important to note that *Aunty Lee's Delights* (2013) was written in an interesting and brief window during which gay men could be fairly

certain that they wouldn't be legally punished for their relationships, but any sexual activity with another man was still technically illegal. Moreover, the government was more hostile toward lesbian women and transgender people than before. This context helps us to better understand the cultural setting of *Aunty Lee's Delights* and its characters' feelings towards gay rights.

- Briefly point out to students that paying attention to the textual representations of homo- and hetero-sexuality is an established type of literary criticism, called sexuality studies.
- Return to the idea of dialogue from earlier. Remind students that Yu actively entered the public debate about gay rights in Singapore by writing and staging representations of gay and lesbian characters. Perhaps left over from her years writing for theater, Yu's fiction writing is heavily steeped in dialogue to help with characterization, tone, and exposition.

15 minutes: Dialogue Activity

- Instruct students to (re)write a short scene in the novel as a play. The finished work should focus primarily on dialogue, but can also include stage directions and actor notes. Remind the students that Yu's work strategically comments on life in Singapore, including its hostility toward LGBTQ issues. Encourage them to consider that commentary in their own dialogue, staying true to Yu's commentary and her characters. Give students 15 minutes for this activity, and tell them their scenes can be quite short. Offer the following "scenes" as suggestions:
 - Scenes from the novel:
 - The conversation between Nina and Aunty Lee about lesbianism (p. 173)
 - Events unseen in the novel:
 - The murders of Laura and/or Marianne
 - A conversation between Carla and Marianne
 - A conversation between police officers who witness Frank and Harry's discussion of sexual assault and women's clothing (p. 130) in the police station
 - Selina's interview with the police about Marianne, Laura, and Carla (reference on p. 95)

10 minutes: Class Discussion

- Bring the class back together and ask for volunteers to share their work. After a few students share, open a class discussion. Ask students to consider the following questions:
 - What changed when you wrote this scene as theater?
 - What became clearer or less clear?
 - What information were you able to add to the story? What information was lost?

2 minutes: Conclusion

- Conclude class by summarizing the main findings of the dialogue activity

Sources:

Obendorf, Simon. "A Few Respectable Steps behind the World?: Gay and Lesbian Rights in Contemporary Singapore." *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in The Commonwealth*, edited by Corinne Lennox and Matthew Waites, University of London Press, 2013, pp. 231–60. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv512st2.12>.

Murfin, Ross, and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Fourth Edition. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018.