

## ADOPTING CONSENSUAL BEHAVIOURS: A LESSON PLAN

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### Abstract

Consent entails the mutual agreement between individuals to engage in a particular activity or interaction. It serves as a cornerstone for developing and maintaining healthy relationships based on respect and communication. A common offensive behavior that characterizes many people, regardless of age or gender, is the invasive physical approach of a partner that might violate their somatic boundaries and self-determination. Here, we propose a lesson plan aimed at raising awareness about the significance of consent, as there is somewhat of a lack of related educational resources. It has been designed for an English for Academic Purposes course in Higher Education, to be held on the International Day of Consent (30th of November) and is intended for young adults. The present lesson plan comprises a three-fold approach: (1) In the first part, audiovisual materials are used to familiarize students with the meaning of consent and its verbal expression. (2) Subsequently, students explore the basis of such abusive behaviors, specifically focusing on the culture of romanticizing violence through kidnapping that is often promoted in films and other media. (3) Finally, students, after watching a video about physical theatre showcasing the non-verbal expression of consent, are encouraged to participate in theatrical exercises under the guidance of a specialist. This teaching micro-scenario is designed to promote empathy, communication skills, student initiative, and respect for others' boundaries.

**Keywords:** *Consent, higher education, physical theatre, English for Academic Purposes.*

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## 1. Introduction

Consent refers to the “clear and unambiguous agreement, expressed in mutually understandable words or actions” (Dougherty, 2015). Notably, women and femininities tend to be the victims (Elliott, Mok, & Briere, 2004). The reasons for the absence of consent are complex (Holmström, Plantin, & Elmerstig, 2020) and may involve the romanticization of violence in popular media tropes (Groszhans, 2017; Olson, 2013). Considering the somewhat lack of relevant educational approaches (Willis, Jozkowski, & Read, 2018), we devised a lesson plan that draws on visual literacy (Elkins, 2009) to educate students in higher education on verbal and non-verbal consent.

## 2. Methodology

Subject: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) – Topic: Consent – Age group: students of higher education, young adults – Duration: 3h

### 2.1. Educational goals

Through this lesson plan, we anticipate students to: (1) Explore the concept of consent as a tool to defend self-autonomy, (2) Utilize verbal and non-verbal cues for successful, empathetic and respectful interaction and communication, (3) Appreciate that physical boundaries may vary from person to person, (4) Identify misconceptions related to consent, (5) Support their right and the right of others to physical determination, also for every individual regardless of gender, age, nationality etc., (6) Acknowledge that they have agency to make choices and act on them, free of threat of punishment or violence, also the right to change one's mind, (7) Promote their oral, writing and communication skills, (8) Engage in activities that boost cooperation, creativity, and responsibility, (9) Interpret audiovisual material (visual literacy), (10) Familiarize with the role and function of theatre education and its incorporation into the classroom.

## 2.2. Materials

(1) Projector, (2) Students' smartphones/tablets/laptops, (3) Classroom with internet access.

## 2.3. Procedure

The present lesson plan consists of three phases, each comprising a micro-activity, plus evaluation phase. The activities are designed to span over approximately three hours. Audiovisual materials are employed, so to actively engage students with the interpretation of visual information (visual literacy).

**2.3.1. 1<sup>st</sup> Phase: 1<sup>st</sup> micro-activity (Duration: 30min).** Introduction to consent and physical self-determination using a speaking activity. For this purpose, original comic strips were created.

1. Warmer: Students watch a video ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zh\\_8xDmlU30](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zh_8xDmlU30)) (duration: 3:00) by the University of Lincoln, which is entitled “*Let’s talk consent*”. Then, they watch the short video “*Consent matters*” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-xRDkCYQeM>) (duration: 1:01) by Oxford Brookes University. Other appropriate materials may also be used by the instructor, involving young people exploring the concept of consent and its implications.

2. A discussion is held on the views expressed in the videos, also with regards to the definition and content of consent. We provide answers to student questions and a list is compiled with the most common themes and relevant issues raised.

3. Students are directed to a Google Docs ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o\\_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh)) spreadsheet to work on a speaking activity. They are asked to interpret a series of comic strip storylines and to infer whether consent is given or not. Their attention is drawn to the verbal cues of the illustrations, but non-verbal cues are acknowledged as well. Finally, students are asked to identify misconceptions of consent.

4. A post-speaking activity discussion is held with reference to the initial list of issues that the students put together. An emphasis is given on whether their views have shifted as a result of their engagement with the speaking activity.

**2.3.2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase: 2<sup>nd</sup> micro-activity (Duration: 50min).** Here we employ the *Beauty and the Beast* fairytale to discuss the notion of pop culture romanticizing violence and abduction, via a writing activity. This activity also promotes creativity and critical thinking. For this purpose, an original illustration was produced.

1. Warmer: We project the trailer of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* film (2017) (duration: 2:07) ([https://www.imdb.com/video/vi179222553/?playlistId=tt2771200&ref\\_=tt\\_pr\\_ov\\_vi](https://www.imdb.com/video/vi179222553/?playlistId=tt2771200&ref_=tt_pr_ov_vi)).

2. Students are requested to reflect on whether Belle has agency to make her own choices in the movie and a discussion is held on the topic.

3. We ask students to run a Google search to try to find common themes and motifs between Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* film (1991) and the following films: *The Terminator* (1984), *12 Monkeys* (1995), *V for Vendetta* (2005), *Passengers* (2016). We explain that the common element lies in presenting, in popular media, abduction and violence against women as romantic (also see <https://youtu.be/t8xL7w1POZ0?si=wSfk7BfgwnBbOtnl>).

4. Students are directed to a Google Docs ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o\\_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh)) spreadsheet to work on a writing activity. They draw information from academic text excerpts that portray the *Beauty and the Beast* fairytale as a story that normalizes abusive behaviors and the absence of female self-determination. Under this light, students provide their views on the role that pop culture holds in this matter and attempt to rewrite the fairytale’s storyline.

**2.3.3. 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase: 3<sup>rd</sup> micro-activity (Duration: 90min).** In this communication activity, we focus on the non-verbal part of consent, by means of engagement with audiovisual material and physical theatre exercises. For this purpose, original material was created comprising video art footage and physical theatre instructor’s notes.

1. Prompt: Students watch a video art piece, portraying physical theatre, that is entitled “*(Un)Connected*” (duration: 2:51) ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o\\_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh)).

2. Subsequently, they engage in storytelling; We ask them to describe the storyline and to interpret the actors’ desires, fears, and intentions.

3. We explain that the director instructed the actors as such: “They would escape a place of isolation and loneliness to explore the new world around them. They would then discover one another,

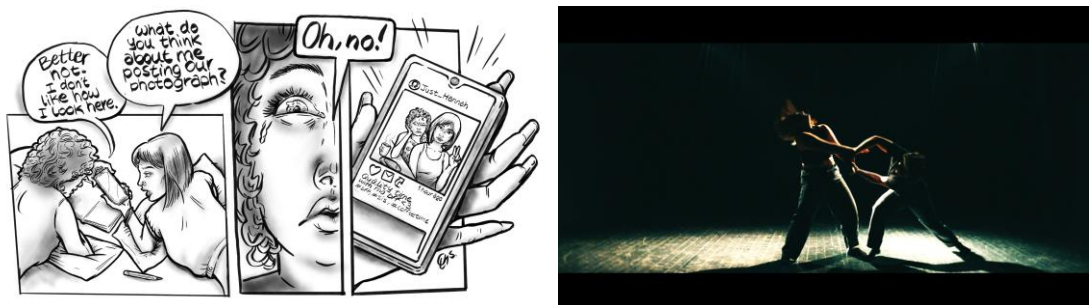
full of expectation and curiosity. A playful interaction would follow; But shortly, they would stumble onto their egos, demands and disregard of one another. The clash would be imminent, unavoidable, and catastrophic; A blast would follow. After the disillusionment, the failed relationship ceases to exist. The characters are again diminished and enclosed in their spaces, there is no escape for them after all.”.

4. Following the director’s statement, we discuss with students to establish a link between the narrative and the concept of consent, its implications and impact on human interactions.

5. Students work on a Google Docs ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o\\_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh)) communication activity, analyzing still images from the above video, in terms of the consensual or non-consensual behaviors depicted.

6. Students get on the stage and under the spotlight, for a series of physical theatre exercises, to express themselves and to acquire body knowledge on the issue of consent.

Figure 1. (i) Verbal expression of non-consent, as shown in a comic panel from the 1<sup>st</sup> micro-activity (illustration by Christodoulos Themi), (ii) Non-verbal expression of non-consent, as shown in a still image captured from the video of the 3<sup>rd</sup> micro-activity (videography by Nontas Garafas, actress and actor: Konstantina Kyriakidou and Konstantinos Papakostas, director: Petros Christakopoulos).



**2.3.4. Evaluation (Duration: 10min).** To assess the effectiveness of the present lesson plan, we get student insights, by means of a plenary discussion and exit tickets. Before leaving the class, students are asked to complete an Google Docs exit ticket, consisting of three sections: “How I felt today:”, “What I learned today:”, “I have a comment on” ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o\\_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o_5M-Km4gETMAfB4g3mDpUCLNA4rIgAh)).

### 3. Conclusion

The present lesson plan involves a series of speaking, writing and communication activities that comprise original visual material to promote consent, self-determination, and agency, as foundations for thriving individuals, healthy interactions, and profound communication.

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