# DECONSTRUCTING GENDER

- How to Teach Gender and Feminist Pedagogy using Stephenie Meyer's *Life and Death* in the EFL classroom

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# Abstract

**Title**: Deconstructing Gender - How to Teach Gender and Feminist Pedagogy using Stephenie Meyer's *Life and Death* in the EFL classroom

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**Summary:**

Research done by The Swedish National Agency for Education shows students being treated and assessed differently. Various demands and expectations are placed on them based on their gender. Schools thus have a responsibility and a duty to counterbalance conventional and stereotypical gender patterns. The aim of this essay is to show how teaching from a gender and a feminist perspective could be achieved with the use of literature in the EFL classroom. The thesis claim of this essay is that Stephenie Meyer's novels *Life and Death* and *Twilight* can be used beneficially as resources as a way of bringing gender awareness and the issue of gender roles and their representation in young adult literature. *Life and Death* is a reimagination of the original novel, *Twilight*, where most of the characters have swapped genders. Fundamental aspects of gender and feminist pedagogy are a focus on gender and for both teachers and students to obtain new knowledge and for their thinking to shift in new directions. With the gender swap, *Life and Death* offers the world of *Twilight* in where changes have been made in regard to power structures featured in the novel, gender roles and what is considered masculine versus feminine. It could therefore be argued that a combination of the two novels are well suited to use as a starting point for gender-conscious discussions. This essay contains a literary and didactic analysis of Meyer's novels, as well as suggested examples of gender-conscious exercises perspective for the EFL classroom, which can complement the reading.

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# Introduction

Every day people are exposed to gender stereotypes and gender inequality - both visibly and unconsciously. Young people are often particularly susceptible to these matters when forming an understanding of their place in society and their potential (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Studies confirm that gender stereotypical thinking may limit children's growth and development as well as their choices, interests and abilities (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999).

Schools play a part when it comes to attitudes towards gender roles; in 2014 the Swedish National Agency for Education published their report titled *Sex Education. Gender equality, sexuality and human relationships in the Swedish Curricula* (2014) in which they affirm that the school has a way of affecting the attitudes of students regarding gender differences. Research shows students are treated and assessed differently and various demands and expectations are placed on them based on their gender. For this reason the Swedish National Agency for Education states that schools have a responsibility and a duty to counterbalance conventional and stereotypical gender patterns (Skolverket, 2014, p. 9). Since the new curricula were presented in 2011, terms such as sexuality, relationships, gender, gender equality and norms have been included in several of the course and subject syllabi for compulsory and upper secondary school, as well as for adult education. This means the responsibility of teaching these topics falls on several teachers, as the topics will be brought up within the scope of multiple courses and subjects (p. 5).

Issues regarding gender is an important topic in which students should be given time to discuss and explore without haste in schools. This essay focuses on issues of gender being taught, and how I as a teacher can raise awareness about gender inequality in schools and inspire young people to question gender stereotypes. One way of doing so is through the use of literature in the EFL[1] classroom from a gender and feminist perspective. Research shows children's attitudes towards gender may be positively changed through the reading of appropriate children's literature and other book-related activities (Blumberg, 2008). One of the fundamental aspects of feminist pedagogy is for both teachers and students to obtain new knowledge and for their thinking to shift in new directions; "[t]his may involve the realisation that personal interpretations of experience or of social phenomena can be re-read and validated in new, critical ways" (Gender and Education Association, 2016). For this reason, the material chosen for this study is Stephenie Meyer's novel *Life and Death* published in 2015. *Life and Death* is closely connected to another of the author's previous work, *Twilight*.

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1   EFL, abbreviation of 'English as a Foreign Language'

In 2015 Meyer published a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *Twilight* and along with it the surprise publication of *Life and Death,* a reimagination of the original novel. In *Life and Death* the lovers of the story have swapped genders, along with most of the other characters in the novel; Bella from *Twilight* has in *Life and Death* become Beau, the male human, and the character of Edward has become Edythe, the female vampire[2].

The thesis claim of this essay is *Life and Death* can be used beneficially as a resource in teaching students in the EFL classroom as a way of bringing gender awareness and the issue of gender roles and their representation in young adult literature. Meyers (2015) herself argues that *Life and Death* simply is a retelling of *Twilight* from a different gender perspective and that only 5% of the changes were made because the main protagonist is now a boy. It is my claim that some issues can be raised with the novel concerning the characters when a gender swap is made – especially considering what is seen as masculine versus feminine. I therefore believe the novel is well suited to use as a starting point for gender-conscious discussions. The purpose of this essay is thus to show how *Life and Death,* in combination with the original novel, can be taught from a gender and feminist perspective to students for the English 6 course at the upper secondary school.

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2   *Twilight* and *Life and Death* will be further introduced in 1.2

# 1. Teaching *Life and Death* in the EFL classroom

In this chapter I will discuss teaching *Life and Death* in the EFL classroom. In the first section I will discuss teaching literature from a gender and feminist perspective and the reasons why it can be seen as beneficial. In the next section the chosen material for this study, *Life and Death*, will be introduced as I will argue for the novel being an opportunity for analysis when used in combination with the original novel.

## 1.1 Teaching literature from a gender and feminist perspective

As stated by Connell (2009) "[g]ender is /.../ a topic on which there is a great deal of prejudice, myth and outright falsehood" (p. ix). According to the Swedish National Agency for Education the aim of sex education is "to give the pupils perspective and knowledge, get them to see context and realise how the view of gender equality, sexuality and relationships has an impact on entire societies and people's life chances, while making them aware of the norms and values that affect individuals and groups in society" (Skolverket, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, as a means to combat stereotypical gender patterns that exist in society, all teachers should make sure that a gender perspective is incorporated in the content of what they are teaching (p. 9). As previously mentioned, the responsibility to bring up these matters falls on teachers within the scope of multiple courses and subjects.

This essay focuses on issues concerning gender being taught in schools, in this instance, through the use of literature in the EFL classroom. With teaching the subject of English the Swedish National Agency for Education says discussions about subjects such as love, gender equality, relationships and sexuality may be central themes when teaching literature in English courses. These themes may then be taken up when dealing with current issues in the media or when comparing different English-speaking countries (Skolverket, 2014, p. 18). Literature can be particularly suitable when discussing issues of gender and gender roles as previous studies have shown the reading of carefully selected books and book-related activities positively influences gender attitudes (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999). Furthermore, Gordic-Petkovic (2012) argues terms such as gender, identity and sexuality have to be more integrated into the broader discussion of language and literature, which can only be accomplished through a wider use of literary texts in the teaching process. Sieben and Wallowitz (2009), however, note that English teachers in attempting to make students feel safe and secure sometimes avoid literature containing subjects such as gender and sexuality that may be uncomfortable or controversial. In addition Carillo (2007) states

"[t]he stakes are high for feminist teachers" (p. 28). Carillo clarifies her statement as she goes on to describe the adversities and complex issues that may come with the practice of feminist pedagogy and its teaching methods when teaching literature, by discussing evaluations made by the end of the term by the students of her classes. In these evaluations the students have classified the discussions made in class and the idea of the teacher asking questions to the students regarding underlying themes in the novels taught in class as not 'real' teaching (p. 28-29). She concludes "[t]his impulse to raise questions about and reflect on that which has long been taken for granted is not only important in the classroom, but is one of the defining characteristics of feminist pedagogy" (p. 39).

Books have a tremendous influence on children (Narahara, 1998) and as stated by Aina and Cameron (2011) teachers have exceptional influence on how children develop ideas of gender and gender significance. Additionally, it is the responsibility of all schools to ensure all students have the ability to critically examine and assess what they see, hear and read as to be able to discuss and take a view on different issues regarding life and values (Skolverket, 2014, p. 9). It is my belief that this could be achieved with a gender and feminist perspective. Gender-conscious pedagogy considers gender to be important for learning, knowledge and teaching (Carstensen, 2006). Gender, according to Connell (2009) is "a key dimension of personal life, social relations and culture" (p. ix). (Skolverket, 2011). However, as Collie and Slater (2011) point out, learning about other cultures and societies can be difficult without traveling outside your own country, and may not be an option for many students. Literary texts, however, are created worlds depicting different versions of societies, where the reader can discover the thoughts, feelings and customs of people from other cultures. Thus, with reading literature you are offered a full and vivid context in which characters from many different social backgrounds can be represented and used for discussions. In addition, literature is authentic material in a sense that it in a variety of ways tackles fundamental human issues and at the same time has not been created for the specific intent of being used for teaching (p. 3). The meaning of a text is not constant, because a literary work can speak to a reader in different ways depending on the time and place it is read (Collie & Slater, 2011, p. 3-4).

## 1.2 Why teach *Life and Death*?

In *Literature in the Language Classroom* (2011), Collie and Slater argue for using literature in the classroom as a resource to further students' skills in the four basic areas of language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, they state when it comes to

selecting what form of literature to use, interest, appeal and relevance are more important factors than language difficulty. There must be some special incentive involved with the chosen material, like a fresh insight into issues that matters to people and that many are passionate about. The students can thus find enjoyment in encountering their own thoughts or situations similar to their own lives, shown in a new, unexpected perspective (p. 6-7).

The chosen material for this study is *Life and Death* (2015) by Stephenie Meyer, a novel which is closely connected to another of the author's previous work, *Twilight* (2005). *Twilight* is a young adult vampire-themed fantasy romance about Bella Swan, a female human at the age of seventeen, and Edward Cullen, an over a century year old, male vampire. They meet when Bella moves to live with her father in a small town in the state of Washington. She is drawn to the alluring and mysterious character of Edward, and soon discovers he is a vampire. They fall in love and much of their continuous story regards the complicated issues that follow with Bella being human and Edward being an immortal vampire. The novel quickly became a worldwide phenomenon, with more than 100 million copies sold since its release in 2005. Along with its success, considerable critical attention has been given from both critics and readers concerning the two main characters. Many argue that both Bella and Edward fit the requirements of what can be considered rigid stereotyped forms of masculinity and femininity, respectively: Bella a 'damsel in distress' and Edward a 'Byronic hero' (Housel & Wisnewski, 2009). Jarvis (2014) points out the popularity of the novel has led critics to focus on analysing their appeal to girls in a post-feminist era. Jarvis herself argues "[i]t is initially difficult to understand why a saga that draws so consistently on tropes associated with female powerlessness should have become the most popular literature of the decade for today's young adult females" (2014, p. 102). Similar criticisms have been given to the character of Edward: Housel and Wisnewski (2009) note that he, with his possessive stalking and excessive violence, can only be described as someone who poses mortal danger to women (p. 188). Driscoll (2012), however, argues that the franchise "appeals to girls simultaneously as an embrace and a rejection of contemporary girl culture" (p. 95).

When selecting material for the classroom, teachers are urged to assess literature critically for gender bias (Aina & Cameron, 2011). However, finding literature devoid of any gender stereotypes may be difficult as gender stereotypes are pervasive in the media and popular culture (Saltmarsh, 2009). Rather than eliminating all literature with stereotypes, Aina and Cameron (2011) argue that teachers can guide their students to recognise those stereotypes that exist in literature. With the help of positive, empowered stories and images of diverse characters, teachers can enhance students' ability to think critically about gender and how gender is perceived in society (p. 16). The purpose of publishing *Life and Death*, as said

by Meyers (2015) herself in the preface of the novel, was to challenge gender roles and to show that it makes no difference if the human is male and the vampire female – that it is still the same story. With a gender swap, the heroine is now the older, violent, vampire stalker and the hero is the much younger, physically clumsy human. Changes have thus been made in regard to power structures featured in the novel, gender roles and what is considered masculine versus feminine. The genders of the narrators have also changed, as the female Bella narrates *Twilight*, and the male Beau does the same in *Life and Death*. Criticisms given to *Twilight* from feminists thus need to be reevaluated since the new version no longer offers the same conditions. Not many authors present their readers with the opportunity to reread their stories from a different perspective, as Meyer has done with the gender swap. For this reason, *Life and Death* offers an extraordinary opportunity for analysis as it opens up for different interpretations when used in combination with the original novel. A comparative analysis allows for a critical approach from a new perspective, which coincides with the aim of feminist theory and feminist pedagogy. It is my hope that this approach and use of material can be regarded as more accessible to students, as a contemporary text might resonate more with students' own experiences. As mentioned above, Collie and Slater (2011) state an interest in what they read is an important factor for students. Yet in *Teaching the Novel across the Curriculum*, Irvine (2008) states students need to create an important critical distance in their reading. They might find this easier to do with fictionalised characters, rather than using true stories from students' own lives as a base for teaching from a gender and feminist perspective.

# 2. Theory

In this chapter I will describe the theoretical framework used in the essay: feminist literary criticism as well as gender theory and feminist pedagogy.

## 2.1 Feminist literary criticism

Feminist literary criticism is an approach to studying literature where focus lies on women writers and on the significance of gender in what we read (Showalter, 1985). One aspect of this theory is to show the living condition of women in a patriarchal culture, which is accomplished by examining the depiction of fictional female characters in literature. Feminist literary critics such as Judith Fetterley (1978) and Susan Gilbert (1985) thus refer to literature as being political. In her work *The Resisting Reader* (1978), Fetterley states:

> [t]o examine /.../ fiction in light of how attitudes toward women shape their form and content is to make available to consciousness that which has been largely left unconscious and thus to change our understanding of these fictions, our relation to them, and their effect on us. (p. xi-xii)

In addition, Fetterley describes one aim of feminist literary criticism, which is to argue for the act of rereading, of entering an old text from a new critical direction, as a means to change the world by changing the consciousness of those who read.

## 2.2 Gender theory and feminist pedagogy

In *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* Wilchins (2004) discusses how gender was at the very core of the feminist struggle that "transformed male-female social relations in the late 20th century" (p. 6). Feminist literary critics raised the question if differences between men and women are because of biology or because of how society has constructed them to be (Barry, 2009, p. 128).

A prominent name when discussing gender is the American philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler. With *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler has become an icon for the cultural movement which sees gender as fluid rather than fixed. She argues that gender is something we *do*, rather than something we *are*. Butler continues to explain that we should perceive gender as *performative*; that people are not who they are according to their sex, but

rather gender is created by our actions. Identities are brought into existence through action instead of being the expression of some pre-existing reality. You become a man or woman through repeated actions that are built on social conventions or customary ways of doing something in different cultures, which is why these actions can differ a great deal from country to country. Butler explains there are socially established rules on how to be a man or how to be a woman, in the same way there are other socially established rules such as how to get married, how to make a promise or how to be a good partner or a friend. Wilchins (2004) further discusses this and explains the notion of how men and women must look, act and dress because of their sex is severely deep-rooted in our society. The term *gender expression* is thus used when referring to the demonstration of an individual's fundamental sense of being masculine or feminine, for example through the use of clothing, grooming and behaviour. This should not be confused with the term *gender identity*, which instead refers to the internal sense most people have of being either male or female, most commonly used when referring to transsexuals and transgender persons (p. 8).

Gender pedagogy is, simply put, teaching with a focus on gender. Hedlin (2012) notes students in schools are frequently happy to discuss questions concerning gender norms and equality. What the students need help with, though, is taking a more reflective stance that can provide new and different approaches and perspectives regarding gender issues. The basic purpose of gender and feminist pedagogy is to adopt a change-oriented critical approach, as well as adopting an active and conscious relationship to power and hierarchies that exists between sexes (Lundberg & Werner, 2012). Fundamental to such an approach are assumptions that different reasonings are based on gender issues made visible and highlighted in the classroom. This includes the ability to distinguish between personal views and more substantiated arguments (Hedlin, 2012).

Bryson and Bennet-Anyikwa declare "[a] traditional teaching method where instructors are actively spewing knowledge standing behind a podium in lecture status and where students are passive receivers of knowledge is viewed as ineffective and disempowering to teacher and learner" (2003, p. 131). Though Hedlin (2012) argues some students in schools are frequently happy to discuss questions concerning gender, she also points out some questions that concern gender roles and what can be considered feminine and masculine are delicate questions to deal with. Strong feelings and reactions can be awakened when problematising these questions, as they often have to do with emotion rather than reason (2012, p. 53). Fundamental to gender and feminist pedagogy is to create a learning process that challenges and alters power structures – both in society and in the classroom – while still maintaining equality and respect (Bromseth & Sörensdotter, 2012). It is important for the

teacher to be responsive to students' needs and realities. Feminist pedagogy aims to shift power in the classroom to give students the possibility to voice their perspectives, realities, knowledge and needs. This could be achieved by incorporating activities in the classroom that encourage student input and to use students' own experiences as a resource, as personal experience is seen as important for knowledge (2012, p. 46). Using this method will lead to transformative learning, i.e. for their thinking to shift in new directions. "This may involve the realisation that personal interpretations of experience or of social phenomena can be re-read and validated in new, critical ways" (Gender and Education Association, 2016).

### 2.2.1 Power structures

The concept of *power* is a much debated and discussed topic when it comes to feminist and gender theory. According to Connell (2009), it is only one among many forms of gender inequality. During the 1960's, power was central to the Women's Liberation movement and their fight against patriarchy: they argued against the notion that men were dominant over women because of their sex. They critiqued women being portrayed through images in the media as "passive, trivial and stupid" (p. 76) and that the power husbands held over their wives as 'head of the household' were seen as the norm of society. The Women's Liberation realised these matters were not a concept possessed by a few individual men, but carried out by society at large. Connell continues by saying that power is constantly contested and that gendered power is no more absolute than other forms. Power can be transformed and reformed (p. 78). One who believes this is the Australian educator Bronwyn Davies, who wants us to scrutinise those concepts which we take for granted. One way of doing so was presented in her work *Shards of Glass* (1993), where she challenges teachers in the classroom to consider the way in which the notions of gender have been established in society. She shows how teachers can work with children to examine how gender is constructed through discourse and a variety of texts. Through the use of literature, children can learn how they are discursively positioned and regulated and also look at the ways in which gender relations are resistant to change. Davies explores ways in which to break old structures and to allow children to discover different ways of being. She also notes this change cannot entirely lie with girls and that all children should be equally included in classroom activities.

Wilchins (2004) discusses Foucault's postmodernist ideas of what is called *discursive power*. With discourse, Foucault means "a social dialogue, a discussion society has with itself" (p. 59). Where gender is concerned, Wilchins says, "the main exercise of power is not through repression but *production*. Discursive power produces specific kinds of individuals,

with specific bodies, pleasures and sexes" (p. 62). To illustrate; because of the physicality of men, the meaning of their identity is masculinity. Similarly, women are physically feminine beings. The concept of womanly is therefore inseparable from Woman in the same way that manly is inseparable from the identity Man. The thought of a masculine woman or a feminine man is thus seen as a ludicrous idea and at odds with reality. Wilchins points out "[t]his kind of discursive power /.../ is not held by authorities and institutions; rather, it is held by no one but exercised by practically everyone" (p. 63).

### 2.2.2 Gender roles

Among several philosophical and sociological theories, gender theory included, gender is seen as a socially constructed act; as Connell (2009) declares: "a condition actively under construction" (p. 5). According to this view, culture and society create gender roles that are based on norms. These societal norms are defined as ideal or correct behaviour for a person of that specific sex. Wilchins (2004) argues that conforming to gender roles by becoming a recognisable boy or girl may be the "founding social act" (p. 153).

The term *gender stereotype* regards generalisations of characteristics, differences and attributes that are associated with the roles of each gender. One way feminist literary criticism has tackled these issues of the representation of gender roles in literature is discussed by literature professor Maria Nikolajeva. In her work *Barnbokens byggklossar* (2004), Nikolajeva shows that feminists have taken an interest in the representation of gender roles in children's literature since the 1960s and 70s. Early studies revealed the ways in which literature portray male and female characters and how they related to reality. The term *gender stereotypes* was the keyword used in these studies. Nikolajeva explains that a male or female character can be described as stereotypical when it behaves as they are expected to, based on prevailing social norms: girls are supposed to be kind, good and well behaved, while boys are mischievous and adventurous. Accordingly, Nikolajeva presents a list of what she argues as being normative male and female characteristics used in children's literature. These are, like with Rousseau, seen as opposite from each other:

| Men/boys | Women/girls |
|---|---|
| strong | beautiful |
| violent | peaceful |
| callous, tough | emotional, mild |
| aggressive | obedient |

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| | |
|---|---|
| competitive | self-sacrificing |
| predatory | thoughtful, caring |
| protective | vulnerable |
| independent | dependent |
| active | passive |
| analysing | synthesising |
| think quantitatively | think qualitatively |
| rational | intuitive |

and so on[3].

(Nikolajeva, 2004, p. 129)


In reality, adapting to this list of characteristics is not straightforward. Connell (2009) argues the pursuit of becoming a gendered person can be both tense and ambiguous; that we cannot think of womanhood or manhood to be fixed by nature, nor as simply norms formed and imposed by society: "[p]eople construct *themselves* as masculine or feminine. We claim a place in the gender order – or respond to the place we have been given – by the way we conduct ourselves in everyday life" (p. 6).

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3   All words are my own translations from Swedish

# 3. Analysis

In this chapter I will show how I intend to teach *Life and Death* in combination with *Twilight* from a gender and feminist perspective. In the first section, 3.1, I will argue for using the chosen material to teach gender and feminist pedagogy. In section 3.2. I will describe the general lesson plan for this project. In the last section, 3.3, I will perform a comparative literary analysis of *Life and Death* and *Twilight*, as well as present lesson plans and activities to suggest how to apply that analysis in the classroom.

## 3.1 Teaching Life and Death from a gender and feminist perspective

The thesis statement of this essay is that the novel *Life and Death* in combination with the original version, *Twilight*, can be used beneficially as resources for teachers who want to teach from a gender and feminist perspective in the English language classroom. With swapping the genders of the characters from the original novel, the author challenges assumptions regarding the importance of the genders of the characters in a love story. Meyer herself says in the preface of *Life and Death* that "I've always maintained that it would have made no difference if the human were male and the vampire female – it is still the same story" (2015, p. xii).  One main focus of feminist literary criticism is on the significance of gender in what we read (Showalter, 1985). I therefore believe that *Life and Death* can be described as a feminist version of *Twilight*. Furthermore, feminist literary critics argue for the act of rereading, of entering an old text from a new critical direction. One way of rereading *Twilight* is accomplished naturally by reading *Life and Death,* as the novel's primary reason for being is to act as bonus material, as a reimagining of the original novel. It is not meant to function as an independent publication.

     *Twilight* is part of a much popular franchise and has been since its initial publication in 2005. Students might therefore have preceding knowledge of the story and its characters[4]**.** Jarvis (2014) states it is difficult to understand that *Twilight* has become the most popular literature of the decade for today's young adult females as it consistently draws on tropes associated with female powerlessness (p. 102). *Life and Death*, however, challenges gender stereotypes. Housel and Wisnewski (2009) label Bella as a 'damsel in distress' and Edward as a 'Byronic hero'. The same cannot be said with Beau and Edythe from *Life and Death*, as I

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4   This is also due to the hugely successful movie franchise based on Meyer's novels, which, collectively, have
     earned more than $3.3 billion dollars world-wide, according to IMDb.

argue those labels are closely connected to a specific gender[5]. With the gender swap, the characteristics of the male and female counterparts in the new version are no longer similar to their origins. The male character, Beau, in *Life and Death* does not resemble the male character of Edward in *Twilight*. One instance when this is made clear in *Life and Death* is when Beau and Edythe are having dinner at a restaurant. In the same scene in *Twilight*, Edward pays without any disputes from Bella. In *Life and Death*, however, Edythe rejects Beau's attempt at paying for the meal and urges Beau to "[t]ry not to get caught up in antiquated gender roles" (Meyer, 2015, p. 135). Edythe does also not respond as Beau anticipates when he directly, after Edythe has paid, tries to act like a gentleman and helps her with the door: "She gave me a strange look when I held the door open – like she was kind of touched by the gesture, but also annoyed by it at the same time" (p. 135). With reading *Life and Death* and seeing some of the changes made from the world of *Twilight*, it does what feminist literary criticism tries to do, which is provide the opportunity to change the consciousness of its readers and perhaps also modify their perceptions of the world (Fetterley, 1978) – in this instance when it comes to societal norms regarding power structures, gender norms and gender stereotypes[6].

One of the defining characteristics of feminist pedagogy, as said by Carillo (2007), is the impulse to, in the classroom, raise questions about and reflect on that which has long been taken for granted (p. 39). The Gender and Education Association (2016) points out this may involve the realisation of social phenomena can be reread and validated in new, critical ways. This can be applied with *Life and Death* in regard to who of the two main characters holds the most power in the relationship. Connell (2009) describes that feminists long have argued against the notion that men were dominant over women because of their sex, that it is seen as a societal norm. In *Twilight,* Edward takes the dominant role and uses it to control Bella. In *Life and Death* Edythe takes the role of her male counterpart. She might be smaller than Beau in terms of size, but she is both older and more powerful than him. Moreover, because she is a vampire, Edythe poses great danger to the human Beau, something he has some difficulties coming to terms with:

> 'You're dangerous?' It come out like a question, and there was doubt in my voice. She was smaller than I was, no more than my age, and delicately built. Under normal circumstances, I would have laughed at applying the word *dangerous* to someone like her. But she was not normal, and there *was* no one like her. /.../ The danger was real,

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5    Meyers herself would rather Bella to be labeled as a "*human in distress*" (2015, p. xi).

6    This will be further discussed in section 3.3.

though my logical mind couldn't make sense of it. And she'd been trying to warn me all along (Meyer, 2015, p. 72-73)

In the same scene in *Twilight*, Bella has no doubt over Edward and the power he commands: "'You're dangerous?' I guessed, by pulse quickening as I intuitively realized the truth of my own words. He *was* dangerous. He'd been trying to tell me that all along" (Meyer, 2005, p. 63). As said by Lundberg and Werner (2012), the basic purpose of gender and feminist pedagogy is to adopt a change-oriented critical approach, as well as adopting an active and conscious relationship to power and hierarchies that exists between sexes. Fundamental to such an approach are assumptions that different reasonings are based in regard to gender issues which are made visible and highlighted in the classroom. By using *Twilight* and *Life and Death*, with the differences in Bella's and Beau's narratives as a basis, different views regarding gender issues are made visible. Students can use these different views as a basis for discussions. Hedlin (2012) notes that students need help with the ability to distinguish between personal views and more substantiated arguments (Hedlin, 2012). By utilising the contrasting narratives of *Twilight,* in combination with that of *Life and Death* as shown with the excerpts above, could thus be one way of doing so. Altogether, I believe that *Life and Death* and *Twilight* together are appropriate texts to use when teaching from a gender and feminist perspective. As previously mentioned, the Swedish National Agency for Education states schools have a responsibility and a duty to counterbalance conventional and stereotypical gender patterns (Skolverket, 2014, p. 9). Terms such as sexuality, relationships, gender, gender equality and norms have been included in several of the course and subject syllabi and these topics may be central themes when teaching literature in English courses. (p. 5, 18). Though little is said in the syllabus of how this is to be achieved practically by teachers in the classroom. In the following sections I will therefore present a general lesson plan for this project and some suggested gender-conscious exercises for the classroom which can complement the reading of the two novels.

## 3.2 Teaching *Life and Death*: a general lesson plan

When making lesson plans whether on a larger or smaller scale, objectives need to be established for students to be able to reach certain goals. In the course plan for the English courses taught at upper secondary school, English 5, 6 and 7, The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2011) state five goals that students should be given opportunities

to develop with teaching in the subject of English. These goals, which I have taken into consideration when planning for this project, are as follows:

1. Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content.
2. The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing.
3. The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts.
4. The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations.
5. The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used.
(Skolverket, 2011, p. 2)

In *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, Hedge (2000) states helping students to achieve these goals lies within the teacher's responsibilities to motivate reading by choosing relevant texts to use in the classroom, to create a supportive environment for practicing reading, as well as useful reading tasks (p. 205). Hedge discusses that in planning different tasks involving reading a text, it is seen as standard practice to use a three-phase method. This method, which I will apply to this project, is divided into three stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading (p. 209). Hedge explains that the pre-reading phase is a time during which a reason for reading is established and for the students to familiarise themselves with the context of the text – which in this case is *Twilight,* but particularly the newly released *Life and Death*. The chosen pre-reading exercise for this project is thus for the students to watch the movie adaptation of *Twilight* from 2008. This fits the requirement of the first goal of the course plan of English: the opportunity to understand and interpret content of spoken English. With watching the movie adaptation of *Twilight*, the students are acquainted with the original version and characters in just over two hours, which in addition can lead to a quicker transition to *Life and Death*. The project of teaching *Life and Death* in combination with *Twilight* may seem daunting as both novels combined totals up to almost 800 pages, which is quite excessive for most students. As there is more content to cover during a school year and to avoid students becoming tired and uninterested by taking too much time, this type of project should not take up more than six to eight weeks. As such, some parts of the material can be read in class however students will also be required to read some at home. One type of solution is to use extracts from both novels. However, Collie and Slater (2011) point out the students could then be bereaved of examining some features of the material, like plot and character development (p. 11). Since the students will have the movie as a basis, I believe they are free from this problem. To complement the movie, and to get the students started

with the project, I will ask them a series of questions regarding the main characters and gender roles. According to gender theory, culture and society create gender roles based on norms and these societal norms are defined as ideal or correct behaviour for a person of that specific sex (Connell, 2009). As previously mentioned, criticisms have been given to *Twilight;* that the novel draws on tropes associated with female powerlessness (Jarvis, 2014) and that Edward, with his possessive stalking and excessive violence, can only be described as someone who poses mortal danger to women (Housel & Wisnewski, 2009). When asked, do the students think anything in particular in regards to how Edward and Bella are portrayed? Do they act in accordance to the students' views on masculinity and femininity? The students, when hearing these criticisms, might agree with them or they might not. Regardless of their views and opinions after watching the movie, these questions and discussions will act as a starting point of the project that will lead up to the presentation of the novel *Life and Death* and the purpose of its conception[7].

While-reading activities customarily focus on encouraging students to stay active while they read. Few research studies show such activities leading to any favourable effects. Hedge (2000) notes, however, that students themselves are positive to while-reading exercises and find them useful (p. 210). Hedge and Collie and Slater (2011) present a variety of ideas and activities for teachers to use to encourage activity, reflection and reaction while reading. With inspiration taken from these authors, for the while-reading phase I will introduce suggested exercises to accompany the two themes used for literary analysis. Ideas on how to design these exercises from a gender and feminist perspective are inspired by The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU, 2009). These exercises will be described in detail in the next section, 3.3.

As for the post-reading phase, Hedge (2000) argues this phase is needed to make use of what the students have read in a meaningful way. A post-reading activity will thus ideally "tie up with the reading purpose set" (p. 211). The purpose for this project is to make the students question societal norms that are defined as ideal or correct behaviour for a person of a specific sex. I will therefore also introduce a writing exercise in section 3.3, inspired by Marsh (2016) that will conclude this project and could be used for assessment.

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7   See 1.2.

## 3.3 Themes for literary analysis and practical work in the classroom

In this section, I will introduce two chosen themes for literary analysis: views on masculinity and femininity and normalising gender roles. For each theme I will also suggest practical work for the classroom which function as while-reading activities. Lastly, I will also introduce a suggested final project for the students, which could be used by the teacher for assessment.

### 3.3.1 Views on masculinity and femininity

Both *Twilight* and *Life and Death* offer the same basic structure; girl and boy meet and fall in love. A few obstacles arise along the way, but the couple manages to overcome them in the end. For Edward and Edythe these obstacles mainly concern being vampires while their love interests are not; for Bella and Beau their obstacles are more internal, as they have to deal with their own issues of feeling like they are far from the ideal representations of femininity and masculinity, which they both desire to be. When Beau contemplates his first day at a new school, whose student body totals up to just over a few hundred students, he wishes he was one of the popular kids;

> But there was no hiding the fact that I was not *that guy* – not the football star, not the class president, not the bad boy on the motorcycle. I was the kid who looked like he should be good at basketball, until I started walking. The kid who got shoved into lockers until I'd suddenly shot up eight inches sophomore year. The kid who was too quiet and too pale, who didn't know anything about gaming or cars or baseball statistics or anything else I was supposed to be into. (Meyer, 2015, p. 9)

Beau cooks and cleans for his father, is clumsy, stammers, blushes constantly and faints from the sight of blood. As a result, he does not relate to people his own age, and feels like no one understands him; "[s]ometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs" (p. 9). Butler (1990) explains gender as being performative; that gender is something we *do*, rather than something we *are*. With the character of Beau, Meyer presents a male main character who does not perform a hegemonic type of masculinity. Wilchins (2004) explains the term *gender expression,* which is used when referring to the demonstration of an individual's fundamental sense of being masculine or feminine (p. 8). Beau does not describe himself as a masculine male. His coveted

interpretation of male expression is the vampire Royal[8], who is likened as being the perfect embodiment of masculinity:

> The taller one – who was definitely taller than me, I'd guess six-five or even more – was clearly the school's star athlete. And the prom king. And the guy who always had dibs on whatever equipment he wanted in the weight room. His straight gold hair was wound into a bun on the back of his head, but there was nothing feminine about it – somehow it made him look even more like a man. He was clearly too cool for this school, or any other I could imagine. (Meyer, 2015, p. 15)

Beau, of course, is the male gender swapped version of Bella from *Twilight*. Bella is a young, white, middle-class woman who, same as Beau, cooks, cleans and does the laundry and washing up for her father. Palo and Manderstedt thus argue that she could be said "to epitomize the ideal woman from the 1950s" (p. 143). One can argue that being domestic is one way to express gender as it is a behaviour connected to the female sex. However, same as Beau, Bella does not see herself in any high regard. In terms of looks and demeanour, she describes herself as being "the new girl from the big city, a curiosity, a freak" (Meyer, 2005, p. 7). In her opinion, in following established norms for a girl like her, who has just relocated from sunny Phoenix, she should be tan, blond and into playing volleyball – and she is none of those. She is neither graceful nor sexy, or enjoys shopping or gossiping with girlfriends, which, according to Bella, are some of the desired characteristics associated with females.

In both novels, Meyer presents two main characters who are outside the norm of what is considered masculine and feminine. Beau and Bella are both aware of this fact, and as a result are not comfortable being together with their vampire love interests. Vampires, according to Beau and Bella, are mesmerising in regard to their beauty: "I stared because their faces, so different, so similar, were all insanely inhumanly beautiful. The girls and the guys both – beautiful. They were faces you never saw in real life" (Meyer, 2015, p. 15). Edward and Edythe are repeatedly described in the novels as being visually perfect versions of their specific sex. So the question in Bella and Beau's minds are why and how these perfect beings can be interested in them, when they, in their own mind, are far from perfect? Beau's feelings have been reproduced from Bella's identical ones in *Twilight*. Meyer thus shows that feelings of inadequacy regarding gender expression do not belong to a single sex.

According to The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) schools play a part when it comes to attitudes towards gender roles, with what is considered to be masculine and

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8   Royal is the male counterpart of Rosalie from *Twilight*, who in Bella's view is the perfect embodiment of femininity.

feminine. Students are treated and assessed differently and various demands and expectations are placed on them based on their gender. Schools thus have a responsibility and a duty to counterbalance conventional and stereotypical gender patterns (Skolverket, 2014, p. 9). The question of gender roles and norms might not be something we think about every day. Not until something is in disagreement with preconceived notions of how men and women or boys and girls are supposed to act as considered correct behaviour for a person of their specific sex. The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education state that 'transphobia', a negative view on what can be considered deviating from norms associated with gender, has led to many boys being afraid of being perceived as "gay", or "less manly". In their own imagination, this is unacceptable as it deviates from the norm. Girls endure similar struggles with fears of not being "girly" enough, though not in the same capacity as boys (RFSL, 2009). As such, The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education argue for working with issues regarding gender with students in the classroom, as a way to prevent these fears among the young. One way to achieve this is inspired by the exercise called "How are men and women expected to be?" (RFSL, 2009). This exercise is in agreement with the goals established for the syllabus of the English 6 course, as it is executed orally and includes reflecting on social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is being used (Skolverket, 2011, p. 2).

The purpose of the exercise is for students to reflect on how we put a so called gender stamp over different qualities and characteristics. As a starting point, the teacher puts students into groups of four or five and asks the question "How are men and women expected to be?". They as a group are to then list different characteristics they associate with males and females, respectively. Expected answers could be "pretty", "sweet" and "nice" for females and "strong", sporty" and "smart" for males. The teacher will then read out these lists to the other groups and use them to discuss whether they know any people who are like the characteristics of the lists? What separates the different characteristics listed as being either male or female? The students could then be shown the lists of characteristics made by Nikolajeva (2004) presented in chapter 2., and use them as reference to their own. Thereafter, the teacher will explain that these are the characteristics which are considered stereotypical to each gender and used widely, for instance, in literature. Can they name a novel which presents characters that fit these opposing characteristics? Here, perhaps, the students will name Edward and Bella as an example. Then questions should be asked if a male has to be strong and aggressive to be seen as masculine, and a female beautiful and obedient to be considered feminine? What happens if a male is considered as "pretty" and dances ballet and a female swears a lot and plays ice-hockey?

This exercise could then progress to discussing these questions in regard to *Twilight* and *Life and Death,* when reading the different character descriptions: In *Twilight*, the male character Jacob Black is good at building cars and Emmett Cullen, who likes to hunt for grizzly bears, is by far the strongest of all the vampires. In *Life and Death* they have been swapped into the female versions of Jules and Eleanor, thus going from representations of male stereotypes into characters that differ from gender norms. As for the main characters, when putting their characteristics into separate lists, you clearly see that aside from Edward they do not conform to stereotypical versions of their gender; Beau is neither strong, competitive nor aggressive and Edythe may be beautiful and graceful, but is far from being considered either sweet, vulnerable or obedient. Bella does not consider herself beautiful, and has no interest in stereotypical girly behaviour, such as shopping or gossiping with girlfriends. Wilchins (2004) describes the term *discursive power* which sees the concept of womanly as inseparable from Woman in the same way that manly is inseparable from the identity Man. The thought of a masculine woman or a feminine man is thus seen as a ludicrous idea and at odds with reality – that this kind of power "is held by no one but exercised by practically everyone" (p. 63). These views contradicts the mission assigned by The Swedish National Agency for Education to counterbalance conventional and stereotypical gender patterns (Skolverket, 2014, p. 9).

Hopefully, this exercise benefits students' conceptions and expectations of how males and females are supposed to be, as both Bella and Beau manage to win the affections of the "perfect" Edward and Edythe and that they liked them just as they are. In *Life and Death*, Edythe tells Beau how she finds him attractive and distracting: "It all took me by surprise when I realized that not only did I find you delicious, but also beautiful" (Meyer, 2015, p. 244). Even though Beau is not a stereotypical masculine male he is still considered desirable by Edythe. The intention of the exercise is to make students question, and widen, the space in which sexes are allowed to move around within the confines of these supposedly opposing qualities. Some students might argue against this exercise. It is then crucial that the teacher explains that Nikolajeva's list is not considered as standard for desired female or male attributes. It is acceptable for one person to fit into characteristics that are set for both genders. Every person develops different skills and characteristics due to different likes and interests. As Connell (2009) states; people construct themselves as masculine or feminine, they are not in any way fixed by nature.

Even with exercises such as the one suggested above, Palo and Manderstedt (2011) state "the representation of masculinity and femininity is culturally situated, and fiction, mirroring society, shows which qualities are desirable and recognized as valid in a particular

cultural environment at a particular time" (p. 147). In one way *Life and Death* reproduces norms set in *Twilight* when considering Bella's difficulties of not feeling acceptable next to the "perfect" Edward. Sadly, in both the *Twilight* series and in *Life and Death*, Beau and Bella's parallel attitudes towards themselves change for the better only when they at the end both become vampires[9]. Thus they achieve the goal in becoming the ideal representations of masculinity and femininity that they have always desired to become: "The Beau in the mirror looked... *right* next to Edythe. Like he belonged. Not like before, when people could only imagine that she was taking pity on me" (Meyer, 2015, p. 366). Meyer thus presents her characters as needing to become vampires to feel desirable.

The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSL, 2009) explains that the exercise above should not include listing the ideal characteristics for men and women set by society, but rather how men and women generally are expected to be. The goal is not for the students to want to change themselves to fit society, but rather for societal norms to be challenged as they do not represent an entirely realistic or healthy view on gender and gender roles. Influence from society cannot be ignored, but it is important for the teacher to state to the students that most people move around in different groups who have different views when it comes to gender norms.

### 3.3.2 Normalising gender roles

Butler (1990) argues that gender is something we *do*, rather than something we *are*. When Edward is performing in correspondence to societal norms regarding masculine behaviour it is seen as normal, standard. It goes unmentioned without being discussed or even mentioned. However, when differences or changes are made in terms of gender differences in *Life and Death*, they are explained. For instance with the example of Edythe paying for dinner and her being more powerful than Beau, as mentioned in section 3.1. With the gender swap, Edythe has now taken the role in a heterosexual relationship which normally is given to a male. Being an immortal vampire, Edythe is far older and stronger than Beau. As this is outside the norm, it is mentioned several times throughout the novel:

> "I wondered if it was supposed to bother me that she was so much stronger than I was, but I hadn't been insecure about things like that for a long time. /.../ So, this small girl was stronger than I was. A lot. But I was willing to bet she was stronger than everyone else I knew, kids and adults alike. She could take Schwarzenegger in his prime. I couldn't compete with that, and I didn't need to. She was special" (Meyer, 2015, p. 82).

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9   For Bella this happens in the fourth novel of the *Twilight* series, Breaking Dawn, published in 2008.

Beau accepts this, especially since the reason is her being a vampire and thus "special". He still tries to maintain the masculine role in the relationship. Edythe, though, does not attune to societal norms correct behaviour for a person of the female sex as she is the female adaptation of Edward, a stereotypical male. In contrast to Edward, Edythe does seem to try to make her relationship with Beau as equal as possible. Nonetheless there are constant references to the gender changes, for example:

> She turned toward the cafeteria, swinging her bag into place.
> "Hey, let me get that for you," I offered.
> She looked up at me with doe eyes. "Does it look too heavy for me?"
> "Well, I mean…"
> "Sure," she said. She slid the bag down her arm and then held it out to me, very deliberately using just the tip of her pinkie finger. (p. 159)

Edythe is shown repeatedly proving her superior strength, as in the example above. Simultaneously, Beau is shown to apply behaviours connected to his gender, like paying for dinner and carrying bags. Bella finds it normal that Edward is stronger than her, and she never questions Edward carrying anything or when he repeatedly carries her on his back. Edythe has to persuade Beau in the same scene in *Life and Death*. He points to her "delicate" frame and when he gives in to her feels "like the stupidest, most awkward person in all of history" (p. 218). Additionally, instead of Beau taking ballet classes as a boy like Bella did as a young girl, it is instead changed to Beau's mother previously having taught ballet (p. 325). Meyer has thus made changes in *Life and Death* for Beau to be able to fit the male gender role and for Edythe to purposely deviate from her role as a female when she behaves the same as Edward, or adds details that makes it apparent that Edythe is assuredly still female. In one scene Edythe ends up in Beau's lap crying and Beau's father, Charlie, is positively dazzled by Edythe when he first meets her and is asked to come visit anytime she wants – where in *Twilight* Bella describes Charlie as "having an aneurysm" upon first meeting Edward[10] (Meyer, 2005, p. 244). In the movie Charlie is shown cleaning his shotgun prior to Edward's

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10 In *Life and Death* all characters have undergone a gender swap, aside from Beau's (and Bella's) parents. Meyer explains this decision having to do with them divorcing when Beau was a baby in 1987, and thus argues that the parents needed to be kept the same, as "it was a rare thing for a father to get primary custody of a child in those days" (Meyer, 2015, p. xii). As much of the story's premise has to do with the main character moving to the estranged parent, Meyer chose to not make Charlie and the mother undergo a gender swap.

entering his house and asking Bella if she has pepper spray. As follows, with *Life and Death* Meyer has given birth to queries whether the swapping of genders achieve more questioning of gender roles or ends up normalising them.

Palo and Manderstedt (2011) derive from Butler's (1990) theory on gender performance when discussing themes of gender involving *Twilight*, and thus explain that "gender norms are less visible, and that gender conventions are internalized to the point of being perceived as 'normal'" (p. 151). To connect this with the questions that arise with *Life and Death*, the suggested exercise for this theme is inspired by the one presented by The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education named "Gendered words" (RFSL, 2009). The purpose for this exercise is, as with the one presented previously in this chapter, to reflect on norms and expectations set for men and women. This will be accomplished by focusing on language, to show that words contribute in shaping our perceptions of gender. Some words are more associated with men, some more with women. Others are gender neutral. These associations differ from different groups; in certain contexts a word can be used to degrade and humiliate, in others it can be used to inspirit. Words thus bear different meanings to different people to what is considered good or bad, or right or wrong (RFSL, 2009).

In this exercise, students will be presented with a list consisting of a variety of words; nouns, verbs, adjectives, etcetera. These should be cut into small pieces, leaving one word on each piece of paper. The different words consist of professions, colours, activities, things and qualities[11]. The students are to then put the words into three groups, consisting either solely of males or females and groups were the genders are mixed. The groups will then divide the different words into three categories: "Man", "Woman" and "Both". The teacher will explain that the decisions to put which word into which category are based both on their own views and views made by society. After, the groups compare the results and discuss the outcome; are there any similarities to which words are put into which category? Which words are sorted differently and are there any dissimilarities between the same gender groups or the ones were the genders are mixed? The students then have to give reason to their choices and to discuss which gendered words are considered as positive or negative. If the word "handsome" can be argued as being a positive word belonging to "Men", which word is the equivalent used with "Women"? Some words are then discussed more in depth: for example, the word "crying" is associated more with girls than with boys. Do boys not cry? What would students think if they saw a male role model of theirs crying? Or a father or an uncle? To incorporate literature into this exercise, the words could later consist of examples taken from the novels that belong

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11 For example: dancer, crying, football, driving, red, make-up, actor, funny, black, loving, etc.

to the different characters. When dividing these words, does the sorting into different categories deviate from the behaviours/interests/qualities of the characters?

According to Lundberg and Werner (2012), the basic purpose of gender and feminist pedagogy is to adopt a change-oriented critical approach, as well as adopting an active and conscious relationship to power and hierarchies that exists between sexes. Fundamental to such an approach are assumptions that different reasonings are based on regarding gender issues are made visible and highlighted in the classroom. Words have power when they are associated to a specific gender; for instance some boys can react strongly to being called 'gay' (RFSL, 2009). In the same way girls can feel strong disapproval of the word 'bitch', even though it is used as a term of endearment in some circles[12]. Contrary to Edward, Edythe is described as delicate and is shown crying in her boyfriend's lap. And unlike Bella, Beau does not like to being carried around piggyback style, and did not take ballet as a child. Why add these changes? Are they changes to show Edythe and Beau in a positive light, or do they follow the norms already set by society regarding gender roles? Connell (2009) declares gender as "a condition actively under construction" (p. 5). She continues by saying that power is constantly contested and that gendered power is no more absolute than other kinds. Power can be transformed and reformed (p. 78). With discussing these questions and with challenging the power some words have being associated with a specific gender, students might find it easier to question societal norms depicted in literature, as Meyer has proven to include in both *Twilight* and in *Life and Death* – despite the gender swap.

### 3.3.3 Activity for assessment - research project

Much can be discussed when comparing the two novels: as they both add up to nearly 800 pages. The suggested exercises presented in the previous sections only offer a small portion of activities teachers can create in using the novels as material for teaching from a gender and feminist perspective. Together with the five goals for the English subject presented in section 3.2, in the English 6 course the students are also to develop strategies for source-critical approaches when reading different material. Furthermore they are to develop strategies to search for relevant information in larger amounts of text and to understand perspectives and implied meaning (Skolverket, 2011, p. 7). Therefore, I suggest a so-called research project for the post-reading phase. This writing exercise inspired by Marsh (2016) can function as an after-reading activity in which the students will produce independently in the classroom, with assistance provided from the teacher.

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12 For instance in several pop, r'n'b and hip-hop songs.

In his work *How to Begin Studying English Literature* Marsh (2016) states that to overcome the first difficulty of studying literature is to start by finding a theme (p. 1). In this case the students are being presented with the already selected theme: the gender swap. The next step, Marsh explains, is to write a question and then to write an answer that fits the question (p. 109). The purpose for this project is to make the students question societal norms defined as ideal or correct behaviour for a person of a specific sex. When reading *Life and Death* and compare it to *Twilight*, the questions that arise include: has the story changed in any way in comparison to the original novel? What impact has the gender swap had in the main characters? These questions can be answered differently depending on how thoroughly or critically you approach the two novels. The students are thus to write a paper arguing their cause; individually complied cohesive texts with an introduction and an ending. They are to follow the three steps presented by Marsh, which can be applied in studying literature:

The first step is to think about the texts. Which common experiences are they dealing with? Then choose a crisis passage from the two texts to look at in more detail. As *Life and Death* is a retelling of *Twilight*, the events featured in both novels are almost identical. The students could therefore choose a topic included in the novels which the students could focus on in their own comparative analysis. Topics could be love, friendship, relationships with parents or self-image. To argue for or against the gender swap having had an impact on this subject in *Life and Death* the students should choose passages where this more or less is shown in their favour.

The second step is to analyse the texts. How do they portray the theme? Here the students search for details and how they portray the chosen topic. The details are then used as evidence to support their claim, which are done by giving examples and citing the source material.

The third step is to relate the part they have studied to the text as a whole; how do the detailed ideas found fit the entire story? As the students have only read passages of the two novels they can instead connect their chosen subject and details to the movie adaptation. Broadening your outlook, Marsh explains, helps with developing an understanding of how complex a subject is and how it is evolved through the entire story. For a book to work all the pieces have to come together. Same goes with working on an analysis. Therefore the chosen subject in the analysis has to fit into its place in the whole text (p. 3-4). If the students cannot relate their analysis to the chosen theme, the gender swap, their arguments are left insufficient and incomplete.

This exercise will work as a conclusion for this project, and could thus be used for assessment by the teacher. It works both as a means to assess the students' language abilities

in writing, as well their abilities to adapt a critical approach and to distinguish between personal views and more substantiated arguments with using *Twilight* and *Life and Death* as references for their cause. All of the aforementioned coincide with the syllabus for English 6 (Skolverket, 2011).

# 4. Conclusion and final reflections

The Swedish National Agency for Education states that schools have a responsibility and a duty to counterbalance conventional and stereotypical gender patterns as research shows students are treated and assessed differently and various demands and expectations are placed on them based on their gender. This essay has argued for the benefits of using literature to teach from a gender and feminist perspective. Fundamental aspects of gender and feminist pedagogy are a focus on gender and for both teachers and students to obtain new knowledge and for their thinking to shift in new directions. The reading of carefully selected books and book-related activities has been shown in previous studies to positively influence gender attitudes. Using literature in the classroom as a resource provide the opportunity for students to reflect on social and cultural phenomena, such as gender issues, in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. The aim of this essay has been to show how this can be achieved in the EFL classroom, as literature also help students further their skills in the four basic areas of language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing, all of which are in agreement with the syllabus for the English subject.

The thesis statement of this essay is that Stephenie Meyer's novel *Life and Death* in combination with the original version, *Twilight,* can be used beneficially as resources in the EFL classroom as a way of bringing gender awareness and the issue of gender roles and their representation in young adult literature. As said by the author, the purpose of publishing a reimagination of *Twilight* in where the characters have undergone a gender swap, was to challenge gender roles and to show that it makes no difference if the human is male and the vampire female – it is still the same story. The answer to the accuracy of Meyer's statement is arguably ambiguous; with the characters of Beau and Edythe *Life and Death* challenges hegemonic views of masculinity and femininity. Certain changes have been made with the main characters, aside from the gender swap, to fit societal norms that are defined as ideal or correct male and female behaviour. Meyer has thus given birth to queries whether the swapping of genders achieve more questioning of gender roles or has ended up normalising them. In summary, *Life and Death* does not offer a utopian version of *Twilight* regarding gender roles because of the gender swap. Consequently, this essay presents suggested ways to critically approach the novels to use for the English classroom, as a means for students to question societal norms that are defined as ideal or correct behaviour for a person of a specific sex.

In conclusion, *Twilight* and *Life and Death,* when used in combination with each other, offer an extraordinary opportunity for feminist and gender discussions. Carillo (2007)

states "[t]his impulse to raise questions about and reflect on that which has long been taken for granted is not only important in the classroom, but is one of the defining characteristics of feminist pedagogy (p. 39). *Twilight* has since publication received considerable critical attention from both critics and readers concerning the two main characters and their representations of gender and gender roles. With *Life and Death,* Meyer provides a fresh, though arguably flawed, perspective into the characters of a saga that has become the most popular literature of the decade for today's young adult females. It is my hope that this study can shed some light on the issues a gender swap of characters can present in children's or youth literature, as well as further the understanding of the importance of gender being taught in schools.

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