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Auszug aus:

Jhumpa Lahiri: "The Third and Final Continent" - Analysing a short story

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R.16

Literature – Short stories, fables and fairy tales

Jhumpa Lahiri: "The Third and Final Continent" – Analysing a short story

Rita Reithelmer-Wolff



In dieser Einheit analysieren die Lernenden die Kurzgeschichte „The Third and Final Continent“ von Jhumpa Lahiri durch eine intensive Auseinandersetzung mit dem Plot einerseits und dem Protagonisten andererseits. Mittels abwechslungsreicher Methoden werden emotionale und inhaltliche Zugänge zu der Kurzgeschichte für junge Leserinnen und Leser geschaffen. Das Thema *arranged marriage*, das einen wesentlichen kulturellen Aspekt der Geschichte darstellt, wird mit einem Sachtext und einem Video ergänzend bearbeitet. Eine schriftliche Klausur, die auf einem Auszug aus dem Roman „Anjanangad marriage“ von Bala Rai basiert, dient der Lernzusammenfassung.

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COMPETENCES

Competences:	1. Reading comprehension/text competence: understanding literary texts and analysing their linguistic and stylistic features; 2. Speaking: participating in complex conversations and discussions; 3. Writing: writing argumentative and analytical texts
Methods:	writing, speaking, giving a presentation, discussing, giving feedback, reading, analysing, commenting, mediating, simulating an interview
Themes:	immigration, isolation and connection, fragility and resilience, cultural identity, marriage and family
Required:	Anton, Daniela and Dowie, Sabrina (Ed.): Crossing Borders. Stories of Migration and Cultural Identity. Ernst Klett Sprachen. Stuttgart 2023.

Facts

Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri was born in London, UK, in 1967. She was the daughter of Indian immigrants from the Indian state of West Bengal. When she was three years old, her parents moved to the United States. Lahiri thinks of herself as an American. The author grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island, where her father worked as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island. For Lahiri's mother it was very important that her children grew up not ignoring their Bengali heritage. Her family frequently visited relatives in Calcutta.

Lahiri's nickname Jhumpa became her usual name when she entered kindergarten: her teachers just were unable to pronounce her real name. Lahiri graduated from South Kingstown High School and received her B.A. in English literature from Barnard College of Columbia University in 1989. She also has M.A. and a Ph.D. from Boston College.

When Lahiri was young, she had mixed feelings about her identity and was conscious of the ambivalence. In an editorial in Newsweek, Lahiri claims that she has "felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new". When she became an adult, she turned out to be part of these two dimensions without the embarrassment and struggle that she had had as a child.

Lahiri's first successful publication was the anthology of short stories "Interpreter of Maladies" (1999). This publication brought her national attention. "Interpreter of Maladies" sold 600,000 copies and received the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In 2003, Lahiri published her first novel, "The Namesake". Lahiri's second collection of short stories, "Unaccustomed Earth", was published in 2008. In 2013, her novel "The Lowland" appeared.

The short story "The Third and Final Continent" was published in "Interpreter of Maladies" (1999). It is the story about an Indian man who goes to London to finish his education and to establish himself abroad. Only a few years later, he moves to the USA (Boston) where he is offered a full-time job in the processing department of a library. Before starting his professional career there, he flies to Calcutta to attend his wedding. It is an arranged marriage, but he does not mind at all. After staying a short period in a YMCA in the USA, he rents a private room with an elderly lady, Mrs. Croft. Although the old lady behaves in a strange and strict way, the narrator manages to get used to it and settles down. When his wife Mala's passport and green card are ready, she joins him in the USA, and they live in a furnished apartment a few blocks away from his room at Mrs Croft's house. They gradually get to know each other in the course of time. They have a son who will graduate in a few years.

The topic of "The Third and Final Continent" is the successful integration of an immigrant to his new surrounding while retaining his identity. The story is also autobiographical because the narrator mirrors her father's experiences. One would expect the description of struggles and anxieties on the part of the immigrant narrator, but this does not happen in the short story. The narrator – and his wife Mala – prove to be flexible enough to find happiness and satisfaction in an alien environment without rebelling against Bengali traditions, such as arranged marriages. Consequently, some readers might be disappointed because they were prepared to be confronted with emotional turmoil, as it is often the case when an individual has a dual identity. The narrator is obviously self-confident enough to face the challenges in the USA.

Notes on the material

This unit provides ample opportunity to explore the different dimensions of the short story "The Third and Final Continent". The material is divided into five topics. It is recommendable that students do not deal with the different topics separately. This, however, does not mean that it is impossible to just deal with selected topics of the unit if there is only a limited number of lessons available.

Topic 1 serves as an introduction into the topic of travelling. As a starting point, two pictures are presented, and the learners will explain in a think-pair-share activity to which place they would rather travel. When students express their ideas, they can recur to the language support provided. Following this, a text on the same topic needs to be written. Finally, students are asked to do some research on the Internet about Finsbury Park in London.

Topic 2 centres around students' travelling habits. For this reason, they are asked to fill in a questionnaire on the topic.

Topic 3 focuses on the short story itself. First, learners speculate about the plot based on the first passage of the short story. After they have written a possible continuation of the passage and read their classmates' texts, they give each other written feedback. To finish, they tick suitable adjectives describing their classmates' texts.

In **topic 4**, students work on the content, plot, and characters of the short story. In M 4, they write down the main incidents of the story, also briefly explaining the context of these. Following this, they will complete sentences as a reading comprehension exercise. As an oral task, students work in small groups and use the Touch-Turn-Talk cards. With M 5, learners then analyse the short story by explaining the title, the atmosphere, the ending and the message of the story. Concerning the narrator, a list with adjectives describing people is offered so that students can tick the adjectives that apply to the narrator. Next, students describe the narrative perspective and its impact on the reader. Finally, they assess the story with the help of task cards (M 6).

Topic 5 deals with the topic of arranged marriages in India and in Germany. Learners will read an English text from the Internet on the tradition of arranged marriages in Asia (M 7). After students have worked on the vocabulary and the content, they write down the main facts and comment on them. Another written exercise follows as learners write about Internet

matchmaking. After this, they prepare and give a short speech on arranged marriages. Finally, they mediate a German text on forced marriages in Germany into English (M 8). They then work with a video on the experiences of an arranged marriage of a woman living in the USA (M 9). In doing so, students enhance their listening and viewing competences. In a concluding creative activity, students prepare and carry out a conversation or interview with the young woman from the video.

The written **exam** includes a section where students need to outline the content of an extract from Bali Rai's novel "(Un)arranged Marriage". As a second task, students must compare this narrator to the narrator from the "The Third and Final Continent". The final task consists in a discussion of a given statement.

Edition of the short story used for this unit:

Anton, Daniela and Dowie, Sabrina (Ed.): Crossing Borders. Stories of Migration and Cultural Identity. Ernst Klett Sprachen. Stuttgart 2023.

Overview

Topic 1: Travelling

M 1 Worksheet – Two pictures

Topic 2: Travelling and you

M 2 Worksheet – A questionnaire

Topic 3: The story – Getting into it

M 3 Worksheet – An extract from "The Third and Final Continent"

Topic 4: The story – Content, plot, and characters

M 4 Worksheet – The content of the short story

M 5 Worksheet – Analysing the short story

M 6 Worksheet – Beyond the short story

Topic 5: Arranged marriages in India

M 7 Text and Worksheet – Arranged marriages in India

M 8 Text and Worksheet – Mediation: "*Heirate oder du stirbst*"

M 9 Worksheet – A video on arranged marriages

Exam

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