

Fiche

Theme II: Encounters (« Rencontres »)

Throughout the ages, man's social identity has been constructed through his encounters with others. Whether they involve individuals or groups of people, these encounters upset the status quo and challenge established order. The English-speaking world has been forged through a series of encounters — desired or imposed — between people, languages, and cultures in different social, geographic, political or economic contexts. This theme offers you an opportunity to explore these life-changing encounters.

The official programme suggests three possible fields of study for this theme.

1: Love and friendship (« L'amour et l'amitié »)

This field of study looks at what draws two people together (*meeting; bonding*), and the darker side of the picture in the case of absence (*loneliness*). It explores how love and friendship give rise to joy and happiness, as well as an ability to transcend oneself for the other person, but also how they can become a source of conflict or of suffering, on account of separation, loss or death. The number of documents available is plentiful. You will be able to enjoy classical plays or poems (*Much Ado about Nothing; She Walks in Beauty; Annabel Lee*, etc.), but also easily accessible songs or musical comedies (*Don't Think Twice It's All Right; La La Land*, etc.) or novels such as those by Jane Austen or Laurie Colwin. This field of study can also explore urban individualism or the issues of social networks for example.

2: The relationship between the individual and the group (« Relation entre l'individu et le groupe »)

This field of study explores how this encounter, whether it is successful or it engenders a sense of rejection, isolation or loneliness or a culture shock, often offers artists and writers an opportunity to highlight its complexity (*encountering; contrasting*). Widely broached in literature with novels by writers like John Steinbeck or George Orwell, plays by William Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, etc. or poetry by Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, etc., the motif of the encounter is equally present in the artwork of English-speaking artists (paintings by Edward Hopper, photographs by Martin Parr, video clips by Bill Viola, graphic novels by Chris Ware, etc.) Another angle which deserves investigation is the departure from expected standards that the encounter can trigger. This theme has been brilliantly exploited by numerous authors and artists, from novelists Daniel Defoe, Kate Chopin, E. M. Forster to the choreographer Anna Halprin or the sculptor William McElcheran. On a socio-political level, you could also look at the differentiation between groups, whether they affirm their solidarity with the local population like the miners, or their difference as in the fights against discrimination, injustice or poverty. The examples are countless.

3: Confronting difference (« La confrontation à la différence »)

The idea behind this theme is that encounters require you to reposition yourself, to acknowledge difference (*confronting; opposing*), to question your own cultural values, be they generational (as in the films *Breakfast Club*, *Dead Poets Society* or the TV series *Mad Men*), social (class distinctions in *Downton Abbey* for example), or in sport (the film *Invictus*, the poem "Casey at the Bat"), etc. The encounter can engender a mutual enrichment but also tension, which then calls for an analysis of the context. Authors like William Golding (*Lord of the Flies*) or Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) for example, offer a vision of otherness which defies social order and which is violently opposed. Likewise, the encounter with the murals in Northern Ireland, painted by two communities in conflict, is thought-provoking. Similarly, Rudyard Kipling's poem "Mandalay" offers a privileged viewpoint of 19th century British colonialism, which still resonates two centuries later. And certain statues, monuments, or sites dedicated to commemorating events or people are transformed into sources of conflict or vectors of national reconciliation.

 [Exercice n°1](#)

 [Exercice n°2](#)