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## THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Das Themenfeld *The Individual and Society* ist im Fachlehrplan ab dem Schuljahrgang 10 fest verankert und rekurriert nicht zuletzt auf den grundlegenden Bildungsauftrag des Faches Englisch, die Schülerinnen und Schüler auf die „Teilhabe und Teilnahme am gesellschaftlichen Leben“ – Fachlehrplan Englisch (Gymnasium/Berufliches Gymnasium), S. 4 – vorzubereiten.

Im Rahmen dieses Themenfelds geht es einerseits um die Rolle des Individuums in der Gesellschaft, umgekehrt aber auch um die Auswirkungen sozialer und gesellschaftlicher Konventionen auf das Individuum. Die Schülerinnen und Schüler sollen sich hier des Spannungsfeldes zwischen Anpassung und Individualismus bewusst werden und erkennen, dass beide Ausprägungen für ein friedliches, tolerantes und freiheitliches Miteinander nötig sind.

Gerade vor dem Hintergrund einer sich schnell verändernden globalisierten Welt besteht eine der größten Herausforderungen der heutigen Zeit darin, eine Gesellschaft zu gestalten, die Vielfalt ermöglicht und sich Veränderungen stellt.

Auf diesem Weg ist es unerlässlich, dass sich die Schülerinnen und Schüler mit weiterhin ungelösten Problemen wie Chancenungleichheit, Diskriminierung und Rassismus auseinandersetzen und auch eigene Gewohnheiten, Handlungsweisen und Lebensentwürfe kritisch hinterfragen. Daraus können Ideen und Lösungsansätze entstehen, wie sich das Individuum und die Gesellschaft als Ganzes entwickeln und verändern müssen, um einer gerechten und nachhaltigen Zukunft näherzukommen.

## The Teachers' Room

by Lydia Stryk

*The novel is set in a small Mid-West town in 1963.*

Esther's a woman of few words in the morning, I've discovered, but over soft-boiled eggs and toast, she surprises me with her talkativeness. She asks me if I know anything about the history of our profession.

"No," I confess. "They didn't teach us that up at college."

5 "How irresponsible," she says, and she looks dismayed.

[...]

10 "Even as the first schools appeared, girls were mostly kept at home. For one thing, schools cost money. They might learn to read, and a few learned to write. They attended grade school at best. Even as free schools opened up for the poor, a complete education was denied them. Women took to the streets to fight for a girl's right to higher education. And these newly educated girls went on to become the first professional women schoolteachers. You should know that the existence of the Teacher's College was the direct result of women who fought for our emancipation."

She stops and looks me in the eye.

15 "Have you heard of the Seneca Falls Convention, Karen?"

"No," I say.

"Shocking," she says. "Elizabeth Cady Stanton?"

"No," I admit.

"But you know who Thomas Jefferson is?"

20 "Of course."

"Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the Declaration of Sentiments. It was adopted at the Convention on Women's Rights at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Does that date ring a bell?"

"No," I say, head hanging.

25 "It's as important a document as the Declaration of Independence. It's American history, for God's sake. But you've never heard of it. And why? Because it's not taught in the schools."

30 Esther gets up from her chair, as if she's had enough, and moves away from the table. She stares up at the ceiling with a sigh, turns to look at me, and shakes her head. She makes her way back to the table resolutely, and placing her hands on the back of her chair leans in toward me. This is a typical classroom position of hers, one I've observed often, and denotes her wish for complete attention.

“The Declaration states that a woman is a man’s equal, nothing more or less. It demands that women be given the right to the vote, but also the right to a thorough education. The signers threatened to overthrow the government if their demands weren’t met. In 1848, Karen, imagine that.” [...] “Their demands weren’t met, of course. The government was not  
35  
overthrown. But they refused to give up.”

I’m moved and galvanized by this appreciation of my calling. I see my colleagues in a new light, as part of something larger, something heroic. I picture them marching down Lincoln Highway, battle helmets on, pointers at the ready, Irene Bachmeier<sup>1</sup> at the fore. The  
40  
image makes me laugh. “Here’s to the teachers,” I shout out, raising my cup. “I’ll never forget this lesson, Miss Jonas.”

“I hope not,” she says, taking another bite, and she looks very serious. “May I continue?”

I realize the history of our profession is no laughing matter to Esther. In fact, many things I’ve skipped lightly over in my life are deadly earnest to her. It must be a German trait, I  
45  
decide. It’s certainly contagious. I find myself growing more serious by the minute.

“Please continue,” I tell her without the flicker of a smile, and she obliges.

“As men left the schoolhouses for better paid and more respected work in the new professions opening up to them, in banking and law, as accountants, managers, engineers, the women were left to teach the children. But with serious restrictions. Married women were  
50  
banned from teaching. Practically speaking, they were sworn to celibacy. If they chose to marry and have a family, they were forced out of the profession. The ban is still in place in some parts of the country. Its effects linger everywhere, even in 1963, as you will be well aware. Teaching may have been the perfect escape for women wishing to avoid marriage and men altogether, but for the others who longed for a family and had a calling to teach, well, they had  
55  
a difficult choice to make. God forbid, they became pregnant. They married quickly and left the profession or they sought help to end the pregnancy, which was dangerous and against the law. If they were lucky, they found a midwife or doctor to carry out the procedure in a back room. Others had no choice but to use coat hangers or knitting needles or drink some awful concoction in the hopes of inducing a miscarriage. Countless women have died attempting to  
60  
end a pregnancy. They die of infections, perforated organs, unstoppable bleeding – teachers among them.”

I push my plate away. The jubilation of some minutes before has turned to dismay.

“But it’s not just history, Karen. It’s happening today.”

798 words

Stryk, Lydia (2022): *The Teachers’ Room*. Bywater Books. Ann Arbor. pp. 69–73.

<sup>1</sup> Irene Bachmeier

fellow teacher of Karen and Esther

## The Teachers' Room

### Assignments

1. Point out the role women played in the development of education until the 1960s.
2. Analyse how the relationship between Karen and Esther is established. Focus on narrative perspective and use of language.
3. Choose **one** of the following tasks:
  - 3.1 “God forbid, they became pregnant. They married quickly and left the profession or they sought help to end the pregnancy, which was dangerous and against the law.” (ll. 55–57)

Imagine Lydia Stryk runs a blog on women’s rights and has asked her readers to contribute. Using the quotation as a starting point, write an entry in which you comment on the legitimacy of abortion.

**or**

- 3.2 Using the cartoon as a starting point, discuss the following statement:  
Gender equality is still a distant dream today.



Mikyung Lee: A woman's greatest enemy? A lack of time to herself  
(Zugriff von <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/21/woman-greatest-enemy-lack-of-time-themselves> am 02.02.2023)