



# MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

Years 6 – 9

**FILM – A LANGUAGE WITHOUT BORDERS**

A project of

**VISION KINO**  
Netzwerk für Film und  
Medienkompetenz

**BFI** Film  
Forever

**IFILM**  
DET DANSKE FILMINSTITUT

Co-funded by the  
European Union



Creative  
Europe  
**MEDIA**

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**THE PROGRAMME**  
**»FILM – A LANGUAGE WITHOUT BORDERS«**

Film is a language without borders and connects people regardless of their origin, age, gender and life experience.

Migrant societies which have arisen as a result of political and social processes such as industrialisation, colonisation, mediatisation and globalisation, can utilise the power of film. Based on this understanding, German non-profit organisation **VISION KINO**, together with the **BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE** and the **DANISH FILM INSTITUTE**, have developed this programme, consisting of eight European feature films for children and young adults, as well as three classic short films.

The selection of films is supplemented by educational materials which will provide students and teachers with opportunities to discuss emotions, identity and the common exploration of European film.

Supplementary research in Denmark, England and Germany will examine the way in which the selected films offer children and young adults a collective movie experience as well as an opportunity for intercultural learning. Joint results from the three countries will form the starting point for the dissemination of the programme in other European countries.

**About us**

“Film – A Language Without Borders” is a project of the British Film Institute, the Danish Film Institute and Vision Kino gGmbH and was developed by Mark Reid (BFI), Charlotte Giese (DFI) and Sarah Duve (Vision Kino gGmbH)



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**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE**

These educational materials refer to the film MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE from the programme “FILM - A LANGUAGE WITHOUT BORDERS”. They are based on the publication “Materials for Film Education in Migration Societies” that contains information on the educational approach underlying the programme, as well as general teaching ideas and reflection offerings.

This particular study guide also provides suggestions for the reflection of your lessons. For your personal notes, boxes can be found at the end of each chapter.

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MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

FILM DETAILS



MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

ORIGINAL TITLE: MA VIE DE COURGETTE

DURATION: 66 MINS

DIRECTED BY: STEPHEN CLAUDE BARRAS

WRITTEN BY: CÉLINE SCIAMMA

BASED ON THE BOOKS BY GILLES PARIS

Film Themes	Family, Solidarity, Friendship, Loss, Loneliness, Domestic Violence, Courage
Teaching Subjects	German, Ethics, Religion, Philosophy, Arts, General Knowledge, Sociology, French
Countries / Year	Switzerland, France / 2016
Grade Levels	Years 6 to 9
Age Recommendation	10- to 14-year-olds
Cast	English voices: Eric Abbate, Romy Beckman, Susanne Blakeslee, Will Forte, Ness Krell, Ellen Page, Amy Sedaris, Finn Robbins
Production Companies	Rita Productions, Blue Spirit Animation, Gébéka Films a.o.
Distributor	Polyband Medien
Language	English (dubbed version)
Format	digital, colour
Rating	PG – Parental Guidance

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

Awards: European Film Prize 2016 (Best Animated Film), César (Best Animated Film, Best Adapted Screenplay); Zürich Film Festival (Best Children's Film), Nominated for an Oscar® and a Golden Globe 2017 (Best Animated Film)

**SYNOPSIS**

Icare is known to everyone as Courgette. At the beginning of the film he lives with his mother. She watches TV and drinks beer while Courgette plays alone in his room and is afraid of her loud, angry voice. The only thing that reminds him of his father is a paper dragon, which he takes good care of. His father is a superhero whom he can hardly remember.

Through an accident, which Courgette thinks he is responsible for, his mother dies and Courgette is sent to a children's home. There he gradually finds a real home. Every child in the home has their own special story: Simon's parents are drug addicts. Ahmed's father is in prison. Jujube's mother has an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Béatrice's mother was deported. Alice was sexually abused by her father. These traumatic experiences characterise their collective lives: The children argue a lot and react sensitively to conflicts. But they also feel a strong bond. Little by little Courgette regains trust and finds a real family.

When Courgette feels properly settled, a new girl moves in. Her name is Camille and Courgette is so entranced by her eyes that he gets butterflies in his stomach. She is only supposed to stay briefly in the children's home as her aunt wants to take her in. However, Camille does not want that. Her aunt does not care for her, but only wants to get her hands on child welfare payments, which are meant for Camille's care. Courgette, Simon and the other children help Camille to convince the adults that she prefers to live in the children's home.

At the same time, the relationship between Courgette and policeman Raymond, who took Courgette to the children's home after his mother's accident, intensifies. The two get along really well and eventually Raymond invites Courgette and Camille to come and live with him.

**BEFORE THE FILM**

## MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

### TOPIC ANIMATION

MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE is a stop-motion animated movie using puppet models. These are 25 cm tall and made of different modelling materials. The production technique is similar to working with plasticine. The figures and backgrounds were animated using stop-motion techniques. Here, scenes are built, figures placed and moved in it. At the end, the film consists of many individual images on which the figures are positioned only slightly differently. Between these small movements a picture is always taken from the same perspective. At the end, the pictures are played in quick succession so the eye is tricked into seeing a movement.

### IDEAS FOR TEACHING

#### Discussion on the topic of animation

The following questions can encourage the exchange of previous experiences and expectations of animated movies:

- What animations do you know?
- What are figures in animations made of?
- How are animations made?

#### Making plasticine puppets

In preparation for the film and its special aesthetics the students create model figures of themselves (approx. 15 cm tall).

In advance, students are given the following questions for orientation:

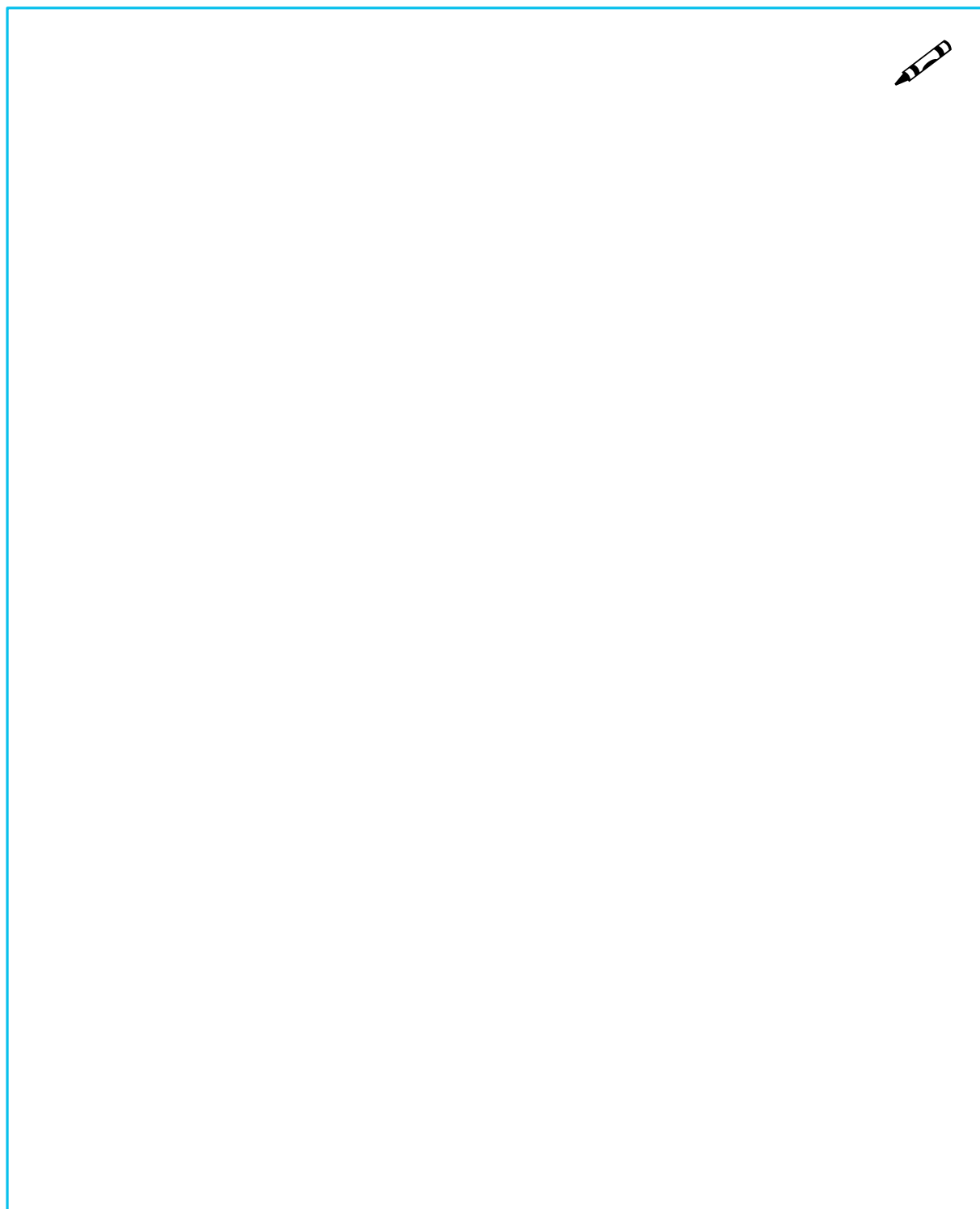
- What do I like about myself?
- What is special about me? What sets me apart from others?
- Which colours do I like best?
- What do I like to do best?

Then a class photo is taken of the plasticine figures.

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**SUGGESTED REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

- How would a real class photo look different or similar to the class photo with the clay figures?
- What image do the students have of themselves?
- What expectations do I have of the film?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for writing reflections. In the top right corner of the box, there is a small, stylized icon of a pencil.

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**AFTER THE FILM**

**DISCUSSING THE EXPERIENCE**

After the film, ask the class to express their first reactions and then open up the room for questions. MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE deals with very personal and individual themes such as loneliness and loss. All of the children in the film experience psychological and physical violence by family members. Students should be provided with a safe space to discuss the film and, if necessary, to talk about their own experiences.

**IDEAS FOR TEACHING**

The following teaching suggestions can either be combined with each other or implemented individually.

**Non-verbal discussion**

The children draw an emoticon to say how they liked the movie. Then they draw the film's most important scene for them.

**Body-Activating Evaluation**

One by one, the following adjectives are read to the children: boring, beautiful, fast, slow, loud, quiet, funny, adventurous, scary, surprising. Where the adjective matches their movie experience, they stand up. Afterwards, they sit down again.

**Film Discussion**

- What would you like to say about the film?
- At the cinema, how did you feel after the film?
- What feelings did you have during the film?
- Are there any scenes or themes in the movie that you would like to talk about?
- What questions remained unanswered in the film? Is there something you did not understand?

For our supplemental research on didactic cinema we would appreciate if you would **send us the anonymised results of the film discussion and/or the class photo of the plasticine figures:**

Vision Kino gGmbH Network for Film und Media Competence  
 Große Präsidentenstraße 9  
 D-10178 Berlin  
 or via email to [elena.solte@visionkino.de](mailto:elena.solte@visionkino.de)



**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE****Options for Counselling and Support**

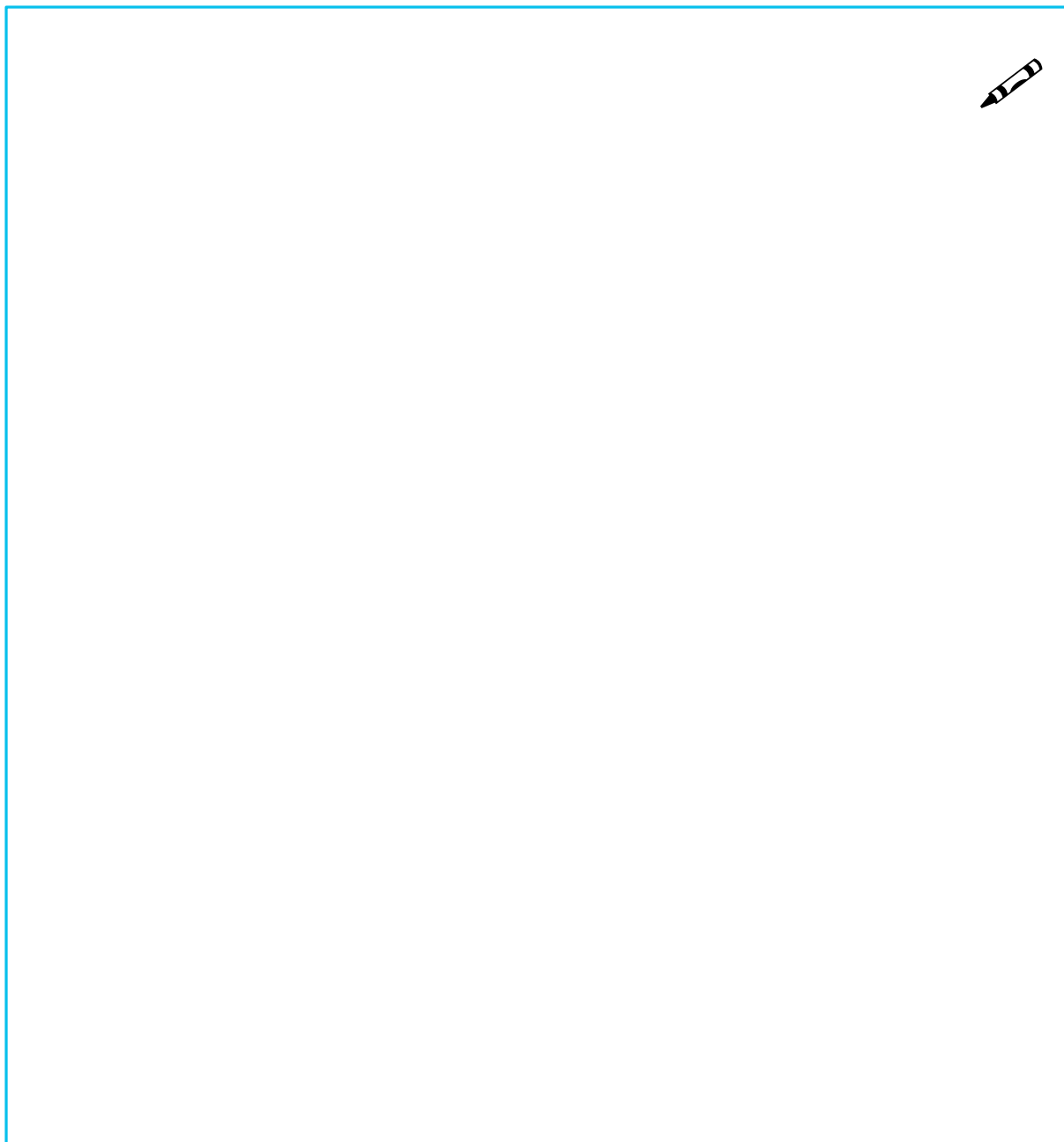
The children in the film are burdened with very serious problems. All of them need outside help to make them feel better. Perhaps some of the film's storylines might remind the students of their own experiences or experiences of friends (violence, asylum and deportation, addiction...). The film makes it necessary to give the students room for such memories and thoughts. It is not necessary for the students to talk about it, but there should be mention of what students could do and where they could get help if they or others are being attacked or threatened with physical and psychological violence or are burdened with illness. Maybe the students already know where counselling is offered. An open conversation can establish their knowledge. Provide the children with opportunities (helplines, counselling centres, guidance counsellors, class teachers...), how they can get help and support, taking into account offers for students whose first language is not German.

- Who can I talk to if I or any of my friends experience violence?

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**SUGGESTED REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

- Did the students like the film?
- Which themes in the film did the students find most interesting?
- Do the students know about options for counselling and support?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for reflection. In the top right corner of the box, there is a small, stylized icon of a pencil.

## MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

### TOPIC FEELINGS

Courgette experiences many different feelings in the film. In some situations he is ecstatically happy and upbeat, in others he is devastated. We can tell Courgette's mood from his posture, his eyes and his mouth. We can recognise these feelings well due to our ability to empathise. We can imagine that Courgette is very sad after the death of his mother, or that he is excited when Camille's hand approaches his.

However, naming these feelings can be much more difficult: The following ideas for teaching help to reflect on the feelings expressed in the film and also to think about one's own feelings.

### IDEAS FOR TEACHING

#### Teamwork on Feelings

In groups of 4-5, the students put themselves into the emotional world of the film figures in relation to community and the other children in the children's home. Each group either works with Situation 1 or Situation 2.

- Situation 1: Courgette has just arrived at the children's home.

Students cut out the figures and speech bubbles from Template I. Using the following questions they position the figures on the poster.

- Where does Courgette stand?
- Where does Simon stand? Does he stand close to Courgette?
- Where does Ahmed stand? Does he stand close to Courgette? Does he stand close to Simon?
- Where does Jujube stand?
- Where does Alice stand?
- Do the children stand close to each other? Who stands close to whom?

Then the students place speech bubbles with the characters and write down what they are thinking and what they are feeling.

- Situation 2: Courgette is leaving the children's home.

Students cut out the figures and speech bubbles from Template I. Using the following questions they position the figures on the poster.

## MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

- Where does Courgette stand?
- Where does Camille stand?
- Where does Simon stand?
- Where does Ahmed stand?
- Where does Jujube stand?
- Where does Alice stand?
- Do the children stand close to each other? Who stands close to whom?

Then the students place speech bubbles with the characters and write down what they are thinking and what they are feeling.

Afterwards, a group that has worked on Situation 1 gets together with a group that has worked on Situation 2 and discusses the following questions:

- What are the differences between Situation 1 and Situation 2?
- Which characters are close and why could that be?

### Emotional Diary

In the children's home there is a blackboard that says "Children's Weather" in big letters. On this board, every child notes down how they feel.

On the "Worksheet Emotional Weather" the students enter for a week how they feel.

Afterwards, the class discusses how it was for the students to classify their feelings every day:

- Why is it good to talk about feelings?
- Why is it good for others to know how you are feeling?
- Why would you still prefer to keep some things to yourself?
- Are there feelings that do not fit the four symbols? Together, more symbols for feelings can be found.

### Expressing feelings with superhero masks

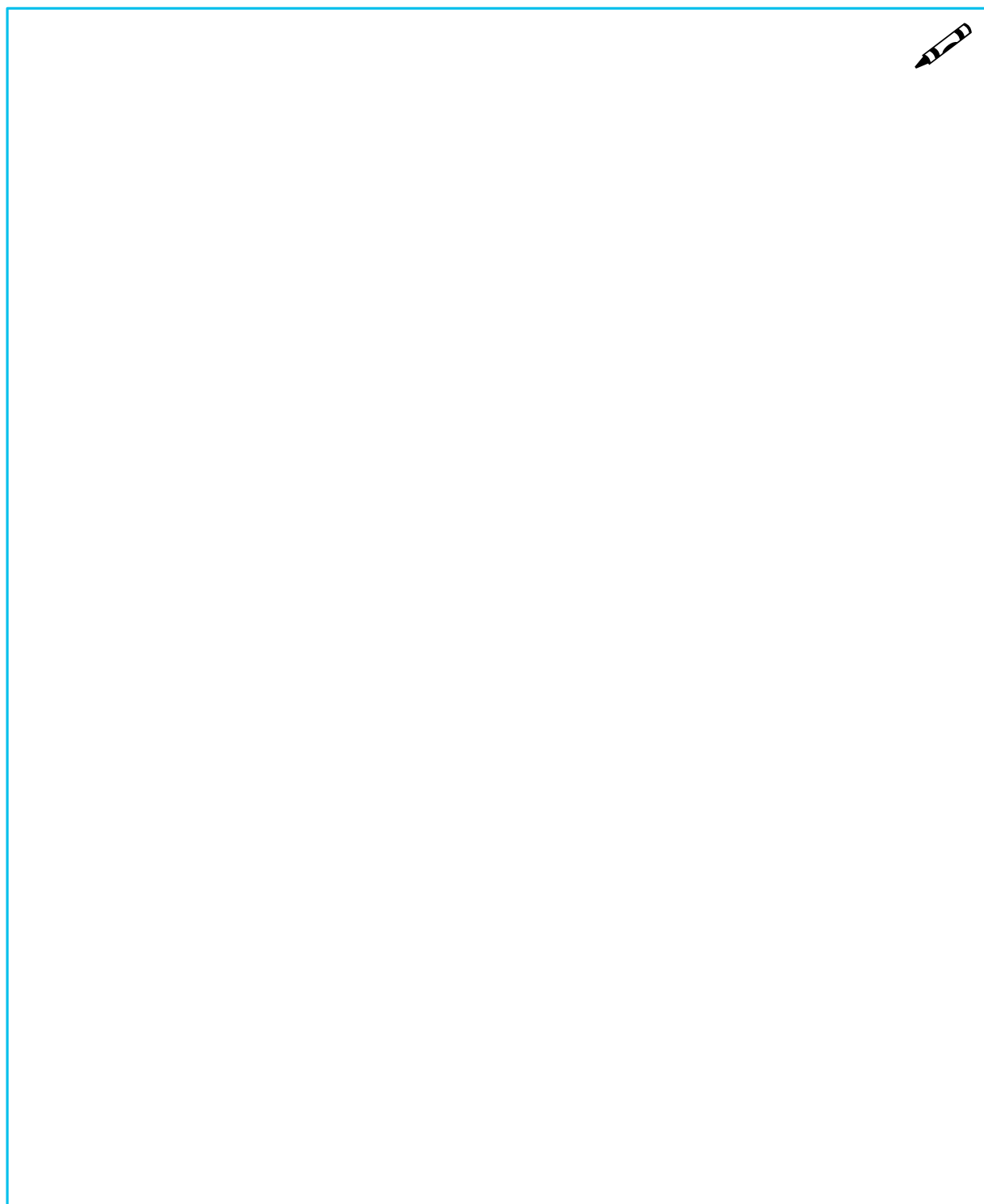
From Template II at the bottom of this document superhero masks are made. The template can be printed on firmer paper and painted or used for tracing on a piece of felt.

- How do you feel as a superhero?
- What superpowers would you like to possess?
- What would you change as a superhero?

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**SUGGESTED REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

- Did the film encourage students to talk about their own feelings?
- Is it difficult for students to talk about their own feelings?
- To my knowledge, which of the children’s fates in the film also affect my pupils in some way?
- With which child in the film do the children feel the most empathy?

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## MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

### TOPIC FAMILY

Courgette is confronted with having to rethink his concept of family twice within a short period of time. In the children's home, the other children and the staff become his family. At the end of the film, we learn that Raymond wants to take Courgette into his home. He leaves a family for a second time in order to find a new one.

### IDEAS FOR TEACHING

#### Collage on the Topic of Family

On a large poster in the middle of the room or on the wall, the students create a collage on the topic of "family". The students are provided with leaflets, brochures, catalogues and magazines. From this they collect pictures and quotes that match the theme of "family".

Afterwards, the collage will be discussed:

- What is a family to you?
- What is the most important thing in a family?
- Who belongs to Courgette's first family? Who belongs to Courgette's second family? Who belongs to Courgette's third family? Can you have more than one family?

#### Interpreting Symbols

The movie uses a lot of symbols. Symbols tell us something about people. We learn what is important to them. The students should bring an object that means something to them.

Together, the students show their objects and tell each other about their meaning. Then they discuss the symbols in the film:

- What does the dragon symbolise to Courgette?
- What does the beer can symbolise to Courgette?
- What does the paper boat symbolise that Camille receives from Courgette?
- What other symbols can you think of?

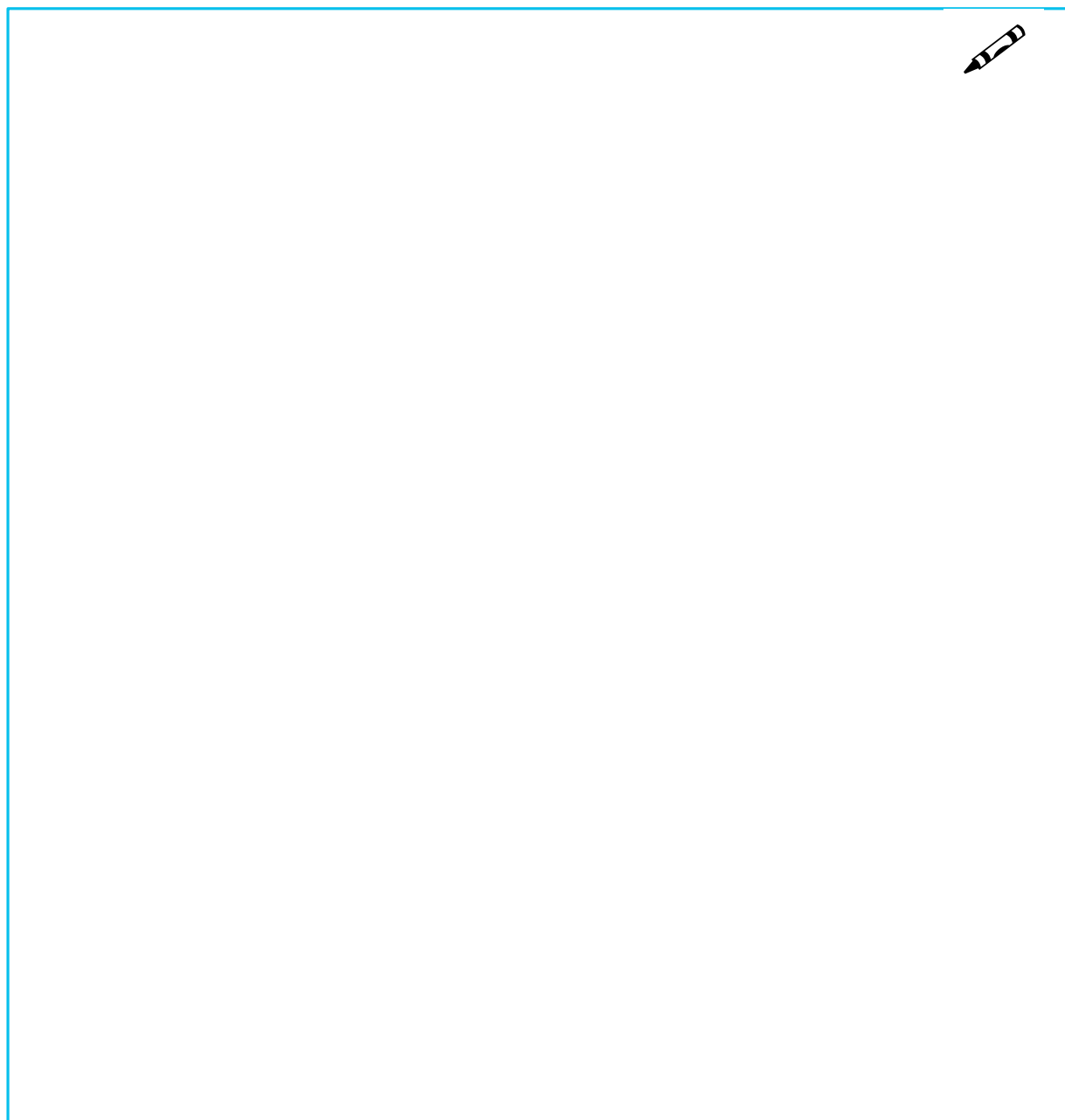
#### Write a letter to Simon: How is Courgette's life going?

Courgette likes to write letters. While living in the children's home, he writes letters to Raymond and tells him about his everyday life. In the penultimate scene of the film, we see Simon reading a letter from Courgette, in which Courgette writes that he has not forgotten him and the others. The students write a follow-up letter to Simon; about six months have passed. From Courgette's point of view they write about his new life with Raymond and Camille.

**MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE**

**SUGGESTED REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

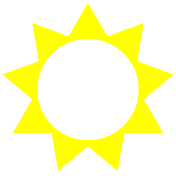
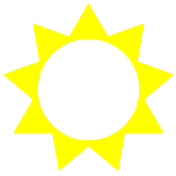
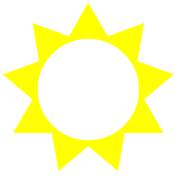
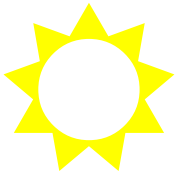
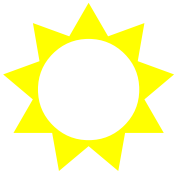















- What concepts of family do the students have?
- Who belongs in a family, according to the students?
- How do concepts of family differ among students? Why could that be?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for students to write their reflections. In the top right corner of the box, there is a small, stylized icon of a pencil.

MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

WORKSHEET

EMOTIONAL WEATHER

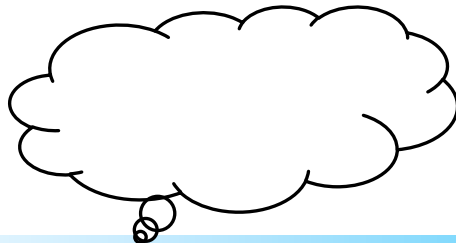
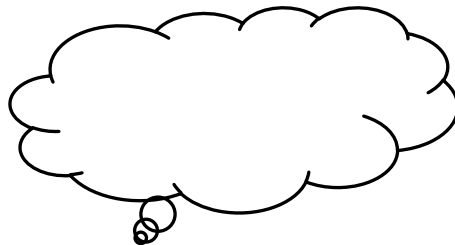
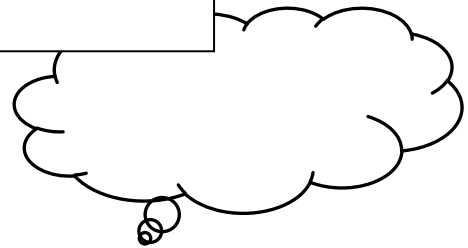
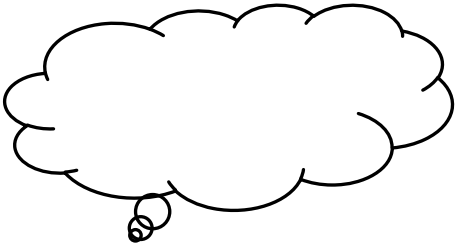
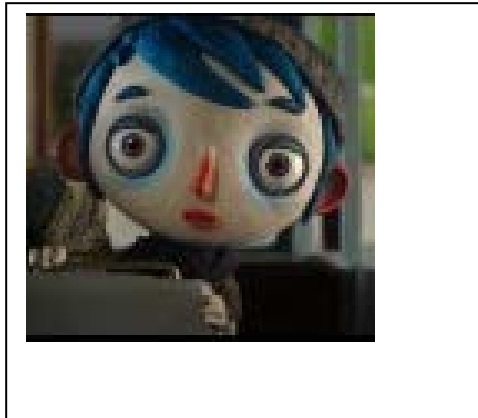
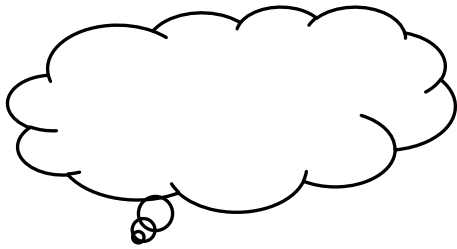
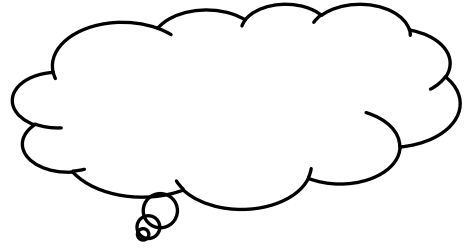
DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
				
				
				
				



MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

TEMPLATE I

TEAMWORK ON FEELINGS



MY LIFE AS A COURGETTE

TEMPLATE II

SUPERHERO MASK

