

WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS  
**SCHOOL PROGRAMS RESOURCES**

# GIRLHOOD



Image courtesy of Strand Releasing

*The coming-of-age story is a genre that invites readers to reflect upon themselves and upon their relationship to the world. —Deborah Boughton*

**DIRECTOR:**

Céline Sciamma

**WRITER:**

Céline Sciamma

**PRODUCER:**

Bénédicte Couvreur

**CAST:**

Karidja Touré

Assa Sylla

Lindsay Karamoh

Marietou Touré

Idrissa Diabate

Simina Soumare

Cyril Mendy

Djibril Gue

## Synopsis

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"Fed up with her abusive family situation, lack of school prospects and the "boys' law" in the neighborhood, Marieme starts a new life after meeting a group of three free-spirited girls. She changes her name, her style, drops out of school and starts stealing to be accepted into the gang. When her home situation becomes unbearable, Marieme seeks solace in an older man who promises her money and protection. Realizing this sort of lifestyle will never result in the freedom and independence she truly desires, she finally decides to take matters into her own hands."

—<http://strandreleasing.com>

## Reviews

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**Girlhood**

Official website for film <http://strandreleasing.com/films/girlhood/>

**You've Seen "Boyhood"--Now It's Time For The Must-Watch "Girlhood"**

Fast Company film review <http://www.fastcompany.com/3041822/the-recommender/youve-seen-boyhood-now-its-time-for-the-must-watch-girlhood>

**Exploring the Limits in a Man's World: In 'Girlhood,' a French Adolescent Comes Out of Her Shell**

New York Times film review <http://nyti.ms/1JQnihR>

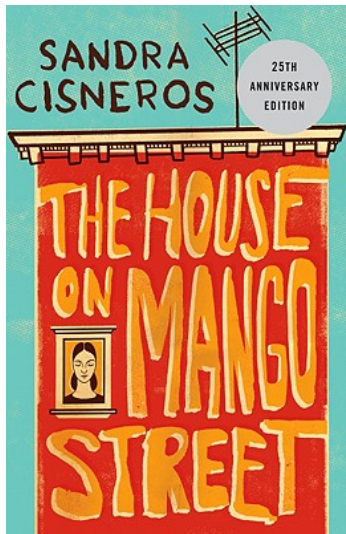
## Related Links

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- My French Life: Blogger, Jennifer Bourne, explains how dating for young adults and teens in France is different from how people date and form relationships in the United States. <http://www.myfrenchlife.org/2014/06/18/french-vs-american-dating/>
- Education in France: As seen in the film *Girlhood*, high school students are directed to pursue one of many educational paths based on their success in the classroom. This link provides an explanation of the educational system in France starting with preschool-aged children. <http://about-france.com/primary-secondary-schools.htm>
- This 2012 Washington Post article examines the state of gender equality in France in comparison to other countries around the world. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/10/25/why-french-women-have-so-little-equality-a-story-in-charts/>
- This thinkprogress.org article comments on the progress toward gender equality in France and shares news of a law to increase women's rights to their own bodies. This newly passed law in France (2014) is one of the first in large package of legislation to strengthen women's rights and gender equality in France. <http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/08/06/3468135/france-gender-equality-law/>
- French Burka Ban: This article from CNN talks about a French Muslim woman's fight against 2011 legislation that bans women from wearing burkas and hijabs in public. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/01/world/europe/france-burqa-ban/>
- *Girlhood* shows viewers how Marieme, the main character's appearance is often under scrutiny or praise from others based on how society feels she should be dressed. Follow this link to see traditional dress for both men and women from all around the world. <http://www.roughguides.com/gallery/traditional-dress/#/7>
- Adair/Howell Privilege Activity: The Huffington Post shares a video that reveals the different privileges and opportunities that exist for everyone, and often lead us to make choices that lead down various paths in life. [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/07/06/what-is-privilege\\_n\\_7737466.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/07/06/what-is-privilege_n_7737466.html)

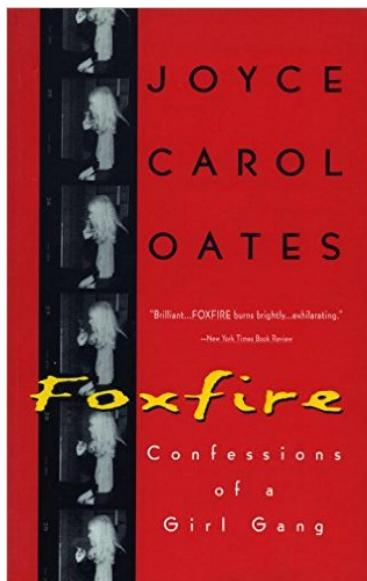
## Related Books

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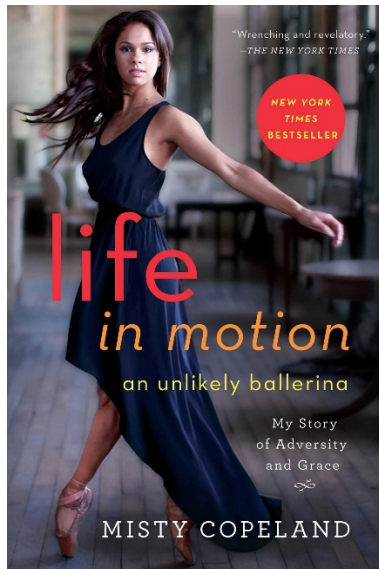
*The House on Mango Street (1984)* by Sandra Cisneros: “Sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous, *The House on Mango Street* tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, whose neighborhood is one of harsh realities and harsh beauty. Esperanza doesn’t want to belong – not to her rundown neighborhood, and not to the low expectations the world has for her. Esperanza’s story is that of a young girl coming into her power, and inventing for herself what she will become.”

[http://www.sandracisneros.com/major\\_works.php](http://www.sandracisneros.com/major_works.php)



*Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang (1993)* by Joyce Carol Oates: “The time is the 1950s. The place is a blue-collar town in upstate New York, where five high school girls are joined in a gang dedicated to pride, power, and vengeance on a world they never made—a world that seems made to denigrate and destroy them ... an often engrossing, often shocking evocation of female rage, gallantry, and grit.”

<http://celestialtimepiece.com/2015/03/13/foxfire-confessions-of-a-girl-gang/>



*Life in Motion (2014)* by Misty Copeland:

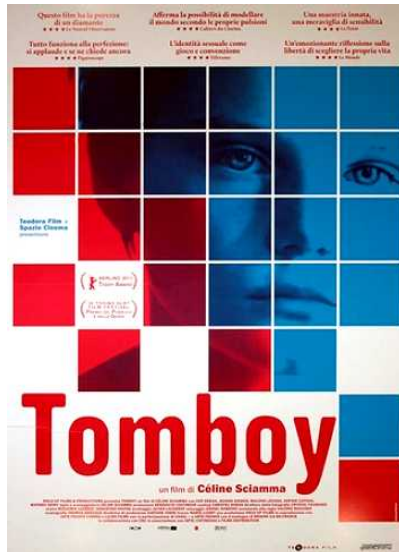
“When she discovered ballet, Misty was living in a shabby motel room, struggling with her five siblings for a place to sleep on the floor. A true prodigy, she was dancing en pointe within three months of taking her first dance class and performing professionally in just over a year: a feat unheard of for any classical dancer. But when Misty became caught between the control and comfort she found in the world of ballet and the harsh realities of her own life (culminating in a highly publicized custody battle), she had to choose to embrace both her identity and her dreams, and find the courage to be one of a kind.”

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<http://pages.simonandschuster.com/lifeinmotion>

## Related Films

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*Tomboy (2011)*: Written and directed by Celine Sciamma, *Tomboy* is “an intimately scaled film about a 10-year-old girl who wants to be a boy, or at least enjoy some boyish freedoms...More specifically you’re watching Ms. Sciamma explore the divide between sex and gender, and whether people are hard-wired or socially conditioned.”

– <http://www.nytimes.com/>



*Water Lilies (2007)*: “The flowers that bloom in the French film *Water Lilies* belong to a familiar cinematic species, the newly sexualized teenage girl” Also written and directed by Celine Sciamma, this film illustrates three French girls’ transition into adulthood. “Girls grow up. They fumble in and out of bed, sometimes with one another. They cry. They laugh. They’re unspeakable. And then they’re adults.” Sciamma sees *Water Lilies*, *Tomboy*, and *Girlhood* as a “coming of age” film trilogy.

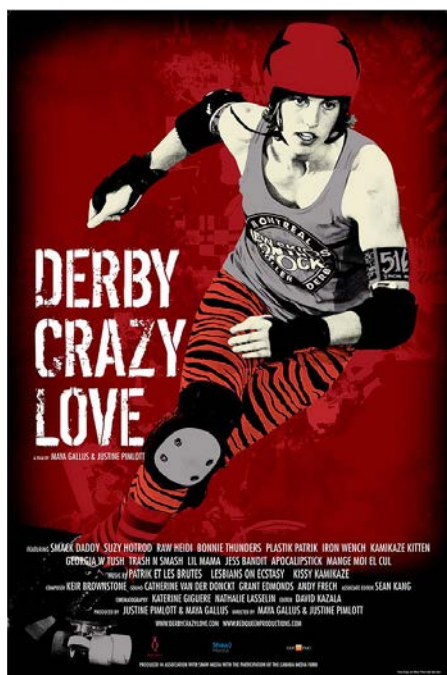
– <http://www.nytimes.com/>





*Tricked (2012):* “Modern-day slavery is alive and well in the United States as thousands of victims are trafficked throughout the country to satisfy America’s \$3 billion a year sex trafficking industry. Meet the pimps, the johns, the police, the parents and the victims of the America’s thriving sex trade in TRICKED, a comprehensive documentary that uncovers America’s dirty secret. It’s an industry that is fueled by greed, fantasy and the commercial sexual exploitation of American children and girls.”

— <http://www.trickedfilm.com/>



*Derby Crazy Love (2014):* “Meet Smack Daddy, Suzy Hotrod, Raw Heidi, Kamikaze Kitten, Bonnie Thunders and other badass warriors who are changing how we look at women in sport and femininity, one booty block at a time. Maya Gallus and Justine Pimlott’s newest documentary takes viewers into the heart of the emerging roller derby phenomenon, a vibrant DIY community of third wave feminist empowerment. The fastest-growing women’s sport in the world is not for sissies. But it is a sisterhood, with over 100 leagues in Canada and 1,400 worldwide. But beyond the spectacle are human stories, women who’ve finally found their own tribe, and a healthy outlet for aggression, which women are usually discouraged to express.”

— <http://derbycrazylove.com/>

## TED Talks

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“Fifteen-year-old Tavi Gevinson had a hard time finding strong female, teenage role models — so she built a space where they could find each other. At TEDxTeen, she illustrates how the conversations on sites like Rookie, her wildly popular web magazine for and by teen girls, are putting a new, unapologetically uncertain and richly complex face on modern feminism.”

[http://www.ted.com/talks/tavi\\_gevinson\\_a\\_teen\\_just\\_trying\\_to\\_figure\\_it\\_out?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/tavi_gevinson_a_teen_just_trying_to_figure_it_out?language=en)

## Writers Explore “Coming-of-Age” Themes

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The “coming of age” is a theme or narrative many writers explore in their work. Here are links to several writers exploring their “coming of age” through many different vantage points, experiences, cultural references, and points in life.

Marieme, the main character, struggles to find her own identity in *Girlhood* as she transitions from adolescence into adulthood. The film shows her experiment with her appearance by the way she dresses, does her hair and make-up, etc. She often waivers back and forth with the popular standards of beauty in her society in search of herself. This article written by Tracey Owens Patton gives us insight into the similar struggle women and girls face here in the United States.

[http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/nwsa\\_journal/v018/18.2patton.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/nwsa_journal/v018/18.2patton.html)

### Poetry on Coming-of-Age

a song in the front yard by Gwendolyn Brooks

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172082>

Dreams by Nikki Giovanni



<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177833>

Playroom by Mary Barnard

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177870>

Adolescence- II by Rita Dove

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172129#poem>

They Shut Me Up In Prose by Emily Dickinson

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182902>

At My Best by John Rodriguez

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/250202>

Innocence by Linda Hogan

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/249874>

Quincenañera by Judith Ortiz Cofer

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/249668>

Step Father by Emanuel Xavier

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/246788>

Slam, Dunk, & Hook by Yusef Komunyakaa

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/180588>

How You Know by Joe Mills

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/242022>

For a Girl I Know about to Be a Woman by Miller Williams

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/176495>

### **Short Literary Prose on Coming-of-Age**

The Flowers by Alice Walker

<http://theliterarylink.com/flowers.html>

Initiation by Sylvia Plath

Salvation by Langston Hughes

<http://centerforfiction.org/forwriters/the-model-short-story/quotsalvationquot-by-langston-hughes/>

Mother Tongue by Amy Tan

[http://www.olypen.com/pnkduurr/as/mother\\_text.htm](http://www.olypen.com/pnkduurr/as/mother_text.htm)

## Related Themes to Explore

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While the film talks about the coming-of-age from a specific reference point, (female, French, lower socio-economic circumstance), this growth, insight, and explorative notion is widely relevant and can be explored in many different ways. Here are some examples of broader topics that you could explore in the classroom:

### Coming-of-Age Around the World

Growing up is hard enough, let alone growing where there is persistent lack of education, resources, and opportunities. Some adolescents and teens face dramatically different challenges as they come of age in this time in the world.

#### *Questions to think about:*

- What are the socio-cultural factors that shaped, or were at play in Marieme, the main character's life? How did those factors influence or complicate her choices?
- [Research Opportunity] Compare and contrast elements of growing up in the United States and what you perceive growing up in France [or another select part of the world] might be like. What are the similarities and differences?
- [Research Opportunity] Which are some of the most and least free countries around the world?
- Does peer pressure look or feel different in other parts of the world? What types of pressures do some teenagers face around the world that teens may not face in the US?

### Identity

The film explores the main character's changing outward expression of style and identity, at points blurring the lines of feminine and masculine style and stereotype, as well as pushing boundaries of race and class. Contemporary culture is also exploring, at times resisting, and/or challenging stereotypes or ideals of what it means to be feminine or masculine, of a certain race or ethnicity, or from a certain economic class.

### *Questions to think about:*

- In what ways is US society reexamining gender identity? What examples are out there in the media, in the community, in school?
- What are some of the historical references where we can trace these notions of specific gender or socio-economic archetypes and roles? Who decides these roles?
- How is society re-envisioning traditional stereotypes and roles based on gender, race, and/or class? Where is society in conflict?
- What are examples of gender socialization? Socio-economic socialization? Where do these notions, expectations, understandings, or assumptions, come from in our society?

## **Teens Doing Cool Things Around the World**

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- French and American pen pals learn about everyday life and culture of the other's country. This article shares the similarities and differences they found from their conversations about school, social lives, fashion, and more.  
<http://snovalleystar.com/2010/03/03/french-pen-pals-give-their-impressions-of-american-teen-life>
- A French student from the United States created this presentation after spending some time with her foreign exchange student to share with viewers the similarities and differences between teenage life and culture in France and the US.  
<https://prezi.com/bcb4fskvyok1/french-vs-american-youth-culture/>