

A Comparative Analysis of the Two Female Protagonists' Life Skills in *The Romances of Jonah in the Fish's Belly* and *A Night Divided*

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Introduction

Authors of children's and adolescents' literature often craft characters who grapple with a multitude of incidents and challenges throughout their narratives and undertake both successful and unsuccessful actions. In doing so, they provide their young audience with a framework to engage with life's various facets in different scenarios. As children and adolescents immerse themselves in these stories, they naturally empathize with the characters and see the story-world through the eyes of the protagonists or antagonists. This immersive experience allows them to grasp the characters' emotions and vicariously experience their triumphs and setbacks. Engaging with these characters and delving into their narratives can profoundly influence teenagers' abilities to confront and navigate life's complexities.

The World Health Organization (1994, 1997 &1999) has identified ten distinct life skills across five key areas that are essential for children and young adults to effectively tackle the demands and challenges of daily life, including, a) decision-making and problem-solving, b) creative thinking and critical thinking, c) effective communication and interpersonal skills, d) self-awareness and empathy, e) coping with emotions and coping with stress.

A close examination of the characters in children's and adolescents' fiction provides valuable insights into their adeptness at facing challenges and crises. Moreover, considering the didactic role of such literature, understanding the characters' proficiency in life skills can shed light on their educational potential and efficacy.

This research aims to scrutinize the primary characters in two romantic novels, *The Romances of Jonah in the Fish's Belly* by Jamshid Khanian (2018) and *A Night Divided* by Jennifer E. Nielson (translated into Persian in 2020), and to assess their competency in various life skills. Given the analogies between the main characters in both novels in terms of age, gender, exposure to perilous situations, and their conduct in unforeseen circumstances, these two works serve as exemplary subjects for a comparative study, with a specific focus on the life skills of teenage characters.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a purposeful sampling method to select the subjects of examination. The collection of data was achieved through a library-based research

approach, and data analysis was conducted using a comparative qualitative content analysis, following the methodology outlined by Mayring (2000). In this analysis, the unit of focus was the entirety of the sample or the overall impact. Given the predefined nature of the ten life skills components and the alignment of the text of the works with these components, this method of content analysis was deemed appropriate for the study.

Discussion

In the domains of self-awareness and empathy, characters embark on a journey towards self-discovery and gain insights into their emotions and aspirations. Throughout the narrative, it becomes evident that Sarah of *The Romances* struggles to articulate her feelings and lacks a clear understanding of her own emotional landscape. In contrast, Gerta of *A Night Divided* possesses a well-defined sense of her desires and boundaries from a young age. Consequently, Sarah's self-awareness is relatively limited and renders her somewhat emotionally detached and lacking in the ability to empathize. In contrast, Gerta displays a higher level of self-awareness and exhibits empathy even towards those typically considered her adversaries.

Sarah's deficiencies in empathy hinder her ability to communicate effectively on both individual and interpersonal levels, leading her to withhold her thoughts and emotions. In contrast, Gerta excels in both self-awareness and empathy which allow her to effortlessly express her thoughts and engage in effective communication with others.

When confronted with decisions related to problem-solving, Sarah, being able to communicate effectively while having weak empathy,

often makes arbitrary choices and disregards the input of others. Gerta, on the other hand, demonstrates a capacity to make sound, rational decisions even when faced with numerous challenges and obstacles. Gerta's decisions are typically rooted in evidence and reasoning, indicating her strong critical thinking skills, whereas Sarah, while making emotionally-driven decisions in sensitive situations, exhibits flashes of critical thinking when the story delves into her past and considers various perspectives and makes thoughtful judgments.

Sarah encounters numerous stressors in her life, yet her character does not overtly manifest stress. Rather, her stress is discernible only through close observation of her emotional responses and assertive demeanor. In contrast, Gerta's life circumstances expose her to an array of stressors, but her strong mental resilience allows her to navigate these challenges without displaying overt signs of maladjustment. Both characters display a degree of success in managing stress, though Gerta appears to exhibit greater resilience due to her robust skills.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the two novels reveals that the main characters, Sara and Gerta, exhibit distinct responses when faced with challenging and unpredictable circumstances. In reality, these reactions reflect their endeavors to navigate these situations. Both Khanian and Nielson adeptly showcase their characters' abilities to cope with sensitive and perilous situations, placing teenage girls in the midst of wars and dangerous scenarios.

A Night Divided, owing to the presence of a character possessing a wide range of life skills, appears to hold a certain advantage over the other

novel, *The Romances*. It serves as an exemplary model for adolescents, especially young girls, who seek to learn and apply essential life skills. On the contrary, Sara, in *The Romances of Jonah in the Fish's Belly*, embodies a more relatable portrayal of adolescence and its complexities, particularly amidst a crisis. She exhibits a range of reactions in various situations, which come across as more tangible, reflecting the natural course of adolescence.

These two works offer distinct reading experiences and learning opportunities and engage the audience with diverse challenges. Despite the somewhat similar nature of the characters, the differences within these narratives offer the adolescent audience unexpected perspectives on life and empower them to confront life's complexities.

Keywords: *A Night Divided*, Jamshid Khanian, Jennifer Nielsen, life skills, *The Romances of Jonah in the Fish's Belly*

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