

Agrégation interne d'anglais

Session 2023

Épreuve EPC

**Exposé de la préparation
d'un cours**

**EPC
480**

Ce sujet comprend 4 documents :

- Document 1 : Thomas Gainsborough, "The Blue Boy", 1770. Collection of the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California.
- Document 2 : Kehinde Wiley, "A Portrait of a Young Gentleman," 2021. Collection of the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California. Commissioned through Roberts Projects, Los Angeles.
- Document 3 : Matthew Wilson, "Gainsborough's Blue Boy: The private life of a masterpiece", *bbc.com*, 21 January 2022.
- Document 4 : Quentin Tarantino, "Django Unchained", the Weinstein Company and Columbia Pictures, 2012.

Compte tenu des caractéristiques de ce dossier et des différentes possibilités d'exploitation qu'il offre, vous indiquerez à quel niveau d'apprentissage vous pourriez le destiner et quels objectifs vous vous fixeriez. Vous présenterez et justifierez votre démarche pour atteindre ces objectifs.

Document 1: Thomas Gainsborough, "The Blue Boy", 1770. 177,8 × 112,1 cm, oil on canvas. The Huntington Art Museum, San Marino, California.



Document iconographique également consultable sur la tablette multimédia fournie.

Document 2 : Kehinde Wiley, "A Portrait of a Young Gentleman," 2021. Oil on linen, 179.1× 124.8 cm. The Huntington Art Museum, San Marino, California. (commissioned through Roberts Projects, Los Angeles).



Document iconographique également consultable sur la tablette multimédia fournie.

Document 3 : Matthew Wilson, "Gainsborough's Blue Boy: The private life of a masterpiece", *bbc.com*, 21 January 2022.

5 A record number of visitors queued outside the National Gallery in January 1922, despite the drizzly conditions, to see a single painting: Thomas Gainsborough's Blue Boy (c 1770). The artwork was bought by a US collector in 1921 and its imminent departure drew 90,000 people to get a last glimpse of what the press had dubbed "the world's most beautiful painting". An article in the London Times claimed that the Blue Boy exemplified the "courtly grace and serene carriage of a people who knew themselves a great people and were not ashamed to own it." To the general population, Gainsborough's Blue Boy was the epitome of high culture and the noble British character.

10 In January 2022, Blue Boy is making a centenary comeback to the UK and will once again be displayed in the National Gallery, now for a five-month run. But how many visitors this time around will know about the painting's private life as a symbol of gay pride?

15 Valerie Hedquist, a professor of art history at the University of Montana, has written extensively about the painting and its role as a gay icon. It is partly a tale of unintended consequences, and how artists cede control of their creations once they are absorbed into the public arena. Hedquist tells BBC Culture that when Thomas Gainsborough painted Blue Boy in around 1770 "it was most likely a demonstration piece to show off his talents". The boy is believed to be the artist's nephew, Gainsborough Dupont, dressed in a 17th-Century aristocratic costume as an act of homage to Sir Anthony van Dyck, an artist whose techniques and compositions Gainsborough admired. Back in 1770, the pose of Blue Boy would have struck people as noble, signalling an exemplary future husband and father. [...]

25 But for Hedquist, the idea that the boy in the painting is dressing up in costume and acting is critical to his later reappraisals: "the Blue Boy invites performance," she says. This began on stage in the 19th Century, where actors playing "Little Boy Blue" in pantomimes were frequently dressed up in the silks, breeches and lace collar of Gainsborough's Blue Boy. And these actors would frequently be girls. This, for Hedquist, was the start of the "feminisation" of Blue Boy. "By the latter part of the 19th Century," she explained, "the magazines are just filled with pictures of girls dressed as Blue Boy." In 1922, the year that Gainsborough's painting found a new home in the US, Cole Porter performed his musical *Mayfair and Montmartre*, in which Nelly Taylor dressed as Blue Boy and theatrically emerged from a frame singing a song called Blue Boy Blues. Marlene Dietrich dressed as Blue Boy for a comedy revue in Vienna in 1927, and Shirley Temple did the same for the film *Curly Top* in 1935.

40 The painting had created a platform for gender identity to become blurred – Blue Boy could be either masculine or feminine in the fluid world of theatrical performance. According to Hedquist, another dimension to the story concerns the writer and leader of the Aesthetic Movement, Oscar

45 Wilde. Wilde dressed in extravagant historically inspired clothing, frequently
with knee-breeches, velvet jackets, cloaks and broad-brimmed hats in
homage to painters like Gainsborough. In one photograph taken by
Napoleon Sarony in 1882, Wilde, in swanky buckled shoes and
knickerbockers, struck the exact pose of Blue Boy.

50 When Wilde was imprisoned for his homosexuality on charges of gross
indecent in 1895, he became the most famous publicly gay man in the
world – and the photographs of him by Sarony were misappropriated.
According to Hedquist, "they eventually ended up in the first medical books
that were teaching people how to recognise homosexuality". It embedded
55 a savagely intolerant view of same-sex attraction, based closely around the
stereotyped visual "tells" of Blue Boy.

After Blue Boy arrived in the US, it became famous, appearing on
ceramics, textiles and thousands of reproduction prints. How it was
interpreted by its new host nation was also subject to the winds of cultural
60 change. According to Hedquist, a formative episode was the so-called
"lavender scare" in the 1950s in which gay men and women were perceived
to be threats to national security and were hounded from government
office. Common stereotypes of gay deportment – now laughable in their
ignorance – such as lacy cuffs and fancy shoes, were cited as signifiers of
65 these "enemies within".

It led to sinister comedic parodies of perceived gay behaviour in
popular culture, with outlets including cartoon strips. [...] "The emerging
ideas about how people see gay men is so important to how the Blue Boy
becomes an iconic image," says Hedquist, "first of all as a source of ridicule
70 and then as a reappropriation."

The reappropriation came in the form of a gay magazine first
published in 1974, called "Blue Boy". The cover of the first issue featured a
photo of Dale, a boxer from Ohio, in a homage to Gainsborough's
masterpiece, albeit without any trousers and a conveniently repositioned
75 hat. The magazine, brainchild of entrepreneur Don N Embinder, continued
publishing until December 2007, and advertised products and services
whose recurrent symbol was the Blue Boy. It recommended gay-friendly
hotels and bars and fostered a sense of community. "The first gay travel
agency was called 'Blue Boy'," Hedquist explains. "They had cruises and
80 hotels where men could be openly gay, wearing 'Blue Boy' T-shirts and
carrying 'Blue Boy' travel bags. It was a full reappropriation and a
celebration that the Blue Boy was gay." [...]

According to Hedquist, Blue Boy is a game-changing symbol in the
history of gay rights. Apart from its appeal to gay artists, its use as a
branding emblem in Blue Boy magazine in the 1970s seemed to have a
resounding historical significance. "It was the first opportunity of a life that
was open and acceptable," she says. "It provided a means of leading a full
85 public existence as a gay man – and it all came through Blue Boy."

Document 4: Quentin Tarantino, "Django Unchained", the Weinstein Company and Columbia Pictures, 2012.

Document vidéo (1'20") à consulter sur la tablette multimédia fournie.