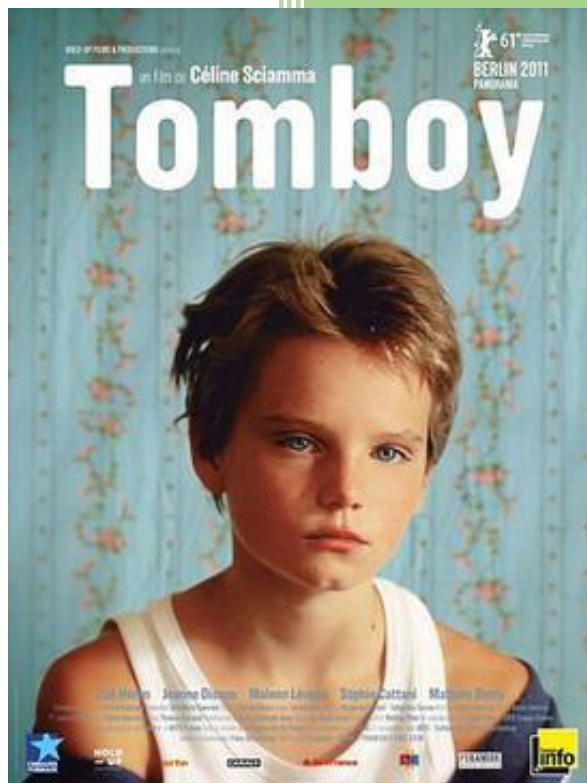


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Tomboy Discussion Questions



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Tomboy (2011): Discussion Questions and Resource Booklet

For film clubs and classrooms | World Cinema with Anna | Film Club Resource

Spoiler and content note: this booklet is for use after watching *Tomboy* (2011), directed by Céline Sciamma. The discussion questions refer to the whole film, including its ending. The film contains a brief, non-sexual shot of a child's nakedness, a fight between children and a moment when a mother slaps her daughter. Please preview the film before screening it to a group.

Part A: For facilitators

About this booklet

This booklet offers a film summary, a glossary, pre-viewing and post-viewing activities, 55 discussion questions grouped by theme, a printable student worksheet and a short list of further resources. You do not need to use everything. For a single session of 45 to 60 minutes, choose between 8 and 12 questions and one activity.

Age guidance

The BBFC classifies *Tomboy* U, with a note of mild violence and occasional natural nudity. Into Film, which runs educational screenings in the UK, has recommended it for pupils aged 12 and over (Key Stage 3), with links to French, languages and PSHE. A U certificate does not mean every theme suits every age, and the film's subject, childhood and gender identity, is best suited to groups of about 12 and older. Please follow your own school or club policies, and consider letting parents and carers know in advance.

A note on language

The film calls its main character Laure with her family and Mickaël with her new friends. It never states whether Laure sees herself as a boy, a girl or something else, and Sciamma has left that deliberately open. In discussion, you can use the character's names, and agree as a group which pronouns to use. This booklet mostly uses she and her for Laure, because her family refers to her as their daughter, and it avoids drawing conclusions about her identity.

Ground rules to agree together

- Listen respectfully and let people finish.
- Disagree with ideas, not with people.
- Nobody has to share personal experiences. Talk about the characters and the film.
- Do not guess or comment on whether real people are in a similar situation.
- What is said in the room stays in the room, unless someone is at risk of harm.
- Everyone can pass on a question.

Looking after your group

Some young people may find the film personally important or uncomfortable. Make it clear that you are available to talk afterwards, and follow your safeguarding and pastoral procedures if someone discloses something. Children who need someone to talk to can contact Childline. Keep the focus on the film's story and avoid asking anyone to speak for a group they belong to.

A suggested 60-minute session

- **5 minutes:** welcome, ground rules and a quick vote on how people felt about the film.
- **10 minutes:** first reactions (questions 1 to 6) in pairs, then shared.
- **25 minutes:** two or three themed sections from Part D, in small groups.
- **15 minutes:** one activity from Part E.
- **5 minutes:** the exit ticket on the worksheet.

Part B: The film at a glance

- **Title:** *Tomboy*
- **Director and writer:** Céline Sciamma
- **Year and country:** 2011, France
- **Language:** French, with English subtitles
- **Running time:** about 79 to 82 minutes, depending on the source
- **Starring:** Zoé Héran (Laure/Mickaël), Malonn Lévana (Jeanne), Jeanne Disson (Lisa), Sophie Cattani (mother) and Mathieu Demy (father)
- **Cinematography:** Crystel Fournier. **Score:** Jean-Baptiste de Laubier (Para One).
- **Awards:** the Teddy Jury Award at the 2011 Berlin International Film Festival
- **Production:** Sciamma wrote the script in about three weeks, and the film was shot in 20 days in August 2010 with a crew of around 15 and a small budget. It has two main settings and about 50 sequences.

What happens (summary)

Ten-year-old Laure moves with her parents and six-year-old sister Jeanne to a new apartment complex on the outskirts of Paris during the summer holidays. When a girl in the neighbourhood, Lisa, assumes that Laure is a boy, Laure introduces herself as Mickaël and joins in the local children's games. Jeanne discovers the secret and is persuaded to play along. Lisa becomes fond of Mickaël, and Laure's double life grows harder to hide as the end of summer and the start of school approach. When the truth comes out, Laure has to face her family, her friends and herself.

Main characters

- **Laure/Mickaël:** the ten-year-old at the centre of the film.
- **Jeanne:** Laure's six-year-old sister, loyal, playful and sometimes fierce.
- **Lisa:** a girl in the neighbourhood who befriends Mickaël.
- **Laure's mother:** loving and busy, and expecting another baby.
- **Laure's father:** warm and affectionate, who takes the family's new life in his stride.

Key terms

- **Gender identity:** a person's inner sense of who they are, such as a girl, a boy, both or neither.
- **Gender expression:** how a person shows their gender through clothes, hair and behaviour.
- **Gender stereotype:** a fixed idea about how girls or boys should look or behave.
- **Gender nonconformity:** behaving or presenting in ways that do not match common expectations of a person's gender.
- **Tomboy:** a word traditionally used for a girl who enjoys activities seen as typically for boys.

Part C: Before you watch (pre-viewing activities)

These activities contain no spoilers.

1. **Title talk:** write the word *tomboy* on the board and ask the group what it means to them. Ask whether it is a positive, negative or neutral word, and where they have heard it.
2. **Predict:** show the film's poster or title and ask what kind of film people expect. Ask what the director might want to say.
3. **Fresh start:** ask people to think about moving to a place where nobody knows them. What would they feel? What would they want to be like?
4. **Watch for:** set three things to notice: how the camera shows Laure, how summer feels, and how the adults and children treat one another.

Part D: Discussion questions

1. First reactions and impressions

1. What was your first reaction as the film ended? Which scene or image stays with you?
2. Which character did you feel closest to, and why?
3. How would you describe the film's tone: gentle, tense, joyful, sad, or something else? Which scenes created it?
4. What does the word *tomboy* mean to you now, and does the title fit the film?
5. What did you expect from a film about a ten-year-old's summer? Did it meet or surprise you?
6. Which moment made you most worried for Laure, and which made you most hopeful?

2. Identity, play and experimenting

7. Why do you think Laure tells Lisa her name is Mickaël? Does it seem planned, or spur-of-the-moment?
8. What does Laure gain from being Mickaël? What does she risk?
9. What small details show how Laure builds the character of Mickaël, in her hair, clothes and behaviour?
10. The film never says how Laure sees herself. Why might Sciamma have left this open? What are the benefits and the drawbacks?
11. Is Laure's experiment a game, a serious exploration of identity, or both? Does the film need to decide?
12. How does the freedom of summer, with its playgrounds and woods, give Laure space she might not have at other times of year?
13. When does Laure seem most comfortable, and when most anxious?
14. How much do hair and clothes express who we are? Where does self-expression end and identity begin?
15. What is the difference between how you look and who you feel you are?

Listen for: that the film shows play and identity as overlapping, and that the group may disagree about what Laure feels. Encourage them to support their ideas with scenes.

3. Family

16. How would you describe Laure's relationship with her mother, father and sister? What do everyday moments show?
17. Jeanne discovers the secret. How does she react, and why?
18. Laure persuades Jeanne to play along. What does this show about how the sisters relate to each other?
19. The family seems loving. Does that make the mother's reaction easier or harder to understand?
20. How does Laure's father treat her in the early scenes? What does he assume about her?
21. Why might Laure keep Mickaël a secret from her parents? What could happen if she told them?

22. What does the film suggest about the difference between loving a child and understanding them?

4. Friendship and first love

23. How does Lisa treat Mickaël? Why is she drawn to Mickaël?
24. What do the children's games and groups show about unspoken rules for boys and girls?
25. How would you feel in Lisa's place when she learns the truth?
26. Describe the relationship between Lisa and Mickaël. What makes it tender, and what makes it risky?
27. What responsibility do friends have when someone trusts them with a secret?
28. Are there moments when the children are kind or cruel to one another? What do they reveal?

5. Truth, secrets and consequences

29. How does the film build tension as the end of summer approaches? What deadline hangs over Laure?
30. When the secret comes out, who is hurt, and in what ways?
31. How do the adults handle the discovery? Which reactions are understandable, and which are hard to watch?
32. The mother's response is a turning point. What is she trying to achieve, and what does it cost Laure?
33. Was there a better way for the family to handle it? What would you advise the mother or father?
34. Where in the film do you see love and support, even when things go wrong?

Listen for: that people can love each other and still handle a situation badly. Encourage empathy for the adults as well as the children, without excusing harm.

6. Society, stereotypes and expectations

35. What expectations about boys and girls appear in the film (clothes, toys, games, behaviour)? Which seem fair and which limiting?
36. Why is it often seen as more acceptable for a girl to be a tomboy than for a boy to enjoy things seen as girly? Do you think this is true?
37. How might the word *tomboy* be helpful? How might it be limiting?
38. Who decides what boys and girls are meant to like or do? Think about family, school, media and friends.
39. How might the story change if the child were a boy who wanted to present as a girl?
40. What would help children feel safe to be themselves in a school or community like the one in the film?
41. When do labels help us, and when do they get in the way?

7. Film craft

42. How does the camera show Laure? Notice when it stays close to her face and body and how it frames her among the other children.
43. How do the summer setting, the light and the outdoor spaces shape the mood?
44. How are sound, silence and music used? Where does the film choose quiet?
45. The film has two main settings, the family's apartment and the neighbourhood. How do they contrast?
46. The film was shot in 20 days with a small crew. Does its simplicity make it feel more realistic?
47. Which private spaces, such as the bathroom and bedroom, does the film show, and why might they matter in a story about identity?
48. How do the performances, especially by Zoé Héran and Malonn Lévana, make the characters feel natural?
49. If you were designing a new poster, what image would you choose and what would it say about the film?

8. Ending and reflection

50. Describe the final scene. What has changed, and what has stayed the same?
51. The film does not tell us what happens next. What do you imagine for Laure, Lisa and the family?
52. Did the film leave questions unanswered? Did that frustrate or satisfy you?
53. What did you learn from the film that you did not know before?
54. How does the film encourage empathy? Has your view of any character changed?
55. If you could ask Céline Sciamma one question, what would it be?

If time is short: a core set of 12

Choose from questions 1, 7, 8, 10, 17, 23, 30, 31, 35, 38, 42 and 50.

Part E: Activities

1. Four corners

Put up signs for strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Read each statement and ask people to move to the sign that fits their view, then to explain their choice.

- Clothes and hair are the best way to show who you are.
- Children should be free to experiment with how they look and behave.
- Families sometimes find it hard to talk about identity, even when they love each other.
- Keeping a friend's secret is always right.
- Stereotypes about boys and girls are less common today than they used to be.
- The film should have given us a clear answer about who Laure is.
- Being honest is always right, even if it hurts someone.
- Summer feels like a time when the usual rules do not apply.

2. Scene study

Choose one of these scenes and look closely. Ask what you see and hear, where the camera is, what people say and what they might be feeling.

- Laure's first meeting with Lisa and the moment she gives her name.
- Mickaël playing with the neighbourhood group.
- The confrontation after the secret is discovered.
- The final scene.

3. Creative writing

- Write a letter from Lisa to Laure or Mickaël.
- Write a diary entry by Jeanne at the end of the summer.
- Write a conversation at the family's dinner table that the film does not show.

4. Poster and title

Design a poster for the film, then discuss how the title, image and colours shape expectations. Compare your design with the original poster.

5. French language activity

Practise these simple phrases inspired by the story. They are not quotations from the film.

- *Comment tu t'appelles ?* (What's your name?)
- *Je m'appelle Laure.* (My name is Laure.)
- *J'ai dix ans.* (I am ten years old.)
- *Tu veux jouer avec nous ?* (Do you want to play with us?)
- *C'est un secret.* (It's a secret.)
- *Je suis ton amie.* (I am your friend.)

Part F: Student worksheet

Name: Date: Class:

1. What was your strongest reaction to the film?

Your notes:

.....

2. Why do you think Laure introduces herself as Mickaël? What does she gain, and what does she risk?

Your notes:

.....

3. How do Laure's family members react to her, and what does that show about each of them?

Your notes:

.....

4. What do the children's games and groups show about expectations for boys and girls?

Your notes:

.....

5. How do you think Lisa feels, and how does her relationship with Mickaël change?

Your notes:

.....

6. How does the film use the camera, light or sound to help tell the story? Give one example.

Your notes:

.....

7. What do you think happens to Laure after the film ends?

Your notes:

.....

Exit ticket

- One thing I learned:
- One question I still have:
- One word to describe the film:

Part G: Context and further resources

About the director

Céline Sciamma is a French writer and director. *Tomboy* was her second feature film, after *Water Lilies*, and she has since directed *Girlhood* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, and co-written *My Life as a Courgette*. In her director's statement for the European Film Awards, she explained that she conceived *Tomboy* as a film that could be made quickly and simply, shot in the summer with a young cast.

Films to watch next

- ***Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019)**: Sciamma's period drama about love and identity.
- ***Girlhood* (2014)**: a coming-of-age story set in the Paris suburbs.
- ***Ma vie en rose* (1997)**: a French-language film about a child who likes to dress as a girl.

Useful links

- [Into Film: Tomboy listing and film club information](#)
- [BBFC: Tomboy classification and content details](#)
- [HOME Manchester: Tomboy screening with a teachers' guide](#)
- [European Film Awards: Tomboy, with the director's statement](#)
- [The Criterion Channel: Tomboy](#)
- [The Cine-Files: Teaching Tomboy by Amelie Hastie](#)
- [BFI: Tomboy](#)
- [Tomboy \(2011 film\), Wikipedia](#)

Related posts

- *Tomboy* (2011) review
- *Tomboy* (2011) Explained: Meaning of the Title, Mickaël and Top 25 FAQs
- Céline Sciamma: The French Director Behind *Tomboy* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*
- 10 Best LGBTQ+ Films from Around the World to Watch for Pride Month