snitch

by Class 1B - Liceo Passoni, Turin, Italy

Abstract:

*La parola inglese **snitch**, tradotta come **'spia'**, **'spione'**, **'informatore'**, è un termine slang americano usato molto frequentemente nel **gergo giovanile**. Si usa in **numerose** e diverse **situazioni**, dall'ironia a contesti più seri. Viene citato spesso nelle **canzoni rap** e **trap** con intento dispregiativo e discriminatorio nei confronti di un singolo individuo. Negli **ambiti criminal**i, questo vocabolo indica qualcuno che riferisce delle informazioni segrete ad una qualsiasi autorità, solitamente al fine di ricevere un compenso personale* [1]. *Anche nelle situazioni meno esposte, come nella vita di tutti i giorni, viene definito 'snitch' l'individuo che tradisce la **fiducia** del suo **gruppo**. Riprendendo il linguaggio usato nei testi rap, molti ragazzi al giorno d'oggi assumono comportamenti e stili propri di **'baby gang'**. Nel contesto di un gruppo, questi usano la parola 'snitch' in modo prevalentemente **aggressivo** così da far sentire **esclusa** la cosiddetta 'spia del gruppo'. Se si ribaltano i punti di vista, uno 'snitch' può avere valide ragioni e **buone intenzion**i verso qualcun altro, per esempio quando riporta ad un adulto di fiducia una situazione problematica che riguarda un minore.*

The English word **snitch**, meaning '**spy**', '**informer**', is an American slang word frequently used among **young people**. In British English, 'a/to grass' are used with the same meaning. **Snitch** is used in **various situations**, from irony to more serious contexts. It is often mentioned in **rap songs** with a derogatory and discriminatory tone against an individual.

In **criminal contexts** this word indicates someone who reports secret information to any authority, usually in order to receive personal compensation.

Even in less exposed situations, such as in everyday life, the individual who **betrays the trust** of his/her group is defined as a 'snitch'.

If the points of view are reversed, a 'snitch' may have **good intentions** and reasons towards someone else, for example when s/he reports a problem involving a minor to a trusted adult.

Etymology:

Meaning: spy/snitch/informer

Origins: of obscure origin, the term probably derives from an underworld slang meaning '**nose**' which apparently develops from an earlier meaning of 'hit on the nose', in turn probably from a **Germanic noun** [2].

It could also derive from the Middle English '**trap**'. It is also linked to the word **snake**, something slimy and creeping [3].

Nowadays, the term is used in **American-English slang** as 'to snitch on', i.e. 'to report a crime' and means 'to be a spy', 'an infamous': those who talk to the **guards** or those who decide to contact the **authorities** by collaborating and denouncing someone are identified as spy [4].

Having a 'snitch' among **a group** means dealing with someone who **can't be trusted** because as soon as s/he turns around s/he tells all the secrets to others. In short, s/he is a spy: a person who talks about someone's else business with others, and/or a person who tells more or less serious things that happened within the gangs to an adult.

Cultural specificity:

To examine the **cultural specificy** of the use of the term **snitch**, we have examined Italian and American English **rap/trap songs**.



Dark Polo Gang
https://www.exclusivemagazine.it/2020/11/16/quale-futuro-per-la-dark-polo-gang/

Italian rap/trap songs
NO SNITCH FREESTYLE (Tedua - 2017)
"*no snitch, non farlo ancora, non bisticci con noi/sul beet il pit è sciolto/minaccia il pitbull è libero*" [no snitch, don't do it again, don't mess it up with us/ on the beet the pitbull is free]
https://youtu.be/L7RKvLvJxP8

BASSOTTO (Dark Polo Gang - 2019)
"*mio fratello ti fa un buco, se provi a farmi un torto*" [my brother blows you a hole if you do me wrong]
https://youtu.be/Hv4GCqUgXUE

SNITCH E IMPICCI (FSK, Drefgold - 2020)
"*non voglio snitch nel gang*" [I don't want snitch in the gang]
https://youtu.be/9NSf6dfnOCw

S!R! (Sfera, Lazza, Thasup- 2022)
"*vorrei fare fuori gli snitch*" [I would like to get rid of the snitch]
https://youtu.be/yscyWJziBMc



https://www.soldoutservice.com/thasup-ha-preparato-una-hit-con-sfera-ebbasta-e-lazza/

American English rap/trap songs
SNITCH (Obie Tricie FT. Akon - 2006)
“Just do whatever you do, Snitch,
Who decide he’s a member once
he got pinched”
https://youtu.be/isaXqowHZuU

SNITCH (Reyn Hartley - 2018)
“Six foot ditch for my snitch”
https://youtu.be/mrAbwRSUQ5E

STOP SNITCHING (YG - 2019)
“Everybody went down’ cause
you snitched”
https://youtu.be/OUXrUIiQWaU

NO SNITCHING
(Lil Mabu, Dusty Locane - 2022)
“I could never snitch, that’s on my kids”
https://youtu.be/ZzyPZKO46ow





Rapper YG
https://www.pxfuel.com/en/desktop-wallpaper-qucky

We can notice that both in the Italian and in the English texts the word 'snitch' has a **negative connotation** and **meaning**. The American songs display a much **heavier tone**, a fact which is linked to the **socio-cultural context** of the **American gangs**. Due to a different **urban setting**, in Italy the word 'snitch' is adopted in a **lighter tone**, and the texts often make use of irony and levity.

And this is a **rap** written and sung **by** some of **us**:

Il cappio
Pensavo di potermi fidare
Ma la confidenza data fa male
Ho fatto male a fare del bene
Mi hai ripagato con delle lame
Ti chiamavo fratello
se eri con me
Ora non ti chiamo
ti chiedi perché
Spesso è difficile fare delle scelte
Tu hai fatto la tua
ma non c'è vabbé
Non c'è scusa che tenga
Se sei infame
rimane nel sangue
Tu ti nascondi dietro una tenda
ma dovresti farlo dietro una lapide
I cazzi miei poco li racconto
Lo vedi non rido, non cambio più il volto

Non faccio un sorriso
Da quanto non ricordo
Ora tu meriti un cappio al collo
E non lo dico per esser cattivo
Ma questo ti meriti se mi hai ferito
Nessuno vicino, figurati amico
O forse per te ero un burattino?
Burattino marionetta
Mi spiace per ciò che e successo
Per me eri come un fratello
Ma ora che sei infame sei meno di zero!

Testo di:
Mattia C., Lorenzo G, Elena J., Zoe M. S.

Noose
I thought I could trust you
but the confidence given can hurt
It was a mistake doing good thing
'cause you repaid me only with blades
I called you bro
if you were with me
now I don't call you
and you ask why
Often it is hard choosing
you made your choice
but there's no maybe
There's no place for excuses
if you're snitch
it will remain in the blood
You hide yourself behind a curtain
but you should do it behind a tombstone
My f***ing secrets, I don't tell much of them
Can't you see I'm not laughing, don't change face anymore
I'm not smiling any longer
since when I can't remember
Now you deserve a noose at your neck
and I'm not saying this for being bad
but you deserve this 'cause you hurt me
No one close, imagine a friend
or maybe for you I was only a puppet?
puppet, puppet
I'm sorry for what happened
for me you were like a brother
but now that you snitched you're less than zero!

Lyrics by:
Mattia C., Lorenzo G, Elena J., Zoe M. S.

Problematization:

The term 'snitch' has lead us to reflect on concepts such as '**loyalty** and **'trust'** (to the group or to the people to whom one is linked), '**betrayal**' (of friends and values), '**honesty**' (towards oneself and others), '**honour**' (the quality of those who possess principles appreciated by society or by the group they belong to and who obtain respect, but also, more simply, of those who remain faithful to the pacts, to the word given).

In short texts, **we reported experiences** in which we were considered snitches, or we snitched someone, or witnessed episodes that led the peer group to assign this appellation to someone.

Here are some of the reflections:

"'***To cheat***', *at least for me, is a much worse verb than 'to snitch'", because, when you betray a person, it means that you do it voluntarily,* ***not caring*** *about the* ***consequences*** *and about the* ***pain*** *that someone else might feel*" (A.A.)

"*For me,* ***trust*** *is everything and I try to pass it on to others as well, thus making it clear that I am a reliable person. If I were in* ***danger****, for example in the event that a friend of mine did something really wrong, then* ***I would talk to***

someone *telling what happened (...). In this case if they called me '**snitch**', I would take it as a **compliment***" (AI.A)

"*All over the world, children and teenagers are left **without a home** and **family** (...). They often become part of **small groups** of guys with the same problems, and over time they will become **real gangs**. (...) [So, within these groups] if a person tells you **personal facts** that they wouldn't tell to others, it means that you have a **certain importance** in their life and you should be **honoured***" (Z.M.S.)

"***Cheating*** *to me is an unforgivable mistake. The moment you cheat, it's a bit like you're cheating on yourself too: you **have broken a promise** with yourself and with others, (...) you have decided to **break the trust** you have created with the other person or group"* (E.J.)

"*I believe that **honesty** is the basis of every **interpersonal relationship**, because you have to be correct towards yourself and towards all those who have entrusted us with their trust*" (S.Q).

"*A **positive sense** of the term is when people are considered 'snitches' because they **reported** to the authorities after seeing a **crime***" (G.M)

"*Sometimes one **can betray** for the **good** of someone, such as when a **serious fact** that has occurred to a minor is revealed to an adult who can thus be of **help***" (C.V)

"'***Honesty***' *is telling the truth, even if it is difficult and uncomfortable; '**loyalty**' is defending people dear to us even at the **cost of lying** to save them from negative consequences. In my opinion, a **balance** between the two values is needed*" (S.M.)

"*Being **faithful** means **honour** and **respect**, but unfortunately not everyone is **loyal**. I consider **betrayal** as a **sin**, a mistake without remedy, which marks the person you are forever, which identifies you as a 'traitor*'"(A.F.)

"*In my opinion, trying to put yourself in **someone's else shoes** helps a lot to respect values such as **honesty, loyalty**, **honour**. Betraying someone, on the other hand, means trampling on their **trust** and at the same time **lacking respect** for this person; for me, no one deserves to be betrayed*" (G.R.)

"***Betrayal** should be considered from **all points of view** because everyone has one and, therefore, a **different version** of the facts*" (C.F.)

"*There was time when some friends of mine **backtalked** about other people that I know so I reported these things: **I 'snichted'**. Obviously, by doing this, I backstabbed the group but I think that **backtalk** is as serious as snichting.* (...) *A snitch could have **good intentions** and **help** someone*" (L.G.)

"*You can snitch for many reasons: **anger**, **fear, evilness**… for me it's always little justifiable"*(M.C.)

Communication strategies:

We have examined how the word 'snitch' is represented in **movies** and in the **social media**.

Films

• *Snitch* (US, 2013; dir. R.R. Waugh), is based on the true story of James Settembrino, a businessman who decides to infiltrate a criminal organization to exonerate his son, unjustly arrested for drugs.

• In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (UK, 2007; dir. D. Yates), Draco Malfoy searches for evidence to accuse Harry of creating Dumbledore's Army. Later, Chi Chang, a member of the exercise, betrays his friends and confesses everything to professor Umbridge. The word isn't actually used in the film but we gave this interpretation to Chang's behaviour.



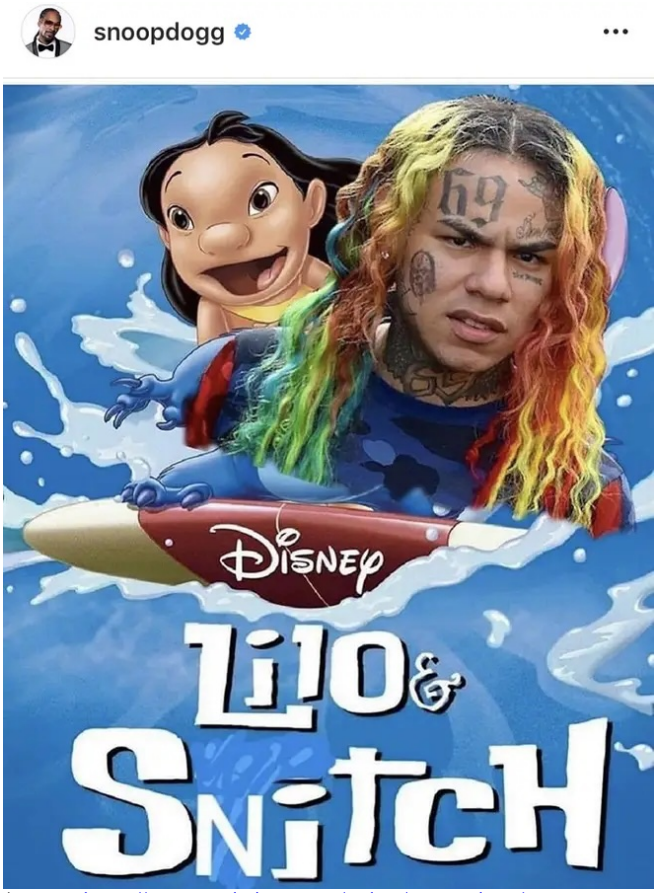
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snitch_(film)



This image shows a **tongue** surrounded by barbed wire. We can read this picture as a threat or warning for those who behave as 'snitch'.

(source: Anarchistposters, Instagram)

This image portrays **6ix9ine,** AKA Tekashi 69 or Tekashi, a famous Nort-American rapper, and represents the poster of the cartoon *Lilo and Stitch* (US, 2002; dir. C. Sanders & De. DeBlois) but with the word 'snitch' and the face of the rapper in it.
Snoop Dogg posted this image on his **instagram profile** changing the name as *Lilo & Snitch* referring to the story of 6ix9ine, who was nicknamed 'snitch' because he passed from one gang to another, from **Bloods** to **Crips**. Bloods (the Reds) and the Crips (the Blues) were **two rival street gangs** of Los Angeles involved in criminal activities such as drug dealing and murdering. They are both active since 1970s.



(source: https://www.capitalxtra.com/artists/snoop-dogg/news/trolls-tekashi-6ix9ine-lilo-snitch-meme/)

The two images are very different.

The first image was made on the computer and it suggests silence but in a **powerful, violent** and **direct** way. It

recalls the syle of the **Pop Art**.

The second image is about **6ix9ine** and represents the cartoon *Lilo and Stitch*, but with the word 'snitch' on his face.

Twitter: snitch tagging

In English, 'dude' behaviour is defined as **snitch tagging**. It is a term formed by 'snitch' (spy) and 'tagging', which in the Twitter context means to include the @username identifier of a person who, thus tagged, will receive a notification from the system.
Often **snitch tagging** consists of and replying to a tweet without making any comments but simply adding @username, usually that of a famous person: it can appear as a sly attempt to **take advantage** and **visibility** by using @username [5].



https://www.terminologiaetc.it/2019/09/19/origine-significato-snitch-tagging-twitter/

Youtube



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGdgoiBk2Hs

And here are some **memes**:



me running after I snitched

(meme by: Carlotta Fiammazzo. Elettra Fiammazzo, Martina Iacovone, Giulia Rosso)



when a snitch arrives at a party

(meme by: Carlotta Fiammazzo. Elettra Fiammazzo, Martina Iacovone, Giulia Rosso)



(meme by: Arianna Allora, Alisya Anastasio, Clara Traglia)

Subversion:

The subversion opened a discussion among us students.

The main questions were: can we **creatively subvert** the term 'snitch'? When can '**snitching**' have a positive **outcome**? Under which **circumstances**?

The first example is in this **rap** written **by us students** where, in a peer relationship, the **snitcher** actually **helps** a friend in trouble.

Il bene nel male
Non ti piace niente
e poi vuoi fare tutto,
di ogni decisione
pensi sempre il lato brutto.
Proprio in quei momenti
c'è chi ti tira su,
dandoti qualcosa
per non pensarci più.
Tu ti senti bella
e importante in un momento
e non ti accorgi che
ti stai solo mentendo.
Le amiche, quelle vere,
tu le chiami infami,
ma è solo grazie a loro
che poi tu ti ami.
Allora essere 'snitch'
non è una brutta roba,
*se ti salva il c**o*
sopra ogni cosa

Testo di:
Anna C., Carlotta V., Beatrice V.,
Melissa M.

Good within Bad
You don't like anything
and then you want to do everything
of every decision
you always think about the bad side.
But precisely in those moments
there is someone who is helping you
giving you something
to make you forget about it all.
You feel beautiful
and important in a moment
and you don't realise
that you are lying to yourself.
Your true friends
you call them snitch
but it is only thanks to them
that you can love yourself
So being snitch
is not so bad
if it saves your a**
for everything

Lyrics by:
Anna C., Carlotta V., Beatrice V.,
Melissa M.

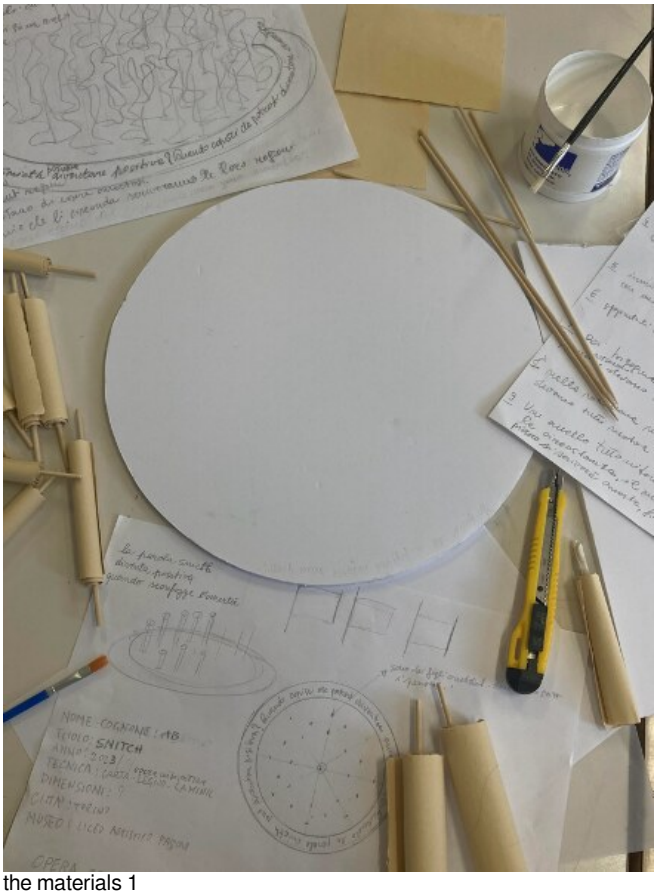
The second example is the **cartoon** below:



(cartoon made by: Giorgia Mostaccio, Laura Pesce, Sara Quattrocchi)

A final example is this **creative/conceptual work** where it reads that **snitching** becomes positive when it **defies omerta** (conspiracy of silence).

Here below are some of the phases of the work:

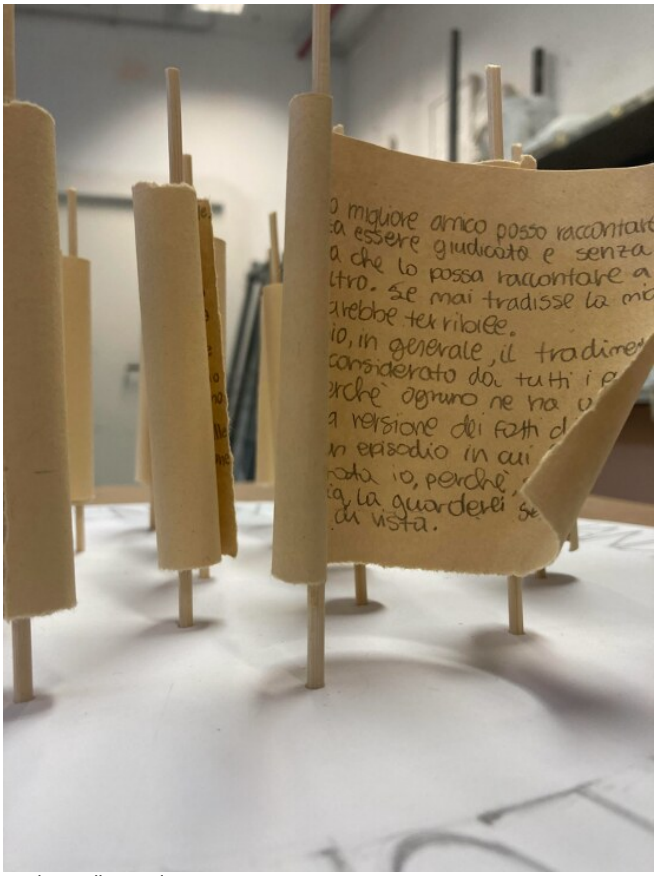


the materials 1



the materials 2


rolling the scroll


each scroll contains a text


the scrolls from above



the final result

(photos by Arianna Allora, Agnese Favro, Martina Iacovone, Sara Sofia Malara, Chiara Uras)

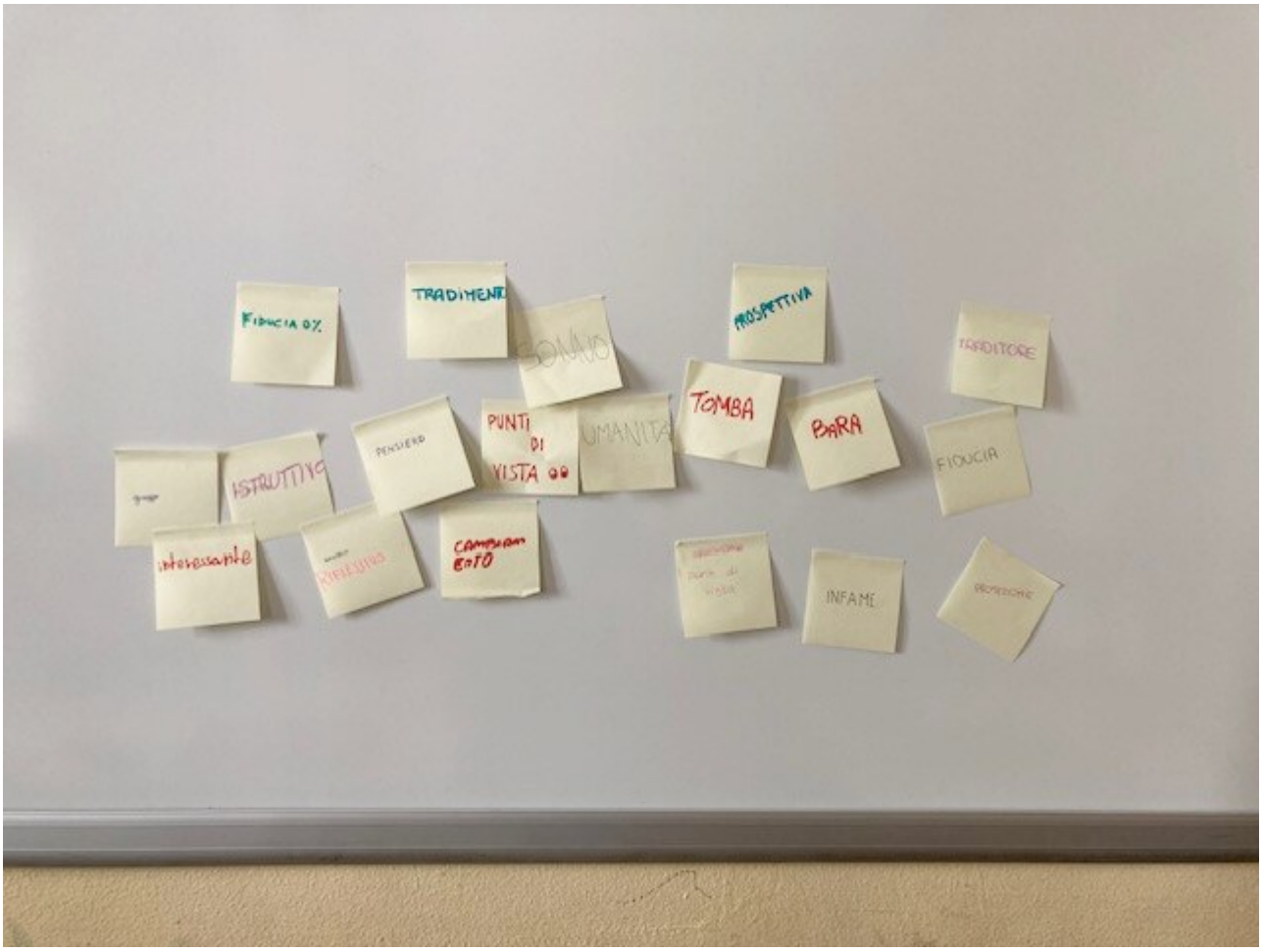
This has been a **collective**, **conceptual**, and **interactive** work.

We reflected on the **uses** of the term '**snitch**' and on the concepts of '**loyalty**' (to the group or people one is attached to), '**betrayal**' (to friends and values), '**honesty**' (to oneself and others), and '**honour**'.

We arranged the **21 elements** (one for each of us in the class) by eye, using 1-cent coins as a guide for the **placement** of the **scrolls** where we wrote some reflections about the term ‘snitch’.

The project made it possible to conceive an **elaboration** from a **concept**. Besides being an opportunity for us for a **reflection-through-action**, it will incite **new considerations** to **all those** who, by **approaching** the **work**, will pick up a scroll, read it and ask themselves **new questions** about the **judgmental term** 'snitch' and, conversely, the value of **counteracting omerta**.

At the end of our **collective discussions**, **reflections**, and **activities**, we were asked to identify a **word** to **summarize** the **path** and the **work** we had done:



Though some **strong negative view** of the 'snitch' are still present ('infamous', 'betrayal', 'grave', etc.) the activities done in class have contributed to **enlarge** the **perspective** and offer more **nuanced interpretation** of 'snitching' ('change', 'trust', 'humanity', 'perspectives', 'points of view') as a **situated move** which depends on the **context** and the **circumstances**.

Discussion:

- Had you ever heard the word 'snitch' before? In which occasions? In which contexts?
- Have you ever used the word 'snitch'? In which occasions?
- Has someone else ever used the word 'snitch' to offend or hurt you? In which occasion?
- Have you ever witnessed (or done) something that you thought it had to be reported to a trusted adult to help someone in trouble or in danger?
- According to you, are there any circumstances in which being a 'snitch' can have positive outocomes towards an individual or a community?

References/Further Readings:

Links:

[1] https://https.www.urbandictionary.com

[2] https://it.m.wikipedia.org [accessed March 13,2023]

[3] https://sapere.virgilio.it [accessed March 13, 2023]

[4] https://www.donnaglamour.it [accessed March 13, 2023]

[5] https://www.terminologiaetc.it/2019/09/19/origine-significato-snitch-tagging-twitter/ [accessed March 25]

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