Diversity is Magical

Teaching representation through fantasy literature in the intercultural classroom.

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Abstract

The world today is globalized like never before and with countries becoming more multicultural it is important to strive towards an intercultural society. This essay aims to answer the question “In what ways can one teach representation in the intercultural classroom through fantasy literature?”. That is, to illustrate and exemplify how one can use fantasy literature in the English classroom to give students intercultural knowledge through discussions on representation and intersectionality. The discussions in the essay are based in the democratic values stated in the Swedish course curriculum for upper secondary school (Gy11) in relation to the theoretical background. With examples from the book *Who Fears Death* by Nnedi Okorafor, the essay breaches both difficult and sensitive subjects that can be discussed to make certain issues less alien for the reader. Cultural diversity is magical and it is important that students get the right tools to form deep relationships across cultural borders, and the fantasy genre is a great tool to use in the classroom to lessen these bridges between different cultures since the genre creates an arena for intercultural meetings where ‘the other’ is in focus, which reduces the alienating aspect of different cultures and identities.

*Keywords:* intercultural, representation, didactics, intersectional feminism, intersectional theory, multicultural, literature, Swedish curriculum, fantasy, young adult literature, intercultural, representation, didactics, intersectional feminism, intersectional theory, multicultural, literature, Swedish curriculum, fantasy
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1. Introduction

It was not long ago that the new cast for the Harry Potter sequel *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* theatre play was released and the outrage was enormous on social media. This was because the character of Hermione was to be portrayed by a person of African descent even though the character's skin color was never brought up in the books. J.K. Rowling's response to this was “I had a bunch of racists telling me that because Hermione 'turned white' -- that is, lost color from her face after a shock -- that she must be a white woman, which I have a great deal of difficulty with, but I decided not to get too agitated about it and simply state quite firmly that Hermione can be a black woman with my absolute blessing and enthusiasm” (Fashingbauer, 2016). The same outrage was directed toward the possibility of James Bond being played by a non-white person, or potentially a female, not to mention the hate discussions around the new *Ghostbusters* movie that featured an all-female cast. This is nothing new; increased debates when beloved characters and franchises are modified in regards to gender, ethnicity and sexuality are common. It is, at its core, all about power-relations and can be seen represented in every aspect of life and culture. In literature, there is no visual representation, which makes the medium more fluid because the scenery, characters and feelings are all on the pages and take hold of the reader’s mind. Therefore, this essay will focus on fantasy literature as a tool to approach the subject of representation. The question that will be discussed in this essay is, “In what ways can one teach representation in the intercultural classroom through fantasy literature?” Key phrases when searching for reference literature are “intercultural practices”, “the intercultural classroom”, “representation in the classroom” and “representation in media”.

In the following discussion, the focus will be on how one can use fantasy literature to talk about representation and how students can improve and challenge their understanding of cultures, norms and stereotypes, as well as educational goals such as gaining higher proficiency in the English language. The center of attention in this text will be on sexual and gender minorities in the intercultural classroom, and young adult literature will be used to shed light on these minorities. This is one discourse of marginalization among others. In regards to literature, one
book has been chosen that includes people of color (POC) as protagonists and is written by a POC author.

1.1 Who Fears Death

Firstly, this book is just the example that has been chosen for this essay. The reason why *Who Fears Death* will be the work discussed in this essay is because it is filled with subjects that range from everyday aspects to heavier subjects that can cause discomfort for some student depending on their past. This is also why a TRIGGER WARNING is issued for this essay in case the reader will find issues such as weaponized rape, female genital mutilation and different types of abuse upsetting and disturbing.

*Who Fears Death* (2010) by Nnedi Okorafor takes place in a post-apocalyptic, futuristic version of Sudan where the protagonist Onyesonwu (Igbo for “Who Fears Death”) struggles against the prejudice against her being an Ewu. That is, a child produced from rape. She goes on a mission to confront her mother’s rapist, the Nuru Daib who is a powerful sorcerer, with her own magical powers. The book includes themes such as weaponized rape and female genital mutilation. Okorafor states in her acknowledgements section that the 2004 AP news story by Emily Wax, titled ‘We want to make a Light Baby.’ about weaponized rape in the Sudan created the passage-way through which Onyesonwu started to form (Okorafor, 2010). The article is about the Arab militia attacking, raping and abusing African women to create white babies since they believe or say that Africans are ugly like dogs and are only good as slaves (Wax, 2004). These Arab militiamen are referred to as ‘Janjaweed’ and the article claims that the event can be compared to genocide (Wax, 2004).

1.1.1 Book Summary

*Who Fears Death* is an epic, yet realistic, fantasy book that takes place in a post-apocalyptic Africa. There are modern elements, such as technology and survival tools like capture stations, featured in the story that are mixed with the haunting and primal desert and desert towns that
stretch over the lands connected to “the Seven Rivers”. The protagonist, Onyesonwu (Onye), is of both Nuru and Okeke descent after her Okeke mother was brutally raped by a Nuru man. A child born of both races is referred to as Ewu and is believed to be evil by nature because they are produced under violent circumstances and are thus seen as outcasts and troublemakers.

During the first few years of Onye's life, her and her mother live as nomads in the desert before they finally settle in the town of Jwahir. It is located far from the West, where the Nuru still ravage and hunt down Okekés who refuse to be diminished to slaves. Onye grows up as an outcast, yet she is loved by her mother and her step-dad and it is not until she goes through the 11th rite that she finds a group of friends. The 11th rite is a transition ritual from childhood to adulthood, but girls are still not considered fully adult until they marry. The rite is performed by the female city elder ‘The Ada’, who says “You’ll become child and adult. You will be powerless and powerful. You will be ignored and heard. Do you accept?” (Okorafor, 2010, p. 41). The rite is for volunteers and is a bonding experience where the girls go through female genital mutilation. It is during the ritual that Onye’s powers, for the first time, are exposed and she enters ‘the Wilderness’; the place where the souls of the dead exist. While in ‘the Wilderness’, she feels threatened by a being that will haunt her throughout the book. Attending the rite with Onye is Luyu, a strong-willed rebel who does not back down from a challenge, Diti, a conflicted gossip-girl who follows traditions, and Binita, who is damaged from years of sexual abuse by her father. After going through the rite together, the girls form an intimate friendship and no longer socialize with their old friends. For the first time Onye has a group of friends to confide in, yet prejudice against her being Ewu is still present in the clique.

Onye possesses the power to transcend into the Wilderness and shape-shift into various animals that she encounters. During this time of newly awakened power, she meets Mwita, another Ewu, who starts to teach Onye small things to control her abilities. However, when Onye finds out about Aro, a town elder and master sorcerer, she is determined to become his student. Mwita insists that it is a fruitless endeavor but Onye refuses to give up and after years of trying, she is finally accepted to go through the trial that determines whether she will be allowed to learn the mystic points. She passes the trial and starts her rigid training. Mwita takes on the role as Onye’s healer and life partner despite his envy of her magical powers.
Onye's main reason for her persistence was that she feared for her life because of the being in the Wilderness, who turns out to be her father, is constantly threatening her life through dreams and the Wilderness. While practicing seeing distant places, a piece of news from a storyteller visualizes in Onye’s mind and her thoughts travel to the West, where “the rainwater showed [her] ripped oozing flesh, bloody erect penises, sinew, intestines, fire heaving chests, mewling bodies engaged in evil” (Okorafor, 2010, p. 161). With the realization that genocide is still actively happening in the West, Onye is enraged with the Nuru’s. Mwita, for the first time, tells Onye about how he came to Jwahir; that he, an Ewu, was a product of love but since this was illegal, his parents were killed. Mwita later had to grow up with his Nuru aunt and was eventually accepted to be the student of the great Nuru magician Daib. When the Okeke’s came in a rebellion, he fled out into the desert where he was captured by Okeke rebels that forced him to become a child soldier by subjecting him to torture and abuse. He was too afraid to run away even though he had the power to become insignificant. He states that “It’s not as simple as you think. Here is sickness on both sides. Be careful. Your father sees things in black and white, too. Okeke bad, Nuru good” (Okorafor, 2010, p.166). The vision of the West makes Onye decide that she should go and, at least, try to do something to stop it… and to kill her father. It is quickly revealed that Onye is the one who’s prophesized to rewrite the Great Book, and together with Mwita, Luyu, Diti, Binta and Fanasi they begin their journey towards the West.
2. Theoretical Background

In the Swedish school and curriculum for upper secondary school (Gy11, 2011) it is clearly stated that “education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” (p. 4). Furthermore, “the school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathize. No one in school should be subject to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief systems, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment” (Gy11, 2011, p. 4). Gy11 (2011) also mentions four essential perspectives in the school’s organization. The first is the ethical perspective, which describes how all subjects in school should give students a foundation and support their ability to develop personal views. The second is environmental perspectives that focus on how students can contribute in order to help the school to become a safe environment for everyone involved. The third is an international perspective that aims to create an international solidarity and a greater understanding of cultural diversity. The fourth, and last, is a historical perspective where students gain understanding of the present and preparation for the future (Gy11, 2011).

2.1 Intercultural education

Culture is created when a group or community share common experiences and world views. Groups can be divided by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ideology, nationality, religion, language and so on (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2010). Furthermore, culture is not static or hereditary; it is learned in an ever-changing process where the environment and traditions change when new people enter in numerous ways (TATA, 2010). Cultural differences can manifest themselves in numerous ways in regards to learning. It can be the approach one uses in learning

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1 Will be continuingly referred to The Alberta Teachers’ Association with the acronym “TATA” through the rest of the text.
situations, how one communicates, deals with conflicts, finishes tasks, makes decisions, and reveals information about oneself to others (TATA, 2010).

Learning is a formative activity that is conducted through different processes in formal and informal settings. Furthermore, learning is also a social process that is conducted over a long period of time where pupils learn through interactions with their teacher and each other (Carpenter, 2012). Intercultural education aims to confront and eradicate all the negative “isms” and phobias that may exist to different degrees in schools. It can be anything from racism and xenophobia, which are common elements in both individual and institutional settings in modern society (Carpenter, 2012).

A way of confronting and eradicating phobias and “isms” is to find more inspirational role-models for pupils, and especially minority groups. Carpenter (2012) talks mainly of ethnic minority groups; however, there are multiple other minority groups and combinations of them that one should consider. For example, there are homosexuals, transgender, disabled and religious minorities that all exist within the school system. One important aspect is that when newcomers and refugee students arrive in a new country, they are vulnerable to marginalization. They are facing issues like becoming accepted by peers, learning a new language, dealing with trauma and mental illness as well as trying to understand the sometimes conflicting cultural norms (TATA, 2010).

2.2 Representation

In Stuart Hall’s Representation (2013) the focus is on the importance of representation in relation to high and popular culture, the connection between these spheres, and how “language is the privileged medium in which we ‘make sense’ of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged” (p. xvii). Popular culture is the distributed forms of music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities and entertainment one enjoys in everyday life (Hall, 2013). Hall (2013) also brings up the circuit of culture, that is, how representation goes into identity, identity into production, production into consumption, consumption into regulation and regulation into representation. In the chapter “The spectacle of the ‘other’”, Hall (2013) asks the question: “How
do we represent people and places which are significantly different from us? Why is ‘difference’ so compelling a theme, so contested area of representation?” (p. 215).

There are three theories on why difference matters. The first is the linguistic approach, where the argument is that difference is essential to meaning and is often compared by using binary oppositions like white/black, day/night, masculine/feminine or European/alien (Hall, 2013). However, it is important to note that nothing is comparable, in its whole, through binary oppositions because they are redundant and over-simplified (Hall, 2013). The second approach is the theories of language, where the main argument is that difference is needed so we can construct meaning through dialogue with the ‘other’ (Hall, 2013). Hall (2013) quotes Bakhtin: “the word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when … the speaker appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic expressive intention. Prior to this … the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language … rather it exists in other people’s mouths, serving other people’s intentions” (p. 225).

In other words, dialogue with the ‘other’ is essential to meaning because words are modified through interaction and conversations. The third theory is an anthropological one, and states that culture and differences are dependent on being assigned to positions within a classificatory system. By classifying difference one symbolically closes ranks and stigmatizes anything which is defined as impure or abnormal. However, difference is also powerful because of it being attractive through its forbidden and taboo nature, as well as its threat to cultural order (Hall, 2013). It is important to be sure that these categories are pure to give cultures a unique meaning and identity (Hall, 2013).

Stereotypes are another important practice in popular culture, and here Hall makes a distinction between typing and stereotyping. He argues that types are what we use to make sense of the world. For example, we assign people as members of different groups in relation to class, gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, sexual preference and so on. Furthermore, one also is assigned a personality type (happy, serious, scatter-brained etc.) and other categorical types. Stereotyping is when one focuses on a few “simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics of a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them” (Hall, 2013). In relation to gender, The Critical Media Project (n.d.) has uploaded
a list of stereotypical characteristics of both masculinity and femininity, and dominant and subordinate groups.

All of the above-mentioned theories correlate and cannot be excluded from each other when analyzing and thinking about representation. If one connects these theories to fiction one needs to take some practices into account; these practices are *how the social world enters fictional discourse, how particular genres address different audiences and invite participation* and *which gendered representations and meanings they construct* in relation to the neglected factor of pleasure which is the fulfillment of our expectations (Hall, 2013).

### 2.3 Teaching multiculturalism

This essay focuses mainly on the intercultural approaches to teaching. However, multicultural approaches are also of value in order to reach the intercultural knowledge of mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms to develop deep relationships to learn and help one another to grow. Multicultural approaches focus merely on people from different cultures and ethnic groups who live alongside each other while intercultural approaches are when one aims to ensure a deep understanding and respect for these cultures and groups (springinstitute.org). In other words, multicultural education should – or could – be used as a catalyst for a progression to an intercultural education and society.

In *Multicultural education: issues and perspectives* (2013) Banks writes about how one can support gender equality among diverse populations through different strategies. One is
confronting and addressing stereotyping and discrimination. Before teachers do this, they must examine their own attitudes and prejudices towards members of gender, racial, ethnic, or sexual groups that do not correlate with the groups the teacher identifies with. This can be done through examination of popular culture where the students get to focus on gender stereotypes like “white men as powerful, white women as sex objects. African American men as aggressive and African American women as inconsequential” (Banks, 2013). Another strategy is to use literature to illustrate issues of cultures, statuses and intersections in relation to gender, ethnic, racial or sexual groups (Banks, 2013).

In relation to sexuality and LGBTQ related issues, one of the first things that needs to be established in a classroom is that nonconforming people deserve respect and that commonplace derogatory terms related to gay people should not be allowed to exist, i.e. phrases such as “that’s so gay” or epithets like “faggot”, “dyke”, “fairy” or “homo” (Banks, 2013). As a teacher, it is important to be critically aware that not everyone identifies as heterosexual and that homophobia is so rooted in everyday words and actions that not everyone is aware of it. Furthermore, one must challenge the implicit and explicit heterosexism, homophobia, and gender conformity that exists in the curriculum (Banks, 2013). In this regard one can do as was proposed with gender equality, namely challenge and examine sexual stereotypes in media (Banks, 2013). Are all gay men feminine and all lesbians butch? How are they portrayed? Are they allowed to be complex or is their sexuality the only interesting thing about them? One can also connect this to the recent media articles about the TV-trope “bury your gays”, which is the common and violent ways in which LGBTQ characters get killed off on screen (Hogan, 2016).

Furthermore, Banks (2013) also writes about different levels of multicultural content and how they can be applied. The first, the contributions approach is about including ethnic heroes/heroines and their individual cultural artifacts and then using these mainstream people and the cultural artifacts in connection to the curriculum (Banks, 2013). These individuals should challenge political, ideological, economic and social norms where the result is one of reform (Banks, 2013). The second is the additive approach, which is when one adds a book, a unit, or a course that does not change the curriculum. However, this approach has its disadvantages since it is often ethnic content from the perspectives of mainstream historians, writers, artists, and scientists that is being added. To avoid this disadvantage a teacher must be aware of who wrote
the book and what its context is (Banks, 2013). For example, in this essay the literary focus is on writers who share the same ethnic background as the protagonists in the story. The third is *the transformation approach*, which aims to make basic changes in the curriculum that enable students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic, sexual, and gender perspectives and points of view (Banks, 2013). When one uses subjects such as music and literature the teacher should acquaint the students with how the art form was practiced by ethnic groups and how they influenced and enriched the nation’s artistic and literary traditions. For example, one could talk about ethnic writers such as Langston Hughes and others who provided unique and revealing perspectives on American society and culture (Banks, 2013). The final approach is *the social action approach*, which includes all the elements of the transformation approach but adds the requirement of students to make decisions and take actions related to the concept, issue, or problem studied (Banks, 2013). The major goal of this approach is to give students the knowledge, values, and skills they need to participate in, and contribute to, positive social change so that marginalized and excluded groups can move closer to attaining their democratic rights and ideals (Banks, 2013). Banks (2013) also mentions that one can mix and blend the approaches in different ways so that they are problematized depending on the different approaches.

2.4 Teaching Literature

In *Teaching Literature to Adolescents*, Beach (2011) makes a distinction between two opposing perspectives in literature teaching. The first one is the *cultural ideal* and it focuses on promoting and preserving a cultural standard or idea through classic literature and western culture representation (Beach, 2011). The second is *cultural access*, which focuses on helping students develop appropriate reading practices, and promoting access to broad arrays of texts and cultural perspectives. The emphasis here is on developing the cognitive, aesthetic social and political capacities of readers (Beach, 2011). Today, literature can be taught with views on sociopolitical practices. Beach (2011) writes, “it is not enough to simply include multicultural literature or promote tolerance of others in the classroom. We are challenged today as never before to make issues of race, class, gender, and injustice explicit aspects of our literacy teaching” (p. 86). This is
much in line with what the intercultural classroom is about, as well as the questions of representation that Stuart Hall (2013) brings up. It is also noted that 20% of 307 award-winning books in the young adult literature genre can be called *multicultural*. However, the characters that are depicted who are from a non-mainstream culture are portrayed as supporting characters; never or rarely the protagonist (Beach, 2011).

Furthermore, Beach (2011) also brings up what kinds of books young adults tend to prefer to read. The genres that, predominantly, are mentioned as their favorites are science fiction, fantasy, and gothic novels as well as series books like J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* or Kristin Cashore’s *Graceling Realm* (Beach, 2011). When it comes to criteria for choosing books and other print materials, a group of teens have developed their own list of six ‘must haves’. These are:

1. *Appeal and Involvement*; that is, books should have a ‘lasting and universal’ appeal with an attractive cover and personal/emotional involvement.
2. *Literary Quality*; books should offer unique perspectives and ways of thinking.
3. *Characters*; the characters should be able to understand the problems of teenagers as well as being realistic, compelling, and distinctive.
4. *Content and Style*; the subject should be relevant to teenagers with compelling descriptions, vivid imagery, and a non-condescending tone.
5. *Plot*; it should have a good blend of action, description and a satisfying end.
6. *Genres*; that is, a variety of genres as long as they have the previous five ‘must haves’ (Beach, 2011).

Furthermore, Beach (2011) also mentions, in relation to literature, how one can study film and television genres through the roles of the stereotypical characters, setting, imagery, and plot/story. When it comes to roles it can be the hero, heroine, sidekick, alien, monster, mentor, villain and so on. With setting, one can determine if the setting or the world presented in the work is associated with a specific genre. For example, if a story takes place in space but has acid-bleeding aliens that hunt people like prey, is it a sci-fi or is it a horror or a mixture of them both? Imagery can be prototypical and archetypal images (black = evil versus white = good) or symbols
(police badge, a Guy Fawkes mask) that are associated with the setting. With the plot, one can see if there are predictable narratives, events and problems in the story and how they are portrayed (Beach, 2011).

2.5 Fantasy in the classroom

“On the one hand, fantasy has been conventionally seen as the literature of escape – a detachment and defamiliarization from the rules, orders and hierarchies that govern our everyday life. However, this defamiliarization also has the potential to critique the orders of reality” (Alkestrand, 2016, p. 62).

The fantasy genre is a useful tool in the classroom for multiple reasons. It has the ability to portray and comment on reality differently than realistic literature can, and it does so with a distance to what is portrayed (Alkestrand, 2016). In Alkestrand’s book Magiska Möjligheter (2016), she aims to highlight and create discussions in relation to the Swedish school’s fundamental values with focus on three different subjects; democracy, human rights and cultural diversity through analyzing alienating abilities, allegories, and power and intersectionality. Fantasy literature is built on a recurring structural construction that starts with a problem and, through a quest, is resolved. Tolkien called this eucatastrophe – the repeal of a catastrophe. In fantasy, the reader confronts the deviant from a point-of-view that is not seen. Through recovery (retaking the fantasy world) the readers are able to see the world around us with new and clear eyes (Alkestrand, 2016). One of the distinguishing characteristics of the fantasy genre’s didactic potential is that it gives the reader access to worlds that differ from reality through elements such as magic and the supernatural, while it also shows some structural similes with it (Alkestrand, 2016).

In relation to democracy, Alkestrand (2016) talks about the revolution of youth and how they motivate and support each other in their uprising against injustice and corrupted adults who take advantage of their power relations towards youth. Alkestrand quotes Clémentine Beauvais when she writes “because the implied child reader of children’s literature might be taught by the children’s book something that the adult does not yet know, that child is powerful in some sense
of the word power – a sense that I call ‘might’” (Alkestrand, 2016, p. 124). That is, a child is mighty because it owns the future and can mold it, but not without threats and opportunity. The youth should not be afraid to challenge and critique the power-relations between them and adults just because adults have the interpretative prerogative (Alkestrand, 2016). As expressed in Gy11, the fundamental values clearly state that we should protect all individuals’ right to equality and show solidarity with the exposed (Gy11, p. 7). Through magic and supernatural elements, the youth rebellion acts like an alienating ability and thus the magic works as a power category (Alkestrand, 2016).

When Alkestrand (2016) discusses human rights she refers to the UN declaration of human rights, since the Swedish curriculum does not specify exactly what the term refers to. She denotes to such power-categories as class, ethnicity, and age, which can function like institutions that affect adolescents’ just as much as concrete institutions. Also, sexuality, ability and the other grounds for discrimination are included in the equality perspective applied (Alkestrand, 2016). In young adult fantasy, one of the most prominent power-categories is age; something which limits the character’s power over their environment and themselves. Furthermore, in relation to ethnicity, one should remember that fantasy specific ethnicities are not the same as ethnicities in reality since both the supernatural and the geographical are interlocked in fantasy worlds (Alkestrand, 2016). Additionally, race ideologies work a lot like their real-world counterparts. That is, they are not based on facts and thus create real consequences for the victims (Alkestrand, 2016). To counteract racist discourses in fantasy, characters can use different strategies. The first is to gain as much knowledge as possible about the alien world in order to develop the competence needed to overcome the obstacles within it. The characters also tend to undertake a struggle against these ideological discourses. This leads to an attempt to change the character’s own power-position and to free themselves from the harmful force of race ideologies, as well as helping others who are under its oppressive powers (Alkestrand, 2016).

In relation to cultural diversity, this is an important part in the work with fundamental values. Analyzing such structures in fantasy literature gives a good starting-point to discuss and observe how one should treat individuals from other cultures and not let one’s prejudices stand in the way of interaction with the other. The other is the one that represents cultural diversity and what is seen as alien for the prominent group's point-of-view (Alkestrand, 2016).
One of the distinguishing characteristics of literature is that the reader is often exposed to other individuals’ perspectives, which can have an ethical effect that creates empathy for other people. However, for this exchange to take place it is important that the reader has a critical and reflecting ability while reading fiction (Alkestrand, 2016). Fantasy literature also has an alienating ability, and this is often applied through supernatural estrangement that is emphasizing that the supernatural elements are used to comment on, and problematize, phenomena in reality (Alkestrand, 2016). Allegory is another dimension of the fantasy literature that is connected to the alienating ability. An allegory is a metaphor that extends over a longer text or a whole work. The goal of the allegorical interpretation tradition is to figure out the deeper meaning in a text (Alkestrand, 2016). As the quote by Saxena on page 10 implies, the fantasy genre actively critique reality through defamiliarization. An example of an allegory would be Voldemort’s rhetoric against muggles and half-blood in *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007), which can be interpreted as being an allegory of racism. Alkestrand (2016) also brings up power and intersectionality in relation to power relations. Power can be both negative and positive; it can act as derogatory of individuals’ freedoms as well as a tool of ownership over their lives, that is, it acts as both oppressive and power asserting (Alkestrand, 2016). Intersectionality “refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Alkestrand, 2016, p. 106). This idea of power and intersectionality is highly relevant since the Swedish curriculum takes a stance against oppression (Lgr, 2011).

There are three different levels of intersectionality. The first, *structural intersectionality*, defines how society organizes and creates intersections between different power categories such as gender and ethnicity. The second, *political intersectionality*, moves in political circles and is closely connected to feminism and anti-racist movements. The third, *representational intersectionality*, describes how categories like ‘black woman’ are constructed in a cultural setting (Alkestrand, 2016). All three levels are relevant for analyzing literature, however, the representational level is the one that is most relevant for the didactic work in relation to fundamental values (Alkestrand, 2016).
3. Discussion

In this section, *Who Fears Death* will be analyzed on the basis of the theoretical background in order to demonstrate how one can breach subjects of representation and democracy through fantasy literature. Equally important is to make it clear that this book is just an example and by no means the book one have to use in the classroom. Also, as mentioned in section 1.1 Who Fears Death, a TRIGGER WARNING is ushered once again for strong content in relation to violence, rape and abuse.

3.1 “Must Haves”

Fantasy is one of the literary genres that young adults tend to get most invested in when it comes to literature, and much like Beach mentioned a book needs to have six ‘must haves’. *Who Fears Death* fulfills all these in one way or another.

1. **Appeal and Involvement:** The cover of *Who Fears Death* portrays a woman centered against a back-drop of a desert. From the woman’s shoulders, transparent wings from a vulture unfold. The colors all range within the warm spectrum of reds and yellows. In relation to involvement, one cannot help but to get drawn into the story. Okorafor writes with a language that is hauntingly beautiful, easily understood and does not shy away from details.

2. **Literary Quality:** *Who Fears Death* does not offer much in the aspect of getting to know many characters intimately since it is a first-person narrative. This, however, does not stop the book from illustrating unique perspectives and ways of thinking since the book constantly switches between different subjects such as oppression, tradition and religion.

3. **Characters:** The characters all fill their unique purpose in the story. The main characters we follow (Onye and Mwita) are both in their late teens when they embark on their mission with their friends Luyu, Binta, Diti and Fanasi. They all grapple with everyday
problems and challenges such as friendship, bullying, oppression by the adults, sexual awakening and finding their way of contributing to the mission. Each character represents different aspects of teenage stereotypes; Onye is the rebel, Mwita is the rock, Luyu is the fearless one, Binta is the damaged one, Diti is the traditionalist and Fanasi is the conflicted one. These are emotions and characteristics most teenagers go through at one point or another.

4. **Content and Style**: Okorafor (2010) depicts racial and sexual violence without flinching and this results in echoes from events taking place in our own time. Her ability to convey emotional moments with a sense of detachment only strengthens the horror that is written on the pages. This ability to convey emotional moments also works the other way around; her ability to illustrate all the characters, the environment, culture, tradition and spiritual mysteries is essential to the story. The tone of the book is not condescending toward Onye’s friends – since it is a first-person narrative, we follow what is happening mainly through the eyes and thoughts of Onye, and she does not judge Luyu for wanting to satisfy her sexual drive or stigmatize Binta, who “was so lovely even her father could not resist her” (Okorafor, 2010, p. 170), for eventually poisoning her father. The main condescending tone that exists in the book is expressed by the adults towards the youth, and the community towards Ewu’s.

5. **Plot**: The story is not so much driven by physical action even though action does exist, but instead it is mainly driven by the internal struggles and fights of the characters. It is not until the second half of the book that the physical action starts to occur more often. As stated above, Okorafor (2010) depicts everything in the book in a way that gives readers a clear picture of what is going on in, and around, the characters. The ending may not be satisfactory for some since Onye dies a martyr’s death after having rewritten the Great Book. At first, this was a disappointment but after some reflection there is a lot to think and discuss about this. The ending is effective and shows a glimmer of hope for everyone.

6. **Genre**: It is a fantasy story where the fantasy, at times, becomes obscured because of the distinct language and, as a reader, one at times has trouble separating fantasy from more realistic stories.
To reflect, discuss and apply *Who Fears Death* in the intercultural classroom with the aim of confronting and addressing stereotyping and discrimination, the focus will be on Banks and his approaches. For this discussion, the emphasis will be on the additive and the transformation approach since they are in tune with the Swedish curriculum and can more easily be applied by teachers or students who do not have much experience with this kind of work. The additive approach is when one adds one book or unit to the curriculum (Banks, 2013). To add *Who Fears Death* to the curriculum one must be aware of the background and intentions of the writer Okorafor. In this case, Okorafor is American born to Igbo Nigerian parents and she draws inspiration from African traditions and spirituality and mixes these with the supernatural. For example, in indigenous religions in Nigeria there are both priests and priestesses and they get their power and influence by being possessed by gods, and they have the ability to tell the future and to heal (everyculture.com). Another cultural aspect described in the book is the tradition of female genital mutilation that, for many westerners, is a horrible and inhumane act against women. Female genital mutilation is still present in many countries around the world and especially in countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti (Boseley, 2014). With this information in mind one should be aware of the cultures represented in the story. As stated above, Okorafor (2010) drew inspiration of the genocide in Sudan and the weaponized rape towards Sudan women by Arab militiamen to make a light baby. In the additive approach, one does not focus on discussion, more on exposure, and with this in mind one can create an assignment where the students write a literary analysis by following Beach’s (2013) ‘must haves’ in a manipulated way.

1. **Appeal and Involvement** – can be the student’s initial thoughts on the book based on the front cover and the summary on the back cover.
2. **Characters** – here the student should write short character descriptions and answer questions such as “What is the character’s motivation?”, “What are the character’s ethics and morals?”, “What does the character think of the other characters?” and “What are the main characteristics of the character?”
3. **Plot and Narrative** – a fitting question here could be “What is the book about and from what point of view is the story told?”. Students can write a detailed summary where they
point out where in the book the dramatic structure takes place. That is, in what scenes do they find the exposition, presentation, deepening understanding of the protagonist and antagonist, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.

4. **Concepts and Themes** – this is one aspect borrowed from the transformation approach but one that is still highly related to this type of analysis. It does not require students to discuss in greater detail, but rather to show their understanding and thus it's more relevant for first year English 5 and possibly English 6 students in upper secondary school. The concepts to understand can be the main issue or idea of the text. It is the concept of intersectionality, a way to enlighten and discuss matters of structural, political and representational issues. The theme is the idea that is infused in a work of popular culture, and in this case a literary work. Much like the example from *Harry Potter, Who Fears Death* contain a theme of racism. However, it also contains themes of genocide, religion and rebellion.

5. **Content and Style** – i.e. what did the student think of the book and how it was written. A relevant question would be “Would it have been a different story if it was written in a second or third person narrative?”.

3.2 Approaches

*The transformation approach* is more advanced in terms of analyzing and applying it in the classroom, and it is highly relevant to the English course plan where it clearly states; “Knowledge of English increases the individual’s opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts […] can also provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contact, and greater understanding of different ways of living” (Gy11, 2011, p. 53). *Who Fears Death* brings up all the subjects mentioned by Beach (2013), namely, concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic, sexual and gender perspectives and points of view. Concepts and themes have already been mentioned above, but through analyzing the remaining aspects, new concepts and themes can emerge. In terms of issues, there are plenty to be found in *Who Fears Death*; for example, the book brings up issues such as weaponized rape, rape culture, female genital mutilation, child soldiers, xenophobia, archaic religious
practices, bullying, sexual repression and liberation, discrimination against gender, age and ethnicity, stoning and so on. It is a book filled with issues that exist in parts of the world today, some even in Sweden, yet not as visibly as in some other countries.

These issues and subjects are sensitive to talk about and in today's multicultural and intercultural classrooms, one cannot even begin to guess all the different experiences that the students have been through. One does not have to use this exact book in the classroom; one can offer a few different alternatives where trigger warnings are issued depending on the issues that are predominantly present in the books. However, even though these are sensitive issues, Okorafor still portrays them in a more lyrical prose when entering into harsh subjects, which may bring a dissociation from the horrors that the characters experience. For example, Onye can transcend into the Wilderness when subjected to horrors or painful moments, and this ability to dissociate with reality is something that is common in victims of abuse and rape and it works as a defense mechanism (Brown, 2012). This is also a common phenomenon among children and young adults; that they ‘check out’ when they feel overwhelmed because they cannot handle what is going on. Brown (2012) also writes that “Women describe dissociation as a numbing or a spacy feeling. They either don't feel something OR they are too spaced out to do much about it. In the middle of a traumatic event, spacing out and numbing is a good thing”. This type of dissociation is not only related to women or children. In Who Fears Death, Mwita's power is somewhat of a physical manifestation of dissociation. He can make himself insignificant so that others do not see or notice him. However, even though he has this power, he was still too afraid to use it to flee from the Okeke rebels who kidnapped him and forced him to become a child soldier and fight the Nurus.

After Onye’s mother Najeeba’s rape in the desert, Najeeba arrives back home and finds her husband still alive; “That was him, not his ghost. Najeeba wanted to say ‘Ani is merciful’, but the goddess wasn’t. Not at all. For, though her husband was spared, Ani had killed Najeeba and left her still alive” (Okorafor, 2010, p. 23). Her relief that her husband was still alive was quickly exchanged to shame when he figured out what had happened to her. Najeeba collected the things that survived the Nuru attack on the village and went out to the desert once again, where she stayed until she and Onye settled in Jwahir. In this instance, students can discuss what Okorafor might mean by the sentence “Ani had killed Najeeba and left her still alive” as well as the
following shame she feels when her husband, in despair, tells her to cover herself up, and further compare this to rape culture.

Another aspect students can analyze and discuss is that of female genital mutilation. Okorafor (2010) portrays the rite in a problematic way where she states both a positive and negative side to it. The negative is that it is a way to control women’s bodies and hinder them from reaching sexual climax. The ceremony is a brutal act, yet all the girls has to attend the rite voluntarily or it will not be performed. The girls do attend it voluntarily for different and cultural reasons. For example, the sexual abuse that Binta suffers from her father is not taken seriously because she is not yet an adult. When she goes through the rite she suddenly gets a voice and rights. Furthermore, the scalpel used in this ritual has juju (magic) connected to it so that every time any of the characters are starting to get aroused they are overwhelmed with a searing pain throughout their body. This intimate rite is oppressive towards female sexuality, yet it is also a bonding experience. Onye, Luyu, Binta and Diti go through one of the most intimate and life-changing rites together and it bonds them in a way none of them expected. So, through this oppressive act they come out stronger as a unit. Later in the novel, they all express feelings of regret for going through the rite and Onye manages to reverse the juju and reinstate their clitoris, and after this the group slowly starts to break apart. The aspect the students can discuss in this case are two different approaches. The first is about ethics and morality, and in this case one can also compare it to male circumcision. Are there similarities and differences in how and why these two medical procedures are applied? The second approach is comparing childhood-to-adulthood transition rituals from different parts of the world, and the differences and similarities that exist within these rites. One can also think about what negative cultural reasons there are for the girls going through the ceremony.

Another important aspect of Who Fears Death is the religious text ‘The Great Book’ that is featured predominantly throughout the novel. It is the text that everyone (Nuru, Okeke, Ewu) are expected to follow and as mentioned earlier, it is inspired by Igbo culture and traditions that still exist today. However, there are also a few similarities to, for example, Christianity and the Christian prophet Jesus. For example, Onye finds out that she is prophesied to rewrite the Great Book, in order to make a significant change in the world. She travels East with her band of friends and travels through the desert, occasionally visiting towns to restock supplies. However,
these visits never seem to end well when someone in the town figures out Onye and Mwita are Ewu. In one town, the residents begin to attack and drive out the group. Binta steps in between the residents and Onye and tries to negotiate, and ends up being killed for doing so. Onye curses the whole town and turns everyone blind. In opposition to this, Jesus gave a man his sight back. However, Onye did deprive the town of their sight for a reason; she did not want to show them the horrors of the West, the vision she showed the group, but instead wanted them to see darkness since they were blind to the world around them. In the end, Onye sacrifices herself and dies a martyr’s death, much like Jesus in the Bible. With the death of Onye, the story’s main change begins to happen, and Okorafor (2010) writes;

As we were walking back to Onyesonwu’s body, my sister yelped. When I looked at her, she was floating an inch off the ground. My sister can fly. We would later find out that she was not the only one. All the women, Okeke and Nuru, found that something had changed about them. Some could turn wine to fresh sweet drinking water, others glowed in the dark, and some could hear the dead. Others remembered the past, before the Great Book. Others could peruse the spirit world and still live in the physical. Thousands of abilities. All bestowed upon women. There it was, Onye’s gift. In the death of herself and her child, Onye gave birth to us all. This place will never be the same. Slavery here is over. (p. 413)

The two sisters remove Onye’s body and give her the funeral pyre that she deserves, and the last sentence in the book reads “it was the most we could do for the woman who saved the people of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, this place that used to be part of the Kingdom of Sudan” (Okorafor, 2010, p 413). This could be construed as her death opened the eyes of the people of the Seven Rivers Kingdom and gave them hope for the future through abilities and true sight. To discuss this in the classroom one can ask oneself, why women? Why were women the ones who benefited from Onye’s sacrifice? Could men also be affected by this in some way? And can one see similarities from other cultures where a figure of hope or a prophet of some kind performed a deed that would change how people view the world?
The transformative approach is wide and filled with possibilities but as stated above it may, at times, be hard to find the right tools and questions to broaden student's, and one’s own, point of view on the world, other cultures and traditions. However, it is important that the alienating effect we have today, where relationships are built on tolerance or hate, are challenged – and if it is one thing that Onye and her friends have shown, it is that one must try to accomplish this and that, as Alkestrand (2016) said, the youth are mighty because they have the future in their hands. Much like many famous fantasy novels, it is the youth who spark the uprising against injustice and corruption. This injustice and corruption is different from novel to novel but in this case, it is the unjust traditions and world-view that oppress people without even knowing it.

However, it is difficult to say how far this ignorance goes since Who Fears Death is written from a first-person narrative. The only adult character in the book who, from page one, is dissatisfied with how The Seven Rivers Kingdom is run is Najeeba. Other adults have their views challenged by Onye. For example, Aro (Onye’s magic teacher) is forced to reconsider his stance on not teaching women the magic points, and Ada (town elder and performer of the 11th rite) is forced to reconsider her stance on the juju of the 11th rite scalpel when Onye questions it. Onye is, unknowingly, working from the basis of a democratic philosophy when she demands to be heard, accepted and loved even though she is both woman and Ewu. Onye is also the predominant force in Mwita turning away from his misogynistic views of being an alpha male and moving towards accepting that Onye is stronger and prophesized to be the force of change. Initially he tries to keep Onye away from magic and from Aro, and when Onye is accepted Mwita feels resentment because she passed the trial and he did not. It also takes a long time for him to accept that his skill lies in healing, unlike Onye whose skill is based in nature and, if wanted, destruction.

In relation to this one can combine the transformation approach with the linguistic approach presented by Hall (2013). In the beginning of Who Fears Death much of the world is structured after binary oppositions, and everything that falls in between these oppositions is unwanted or ignored. Some of the predominant binary oppositions are; dark/fair, masculine/feminine, tradition/rebellion, hate/love and nature/nurture. However, the further Onye gets on her journey, the more these binary oppositions become blurred. The Okeke are viewed as dark and Nuru as fair, while Ewu are not viewed as individuals at all until Onye, through actions and rumors, starts to get noticed and appreciated, yet still hated by some. Masculine and feminine
roles also become obscured throughout the story. For example, Mwita becomes the nurturer of the group while Onye becomes a force of nature. Also, Luyu is described as braver than her male peers. Furthermore, when Onye tells the group that she can undo the juju of the 11th rite, Luyu proclaims “I don’t care about you putting your hands on me. Anything to enjoy intercourse again I don’t have time for marriage” (Okorafor, 2010, p. 244). Luyu is shameless when it comes to her sexual desires and does not apologize for it. She is not shamed by the others either, except when she sleeps with Fanasi who is still married to Diti. Luyu also breaks the tradition by refusing marriage; yet she still does pray to Ani and utter nostalgic wishes about feasts. Furthermore, Onye modifies traditions through rebellion, for example when she is finally accepted by Aro or when she, as an Ewu, goes through the 11th rite.

3.3 Representation

Another interesting aspect about *Who Fears Death* is that Okorafor (2010) blends tradition with advanced technology such as computers, portable devices and capture-stations in a fluid and unproblematic way. This gives an interesting reflection on Africa today and it challenges common African stereotypes. If one connects this to Hall’s (2013) *circuit of culture* it becomes apparent that the importance of representation is still valid. In this case representation is related to multiple subjects, namely, ethnicity, tradition, gender, age and sexual awakening. Three of the most sensitive subjects of representation are ethnicity, gender and sexuality since it is there the discussions lay. For example, as The Critical Media Project reports, ethnically ‘non-whites’ are typically typecasted as a primitive, violent and illegal individual whereas ‘whites’ are portrayed as civilized, stable and rational. If a person who identifies with a non-white ethnicity constantly sees negative portrayals of their own community, it will create a negative circuit of culture. Therefore, positive representation is essential so that individuals can feel that they matter as well. For example, when the character Commander Lexa was introduced in the TV-series *The 100* (2014-ongoing) the LGBTQ community quickly became involved because it was a complex, queer character who was also a woman in a power position. When she later got killed off in a horrible manner, social media overflowed with outrage because, once again, popular culture retorted to the *bury your gays* trope (Williams, 2016).
In regards to *Who Fears Death*, there is, generally, a positive circuit of culture since the novel consciously problematizes the subjects mentioned above. It is not a question of binary oppositions as presented with the linguistic approach, but instead it is about complex representations that follow the circuit. Identity is, as stated, a social construct that evolves and changes throughout an individual’s life and people usually have more than one identity depending on the context or group one is situated in at a given moment. However, most people have a few characteristics that never change within their identity. The predominant one is ethnicity, since one cannot change one’s skin color without the aid of medical science or specific illnesses. It is because of this that representations of different ethnic backgrounds are so important; especially in the intercultural classroom. There are a lot of positive representations of ‘white’ people of all genders and their different identity characteristics. In *Who Fears Death* the issue of ethnicity is a complex, yet compelling, subject. There are three non-white ethnicities presented, of which each is suffering from some sort of oppression. The Nuru, who anthropologically are the dominant in the classificatory system, are oppressed by The Great Book. For example, they are not allowed to socialize with Okeke in any other way than the prescribed master-slave relationship. This becomes apparent when Mwita tells his back-story; that he, an Ewu produced from love, is born and both his parents are murdered for their interethnic relationship. This can be connected to modern history in different parts of the world, and it's a perfect subject for students to get more acquainted with. The Okeke are ‘naturally’ inferior to the Nuru and are subordinate in the classificatory system, and lastly the Ewu are the ‘other’, the ones who everyone else rejects. In this instance the Ewu identity is based on the fact that they feel unfairly treated and they are strongly aware of the common view of what an Ewu is. Both Onye and Mwita constantly struggle when interacting with Okekes and Nuruses to not give them reason for their negative beliefs. The product of their identity is to challenge racist and sexist hierarchies in society. When readers then consume the work, they get a view of these aspects that regulate and give directive towards that it is possible to be strong and vulnerable at the same time – which then forms the basis of creating a representation, and this representation, in turn and contribute to modifying an identity.

The concept of the circuit of representation is closely linked to Alkestrands’ (2016) theories on the importance of intersectionality, alienating ability and democratic views. *Who*
Fears Death is built on democratic views where the characters challenge the establishment to force a change so that everyone can live in harmony with each other. Through recovery (retaking the fantasy world) they instigate a revolution against injustice and corruption. However, they only do this within the group, as with many other quest-fantasy books. They do not get much help on their way except when they run into The Red People, a nomadic tribe that travels with a desert storm. As is a common concept, it is up to the prophesized protagonist to end the sickness of the world. In the Harry Potter series (1997-2007), it is up to Harry with the aid of his friends to destroy the horcruxes created by Voldemort in order to kill him. In Sarah J. Mass Throne of Glass series (2012-ongoing), it is up to Celaena to find the strength to overthrow and kill the King to bring peace to the realm. In Who Fears Death it is up to Onye, with the aid of her friends, to destroy the sickness of The Great Book. One common thing with these types of books is that the protagonists (in this case Harry, Celaena and Onye) not only have to fight the evils in their respective world; they also must fight their own inner demons to prepare for the final task. The main struggle for Onye is to be seen and heard, and the main difference here is that she is ‘the other’ and thus tries to create a forum through interaction where she can initiate a dialogue so people will not see her as an alien. Since Onye is the subject of racist discourses from both Okeke and Nuru she, instead of gaining knowledge of the alien world, tries to make her own world and identity seem less alien to ‘the others’ by not succumbing to the thoughts and ideas people have about Ewu-people. This is a good starting-point for creating a discussion about people from other cultures and how one should not retort to prejudice. And in this discussion one should include issues of both ethnicity and gender. For example, Mwita has more freedom than Onye because he is a man and this goes for all the men in the book. Women have restrictions asserted upon them, no matter their ethnicity. There are other intercultural similarities between the Nurus, Okekes and Ewus, and one should try to identify these similarities and try to connect them to aspects of life that one is familiar with. This will give the reader a greater understanding of the culture one is exposed to and it can be transferred to how one confronts ‘the other’ in everyday life.

‘The other’ is the one representing cultural diversity in relation to the predominant groups. Alkestrand (2016) brings up three different approaches on intersectionality that will be discussed here. Structural intersectionality is, for example, how minorities experiences of certain events can be perceived differently depending on who experiences it. When Najeeba comes home
from the desert after she and the other Okeke women have been raped, she is instantly shamed by her husband and, essentially, thrown out of the home. Okorafor (2010) writes “An Okeke woman will never kill a child kindled inside of her […] However, custom dictates that a child is the child of her father. These Nuru had planted poison” (p. 21). Najeeba was violated in the worst possible way and was then forced, through tradition, to leave her home and live in shame for she, a rape victim, was carrying an Ewu-child. An aspect of this that students should think about is how victims of rape are treated in different parts of the world and if there are differences between ethnicities and cultures. Political intersectionality is about identities intersecting with oppression, domination, or discrimination. All marginalized people are included within this approach and a lot of the focus is on feminism and anti-racist movements. It has already been established that Onye is, in many ways, a feminist since she fights and – in the end – saves all women from oppression by rewriting The Great Book. She also works against oppression and discrimination of Okeke and Ewu’s on her journey.

The last, and most important, approach is representational intersectionality. Representational intersectionality is an important tool for the didactic work in the intercultural classroom. This approach defines how social constructs are created when a category as “black woman” is placed in a cultural setting. In terms of representation, there are a lot of different varieties in Who Fears Death and some of them have been approached several times in this discussion. Now, these varieties will be more closely connected to the fundamental values and intercultural classroom. It is about how people of color tend to be undervalued much more frequently than “white people” in popular culture; especially women and gender nonconforming individuals. If a teacher aims for the classroom to be a safe zone for all students, no matter their background, it is important to be aware of the issue of representation as well as the lack of it. On a personal note, when in school, the required reading was of the classics and no discussion or analysis on representation of gender, ethnicity or sexuality was present. Back then, one had to turn to television to find interesting and complex representations of women that one could identify with. Today, it is easier to find literature which contains the characteristics one wishes to read about through sites such as ‘goodreads’ and social media. As a teacher, it is much easier to find relevant books to use in the classroom that bring up issues such as representation, alienation and democracy. To connect this back to Who Fears Death, the book has many different aspects to
it; it has both female and male characters of color who are complex, strong, sensitive and possess a wide range of other characteristics that challenge the stereotypes of non-white ethnicities. One interesting character who has been overlooked so far is the Ada. She is an empowered woman who has the respect of the community and is educated. She is married (to Aro) yet lives alone; she is content with her life and she is a complex character who blends tradition with modernity. For example, the Ada is connected to tradition because she is still highly involved in the 11th rite ceremony, whereas she is modern because she makes her own luck and happiness. This, with everything else that has been brought up in this discussion, is an interesting discussion topic; i.e. how much tradition and modernity are interrelated. This issue can also be seen in relation to technology and the rest of the characters. For example, Mwita is a traditionalist when it comes to relationships and the hierarchy of genders (even though he is forced to change his way of thinking) yet modern in the sense that he, as a male, takes on nursing duties and weaves when he is stressed.

3.4 Swedish Course Plan

The discussed approaches and issues are connected to the different perspectives of the Swedish course plan. The ethical perspective is highly relevant in relation to Who Fears Death. As discussed, the novel both challenges and gives different views on the Seven Rivers Kingdom. It is about giving the students the ability to reflect on their own personal views through a different cultural setting. For example, Onye is a rebel at heart. First, she rebels by going through the 11th rite that her mother disapproves of. Secondly, she rebels by challenging the whole system that the world is built on in order to find her place in the world; to find the core of her personal identity. This identity is developed through meetings and interactions with people who hate her for being Ewu. Through these interactions, she finds a self-worth that manifests itself in her magical abilities. She is a noble predator who can interact with people even though there are boundaries that should not be possible to break.

The environmental perspective is about being safe in one's environment. Throughout the novel, Onye rarely feels safe due to the threat of her father, the community and traditions. She has very few safe places in the world and cannot gain safety even in her dreams, where Daib is a
constant presence. She has a few relationships that create a safe environment; her mother, Mwita and Luyu. Otherwise it is in the desert, as a nomad, that she feels safe. This is further proved when the group comes face to face with The Red People. By them, she is treated and accepted like any other, and even looked up to due to her magical abilities. The Red People are free of judgment when it comes to ethnicity, sexuality and tradition and their community is built on ‘togetherness’. Everyone helps everyone when it comes to taking care of children, cooking and other everyday aspects of life. They also do not follow the traditional view on marriage; in this desert storm, everyone can sleep with anyone if both parties agree. This fluidity is something that Onye adores. Luyu and the others also enjoy The Red People’s culture. The only one who is showing some opposition to it is Mwita, and this may be linked to his traditional view on relationships. The international perspective is closely linked to what Alkestrand (2016) writes about the dialogue with ‘the other’; to gain a greater understanding of other cultures one should create a dialogue with ‘the other’ and read up on said culture. This is to make it less alien and one of the bridges is to find similarities instead of differences.

In the classroom, this can be applied through the different approaches and perspectives mentioned earlier in this essay. One important aspect that has not been discussed in this essay so far is that of student's influence on the literature that is chosen. As a teacher one can still set requirements in terms of characteristics such as genre (fantasy) and protagonist (youth), then the students can come up with a few examples of titles and one can add them to a list with pre-determined titles. This will enable students to feel heard and help them to make decisions; which both are connected to the ethical and environmental perspectives.
4. Conclusion

Many Swedish classrooms today have a great mixture of cultures, traditions and religions represented. It is thus of the greatest importance that the classrooms and schools are breeding grounds for positive and reflective subjects that will enable a safe environment by and for everyone. Examples of tools to use to achieve this are discussions and analysis. By using fantasy literature one can discuss and analyze cultural, sexual, gendered, traditional and religious differences with some distance that enables students to take in and understand aspects and issues that they might not otherwise understand. Young adult fantasy often has a theme of rebellion that is aimed towards non-democratic views that include racism, xenophobia, sexism and homophobia as well as adults viewing youths as insignificant. It is also nearly always portrays youth protagonists who go through issues that are relatable for the young readers. This in turn can act as a motivator for the readers/students to analyze the issues and connect them to reality. It is like Alkestrand (2016) says; that children are mighty because they own the future. If they become aware and able to identify and discuss these issues from a democratic point of view the intercultural classroom will become a safe, understanding and accepting environment. Depending on what fantasy text one decides to work with there will be many different approaches and perspectives one can apply that will bring the issues at hand to focus in a didactic and democratic way. To help the students get involved one should try and apply and follow the ‘must have’ list and present a few literary works to choose from. Then one, as a teacher, needs research the background to the books, the authors and cultural influences as well as read the book to get a better understanding of the themes, issues and allegories that exist within the work. When this is done, the teacher can start applying and work out discussion and analyzing questions that fit the books so that students know how and what they are to focus on in order to analyze and question the aspects of the books in relation to different realities around the world. It is a way to challenge the binary oppositions and discourses that are common in popular culture and other aspects of life.

In conclusion, the fantasy genre is a great tool to use in the classroom to lessen the bridges between different cultures since the genre questions creates an arena for intercultural
meetings where ‘the other’ is in focus, which reduces the alienating aspect of different cultures and identities. The varying representations can be problematic or positive and it is important to highlight this when reading a fantasy novel; that it is not a representation but a fictionalized reality with inspiration from real-world issues.
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