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University**

Faculty of Education and Natural Sciences

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**Master`s Thesis**

**The possibilities of YA fantasy literature in  
upper secondary subject English when  
teaching the interdisciplinary topic “health  
and life skills”**

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Skien, 2020

Åsne Hovden Sunde

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## Norsk sammendrag

Denne oppgaven undersøker fantasilitteratur for unge voksne og hvordan den kan implementeres på videregående i faget engelsk i Norsk skole. Mer konkret fokuserer det på hvordan det kan brukes når man arbeider med det tverrfaglige temaet "folkehelse og livsmestring" fra den nye nasjonale læreplanen. Jeg har valgt ut emner som er relevante for det tverrfaglige temaet for å utforske didaktiske muligheter, og disse er identitet, aktørskap, mangfold og brutalitet. Innenfor temaet mangfold bestemte jeg meg for å fokusere på kjønnsroller, funksjonshemninger, LHBTQ og multikulturalisme. I temaet brutalitet inkluderte jeg temaene vold, slaveri og seksuell mishandling. Jeg eksemplifiserer hvordan disse temaene kan brukes i sammenheng med fantasilitteratur for unge voksne gjennom en litterær analyse av den valgte romanen *Six of Crows* (2015) av Leigh Bardugo.

Studien er basert på litterær teori og didaktisk teori om ungdomslitteratur og fantasilitteratur, samt de utvalgte emnene som er relevante for folkehelse og livsmestring, og som presenteres i teorikapitlet. I tillegg gjennomfører denne studien også en litterær analyse av *Six of Crows* (2015). Funnene fra teorikapitlet og den litterære analysen blir drøftet i sammenheng med læreplanen i engelsk og den nye nasjonale læreplanen, med fokus på det tverrfaglige emnet folkehelse og livsmestring. Til slutt utforsker mulige didaktiske muligheter med fantasilitteratur i sammenheng med det tverrfaglige temaet, hvor jeg drøfter ulike måter den utvalgte romanen kan bli brukt i engelskfaget og mulige utfordringer som kan oppstå.

## Abstract

This thesis examines young adult (YA) fantasy literature and how it can be implemented in upper secondary school in the English subject classroom in Norway. More specifically, it focuses on how it can be used when working with the interdisciplinary topic “health and life skills” from the new national curriculum. An assortment of topics relevant to health and life skills has been selected to explore the educational benefits: identity, agency, diversity, and brutality. Within the topic of diversity, I decided to focus on gender roles, disabilities, LGBTQ, and multiculturalism. On the subject of brutality, I included violence, slavery, and sexual abuse. I exemplify how these topics can be used in relation to YA fantasy literature, through a literary analysis of the chosen novel *Six of Crows* (2015) by Leigh Bardugo.

The study is based on literary theory and didactic theory concerning young adult literature and fantasy literature, as well as the selected topics relevant to health and life skills, which are presented in a literature review. The second research method is a close reading of *Six of Crows* (2015). The findings from the literature review and the close reading are discussed in relation to the English subject curriculum and the new core curriculum, in which the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills is the focal point. Finally, it explores possible didactic benefits of the fantasy genre in relation to the interdisciplinary topic, and I discuss overarching concerns in the chosen novel and teaching implications.

# 1 Introduction

In her book *Fantasy literature for children and young adults: a comprehensive guide*, Ruth Nadelman Lynn (2005) asks “Does fantasy have any function beyond entertainment?” (p. 18). The inquiry has been a topic of conversation surrounding the usefulness of fantasy literature, and many would argue that it does not. This opinion was a point of inspiration for this entire thesis and the overall thesis statement. It all started in a heated debate with a family member back in 2017. I was asked what sort of literature I preferred and confessed to having an affinity towards fantasy; the family member in question could not fathom why. She could not understand why I would read fantasy when there was so much literature out there that would be much more fulfilling and academically stimulating. She described it as a waste of time and merely a source of entertainment. This would, later on, inspire this thesis, a thesis on why we should be reading fantasy literature, and why it is not a waste of time. In fact, I think fantasy literature can be used to meet central aims in Norwegian education.

The new core curriculum, which will be in effect from the fall 2020 onwards for all primary and secondary education and training, has created a new approach to the pedagogical practice in Norway (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 3). The purpose of the core curriculum is to guide teachers concerning how to give pupils the necessary tools to learn about the world and to develop as humans (pp. 3-6). To assist in this development, the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, has been created (p. 15). It functions as a way to promote good physical and mental health for pupils (p. 15). The English subject is one of the subjects responsible for implementing the health and life skills topic (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). It has to be used while fulfilling the objective of the English subject, which is for pupils to gain and develop language skills, understanding of other cultures, and personal identity (p. 8).

I believe YA fantasy literature can be used to teach the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, in the English subject curriculum. This is because YA fantasy literature can help us better understand ourselves, other people, and the world we live in, in a unique and unconventional way (Lynn, 2005, p. 18). Lynn believes that fantasy often illustrates a more authentic version of reality than other seemingly more realistic genres (p. 16). Fantasy can work as both an escape and immersion in reality (Lynn, 2005; Gates, Steffel & Molson,

2003). YA fantasy can work as a safe environment where pupils can discover who they are without taking actual risks (Gates, Steffel & Molson, 2003).

## 1.1 Thesis aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine how YA fantasy has didactic benefits for Norwegian L2 learners of English in upper secondary school. Furthermore, it aims to explore how YA fantasy can be utilized in regards to the interdisciplinary topic “health and life skills” from the new national curriculum in Norway. My research questions are:

1. What are the didactic benefits of using fantasy literature aimed at young adults?
2. How can YA fantasy literature in general, and Leigh Bardugo’s *Six of Crows* (2015) in particular, be used to teach the interdisciplinary topic “health and life skills” in the English subject?

To help me explore and discuss the second research question I have chosen an assortment of topics relevant to the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, that will serve as points of discussion when analyzing *Six of Crows* (2015). The topics chosen are identity, agency, diversity, and brutality. The topic diversity focuses on gender roles, disabilities, LGBTQ, and multiculturalism. While the topic brutality focuses on violence, slavery, and sexual abuse.

## 1.2 Relevance of thesis

The core curriculum states that school is expected to “*facilitate for and support the pupils’ development in the five basic skills*” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 14). Among those is the basic skill reading, and relating to that skill they offer up the example: “there is continuous progression, starting from when one first learns to read and write all the way to acquiring the ability to read advanced subject texts.” (p. 14). This means that the pupils should be able to read literature such as YA fantasy in upper secondary school, because the genre is aimed towards individuals in that age group.

Crag Hill (2014) believes there are three ways to use and research YA literature in schools: “Find the books that fit all kinds of readers (reluctant, sporadic, recreational, passionate)” (p. 8), “provide resources for secondary teachers” (p. 8), and “design qualitative/quantitative



research to measure the efficacy of pedagogical strategies using YA literature” (p. 8).

Through qualitative research of utilizing YA fantasy literature in upper secondary school, I hope to assist in finding motivating books for pupils and provide a resource for other teachers. In this way, I hope to assist in encouraging the use of YA literature in the classroom.

Furthermore, I discuss the new core curriculum and the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, that has been added as a way to further facilitate learning on prevailing societal challenges. By examining how to apply the interdisciplinary topic to the English subject, I develop new knowledge that can be relevant for teachers when implementing the new core curriculum into their teaching lessons.

### **1.3 Outline of thesis**

The thesis is structured in eight chapters. The first chapter clarifies the overall thesis aim and research questions. It explains the relevance of using YA fantasy in schools, and what I hope to achieve by writing this thesis. The second chapter consists of the research methods that have been used in this thesis; qualitative research in the form of a literature review and a close reading of the novel *Six of Crows* (2015) by the author Leigh Bardugo. Chapter three provides an outline of YA literature and fantasy as a genre through literary and didactic theory. Chapter four establishes the educational context in Norway and provides an overview of the new core curriculum, including the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills, and the updated subject curriculum that is relevant for this thesis. Chapter five contains an outline of a set of chosen themes linked to health and life skills and YA fantasy. These are broken into four main sections: identity, agency, diversity and brutality. In chapter six, I conduct a literary analysis of Bardugo's novel in relation to the chosen themes from the previous chapter. This includes analysis of characters and situations from the novel, and how they can pertain to the various themes. Chapter seven explores possible didactic benefits of *Six of Crows* (2015), and examines overarching concerns and possible teaching implications of the novel. The final chapter formulates a conclusion to the research questions and the overall aim of the thesis.

## 2 Methodology

The research method applied throughout this thesis is qualitative research in the form of a literature review and close reading of the novel *Six of Crows* (Bardugo, 2015).

### 2.1 Literature review

Arlene Fink defines literature review as “a systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluation, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners.” (2014, p. 3). A literature review aims to provide an overview of existing literature on a selected topic, for this paper the topic of choice is YA fantasy literature and education. Obtaining an overview of the topic helps establish my own position in the existing field. Furthermore, a literature review presents the reader with where they enter the academic conversation on the selected topic.

In order to establish the didactic potential of YA fantasy literature, I have read and reviewed a wide range of academic sources. These were located through the library and database searches. Search words that were used to collect relevant research included words such as “fantasy”, “young adult”, “literature”, “education”, and “teaching”. I located several sources that were useful when defining terminology and clarifying the positive effects of reading fantasy literature. To provide an overview of the different types of fantasy, I found that Levy and Mendlesohn`s book *Children`s Fantasy Literature* (2016) was particularly helpful, as it offers up a range of critical definitions applicable to the fantasy genre to distinguish the various types of fantasy.

Secondly, as the thesis aims to examine the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, from the new core curriculum, as well as how to use it in the English subject curriculum, I supplied the essential information needed to understand the curricula and educational context. To create an overview of the educational framework in Norway, I compiled the most important aspects of the core curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2019) and the subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019) that are relevant for my thesis questions. These are official documents available through the Ministry and Directorate`s websites.

Lastly, I assembled an assortment of research on the chosen themes linked to health and life skills and YA fantasy literature. I systematically organized existing literature and theories on the selected themes relevant to health and life skills: identity, agency, diversity (gender roles, disabilities, LGBTQ and multiculturalism), and brutality (violence, slavery, and sexual abuse). I accumulated necessary data through searches in the library and databases, as well as non-academic sources. It became apparent that there is a lack of information on many of the topics related to health skills in relation to fantasy literature and education, and non-academic sources provided a much-needed source of information on specific topics relevant to this thesis.

## **2.2 Close reading**

Close reading means to scrutinize and pay special attention to a text (Catterson, 2017, p. 3). The paradigms of close reading may differ, however, depending on the objective (p. 3). The types of texts chosen for close reading, and “assumptions about where meaning resides”, will be determined by the intention of doing a close reading (p. 3). In this thesis the aim is to explore possible educational benefits of YA fantasy literature, which meant that it would be beneficial to do a close reading of a specific work within that genre. I also had to consider aspects relevant to the interdisciplinary topic health skills, which meant I had to find a text that inhabited qualities relevant to the topic.

I conducted a close reading of Leigh Bardugo’s *Six of Crows* (2015), and subsequently completed a literary analysis of the content of the novel. I have read many works of literature in the selected genre, YA fantasy, and based on this, I found that Bardugo’s novel was the best suited for addressing the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills. The novel inhabits the characteristics commonly found in YA fantasy literature, as well as containing a plethora of elements relevant to, health and life skills, from the core curriculum. This made it an excellent candidate for investigating the didactic benefits of using YA fantasy to teach health and life skills in the English subject.

Prior to reading the chosen novel, I decided to establish the themes related to health and life skills of the thesis. The established themes would then serve as a guideline when performing the close reading of *Six of Crows* (2015), that way I would know what to look for as I was

reading the novel. The literary analysis of the novel includes the examination of the six main characters, as well as further content and examples from the novel relevant for the thesis. Theory outlined in chapter 5, on the different themes linked to health and life skills and YA fantasy literature, has been applied to the study of the characters and content of Bardugo's novel.

### **2.3 Limitations and potential problems**

As this was not an empirical study, the thesis can only offer assumptions and suggestions on the proposed analysis and theory. There has also been an evident lack of academic research that explicitly refers to YA fantasy literature and the didactic possibilities of the literary genre. The lack of research means that the majority of my sources has only included some of the aspects of my research questions. There has also been an apparent absence of information correlating to the use of YA fantasy texts in the context of Norwegian schools; this means that most of the theoretical evidence has been gathered outside the geographical area of Norway.

The new core curriculum has not been fully established in Norwegian schools yet, which means that there has not been done much research on how to implement it. As the curriculum has not been implemented yet, there are no empirical studies available, which results in a lack of evidence proving the didactic benefits of using such texts in the classroom in regards to the new core curriculum.

### **2.4 Justification of research strategy**

The revised core curriculum does seemingly open up for the possibilities to have a greater freedom when choosing what to include in lesson plans. This means that YA fantasy is a relevant genre to explore and use for Norwegian L2 learners of English in upper secondary school, because it can offer up new information that can be valuable for teachers. The limitations mentioned above correlating to the lack of academic research within the specific research questions for this thesis, confirm the need to fill a gap in existing research. The absence of research in this field demonstrates why this project is valuable, because it will advocate for a genre in literature that is often overlooked and underestimated in favor for other genres.

The combination of literature review and the close reading of Leigh Bardugo`s novel can provide a great deal of material to explore the didactic benefits of YA fantasy literature. The literature review lays down essential information of the themes chosen in relation to the new core curriculum, as well as the necessary information of the different topics discussed, and works as a foundation to the close reading of the novel, *Six of Crows* (2015). The findings from the literature review and close reading would then in combination validate why YA fantasy literature can contribute to the development of health and life skills.

Leigh Bardugo`s novel *Six of Crows* (2015) is a part of a duology, where the second novel is titled *Crooked Kingdom* (2016). The reason for choosing the first novel exclusively was because it had enough content needed for the literary analysis. Furthermore, it was a conscious decision to choose one book, this was to exemplify how it is more realistic for pupils to read a single book in a school context, as there is usually not enough time or resources to read multiple books in a series.

### 3 YA fantasy literature

#### 3.1 YA literature

The world of literature is continually changing, as are the genres and categories within. One such genre is young adult (YA) literature. The definition of YA literature can be challenging to outline, and people have offered a variety of descriptions of the genre throughout the years. The lack of a precise and agreed upon definition could create confusion concerning what constitutes as YA literature (Hill, 2014, p. 6).

There is little consensus concerning precisely who the young adult is. The differing views on the age range described by the term are part of the reason why there are different definitions of the term. Joan F. Kaywell discovered in a survey of the members of the Conference on English Education Commission on the Study and Teaching of Young Adult Literature a variety of ages used in the several definitions (2001, as cited in Bucher & Hinton, 2014, p. 4). The survey included ages between 10 and 21, 11 and 16, and between the ages 12 to 22 (p. 4).

Since there are different ways of defining the term YA, there are also different ways of defining the term YA literature. Iyer (2011) is among those who have offered up a definition on YA literature:

The term young adult is now used for books aimed at 14- to 17-year-olds, books that engage with the world through the filter of a teen protagonist's experiences. As young adult novels are specifically written for and marketed to teens, they are held to higher standards of accuracy and authenticity in their portrayal of the teen experience than adult fiction featuring teens. (pp. 20-21)

Iyer focuses on a specific age as well as how the narrative should be told from the perspective of the intended reader. The depiction of the teen is also set to a higher standard than other types of literature. There is a more significant focus on portraying authentic characters that reflect the experiences and emotions of a typical teen.

Other definitions may focus on such things as the characteristics of the content in the novel, instead of the exact age of the intended audience for the novel. Small (1992, as cited in Hill, 2014) defines YA literature as books where:

“the main character is a teenager, events and problems in the plot are related to teenagers, the main character is the center of the plot, dialogue reflects teenage speech, including slang, the point of view presents an adolescent’s interpretation of events and people, the teenage main character is usually perceptive, sensitive, intelligent, mature, and independent, the novel is short and rarely more than 200 pages, and the actions and decisions of the main characters are major factors in the outcome of the conflict.” (p. 6)

Small focuses on specific characteristics that are viewed as typical to teenagers. The characters have to inhabit the qualities and traits of teenagers. Small also specifies the number of pages. This definition is quite narrow and quite different from the one offered by Iyer (2011, pp. 20-21). Unlike Small’s definition, it specifies the age group of the intended reader, and even though it also states that the character should reflect the typical teen experience, it does not specify what sorts of experiences that might be. It is because of such different definitions that there is confusion around the topic of what exactly YA literature is.

The term can also be defined in a way that distinguishes it from children’s and adult literature. Hilton and Nikolajeva (2012, pp. 1-2) discuss how adolescence, and then the following literary genre YA first appeared. They argue that scholars have determined that the psychologist and educationalist Stanley Hall was one of the first to apply the term “adolescence” to define a separate mode of being in his work of the same name in 1904 (pp. 1-2). Hall examined the “psychology of normative development to distinguish a separate age between the onset of puberty and mature adulthood.” (p.2). He was, therefore, one of the first to try to categorize and label the process that happens between being a child to transforming into an adult. With this distinction, we could eventually try to formulate and separate the YA genre from the children’s and adult genre (p. 2).

Following this discovery of a new stage in human development and its subsequent labeling, the birth of a new genre would inevitably enter the literary world. There are varying opinions on exactly which book was the first one that was considered a YA novel. Cart (2010) argues that *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly, which was published in 1942, was the first book

to be deliberately marketed towards young adults. He explains that the market began to realize that teenagers could be a target in merchandising and how the new genre sprung up because of its new demand in society (p. 11). This explains how a new market emerged after the Second World War because of the economic change in society and it was made possible for youth to obtain previously inaccessible merchandise (p. 11).

Hilton and Nikolajeva (2012) agree that the construction of the term adolescence did not result in immediate representation of it in fiction. They support Cart's (2010) claim that it was the Second World War that forced a change in the market. However, Hilton and Nikolajeva (2012) describe this change as development in sociological and psychological thinking in society in addition to the economic change. They discuss how there was an absence of the "psychological configuration as a separate part of human existence" (p. 4). They describe the lack of any significant depth and affect in the teenage characters that were described in the books written before and after the Great War and then the Depression. This way of portraying the adolescent character continued until the Second World War. They quoted Victor Watson, who observed, "One consequence of the Great War was that for more than half a century, writers of children's books set their hearts against maturation" (pp. 5-6). The shock and trauma during these troubled decades made it so that popular writing became an essential source of escape among the public. Staying clear of such topics as teenage angst, the authors of that time focused on lively characters with little to worry about (p. 5). The change in adolescent writing that took place after the Second World War was a result of how "Writers who had survived the war as children and young adults themselves began to reject the sentimental tradition and the invisibility of teenage interiority in twentieth-century literature for the young." (p. 6). There was no more hiding the psychological construction of adolescence.

With the time of prosperity after the war in the early 1950s, there was a rise in the consumption of goods among young people (Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012, p. 7; Garcia, 2013, p. 5). Furthermore, with this change in the consumer market, came the critique of the genre. The writers and the consumer demanded a change; they desired characters with psychological depth, whether that be of the positive or negative kind (Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012, p. 7; Garcia, 2013, p. 5). This change is illustrated by Hilton and Nikolajeva (2012) by how "the adolescent reform novel of the late nineteenth century had contained characters, ethical characters who transcend their society by some form of self-reliance, providing hope for the



society's future change" (p. 7), while the aftermath of the Second World War showcased how "the adolescent protagonist appears as vulnerable to breakdown and inner conflict as society itself." (p. 7). The public no longer dismissed the idea of a legitimate portrayal of the intricate process of an individual's journey from child to adult in literature.

### **3.1.1 Defining YA literature in this thesis**

Taking into consideration the various contributions on the topic of young adult (YA) literature, I offer, for this thesis, the following definition: YA literature is a genre of fiction, and is generally aimed towards teenagers/young adults. The process in which a child transforms into an adult may differ from one individual to another. Therefore, it is difficult to establish the exact age in which a person falls into the target group of the young adult genre. YA literature is identified through an assortment of characteristics. To create a clear context for this thesis, I offer the definition, of Bucher and Hinton (2014), who describe it as

"a blend of enduring adolescence and constant change. For our purposes, young adult literature will be defined as literature in prose or verse that has excellence of form or expression in its genre provides a unique adolescent point of view, and reflects the concerns, interests, and challenges of contemporary young." (p. 8)

This definition demonstrates an understanding of the intricate process in which adolescents often find themselves in during their transition to adulthood. It is an all-encompassing definition that takes into account the most critical aspects and does not exclude essential traits that are often included in what is considered YA literature among authors and publishers.

## **3.2 Fantasy literature**

Fantasy as a literary genre is a broad category and resists a clear and consistent definition (Lynn, 2005, p. 16; Fimi, 2017, p. 2). Fantasy has been around for a long time, and the earliest traces are found in mythology from the word *phantasticus*, which is Latin and can be translated to `fantastic`; meaning to make visible or manifest (Jackson, 2009, p. 8). This all-encompassing word does not aid us in the search for a precise definition. What has been prevalent is using fantasy fiction as a tool to explore the mysteries of the world without the

limitation of size, time or space (Gates, Molson & Steffel, 2003, p. 2). The writing of fantasy has continually changed as the circumstances have transformed. The influence of time and place, as well as history and culture, has affected and changed the way fantasy literature is written (Fimi, 2017). Transformations within literature is not a new concept, as society develops and changes, elements within will change along with it. Nevertheless, the genre has some aspects to it that stay consistent and have been shared across all fantasy literature (2017).

The element of the impossible in the genre of fantasy has been the most prevalent component and is widely accepted as a way to identify literature as fantasy (Lynn, 2005, p. 16; Fimi, 2017, p. 2; James & Mendlesohn, 2012, p. 1). Fantasy does not follow the rules of being `possible` or `real` (Jackson, 2009, p.8). The genre is not constricted, and words such as preposterous, unthinkable, and unimaginable are not an issue, because this is a genre that celebrates the impossible and absurd (p. 8).

There has also been a need for the element good vs. evil throughout the history of fantasy literature, although this component has become more obscure in recent literary works (Gates, Molson & Steffel, 2003, p. 2; Lynn, 2005, p. 16). There has been a need in humans to seek understanding of the conflict between good and evil, and preferably the good overcoming the evil. The struggle has been central since the beginning; in stories from ancient mythology, to fairy tales and onwards to modern fantasy (Gates, Molson & Steffel, 2003, p. 2-6). It has been shown in stories about rescuing the innocent and good princess from her evil stepmother to conquering the monster harming the good people of a village. People seek to clearly define who is good and who is evil, to get it in black and white (p. 2-6). However, with more comprehensive and new material, these lines are becoming more blurred. We are witnessing more complex characters in modern literature; they are not strictly defined as either bad or good; they are inhabiting qualities of both. This is a reflection of the complexity of human beings in general, because people are not exclusively bad or good.

The fantasy genre has a long and rich history, and the meaning of what is perceived as fantasy has also changed throughout history (Indick, 2012, pp. 1-2). The literary genre stems from many places; it originates from places like the classic fairytales, mythology, and folklores, from a time when stories were told by word of mouth (Indick, 2012, p. 1; Fimi, 2017, p. 1). One could say that "the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book" (McCafferty,

2017), *The Bible*, could fall into the fantasy genre (Zipes, 2009, p.78). *The Bible* certainly operates by a different set of rules, with a universe that defies our laws of physics (p. 78). With flying chariots, mythological creatures like the giant Goliath, people with magical powers, and a world filled with demons and angels, the Bible inhabits the characteristics that are often seen in fantasy literature.

### 3.2.1 The purpose of fantasy

People have continuously had a thirst for the “otherness” fantasy offers up; there has always been a great appeal in the fantasy genre (Zipes, 2009). Fiction literature allows us to step into someone else’s shoes and get away from our own lives. Fantasy fiction does this on a grander scale than other types of literature. It gives us the chance to get lost in another world, where the opportunities are more excellent. In fantasy, the reader is allowed to step into a fictional universe where events can occur outside the ordinary laws of physics. Fantasy makes it possible to transform the plain and dull into something exciting and fantastic. People seek to have a place where there are no boundaries and where they can live out some of their most profound wishes and desires, and fantasy can give type of illusion (2009).

Fantasy is undoubtedly a source of entertainment, although there is a great deal more to it than that (Lynn, 2005, p. 18). Fantasy can not only help us understand ourselves and others better but also creates a “unique way of helping us to better understand our own world.” (p. 18). Through the portrayal of characters, the reader can gain insight into themselves by identifying with them or their situation. Identification of self through others is common in not only fantasy but in all types of literature (2005). Some critics believe fantasy “may portray a truer version of reality than many or most realistic novels” (p. 16). Zipes (2009) is among those that believe fantasy and reality are closely linked, that “It is through the fictive projections of our imaginations based on personal experience that we have sought to grasp, explain, alter, and comment on reality.” (p. 78). He argues that this could explain why texts such as the Bible and the Grimm’s fairy tales became so influential and significant. They merge with reality while simultaneously challenging it through elements of fantasy (p.78).

Fantasy has been criticized of being “evasive, escapist, and counterproductive; in fact, they conclude, it is a kind of moral and psychological cowardice.” (Gates, Molson & Steffel, 2003,

p. 3). We acknowledge how fantasy can aid us in escaping reality. Nonetheless, it can also help us in immersing ourselves in reality (Lynn, 2005, p. 16; Gates, Molson & Steffel, 2003, p. 3). It can illuminate our world by exploring moral, philosophical, and other dilemmas applicable to all worlds (Lynn, 2005, p. 18). Gates, Molson & Steffel (2003) discuss how respite offered up by fantasy is healthy and productive, and suggest how it “can foster skill in designing scenarios whereby individuals can pursue alternatives or try out new roles without actual risk” (p. 3). Fantasy creates a window where we can explore possibilities within ourselves. Hence, they argue that fantasy “needs to be cultivated rather than denigrated” (p. 3).

### 3.2.2 Categories of fantasy

Critics, historians, and bibliographers of literature offer up a plethora of categories, modes, and sub-genres of fantasy literature (Gates, Molson & Steffel, 2003, p. 7). The debate continually changes as we are frequently introduced to new types of fantasy. There is and will probably continue to be little consensus around the topic of identifying different types of fantasy (p. 7).

Fantasy is popularly categorized as high fantasy/epic fantasy and low fantasy (MasterClass, 2019). High fantasy and epic fantasy have been encompassed to one, as they are similar to one another. This type is set in an entirely fictional fantasy world, with its own rules and physical laws (MasterClass, 2019; Fimi, 2017, p. 3). The plot revolves typically around a great quest, involving multiple characters and centering around one particular character or group. Low fantasy is that which takes place in the real world, though it includes elements of fantasy (MasterClass, 2019; Fimi, 2017, p. 3). However, I think it is necessary to distinguish more clearly between different types of fantasy.

In their book, *Children`s Fantasy Literature*, Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn (2016) discuss a range of critical definitions applicable to the fantasy genre (p. 3). These could help identify and understand the different types of fantasy that exist in literature. These four modes of fantasy are the following: *portal-quest fantasy*, *intrusion fantasy*, *immersive fantasy*, and *liminal fantasy* (2016).

*Portal-quest fantasy* revolves around the protagonists being situated in a tourist narrative, in which the characters have entered a fantastic world through a portal (Levy & Mendlesohn, 2016, p.3). The protagonists are, in this case, in a world foreign to them and have little access to the foundation of the world. *Intrusion* fantasy is when the fantastic befalls the normative world (pp. 3-4). It is set in our world, but there has been an intrusion of elements of the fantastic. This disruption continues until defeated, and the world is expected to go more or less back to normal, until the next intrusion. *Immersive* fantasy is a mode in which the fantastic world is constructed as the primary world for all characters (p. 4). The reader is treated as being a part of the world; there is little explanation to it. *Liminal* fantasy, as with intrusive fantasy, is also set in our world (p. 4). The difference is that when the fantastic appear, the characters usually accept them as a normal part of life. It is perceived as standard for the protagonists, but not the reader, and usually adopts a blasé tone (2016).

### 3.2.3 Didactic benefits of fantasy

Why should fantasy literature be taught in school? Melissa Thomas (2003) lists two reasons for why fantasy literature can be the perfect tool to use in the classroom:

1. Students like it
2. It is a metaphor for the human condition – ripe with mythic structures, heroic cycles, and social and religious commentary (p. 60)

There has been a certain stigma among literary critics attached to the fantasy genre; nonetheless, it has been proven popular among the general public (Thomas, 2003). The massive success of book series such as *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2000) and *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 2014) has proven that there are a great appeal and desire for what is offered in the fantasy genre (Kain, 2019). The global success of literary works in fantasy shows how popular the genre is, among both the young and older generations. Fantasy is such a vast and all-encompassing genre and can cater to a variety of interests. Those claiming not to enjoy reading could discover the wonders of reading through finding the right book, and many could find this in fantasy. To have a genre that is well-liked increases the possibility of pupils being interested in reading the assigned texts.

As Thomas (2003) remarks, fantasy literature serves as a metaphor for the real world. It offers up a version of reality that is seemingly distant but is, in fact, heightening our perceived reality. Through elements such as mythical depictions, portrayals of heroes and villains, and interpretations of social and religious experiences, pupils can analyze the world in which they live in a unique way (2003). Human experiences do not have to change even if we are transformed into a new world, but how we perceive and understand those human experiences can. Additionally, fantasy can expose and portray diversity and prejudice to pupils in a different way than what they might be used to (Shaw, 2018). The absurd is often more accepted in the world of fantasy, and the exposure of otherwise marginalized voices could result in a more accepting attitude among pupils. In the next chapter, I introduce the educational context in which YA fantasy literature is supposed to be used in this thesis.

## 4 Curricula and educational context

In Norway, all primary and secondary education and training are required to follow the core curriculum, as well as the connecting subject curricula. The core curriculum functions as an outline for the “values and principles for primary and secondary education and training” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 3). The subject curriculum is a regulation that forms a binding foundation for the curriculum in different subjects (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). It clarifies the relevance and central values of each subject. The core curriculum is supposed to give direction in all the subjects, while the subject curricula are explicitly relevant for one specific subject.

### 4.1 Core curriculum

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, a new core curriculum was “laid down by Royal Decree” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 3). The core curriculum should in its essence be used as a guidance tool and foundation on how teachers can educate pupils in “all lower and secondary education and training” (p. 3). The core curriculum also addresses “the responsibility of the school and training establishments” (p. 3), of providing “education and all-round development” (p. 3) to all participants in primary and secondary education and training (p. 3). The objectives clause has been constructed to express the “values that unite the Norwegian society” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 6). It is created to help us live in unity amid an unpredictable and complex world. It has been established with regards to “Christian and humanist heritage and tradition” (p. 6), in addition to other religions, worldviews, and human rights. The core curriculum underlines a variety of values that schools are obliged to follow going forward. These values are the following:

1. Human dignity
2. Identity and cultural diversity
3. Critical thinking and ethical awareness
4. The joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore
5. Respect for nature and environmental awareness
6. Democracy and participation (2019)

The goal of primary and secondary education and training is set to strengthen an individual's intellectual autonomy, wide-ranging development, independence, responsibility, and capability of compassion towards others (Ministry of Education, 2019). The teaching is supposed to create a foundation where the pupils can understand not only themselves but also others and the world they live in. The core curriculum states that the childhood and adolescent years are complicated times, times of discovery and finding oneself, and that schools must acknowledge the intrinsic value of this (p. 12). Furthermore, it explains that the school plays an essential role in the development of the pupils, and it is their job to help them gain the necessary skills and abilities to learn and develop. These are all qualities that are relevant to the following interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, which is the focus of this thesis.

## **4.2 Interdisciplinary topics: Health and life skills**

Society is facing challenges not only nationally, but also internationally, both on an individual level and in communities (Ministry of Education, 2019). These are being addressed in a section in the new core curriculum through what has been titled interdisciplinary topics. These three specific interdisciplinary topics will be incorporated into primary and secondary education. The topics are health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development. However, only the first two topics are mentioned in the English subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). As the three interdisciplinary topics focus on challenges in society, the core curriculum states that they are topics that require involvement and effort from both individuals and society, on a national and international level (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The aim is for the pupils to work on the interdisciplinary topics within the regular school subjects, and thereby gaining insight into the challenges and dilemmas within the various subjects. The main aim of the interdisciplinary topics is for the pupils to acquire knowledge and understand the connections between the subjects (Ministry of Education, 2019). I focus on one of these topics in this thesis, namely health and life skills, and I will now discuss it in more detail.

Health and life skills is a broad subject, but is in its essence meant to promote good physical and mental health (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 15). With this new subject, there will be



more focus on the intricate and complex time that is the childhood and adolescent years (p. 15). The Ministry of Education states that: “A society which gives the individual the platform from which to make good health choices will have great impact on health.” (p. 15). The topic will work as a way to educate pupils on how to make good health choices, to create a positive and healthy environment for everyone. The second part of the topic refers to the concept of agency: “Life skills refers to the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life.” (p. 15). The goal for pupils to attain life skills means to achieve agency, in short it means to be able to make your own choices and actions (Meyers, n.d.). To feel as if one is in control of their own life, can have a significant impact on an individual’s mental health (Lamia, 2010). Agency will be discussed further in chapter 5.

There is a series of relevant topics within health and life skills, and this thesis focuses on the following: identity, agency, diversity (gender roles, disabilities, LGBTQ and multiculturalism), and brutality (violence, slavery, sexual abuse. These are issues that can be directly linked to literary works within the genre of YA fantasy, where the chosen novel *Six of Crows* (Bardugo, 2019) is among those. Health and life skills can be utilized in the English subject curriculum as a way to help each pupil attain necessary knowledge of the interdisciplinary topic, and literature could be a tool in this process.

### **4.3 English subject curriculum**

English as a subject in education is valuable when gaining communication skills, cultural understanding, and identity development. The purpose of the English subject curriculum is to give the pupils the necessary tools and knowledge to be able to communicate with people, regardless of their national or cultural background (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). “The subject should help to develop students' understanding that their perception of the world is affected by culture. This can open up to several ways of interpreting the world, help create curiosity and dedication, and help prevent prejudices.” (p. 2, my translation). By recognizing that they are all affected by the cultures they are continually being exposed to, the pupils can gain understanding and reflect on the world they live in.

English is a global lingua franca, meaning it is a global language and is frequently used during moments of communication (Nordquist, 2019). Literature is a form of communication in the sense that it communicates not only the content, but also the language that is being used. English being such a common language, means that there is much more content available for those who speak and read that language. This means that if pupils learn the English language, they will, as a result, have access to a wider range of literature. Being able to read literary works in other languages, as well as content from authors of other nationalities, could strengthen cultural understanding within each pupil.

In the description of the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills concerning the English subject curriculum, there is only mention of two basic skills, oral and writing skills (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). However, in the description for the subject's relevance and central values, it explains how the subject should prepare pupils for further education, as well as a social and working life through giving them reading, writing and oral skills (p. 2). All basic skills are interconnected, and through the use of one, you can strengthen the other skills. Consequently, pupils can develop oral and writing skills by working on their reading skills. Through the learning of basic skills in the English subject, the aim is for the pupils to acquire language proficiency and knowledge of cultures (p. 3). The definitive objective is to build a foundation to help pupils express their wide-ranging thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions (p. 3). In the following chapter, the thesis will present the selected themes that are relevant for the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, in the context of YA fantasy literature.

## 5 Themes linked to health and life skills and YA fantasy literature

### 5.1 Identity

In the new core curriculum, one of the core values of education and training deals with the topic of “identity and cultural diversity” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 7). The curriculum states that “*School shall give pupils historical and cultural insight that will give them a good foundation in their lives and help each pupil to preserve and develop her or his identity in an inclusive and diverse environment.*” (p. 7, italics in original). The core value focuses on the development of the pupils, and they must gain knowledge and insight that help them grow as individuals. School will be a place where the pupils can be given tools that they need to be able to understand and reflect on the world around them (p. 7). In primary and secondary education and training, the development of identity plays a significant part, and the core value emphasizes this and gives teachers direction on how to handle this process regarding the pupils.

Capturing a precise summary of the term identity can prove quite tricky. Identity is such an all-encompassing word. Nevertheless, some have attempted to create an adequate summary that captures the most critical aspects of the word. Identity is generally concerned with inquiries such as who you are (Heshmat, 2014). It focuses on the choices that we make, why we make them, and how those choices shape us. The choices we make reflect on who we are and what our values are (2014).

Identity is what sets us apart from others (NAKU, 2019). We can differentiate between two types of identity, that of personal identity and social identity. Personal identity includes the beliefs, knowledge, and appearance of the individual. Social identity, on the other hand, is family, friends, and other communities, in addition to the profession and geographical affiliation of the individual (2019). All of these components shape our identity, although some might be more pronounced than others, and are weighted differently by different people.

Identity can not only be ascribed by ourselves but also by others (Dyndahl, 2008). Our view of others is often different from how they view themselves. An example can be that we view

someone as angry, while that person would describe themselves as depressed. Identity is shaped by those around us, such as parents, peers, among others (NAKU, 2019). People are affected by how others perceive them. If pupils are continually encouraged and praised academically, it could help make them perceive themselves as smart and, in turn, make them more confident in school.

Defining oneself can be a tough process for many (NAKU, 2019). The struggle to find one's identity can lead to what is called identity struggle. An individual could be in a dark place in their life or having struggled with something for a long time, which could have, in turn, lead to adopting a darker identity. As a result, what others might view as a positive trait, could be considered negative for the individual (2019). Those struggling with negative views of their identity could lead to them defining themselves as such, they can no longer see the positive but are letting the negative take control.

Identity is never clear-cut or definite; it is an ever-changing process (Heshmat, 2014). It develops and transforms throughout life. To be confident in one's identity can prevent mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. It can also increase self-esteem and make people more sure of themselves. A sense of identity can, therefore, be directly linked to an individual's happiness and contentment (2014). This is especially emphasized in the core curriculum, in the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 15). It mentions how in "the childhood and adolescent years, the development of a positive self-image and confident identity is particularly important." (p. 15). It is therefore, essential to give the pupils the tools and encouragement they need to create a positive view of themselves, especially during such a vulnerable time of their lives.

## **5.2 Agency**

In an article from 2016 written by James W. Moore, he focuses on the sense of agency (p. 1). He describes a sense of agency as "the feeling of control over actions and their consequences" (p.1). The feeling of agency and possessing agency can, therefore, be distinguished from one another. Therefore, the measuring of agency can be challenging (p. 2). Individuals can feel as if they are in charge and inhabit the agency of oneself, but others might view them as not having it. Alternatively, the situation could be in reverse, that others view someone as

inhabiting the ability of agency, while that individual feels a lack of it. This could be called a false sense of agency and autonomy, thinking you are the one in control, but that the reality is quite different.

The ability to influence your own life, to have faith in your own decision making, can affect you as a person (Lamia, 2010). Clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst Mary C. Lamia (2010) claims that having a sense of agency influences your psychological stability, and your ability to see yourself as a separate person. It is therefore important to have a sense of agency, to feel as if they are in control of their own lives (2010). This element is discussed in the interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, as it mentions how life skills can make you able “to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one’s own life.” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p.15). Therefore, we can say that the new curriculum recognizes the importance of agency.

Diana T. Meyers offers up the definition of agency as someone’s ability or capacity to make individualized choices and actions (n.d.). In an article, she has written about the agency of women throughout history, or rather the lack of it, she discusses how institutions and practices throughout time have limited women, though the extent of the limitations has changed depending on time and place. She goes on to explain that because young people absorb cultural norms, they can, in turn, inherit such prejudices and continue to view women as subordinate (n.d.). It can lead to not only the lack of agency but to gain agency. Because institutions and practices limited the agency of women, it strengthened the agency of men. Men have been viewed as superior, and have therefore had more agency as a result of this view. These types of preconceptions and its limitations can be applied to not only women but all types of people. This issue will also be discussed later in this thesis in the selected theme gender roles.

### **5.3 Diversity**

In society and literature, there is an issue of systemic acceptance of dominant social views (Miller, 2014). Society constantly creates an environment where certain characteristics are more accepted than others. Miller claims that people shape their identity according to “dominant narratives along social class, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, gender roles,

sexual orientation, national origin, language, age disability, ability, accent, size (body type), weight, and height.” (p. 57). Through accepting specific social constructions as the norm, people develop and maintain “dichotomous beliefs such as normal/abnormal, superior/inferior, desirable/undesirable, and inclusion/exclusion.” (p.57). This is exemplified in YA literature because there is usually a specific set of characteristics being represented in literature, such as the “white, traditionally beautiful and heterosexual” character (Garcia, 2013, p. 77). Certain features are being accepted as the norm, and those who do not inhabit these characteristics are being pushed aside and viewed as lesser. It also results in a lack of representation for readers as well, because they are not able to see themselves in literature.

Nevertheless, times are changing, and the literary world along with it. Even if there is a long way to go, people are becoming more aware of the problems we are facing (Slater, 2017, p. 79). New authors and literature are constantly being introduced to the market, and we are seeing more diversity in literature than before. (Bishop, 2017)

The new core curriculum also reflects the transformations we witness in society. In the topic of “identity and cultural diversity”, concerning the core values, it clarifies how:

In a time when the population is more diversified than ever before, and where the world is coming closer together, language skills and cultural understanding are growing in importance. School shall support the development of each person's identity, make the pupils confident in who they are, and also present common values that are needed to participate in this diverse society and to open doors to the world and the future. (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 8).

School shall be an area where they learn the importance of diversity through language and cultural skills. It emphasizes the importance of encouraging each pupil to be who they want to be, and to help understand that everyone is different, to celebrate and normalize diversity to create a positive environment.

### **5.3.1 Gender roles**

The dictionary Lexico, powered by Oxford University Press, defines gender roles as “The role or behavior learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.” (n.d.). Culture and society teach us what is appropriate, and children are

taught how they are supposed to behave and feel according to their gender. Jacobs (2004) states how “books play a significant role in transmitting society's culture to our youth”. Adolescence is a time of self-discovery, and how YA literature portrays genders can greatly affect how children and young adults view the role of gender (2004).

Stereotyping in literature is not uncommon, but in today's literate world, more authors are stepping out of and challenging the mainstream gender norms. YA texts are portraying strong and leading female characters, and generally empowering women through literary works (Garcia, 2013, p. 77). This is not to say that there is no gender bias and stereotyping in modern YA literature, because the genre still has room for improvement. Although we are seeing powerful female characters, they are still at times viewed as weak, because they have certain female traits (p. 77).

The construction of female and male identity in YA literature varies (Garcia, 2013, p. 79). Garcia reveals how “Notions of beauty, attraction, and expected behavior of girls in books define for readers what is considered *normal*. The intentions behind descriptions and actions may not intend to limit female identity, but the effects are still the same.” (p. 79). This could be applied to not only females but other genders as well. How gender is portrayed in literature affects the reader and their views. Descriptions of characters might seem insignificant, but every character influences how the reader views the role of gender.

A great deal of YA fantasy literature presents thin and beautiful female characters, and these are the characters being presented to young females. There is also an issue of unhealthy relationships with their bodies, and even though this is realistic with how teenagers often struggle with their perceived appearance, it normalizes being unhappy with their bodies. An example can be found in Sarah J. Maas's fantasy novel *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015a) where the main character, Feyre, refers to herself, “I *had* looked pretty. Feminine. I wouldn't go so far as to call myself a beauty, but... I hadn't cringed. A few months here had done wonders for the awkward sharpness and angles of my face.” (pp. 202-203). There seems to be a pattern in many YA books that the heroine cannot appreciate or be confident in her own beauty. In this passage from Maas's book, the heroine appears to view herself as average in relation to appearance. However, since this is early on in the series, her view of herself changes in the following books as her character develops.

There is also the issue of expectations; that we assume that the female and male characters will act a certain way according to their gender. We typically assume that the male will have masculine traits, while the female has the stereotypical feminine traits. When we read a James Bond novel, we expect that he will behave with the stereotypical male attributes, to be the strong assertive white male who is not afraid to take risks. With female characters we expect them to have other traits, such as being nurturing, tender, affectionate and emotional.

Women are not the only ones being limited in YA literature; male identity is also experiencing difficulties in representation. Antero Garcia states that there is a lack of male representation across genres; they are being constricted to books “about sports, urban violence and survival, or fall into genre fiction like fantasy and science fiction.” (2013, p. 83). Being forced to pick from only a selected range of topics within literature, could result in men losing interest in reading, as well as creating a skewed image of the male identity.

In the past, there has been too much focus on creating characters that stay true to their gender norms. Modern YA literature is changing and challenging these mainstream gender norms. Male characters that dare to show emotion and be vulnerable are becoming more common. This is also reflected in YA fantasy literature in novels such as Cassandra Clare’s *Clockwork Angel* (2010), as well as Bardugo’s *Six of Crows* (2015). In Clare’s *Clockwork Angel* (2010) the reader is introduced to the main character Jem Carstairs, a shadowhunter, a warrior who fights demons. He is described as kind, gentle, calm, and intelligent, traits that are usually associated with females. He is also portrayed as a brave and strong character. In a conversation between Jem and the main character Tessa, he expresses the insignificance of physical norms,

“Whatever you are physically, male or female, strong or weak, ill or healthy – all those things matter less than what your heart contains. If you have the soul of a warrior, you are a warrior. Whatever the color, the shape, the design of the shade that conceals it, the flame inside the lamp remains the same. You are that flame.” (p. 289).

This is a response to Tessa’s conflicted feelings after having violent thoughts, how she struggles to figure out if it is okay for anyone to have those kinds of thoughts, especially a girl. He conveys how it does not matter what gender you are, or possible physical limitations



or differences. He says that it depends on who you are as a person, and that people have a choice regardless of physical attributes.

Bucher & Hinton believe that “Both genders deserve fair and equitable treatment.” (2014, p. 47). We must have access to literature that portrays genders in ways that are not stereotypical. It is so ingrained and normalized in literature, as well as other types of media, to portray genders in a certain way. It is, therefore, challenging to find literature that does not perpetuate stereotypes, create false perceptions, and tell half-truths about genders (p. 47).

Although in a study on gender, Forrest (1993), noted that

“Fantasy is one area of young adult literature that offers a rich source of gender-fair fiction. It is popular with both male and female adolescents and has traditionally been a genre in which women escape the standard cultural roles. Portrayals of passive females can certainly be found; nevertheless, readers are often offered a chance to experience what females could be instead of what they are.” (p. 38).

Fantasy differs from other genres; they make it possible to think beyond the norm. They are not as restricted to the same gender norms that other genres follow. Therefore, it can be a suitable genre for discussing diversity in terms of gender roles.

Unintentionally, gender roles are applied even in the educational arena. In an article published in 2014, journalist Ida Kvittingen mentions a problem concerning a stigma that has arisen among girls and boys in school. She states that boys are losing in school, while the girls are the winners. It is believed that boys are at a disadvantage early on, and among the explanations from the media are that learning is customized for the girls, boys are unable to concentrate and unruly, and that there are differences in the development of boys and girls (2014). As a consequence of media stating that boys are struggling at school for the plethora of reasons they lay down, they are in turn creating a stigma for all boys and girls in school. This means that these gender roles are immediately applied to the pupils depending on their gender. If you are a girl, you are expected to do well, if you are boy, the expectations are lowered. This is an example of discussions that are being had about gender in Norwegian schools, and underlines the importance of addressing gender roles in the classroom as well.

### 5.3.2 Disabilities

Historically, there have been several demographics of people being underrepresented in literature in favor of the stereotypical white, straight, often male literary figure (Hamilton, 2019). One of the groups that have been greatly underrepresented in literature are characters with mental, physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities (2019). Research recently showed that over a period of 12 months, there was only one book in the top 100 bestseller list for children`s fiction that prominently featured disability (Ferguson, 2019).

What little representation of disability there has been in literature, much of it has been negative and restrictive (Curwood, 2013). There has been a lack of legitimate and appropriate presentation of characters with disabilities (2013). Marianne Ryan, an author with a disability, claims that people with disabilities are often served “as merely the means to an end, a perpetuation of ableist thinking that construes and objectifies people with deformity or disability as inherently pitiable, powerless, defeated.” (Hamilton, 2019). Moreover, in the past, characters with disabilities have been portrayed as monsters, often associated with guilt and crime (Encyclopedia, 2019). Then, later on, it was used to elicit sentimentality and pity from the reader (Encyclopedia, 2019) Rarely have the characters with disabilities been the main characters, but rather been supporting characters that influence the narrative (Curwood, 2013). Typical storylines would be playing a part in the moral development of other characters or serving as symbolism (2013).

In more recent times, there has been more focus on accurately portraying individuals with disabilities and their affected environment (Curwood, 2013). Elizabeth A. Wheeler comments on how “Twenty-first-century children`s books stage a revolution in the portrayal of kids with disabilities and the portrayal of their communities as well.” (2013, p. 335). She remarks on how new types of literature offer insight to the disability community in a way we have seen little of in children`s and YA literature before (2013). Authors are also moving away from the typical character portrayal of those with a disability, they are no longer just depicted as helpless and to be pitied (Curwood, 2013). We are seeing characters with real authenticity, because authors are taking the time to research, and try to create more realistic narratives (Quibell, 2019).

YA fantasy literature has created a unique way of portraying characters with disabilities. It can provide complex and multilayered characters who are not solely defined by their disability, and who has become inspirational heroes for many young readers. YA fantasy novels such as *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2013) and *Renegades* (Meyer, 2017) portray characters with various disabilities. Rick Riordan created a unique hero in his novel *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2013), where the main character is a twelve-year-old boy by the name Percy Jackson with learning disabilities who often gets in trouble at school. Percy is noticeably aware of his disabilities, which is made clear early on in the novel, “I have dyslexia and attention deficit disorder and I had never made above a C- in my life.” (p. 7). His learning disabilities had for a long time a negative impact on Percy’s life, but in his journey throughout the novel he slowly becomes aware of the positive aspects. Such as how he can channel his ADHD in a way that he is constantly alert and perceptive to his surroundings, and how his dyslexia makes it possible for him to understand Ancient Greek.

In Marissa Meyer’s novel *Renegades* (2017), the reader is introduced to the character Oscar Silva, who has the ability to summon and manipulate smoke. He has a physical disability, and despite the fact that he has extraordinary powers he is still judged for his disability,

Oscar could have wowed the audience with an entire flock of smoke dragons and an army of vapor knights to destroy them, and someone still would have questioned if a kid with a bone disease that kept him tethered to a cane could possibly become a hero in Gatlon City. (p. 156)

Oscar is a character that exudes humor and confidence, but at times it feels as if he tries to keep up a façade to try to cover up his insecurities. His physical disability does not seemingly physically prevent him from doing what he wants, but how others view his physical disability affects his mental state.

Various articles expose how children and young people with disabilities are excluded in Norwegian schools (Ellingsen et al., 2019; Jakobsen, 2016). The ideal is to normalize, integrate, and include those with disabilities (Jakobsen, 2016). To create a more inclusive classroom, where pupils with disabilities can feel seen and understood, teachers have to be conscious of the type of content they provide for the pupils. This could be directly linked to the principles for the school’s practice in the core curriculum, where they state that “*School shall develop an inclusive environment that promotes health, well-being and learning for all.*”

(Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 18). YA fantasy literature can contribute in this area with novels such as *Six of Crows* (2015) that portray characters with different disabilities. Working with content that touches on the subject of disability, can create an environment where the pupils can gain a greater understanding of the topic, and can generate an environment focused on inclusivity.

### 5.3.3 LGBTQ

LGBTQ is an acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer” (Dastagir, 2017). The term is used as a way to illustrate a person’s gender identity or sexual orientation (The Center, n.d.). There is also a series of other similar acronyms utilized, such as LGBT+, LGBTQIA among others (Dastagir, 2017). The Q is also said to stand for “questioning”, which is to illustrate the process in which people evaluate and examine their gender identity or sexual orientation (2017).

The school’s interdisciplinary topic health and life skills explicitly refers to sexuality as one of the relevant areas (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 15). Matters relevant to the topic are “the ability to deal with thoughts, feelings and relationships” (pp. 15-16). These are all issues pertinent to the matter of LGBTQ. Health and life skills can work as a topic that increases understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, and can help reduce stigma and discrimination towards LGBTQ people. Working with literature that portray people in the LGBTQ community can contribute in this area.

The early contributions within literature depicting characters in the LGBTQ community were usually associated with being temporary and shameful, in addition to ideas of perversion and deviance among many others (Waters, 2016; Wickens, 2011, pp. 154-155). LGBTQ characters have had a long history of negative representation (Waters, 2016). Although there has been a lack of an authentic portrayal of LGBTQ characters, there is also the issue of the normalization of homophobia within literature (Wickens, 2011). This normalization has made it challenging to move away from homophobic attitudes and influence (p. 153). In recent times there has been a shift, and many authors are now working towards creating an inclusive attitude towards all sexual and gender identities. They are now working towards portraying LGBTQ characters that are “positive, ordinary, cool, even *normal*.” (p. 153).

Michael Waters states that “what is changing in YA reflects what is changing in our world” (2016). The rise of LGBTQ representation in YA literature has been mirroring the rise of activism and the following transformations that we have seen in society. Society is moving towards a more accepting attitude towards the LGBTQ community, and this change is reflected in literature (2016). Publishers and authors are noticing a rise in the demand for a wider diversity of storylines and characters (Aviles, 2019). Though there is not an exact number, publishers have spotted an increase in the number of YA literature with LGBTQ representation in the last few years (2019).

Diversity in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation has sorely been lacking, but modern literature is steadily offering up new and diverse characters. Young adult fantasy books such as Cassandra Clare’s *City of Bones* (2007) with openly gay characters such as Alec Lightwood and Magnus Bane, as well as Marissa Meyer’s *Renegades* (2017) where the main character, Adrian, was raised by two dads; help normalize homosexuality in literature. Meyer, in her novel, *Renegades* (2017), constructed a world where the main characters do not know a reality in which LGBTQ was viewed as something foreign and other,

Nova had been too young to notice if there was any shock or scandal when two of the original Renegades announced they were in love, or if there had been any announcement at all. Maybe they just *were*, from the start. Either way, she suspected the world had been dealing with too much devastation to really care back then, and these days Captain Chromium and the Dread Warden were practically the world’s favorite sweethearts. (pp. 32-33)

The main character, Nova, is commenting on the relationship between Adrian’s dads. For her generation a gay couple was not considered a big deal, it is all they know. A world in which sexual orientations such as homosexuality is considered the norm should be what society strives towards, and in the fictional world Meyer created in *Renegades* (2017), she shows that it could become reality one day.

We may have seen a lot of change in the YA genre, but there is still room for improvement (Aviles, 2019). In LGBTQ literature certain gender identities and sexual orientations are being marginalized from within (2019). We are often only seeing some parts of the LGBTQ being represented. Aviles argues that those who identify as transgender, intersex, and asexual

are having a tough time locating books that represent them (2019). This means that there is still a long way to go concerning LGBTQ representation in literature, which might create difficulties locating literature when addressing this part of the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills.

### **5.3.4 Multiculturalism**

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions defines multiculturalism as “the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles.” (IFLA, 2016). It can be viewed as by what means society deals with cultural diversity, and that this can transpire on both a nationwide scale or at the community level (Longley, 2019). It is considered a way for especially minority groups, to acquire special acknowledgment of their distinctions within a dominant culture (Eagan, n.d.). A tenet of multiculturalism is that society can benefit from preserving, respecting and encouraging cultural diversity (Longley, 2019).

Multicultural literature is more problematic to define because it also involves authors from different cultural backgrounds (Bista, 2012). Multicultural literature focuses not only on diversity and inclusion but also on power structure and struggle. The ultimate goal is to create a space of acceptance, understanding, and appreciation for cultural differences (2012).

In an article dated back to 1965, Nancy Larrick brought much-needed attention to the lack of multicultural content in literature. It was titled as follows, “The All-White World of Children’s Books”, and it opens up with the question “Why are they always *white* children?” (p. 63) enquired by a five-year-old African American girl. Larrick then goes on to explain and illustrate in her study how the majority of characters in literature are white, and the seriousness of this, as even a child managed to single out one of the most critical issues in literature at the time. She notes how possible consequences of this can lead to “little chance of developing the humility so urgently needed for world cooperation” (p. 63), and that “our children are brought up on gentle doses of racism through their books.” (p. 63). The study conducted by Larrick would, combined with other following changes in society, lead to a multicultural movement within the publishing industry (Hughes-Hassel, 2013).

Helen Young (2016) problematizes habits of Whiteness that have been formed in fantasy literature (p. 10). These habits take on different forms:

some are to do with the bodies which have traditionally dominated its spaces – in both the real and imagined worlds; some with the voices that are most audible; and some with the kinds of sources which inspire imagined worlds, and the ways that they are used. (p. 10)

She does not necessarily mean the domination of white culture or appearance exclusively, but anything that is dominant and its effects. Habits of Whiteness means that people have a habit of creating stories of the present dominant culture, “whether physical, digital, or imagined” (p. 11). Prominent and famous authors of fantasy literature such as C.S. Lewis and Tolkien were British, and have been considered “White men who drew heavily on European myths, literature, and history for inspiration, and who populated their worlds largely with White protagonists.” (p. 11). As a result, because of their popular books, contemporary popular fantasy inherited many of their habits.

There has been a noticeable change in multicultural literature in the last few years (Bishop, 2017). The number of books available to us has increased considerably, and with this we see new authors and publishers producing books of a wider variety than before. Diversity and multiculturalism in literature are being acknowledged and celebrated in the publishing industry, winning prestigious awards and receiving accolades (2017). Nonetheless, despite all these new and diverse contributions to literature, the percentage of books that portray historically underrepresented children has not shown a significant rise over the years (2017).

There has also been an ongoing debate among authors and critics of multicultural literature whether it is appropriate that authors write about characters and narratives that are not related to their ethnic or cultural group (Bista, 2012, p. 318). Some believe that to create an accurate experience in literature the author has to belong to the particular ethnic or cultural group being written about. However, some people argue that it is acceptable as long as sufficient research and knowledge can create an authentic portrayal of the ethnic or cultural group (p. 318). Problems have occurred where there has been a misrepresentation of a specific culture, in which the result has been the banning or censorship of the literary work. Biases as a result

of a lack of understanding of other cultures can create difficult situations, and ultimately defeats the purpose of multicultural literature (pp. 318-319).

Rudine Sims Bishop (2017) proclaims that it is hard to find “fantasy novels with people of color as the heroes”. Nonetheless, we are seeing people of different ethnic and cultural groups being represented in modern YA fantasy literature. In Sabaa Tahir’s novel *An Ember in the Ashes* (2015) she created a fantastical world illustrating cultural differences among people. Instead of focusing on the color of the skin, the people view their differences according to groups. The most prominent groups are the Scholars and the Martials. Although the color of the different groups is different, it is not a point of focus. The Martials are viewed as the dominant group, and have subjected the Scholars to injustice for a long time. In the second novel of the series *A Torch Against the Night* (Tahir, 2016), it is illustrated through the character Helene how many Martials view the Scholars:

I’ve never seen the Scholars as enemies, exactly. An enemy is someone you fear. Someone who might destroy you. But the Scholars will never destroy the Martials. They can’t read. They can’t fight. They have no steelcraft. They are a slave class – a lesser class. (p. 224)

The Scholars have been suppressed for so long, and the Martials view of the Scholars has been passed on through generations that they are not even worthy of being feared if they decide to rebel. Their cultural differences are not measured by the color of their skin, but the group they are born in, which is reminiscent to situations that can be found in the real world. There can be many parallels drawn between Tahir’s world and the real world, as well as its history, such as how the mass killing of the Scholar race mirrors the holocaust and the genocide of the Jews. As well as component of slavery that is present throughout the novel, which is reminiscent to the slavery in Ancient Rome.

The popular YA fantasy author Marissa Meyer, with titles such as *Cinder* (2012) and *Renegades* (2017), is among those who focus on and have become known for creating diverse characters. In an interview by Bustle, Meyer emphasizes how important it is for her to write stories with characters that reflect reality,

“A lot of it comes down to authenticity — our world is full of unique, interesting individuals, of people who come from so many different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities,” Meyer says.



"To write a book in which everyone looks the same or comes from the same background would read false to me... and also boring! I want my books to feel as richly populated as the real world is, and I want readers to be able to connect with these characters and hopefully feel like there is at least one character they can relate to. We all should have the opportunity to be superheroes." (Jarema, 2017)

With characters from all sorts of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds she focuses on creating authentic and realistic worlds that reflect reality.

The interdisciplinary topic health and life skills specifically describes how "relations with others, the ability to draw boundaries and to respect others' boundaries" (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 16) are relevant issues. This could be interpreted as respect for other people, including other people's culture, and essentially how to deal with human relations. Race, religion and culture are such a large part of our identities, so how to navigate our differences, could be what is implied when referring to the importance of "relations with others" (p. 16). Multiculturalism, meaning the co-existing of diverse cultures, could then be directly linked to the relevant areas of health and life skills.

## 5.4 Brutality

In an article written in *the Guardian*, Rebecca Westcott questions if there is content that should not be included in YA literature:

Children's fiction is constantly evolving and a question often posed is: Is there anything that we shouldn't write about when we write for children? Is there any subject that is off-limits? If we include YA in this question then I think that the answer is probably: no. If it happens to people and it happens in families and it's a part of life – then it's probably been or being written about for children. (2014)

She believes that dark content should not be excluded in YA literature. She believes that it is a good thing that authors are writing about the dark aspects of life, and that young people can as a result have the opportunity to recognize, reflect and relate to that type of content (2014).

Appleyard (1990) suggests a clear distinction between literature for children and those for young adults:

The difference is that the juvenile books all deal with an innocent world, where evil is externalized and finally powerless, where endings are happy. The adolescents' books deal with sex, death, sin, and prejudice, and good and evil are not neatly separated but mixed up in the confused and often turbulent emotions of the central characters themselves. (p.100)

YA literature does therefore move away from the innocent world of children's literature. It works as a transition towards adult literature, dealing with controversial topics in a way that reflects the not so innocent real world. It is a safe place for teenagers to attain new experiences before or even while being exposed to it in the real world.

Various YA fantasy novels address controversial topics, such as themes of slavery, violence, and sexual abuse. Issues of social injustice are being addressed through YA fantasy in a way that reflects upon the real world. With its continuous appeal to readers, some criticize the fantasy genre, especially the books in the young adult section (Lynn, 2005). Adolescents and children are often seen as needing protection from the outside world, to maintain their innocence (Gurdon, 2011). Some parents, schools and authorities, criticize YA books such as those in the fantasy genre because of certain content (Crowe, 2001). Complaints have included statements such as "They corrupt the young" (p. 146). A private school teacher claimed that pupils could "damage their "sensitive subconscious brains"" by reading fantasy literature (Telegraph Reporters, 2016). The teacher also claimed that particular fantasy titles could encourage bad and villainous behavior and that it can distance youth from reality with too much violence and aggression (2016).

In his article "Why the Best Kids' Books are Written in Blood", Sherman Alexie (2011) criticizes Meghan Cox Gurdon's complaints from her editorial "Darkness too visible", in which she disapproves of the abuse and violence shown in literary fiction (2011). Alexie (2011) explains how he frequently receives letters from young people who appreciate and love his YA novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2015). He also clarifies how he has never received a letter from a child who felt violated/upset by the content in the book, which included domestic violence, drug abuse, racism, poverty, sexuality, and murder (Alexie, 2011). He responds to the critics of the "ever-more-appalling" YA book,

they aren't trying to protect African-American teens forced to walk through metal detectors on their way into school. Or Mexican-American teens enduring the culturally schizophrenic life of being American citizens and the children of illegal immigrants. Or Native American teens growing up on Third World reservations. Or poor white kids trying to survive the meth-hazed trailer parks. They aren't trying to protect the poor from poverty. Or victims from rapists. (2011)

He declares that they are instead trying to protect literature and what they think it is and should be; they are trying to protect their seemingly privileged children (2011). He underlines the importance of seeing yourself in books, to have books that the reader can relate to. That it is often a terrible world that children and teenagers live in, and reading can offer an escape. Alexie concludes his article with: "I don't write to protect them. It's far too late for that. I write to give them weapons—in the form of words and ideas—that will help them fight their monsters. I write in blood because I remember what it felt like to bleed." (2011). He writes about his own dark experiences, and he hopes that he can give young people content that can help them fight their own darkness. It is important to provide pupils with platforms in which they can experience the dark parts of the world, and in agreement with Alexie, I consider it a positive development that authors are creating more realistic stories, even they might seem too dark and dangerous at times.

#### **5.4.1 Violence**

Is not the escape of not having to play by the rules the reason why so many people read fantasy? Maybe a book with dragons, swords, and fighting is where a teenager in high school finds his solace when aspects of his real-life anger and upsets him. Gerard Jones's book, *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence* (2003), talks about how a little boy coped with certain events in his life by playing violent games. Playing those types of games gave him some semblance of control, during those moments he did not feel helpless or scared. He managed to acquire some semblance of agency through playing video games. Violent and frightening notions and images are such a natural part of life. Too many people want to pretend that these parts of life do not exist and want to protect their children from that aspect of life (Jones, 2003). Jones explains in his book the appeal of imaginary violence for young people (2003). By fantasizing about violence through

media and other outlets, they can channel their anger and feelings towards that instead of other unhealthier methods. He describes how through these sorts of media they can learn the consequences that accompany acts of violence (2003). There is a distinction between glorifying and promoting violence, to showing its problematic nature and consequence. YA fantasy can present violence in a way that can work as an outlet as well as being informational and educational.

However, the violence is not always as seemingly realistic or brutal in YA fantasy literature as other genres. Being swallowed up by a dragon may not seem as violent as a book where someone is shot on the street in an action novel, but dead is still dead. In other genres, such as action and adventure novels violence is usually a big part of the story, with the accompanying blood and gore. In young adult fantasy, it is usually either there to provoke an emotional reaction or something quick and seemingly unimportant.

That is not to say that there is not much violence in YA fantasy. Some novels have more violence than others. In certain young adult fantasy novels, the main character is a trained killer or assassin, and the killing of people becomes a common and typical element in the storylines. Such as in a *Throne of Glass* by Sarah J. Maas where the protagonist is a trained killer, and throughout the narrative she murders an abundance of people and creatures (2012). Characters in such types of fantasy are usually not portrayed as soulless beings thirsty for blood, they have more depth, and violence is just seen as a natural part of their life. Books such as the one Maas wrote have main characters that are female, and violence has for a long time been seen as something only boys can handle. It is books like this that can show how females are not necessarily capable of violence, but that they can be just as tough and “badass” as the males. Violence can, therefore, serve a greater purpose than mere entertainment for the reader, but as a way to challenge normalized gender norms.

It is not unusual that death occurs in a fantasy novel. When you read a novel, naturally, you hope that your favorite characters survive, but this is not always the case. The author may kill off your favorite character and it can provoke a strong emotional reaction. What can a child or adolescent learn through such an experience? Books that make them feel such emotions can help prepare them for real-life situations. Maybe a young person out there who has never experienced a death in the family learned how to cope with death through reading. It is not to

say that it is the same thing, but maybe through reading the experiences of the characters, that person could see the familiarities and relate to it.

The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs states in an article from 2015 that “one in five children are subjected to minor physical violence from at least one of their parents” (my translation), after a study was completed among those from the age 18 to 19. An article posted on Norwegian Institute of Public Health, moreover, states that “about 1 of 20 children and adolescents grow up under violent conditions (child abuse)” (Reneflot, 2019). That means that a large portion of children in Norway go to school having experienced violence in one form or another in their private lives. Violence is not only happening behind closed doors, it is also becoming a growing problem in school (Ulvestad, 2019). Pupils are becoming more violent as they subject teachers and other school workers, as well as fellow pupils, to violence and threats every day in Norwegian schools (2019). These various articles and studies illustrate not only the growing problems concerning violence in society, but that a great portion of children and adolescents are or have been exposed to violence. Shying away from the topic does not protect anyone, but having a safe place, in the world of literature, where they can gain a better understanding of the world around them, can make a difference in learning how to deal with a violent world.

#### **5.4.2 Slavery**

Many believe that slavery ended a long time ago, but that is not the case. It “changed its forms and continues to harm people in every country in the world” (anti-slavery, n.d.). Modern slavery is more about exploitation and control over someone than about direct ownership (n.d.). Slavery is happening across the globe, even in Norway (Gustavsen & Malm, 2018; Kobbeltvedt & Elgesem, 2018). An article in the Norwegian media outlet NRK stated in 2018 that the international Global Slavery Index estimated that around nine thousand people lived as slaves in Norway at that time. The article states that the type of slavery varies from sexual slavery and car washers working excessively for little pay (Gustavsen & Malm, 2018). Slavery is also reflected in Norwegian society in other aspects, as the population wear clothes and eat food that can be products of slavery from other countries (Kobbeltvedt & Elgesem, 2018). Slavery is not a visible enemy, it is hidden and rarely spoken of, which is why it should be brought into the light.

Through YA fantasy novels such as *An Ember in the Ashes* (Tahir, 2015), *The Winner's Curse* (Rutkoski, 2014), and *Six of Crows* (Bardugo, 2015), in which all address the topic of slavery, the reader can gain insight to controversial topics in a different way than what is available in YA contemporary or non-fiction. They portray slavery in different forms, both modern and older traditional types of slavery. Depiction of topics such as slavery can be challenging, but YA fantasy has the opportunity of addressing the topics in a way that can make readers care and understand more about such things as the slavery epidemic that still exists today.

### 5.4.3 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is defined by American Psychological Association as: “unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent.” (n.d.). Newton states that there are long-lasting ramifications of sexual abuse, such as: "problems with identity, self-esteem, and sexuality" (1995, p. 102). Additional consequences include excessive sexual activity or avoidance of any physical interaction, which can make it challenging creating and maintaining social relations and interactions (p. 102).

Norwegian Institute of Public Health posted an article that states how 1 of 5 girls and 1 of 14 boys have experienced sexual abuse as children and adolescents (Reneflot, 2019). It also mentions how nine percent of all women have been subjected to rape at least once in their life (2019). Sexual abuse can have long term effects on an individual's mental health. Having such a large portion of young people have been subjected to sexual abuse, means that there are likely many pupils struggling mentally. Health and life skills can serve as a way to contribute to helping those that might struggle as a result of sexual abuse, and creating a safe space where pupils can gain knowledge on the topic. Having content, such as literature, in Norwegian schools that educate pupils on the topic of sexual abuse, can be essential in creating a safe place where it is considered to a good thing to be open about such a seemingly controversial topic.

In an NPR article titled “When talking about sexual consent, YA books can be a parent's best friend”, Neda Ulaby discuss how YA authors are focusing more on the different aspects of sex (2016). She quotes the YA author E.K. Johnston who herself wrote a novel about sexual

assault: "'It's something that authors are starting to name," she explains. "Whether it's fantasy, whether it's contemporary, whether it's sci-fi — they're starting to actually say the words 'consent, 'rape,' 'permission,' 'yes,' 'no,' those kinds of things.'" (2016). She mentions how Johnston has “noticed a change in how today`s young adult writers discuss consent” (2016). She points out how “In a world where sex education is often basic, and porn is everywhere” (2016), YA is becoming a place where young people can find answers and gain knowledge about the topic of sex.

YA fantasy can portray aspects of sexual violence in way that can appear distant and far removed. As fantasy worlds often seem so distant from reality, situations can often not be viewed as seriously as they would in other genres such as non-fiction or YA contemporary. This sort of alienation can have both negative and positive aspects. It could make the reader not taking the content seriously enough, not comprehending the parallels drawn between the literary work and reality. In a positive way it could portray reality in a way that does not become too overwhelming for the young reader, making it appear suitable for a wider audience.

In Sarah J. Maas`s *Throne of Glass* series (2012; 2013; 2014; 2015b; 2016; 2017; 2018) the reader is introduced to the character Lysandra, a victim of sexual violence. In the early depiction of Lysandra, she is portrayed as a spoiled and confident girl, who views the main character, Celaena Sardothien, as her rival and enemy. As a young child she was thrown out of her own home, she was eventually found and given to Clarisse DuVency, a madame of a brothel. As a result, she was groomed and eventually used as a prostitute, frequently being subjected to sexual abuse. Lysandra is eventually able to get away from the brothel, and becomes an ally to Celaena. Throughout the series she manages to work through her traumatic experiences, and the reader observes her character develop as she transforms into a courageous and kind woman. After struggling to connect with other people on both a physical and emotional level, she is eventually able to have a romantic relationship with the character Aedion. The reader is able to observe Lysandra as she overcomes her traumatic experiences throughout the series. Lysandra`s character presents possible consequences for victims of sexually abuse, and illustrates for others that it is possible to find a way out. This example shows that YA fantasy literature could provide victims of sexual abuse with realistic descriptions of what their suffering is like while also giving them hope for the future; that their situation could improve.

## 6 Literary analysis

This section includes a summary and outline of the world in the novel *Six of Crows* (2015) by the author Leigh Bardugo. *Six of Crows* (2015) is set in a world named the Grishaverse, which consists of the following countries: Ravka, Fjerda, Shu Han, Kerch, Novyi Zem, and the Wandering Isles. The word Grisha originates from the Grisha people, who possess magical powers. They are divided into three orders, Corporalki, Etherealki and Materialki, with each having different types of specializations. Corporalki are Grisha whose power focuses on the human body, Etherealki can manipulate different natural elements, and the Materialki focus on composite materials. *Six of Crows* (2015) is set mainly in Kerch and Fjerda, but there are references to the other nations. Most of the novel takes place in Kerch, in the capital city of Ketterdam; a city of international trade, as well as the criminal underworld. In addition, some of the plot take place in the northern nation Fjerda, which is often described as a cold and shapeless country. They are known for the drüskelle; a selected few of their people that become soldiers who hunt and kill Grisha. Ravka is the place where the Grisha army is based, and because of their hatred towards the Grisha, Fjerdans view Ravka with hostility.

Bardugo's novel *Six of Crows* (2015) is about six teenage characters and their heist journey. In the bustling city of Ketterdam, criminal prodigy and leader of a gang by the name Dregs, Kaz Brekker is presented the opportunity of a large heist. The task is to retrieve the scientist Bo Yul-Bayour from a fortified prison in Fjerda because he developed a dangerous drug by the name *jurda parem*. This drug only affects the Grisha. To be able to pull off this heist he recruits five outcasts to help him: Inej Ghafa, also known as the "Wraith", a spy for the Dregs, and originally from Ravka; Jesper Fahey, a sharpshooter, also a prominent member of the Dregs, from Novyi Zem; Nina Zenik, a Grisha from Ravka and one of the Corporalki, whose power focuses on the human body; Matthias Helvar, a former Fjerdan drüskelle soldier, who had to be broken out of jail after being framed by Nina; Wylan Van Eck, a merchant's son who is skilled with demolition, and is, along with Kaz, the only main character from Kerch. The reader follows their journey as they try to work together to achieve this dangerous and difficult task.

Going by the definitions above, the selected novel for this thesis, Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows* (2015), is considered high fantasy/epic fantasy, as well as *immersive* fantasy. This is



because Bardugo`s novel is fully set in a fictional fantasy world, in which it is considered the primary world for all the characters. Furthermore, it can be considered high/epic and *immersive* fantasy because the world has magical elements to it; and, therefore, abides by its own set of rules and physical laws. The novel is also identified as such because the storyline revolves around a great quest, involving a group of characters. All of these elements assist in finding what category of fantasy *Six of Crows* (2015) belongs in.

The novel is written through a third-person omniscient point of view, where the narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all the six main characters in the story. The novel shifts narrators from chapter to chapter, where certain characters are more frequently used as narrator than others. Although the character Matthias is visibly less used as a narrator in comparison to the other main characters, and Wylan is in fact never used, the others are regularly being switched as narrator. The reader is able to thoroughly get to know all the different characters, because the reader can observe them through the viewpoint of others in addition to themselves. Being able to have the perspective of the different narrators we have the opportunity of attaining different viewpoints on the same character or event. The focus of this chapter is diversity, where identity, agency, and brutality are all important components of the various diversity issues being discussed throughout the chapter.

## **6.1 Gender roles**

In *Six of Crows* (2015) we are introduced to a variety of main characters that challenge and perpetuate gender norms.

### **6.1.1 Nina**

In the novel, the reader is introduced to the strong female character, Nina Zenik. Nina is a powerful Grisha, a Corporalki, specializing as a Heartrender. A heartrender is capable of using their powers to manipulate the body on a molecular level, and the power is usually used with the intent to harm. Nina was a Grisha soldier, and during a mission, she was captured by the drüskelle, where she met Matthias, and was taken aboard a ship. After a storm where Nina and Matthias both fell in the water, they relied on each other to survive. As they found their

way to civilization, Nina, in an attempt to protect Matthias from other Grisha, got him captured and sent to a prison in Ketterdam. Nina stayed in Kerch to find a way to get him out.

Through the perspective of Kaz, one of the male characters, Nina is described as “tall and built like the figurehead of a ship carved by a generous hand.” (p. 81). The reader is made aware of Nina’s beauty early on in the novel, and her attractiveness combined with her personality as a sensual and flirty woman is brought up throughout the novel. However, how Nina is viewed changes depending on the narrator. In simple terms, Kaz describes Nina in a way that makes the reader understand that she is attractive, but not in a way that comes across as diminishing for Nina’s character. Certain other characters in the novel, however, describe Nina in an overly sexual manner, that her beauty is excessive. In a moment where Nina and Matthias have to share body heat after almost drowning, Matthias remarks how “She was indecently round” (p. 245). Furthermore, in a conversation between Matthias and his former mentor Brum they have a conversation concerning Nina: “”She’s beautiful,” Brum said, “in an exaggerated way. You were strong not to be lured by her.” (p. 405). Through the view of these two characters, Nina is being sexualized, and she is being judged for being a sexual woman.

Although Nina is objectified as a sexual being on multiple occasions, and her being aware of it as well, she chooses to embrace it instead of viewing it as a weakness. Nina is described as a bold and confident woman, and she does not let other people define who she is.

Additionally, she uses her seemingly attractive appearances and their prejudice as a weapon and a tool towards those who underestimate her. One instance is when security guards are checking Nina and Inej, and they are questioning Nina’s identity. To distract the guard, she resorts to using her good looks and flirting,

the Fjerdan seemed to be eating it up. Maybe Nina had a stupefying effect on all stalwart northerners.

“Move along,” he said gruffly. Then added, “I . . . I may be at the party later.”

Nina ran a finger down his arm. “I’ll save you a dance.”

He grinned like a fool. (p. 364)

Males are regularly misjudging her, and she uses this to her advantage. She is confident in herself and her identity as a woman and does not let them limit her agency.

What is unique with Nina's character that we often do not find in YA literature is her described body type. Among those descriptions mentioned previously, other depictions of Nina include, "I like this one, still nice and round." (p. 182), "Inej moved to the nearest air duct and lifted the grate. It would be a tight squeeze for Nina, but they'd manage." (p. 359), and "You're heavier than it says on this paper I'll wager." (p. 364). Nina is not described as the slim heroine with the perceived perfect unattainable body type. Nina is described as a tall and curvaceous girl, and she does not seem self-conscious or insecure about it. This is such a rare trait to find in a female character in YA, especially in a central female character who is described as the sexy one.

There are also moments where the reader sees Nina's vulnerable side, and the reader is reminded of the fact that she is just a young teenager with her insecurities. This is illustrated in the scene where Kaz describes how Nina changes her persona when she is in a position of vulnerability:

Kaz marvelled at the transformation. In these rooms, she played the part her clients wanted to see – the powerful Grisha, serene in her knowledge. But sitting there with her brow furrowed and her feet tucked under her, she looked like what she truly was: a girl of seventeen, raised in the sheltered luxury of the Little Palace, far from home and barely getting by every day. (pp. 84-85)

The reader can quickly forget that the characters are not adults, but teenagers. It is during such moments that we are reminded that these characters are only teenagers with typical and non-typical teenage problems.

Although they have moments of vulnerability that reflect their youth, a few characters appear to desire not acting like what they perceive a little girl or little boy would do, and Nina is among them. The moment after Inej was severely hurt, Nina has a moment of uncertainty, "'Please be okay,'" she whispered. She hated the frail waver of her voice in the cabin. She didn't sound like a Grisha soldier or a hardened member of the Dregs. She sounded like a little girl who didn't know what she was doing." (p. 175). She usually views herself as a strong and confident woman and seems to be unaccustomed to this moment of vulnerability.

There are moments in *Six of Crows* (2015) that reflect the complexity of humans being in touch with their emotion and the misconception of asserting gender roles to behavior. As mentioned previously in this thesis, female characters are often viewed as weak if they inhabit typical female traits such as tender, affectionate, and emotional. Nina is portrayed as an independent and strong-minded character, but also shows her vulnerability, among others. This is illustrated when Nina and the others find Matthias in his jail cell after he was beaten up and they are about to break him out, “A lump rose in her throat, and she felt the ache of tears threatening. She pressed a kiss to his temple. She knew that Kaz and the others were watching and that she was making a fool of herself” (p. 107). Later on, she does the same thing after Inej was badly injured, “And then Nina burst out crying.” (p. 199). Crying and being emotional is typically viewed as a weakness, which is reflected when Nina mentions how she was making a fool of herself in front of Kaz and the others. She perceives crying as a weakness and would prefer not to show that among the other characters. This could be analyzed in a way that maintains the notion that females are always sensitive and emotional beings while men are not, and that the novel perpetuates stereotypes. However, it could also be viewed as Nina being the only one brave enough to show emotion. Although she is self-conscious about it, she seems to be in touch with her feelings in a way that the other characters appear to struggle with.

### **6.1.2 The case of the Fjerdans**

It is important to mention that the characters Matthias and Brum, who are both Fjerdans and Drüskelle, come from quite a different culture than the other characters in the novel. The reader learns in the novel how “the *drüskelle* live like monks” (p. 134) as well as how “The Fjerdans didn’t believe the Grisha were human. They weren’t even on par with animals, but something low and demonic, a blight on the world, an abomination” (p. 186). Furthermore, Fjerdans appear to view women in general as inferior to men. To be able, as a reader, to understand where they come from and their background, the reader can better understand why the characters are acting the way they do. Knowing what we know about Matthias and Brum, the reader can realize that they come from a less liberal place than the other characters. This is not necessarily an excuse for their behavior, but it makes the reader aware that people come from different cultural backgrounds and views, and that this affects their behavior towards people of different societies. This is an example of how “gender stereotypes is practiced under the influence of cultural and societal experiences” (Haruna-Banke & Banke, 2017, p. 78).

In *Six of Crows* (2015), the reader can observe a clear character development with the male character Matthias. It is especially noticeable as his view towards Nina changes throughout the novel. In the beginning, when referring to Nina, he describes her as a “Traitor, witch, abomination. All those words came to him, but others crowded in, too: beautiful, charmed one.” (p. 113) as well as, “A monster, a maiden, a sylph of the ice” (p. 188). During these moments, he objectifies her and can only view her the way he was taught to view women and Grisha. Though as he gets to know Nina, and his feelings towards her shifts, he starts to view her traits in a different light. This is reflected in his conversation with Brum that is mentioned previously: “”She`s beautiful,” Brum said, “in an exaggerated way. You were strong not to be lured by her.” I was lured, though, thought Matthias. And it wasn`t just her beauty.” (p. 405). She is no longer just an object of temptation and evil for Matthias, but a person he cares for and appreciates as a multifaceted person.

Towards the end of the novel Matthias`s view of not only Nina, but women in general, shifts. Being exposed to women like Nina and Inej has taught him that women can be equals, that the differences he previously believed in were a constructed belief. He can reflect upon his past assumptions and prejudices and is able to adjust and acquire respect appreciation for the female gender.

### **6.1.3 Kaz**

In contrast to Jem from Cassandra Clare`s *Clockwork Angel* (2010) mentioned in chapter 5, who embraces his emotional side and does not mind being vulnerable, the males in *Six of Crows* (2015) are more closed off. They are typical teenage boys, in not so typical situations, who do not want to show weakness, especially in front of others. Kaz Brekker is a multi-layered character; he is described by other characters as, “cocky little piece of crap” (p. 27), “the picture of restraint” (p. 25), “a dangerous player who was always working an angle” (p. 71), and “the toughest, scariest thing walking the alleys of the Barrel” (p. 73). What comes across when reading the novel is that Kaz created a persona as a result of the death of his brother.

To better understand Kaz, one should know a little about his background story. Kaz and his brother Jordie came to Ketterdam years before, after the death of their father, hoping for a

better life. Not too long after they arrive, a man named Pekka Rollins swindled them of all their money. Then, as the outbreak of firepox struck the city, the brothers had no money for medicine when they got infected by the disease. Jordie's dead body, along with Kaz, who was barely alive, was then brought to Reapers Barge, where those dead from the plague were transported. In his efforts to survive, he used his dead brother's body as a floating device back to Ketterdam.

Ketterdam is a dangerous city, and following the death of his brother, Kaz understood that he had to adapt to survive. However, there are moments in the novel that the reader is reminded of the fact that Kaz is just a teenage boy who has gone through a lot of hardships in life. In a moment of insecurity, he thinks he sees Jordie's ghost, "*Ghosts*, Kaz thought. A boy's fear." (p. 44). He has a constant need for control, and he despised this moment of weakness. The need seems to stem from a desire not to repeat the mistakes he and Jordie took. He detests how naïve they were, "He hated the boys they'd been, two stupid pigeons waiting to be plucked." (p. 77). He correlates being a boy with not having agency, because of his past.

While everyone else seems to fear Kaz, Inej appears to be one of the few to see Kaz's vulnerable side, "He was the same Kaz – cold, rude, impossible – but beneath all that anger, she thought she'd seen something else, too. Or maybe she was just a romantic." (p. 175). Kaz is closed off to everyone, but Inej appears to be an exception, he trusts her. After passing out, and Inej observing it, following a panic attack, he remarks,

He hated that Inej had seen him this way, that anyone had, but on the heels of that thought came another: *Better it should be her*. In his bones, he knew that she would never speak of it to anyone, that she would never use this knowledge against him. (p. 297)

To uphold his reputation, he feels he cannot display his weaknesses in front of anyone. Kaz's wish to be viewed as a man to be feared seem to be derived from a place of necessity, at least from his point of view. Because if he does not maintain this persona in front of everyone, he believes he will not be able to exact his revenge on the person he feels is responsible for his brother's death.

Kaz appears to struggle between two identities, between the one he constructed for everyone to see, and the one he tries to hide. After Jordie died, he created a darker identity to try to gain

a sense of agency. The reader can see a moment of transformation through the perspective of Geels, the leader of a rival gang:

Geels looked at Kaz as if he was finally seeing him for the first time. The boy he'd been talking to had been cocky, reckless, easily amused, but not frightening – not really. Now the monster was here, dead-eyed and unafraid. Kaz Brekker was gone, and Dirtyhands had come to see the rough work done. (p. 34)

Being Kaz Brekker and Dirtyhands creates an identity that makes him feel as if he has control over his actions and their consequences. It has become his armor. However, wearing that armor eventually weighs him down, and that is why he needed to create room for the person he once was before his brother died. That is most likely why he eventually starts to trust Inej and shows her his vulnerable side more. Although Kaz might feel like he has a sense of agency, actually having it is another matter. And he will not be able to accomplish this unless he manages to unite the two identities.

The identity and persona that Kaz constructed to convey strength could have been created as a result of the pressure of what a male should be like. Gender roles occur in the Grishaverse, much in the same way as the real world. Kaz being exposed to males in the criminal underworld, who always convey strength, and where the weak are preyed on, he most likely feels as if he has to keep up appearances. He also correlates his tough male persona with having a sense of agency, and that showing traits related to boyhood means the loss of agency. However, as he opens up to Inej towards the end, he realizes that perhaps he could be mistaken and that maybe a little vulnerability could be healthy.

## 6.2 LGBTQ

In *Six of Crows* (2015), two of the characters are queer, Jesper Fahey and Wylan Van Eck. Though there is no queer relationship until the following sequel, *Crooked Kingdom* (Bardugo, 2016), it is not necessary to have one in *Six of Crows* (2015) in terms of being a valid representation of LGBTQ. There is the occasional flirting going on, especially from Jesper's side, "You can't kiss me from down there, Wylan." (p. 150), and "'I have other skills that bring me more pleasure and profit than this. Lots of other skills. Wylan coughed. Flirting with

him might actually be more fun than annoying him, but it was a close call.” (p. 311). The reader gets to see the beginning of a possible romance between the two.

*Six of Crows* effortlessly fits LGBTQ into the fantasy world of *Six of Crows* (2015). There is no need to explain anything around LGBTQ; it is just a regular aspect of their world. *Six of Crows* (2015) has a world similar to Marissa Meyer’s *Renegades* (2017) as the characters view LGBTQ as the norm because no one comments or reacts when Jesper and Wylan are flirting. They treat it the same way the real world would treat a heterosexual couple.

Jesper and Wylan do not seem to fear others knowing about their sexual orientation, and it is not something hidden or a secret waiting to be exposed. They are just normal teenagers, flirting with someone they like, and freely doing so. For instance, when most of the group is gathered during their mission, Jesper says, “Jesper took the shoes from Wylan. “If I didn’t think these might be crawling with disease, I would kiss them and then you.” (p. 315). Jesper is blatantly flirting in front of the other characters, and presumably does not mind showing physical intimacy with Wylan should the opportunity arise.

Homosexuality is not the only sexual orientation being represented in *Six of Crows* (2015). Jesper is a bisexual, which is implied in his conversation with Wylan,

“Music, Numbers, Equations. They’re not like words. They... they don’t get mixed up.”

If only you could talk to girls in equations.”

There was a long silence, and then, eyes trained on the notch they’d created in the link. Wylan said, “Just girls?”

Jesper restrained a grin. “No. Not just girls.” (p. 388)

Jesper is seemingly the only character in the first novel who identifies as bisexual, but in the second book, *Crooked Kingdom* (2016), specific passages point towards Nina not being completely heterosexual. As Matthias remarks on Nina flirting with every man she meets, she responds with: ““I flirt with the women too.”” (p. 235). Even if it is not clear-cut what the characters define themselves as it is just a reflection on how society should be. People should not have to declare whether they identify themselves as a part of the LGBTQ community or not. It is a positive thing that the plotlines are not created around their sexuality, they have character traits beyond being queer, and they are just treated as any heterosexual character.



## 6.3 Brutality

*Six of Crows* (2015) does not hold back on the representation of controversial topics. It deals with slavery, sexual abuse, violence, and good and evil, which represent much of the negative aspects of life. The main characters are a mix of teenagers with various problems and struggles, and the reader follows their journey in a violent and complex fantasy world. The topic of brutality is essential when understanding other aspects of the various characters in the novel. Knowing about their experiences with brutality, we can better understand the characters. Having knowledge about their backgrounds and how they are still affected by them to various degrees, we can recognize how various issues within brutality are closely linked to other aspects, such as a disability developed as a result of violence, for example, and how it can relate to larger issues of identity and agency.

### 6.3.1 Slavery and sexual abuse – the case of Inej

The female character Inej Ghafa is a prominent member of the dregs. She is of Suli heritage, meaning she is a part of the nomadic people from Ravka, and she was raised as an acrobat in a family of performers. Inej is a victim of slavery and sex trafficking. She was taken at a very young age from her family, “the slavers took her. She`d been fourteen” (p. 203). She was then sold off to Tante Heleen, the owner of a pleasure house where she was forced to work: “the Menagerie, also known as the House of Exotics, where Inej had been forced to don fake Suli silks.” (p. 79). At the age of fifteen, Kaz was able to buy and transfer her contract to Per Haskell from Tante Heleen and gave her the option to join the Dregs to work off her indenture. In the novel, Inej is currently 17 years old, three years after she was initially taken and sold. She is no longer a sex slave at the pleasure house, but paying off her indenture to Per Haskell through working with the Dregs. Although she is no longer a sex slave, she could still be considered a slave since indentures are often viewed as another form of slavery.

*Six of Crows* (2015) portrays a reality that is not unlike what is happening in modern slavery. At the time when Inej is captured and sold, she expresses her confusion, “they would be auctioned to private owners or pleasure houses in Ketterdam and Novyi Zem. People came from all over the world to bid. Inej had thought slaving was illegal in Kerch, but apparently it still happened.” (p. 204). She might have lived a sheltered life, or slavery might be a topic that

is relevant but not talked about among people. It is a dark part of society that people prefer not to acknowledge. It appears as if most people want to cover up and normalize slavery by calling it an indenture, “Privately, the Kerch knew slaves moved in and out of the ports of Ketterdam, and most indentures were really slaves by another name. But publicly, they reviled it and were obligated to prosecute all slavers.” (p. 260). Indentures are a common practice, people get taken advantage of, and then they have to work to pay it off, and some are never able to.

The reader does not get an explicit account of all her time as a slave, especially those that are sexual. However, how she is affected when confronted by her past, and specific passages in the book, make it possible for the reader to imagine what horrors she might have experienced. Such as when she mentions despising the place where she was a slave, “Inej hated every inch of the Menagerie – the parlour where she and the other girls were forced to coo and bat their lashes at prospective clients” (p. 325). These sorts of passages are one of the few that hint at her being a sex slave. Her time as a slave presumably made her wary of the opposite sex, because they were most likely the clients that exploited the services she was forced to provide. This is illustrated early on in the novel as she declares, ““I like it when men beg,”” (p. 32), when threatening the life of a rival gang member. Having a case of misandry, she has come to hate and distrust most men, which has manifested as a result of physical and mental trauma.

The physical abuse Inej endured in the Menagerie was not solely sexual, and was not exclusively performed by men. Inej was subjected to beatings and other forms of cruelty on several occasions by Tante Heleen, the woman in charge of the pleasure house. This is explained by Inej as she recalls her troubled past, “Tante Heleen’s salon was the worst. It was the room for beatings, for Heleen’s worst rages.” (p. 325), and as she remembers what happened after she tried to escape when she first arrived in Ketterdam:

Cobbet had clamped a meaty hand on the nape of her neck and hauled her back. Heleen took her into the salon and beat her badly enough that she hadn’t been able to work for a week. For the month after, Heleen had kept her in golden chains, not even letting her go down to the parlour. (p. 325)

She has been mistreated by both genders, which has most likely resulted in her affinity for being alone. Preferring isolation from other people has been beneficial in her role as the Wraith for the Dregs. She is able to live a lifestyle where her job is to be invisible to others.

She struggles to find her identity and value throughout the novel. She has moments of doubts and helplessness, and the reader comes along in her journey of self-discovery and pursuance of agency. In a moment of insecurity after being confronted by Tante Heleen, the person who first bought her, there is an instant where she tries to remind herself of her worth, “She was the Wraith. She had nothing to fear from Tante Heleen any longer. Per Haskell had bought out her indenture. He’d freed her. She wasn’t a slave; she was a valued member of the Dregs, a thief of secrets, the best in the Barrel.” (p. 151). Throughout the novel, she tries to remind herself of her value in times of doubt.

The last few years of Inej’s life have been continuously under the control of others. First, she was sold to a pleasure house under the control of Tante Heleen, and then she was transferred to a gang where she had to work as a criminal to buy her freedom. It all started after her capture, as she was being appraised and examined by Tante Heleen,

The woman had held her lantern up and examined every inch of Inej – her teeth, her breasts, even her feet. She’d tugged on the matted hair on Inej’s head. “This will have to be shaved.” Then she’d stepped back. “Pretty,” she said. “Scrawny and flat as a pan, but her skin is flawless.” (p. 205)

She was viewed as merchandise and an object to be utilized for other people’s benefit. She was no longer a person. Though her circumstances changed, there are still moments in the novel where she is reminded of her past. In a moment in the novel where she runs into Tante Heleen, the following happens, “Heleen ran a single manicured talon along her cheek. “Lynx is your only name,” Heleen crooned. “You’re still pretty enough to fetch a good price.” (p. 150). This type of objectification is similar to what happened with Nina in the sense that her value is viewed and measured in a correlation of her appearance and gender.

Tante Heleen is described as a proud and powerful woman, and she thrives at making girls feel insecure and inferior to her. She views girls as a source of income, a way to make herself rich. Inej, in the beginning, lets Tante Heleen have this power over her by panicking and not

sticking up for herself, but as the story develops, the dynamic changes. This sort of objectification also happens when she is with the dregs; multiple times in the novel she and others refer to her as an investment: “Per Haskell had needed convincing, but Inej was one of the best investments Kaz had ever made.” (p. 43), “I’m a very valuable investment.” (p. 201), from Kaz: “I protect my investments.” (p. 165). Kaz referring to her in this way, hurts her because she cares about him, and it continually reminds her that she is just another thing being used by others, even by Kaz.

Throughout the novel, the reader observes Inej’s journey as her character develops and transforms. And towards the end she has a moment of revelation where she realizes her agency:

She wanted a storm – thunder, wind, a deluge. She wanted it to crash through Ketterdam’s pleasure houses, lifting roofs and tearing doors off their hinges. She wanted it to raise the seas, take hold of every slaving ship, shatter their masts, and smash their hulls against unforgiving shores. I want to call that storm, she thought. And four million krugge might be enough to do it. Enough for her own ship – something small and fierce and laden with firepower. Something like her. She would hunt the slavers and their buyers. They would learn to fear her, and they would know her by her name. *The heart is an arrow. It demands aim to land true.* She clung to the wall, but it was purpose she grasped at long last, and that carried her upwards. She was not a lynx or a spider or even the Wraith. She was Inej Ghafa, and her future was waiting above. (pp. 332-333)

With the prospect of the reward from the heist, she is finally able to dream of a better future for herself. She hopes to use her experiences from the past to prevent others from the same fate. She is in a stage where she finally feels as if she has control over her future, and she is excited over the prospect of helping others like her. She recognizes the injustice that has been done to her, and she wants to turn a horrible experience into something good. It is at this point she is finding her agency, she is making her own choices, taking control over her own life. After being controlled by others for so long, there is a sense of happiness and excitement as she discovers a sense of agency.

### 6.3.2 Violence

The threat of violence and death is a constant in *Six of Crows* (2015). Most of the characters have either grown up in a violent environment or been exposed to later on in life. Through the perspective of Inej, during a moment of uncertainty, whether they would be able to survive the heist, she studies their strange group, “A gambler, a convict, a wayward son, a lost Grisha, a Suli girl who had become a killer, a boy from the Barrel who had become something worse.” (p. 355). In a passage where Kaz asks their group a question, it reflects how their thought process has been affected by living in such a violent setting:

Kaz leaned back. “What’s the easiest way to steal a man’s wallet?”

“Knife to the throat?” asked Inej.

“Gun to the back?” said Jesper.

“Poison in his cup?” suggested Nina.

“You’re all horrible,” said Matthias. (p. 135)

They have all been affected by the violent environment they live in, and it has resulted in them all answering a simple question with various forms of violence as the solution.

#### *Kaz*

Kaz is especially portrayed as a violent and ruthless character. Descriptions of Kaz are plentiful throughout the novel, “greed is your god” (p. 43) and “cold, rude, impossible” (p. 175). Kaz has built a reputation for himself, where he is perceived as a monster. This is exemplified when Matthias describes Kaz based on rumors, “He’d heard Brekker’s name in prison, and the words associated with him – criminal prodigy, ruthless, amoral. They called him Dirtyhands because there was no sin he would not commit for the right price.” (p. 119). If the reader were only to view Kaz through the perspective of others the reader might agree with the statement of him being a monster, but because we get his backstory and thoughts, we are able to sympathize with him.

Kaz’s experiences during the outbreak of firepox in Ketterdam is brutal, and to provide a greater understanding of Kaz as a character, one should be aware of just how bad it was. This is to offer a greater context and to understand the effect it has had on his mental health, and

the continued consequences he faces recurrently. Kaz and Jordie were both infected by the disease, and as he wakes up finding Jordie lying dead next to him, he “laid his head on Jordie’s chest. It felt wrong already, cold and hard.” (p. 294). He and Jordie were later rolled onto a boat for the sick, “He felt himself falling, and then he was caught in a tangle of bodies. He tried to scream, but he was too weak. They were everywhere, legs and arms and stiff bellies, rotting limbs and blue-lipped faces covered in firepox sores.” (p. 294). He was then taken to Reaper’s Barge, a place where they take the dead and proceeds to pass out. Then wakes up

surrounded by corpses. He was lying in the shallows of the Reaper’s Barge, his clothes soaked through, skin wrinkled from the damp. Jordie’s body was beside him, barely recognisable, white and swollen with rot, floating on the surface like some kind of gruesome deep sea fish. (p. 294).

He then subsequently uses Jordie’s body as a raft to float back to Ketterdam. It is during this moment that there is a shift in Kaz. As he threads through the water, his thoughts reflect this turning point, “He’d heard there were sharks in these waters, but he knew they wouldn’t touch him. He was a monster now, too.” (p. 295).

In a flashback right after the death of his brother, there is a scene where he wants a job, but another boy already occupied it, which leads him to do the following:

Kaz waited all night until he saw a boy about his age leave the premises. He followed him for two blocks, then hit him in the head with a rock. He sat down on the boy’s legs and pulled off his shoes, then slashed the soles of his feet with a piece of broken bottle. The boy would recover, but he wouldn’t be working anytime soon. (p. 336)

This is the first brutal act of violence that Kaz commits. If the passage were to stop there, the reader would understand Kaz as a bad person, but knowing what horrors he recently went through, and as the story continues with: “Touching the bare flesh of his ankles had filled Kaz with revulsion. He kept seeing the white bodies of the Reaper’s Barge, feeling the ripe bloat of Jordie’s skin beneath his hands.” (p. 336), the reader can understand his motives.

Without the visceral memories of Kaz's circumstances, it would be a lot harder to sympathize with his character. Knowing what he went through makes it easier for the reader to understand his brutality and use of violence. It could create an inner conflict with the reader because while they know of his tragic background, it does not justify his cruel actions. However, the author has portrayed Kaz in a way that evokes empathy, the reader knows what he does is wrong, but they might accept it because of his past.

### *Wylan*

Wylan Van Eck is the most innocent of the main characters. He is described as shy and often fades into the background. Wylan has lived a sheltered life in comparison to the other characters and has not been exposed to the kind of horrors the other main characters have gone through. At the beginning of the novel they all looked down on him because of how he had lived a privileged life, and they made fun of him for having had "pricey tutors" (p. 130), among other things. Being among people used to violence and death, he becomes an outsider. After he joins the heist crew, the dynamic starts to change as the story progresses. Throughout their journey, they are frequently exposed to various violent and dangerous situations. As Wylan becomes accustomed to a life of danger, he starts to adjust to his environment and can better understand the other characters in the group.

In the beginning, he is adamant not to be compared with the others as he declares "'I'm not a criminal'" (p. 207), and "'I'm nothing like him. I don't belong here'" (p. 207) when being complimented for thinking like a lockpick and not wanting to be compared to Kaz. Although he resists the title criminal, he takes pride in being the demolition expert in the group.

Towards the end of *Six of Crows* (2015), Wylan, in a moment of vulnerability, admits to Jesper of never seeing a dead body before joining the group,

"I'd never even seen a dead body before I came to the Barrel," Wylan admitted.

"It's not something to be embarrassed about," Jesper said, surprising himself a little. But he meant it. Wylan needed to learn to take care of himself, but it would be nice if he could do it without getting on friendly terms with death. (p. 378)

Having observed how the group value experience with the dark parts of the world, he is embarrassed having to admit not seeing a dead body earlier in his life. People often have a need to fit in, and Wylan is no exception; to fit in, he feels that he needs to be more familiar with death and violence. Jesper has been involved with the dark side of the world for some time and often considers dangerous situation exciting and appealing. In his answer to Wylan, he is surprised by his response and subsequent thoughts, which suggest that his mindset has recently changed, perhaps by Wylan. He recognizes the value of being able to take care of oneself, but that is possible to do that without being involved with death. Death is not a necessary part of life, but can occasionally be unavoidable.

## **6.4 Disabilities**

The fantasy world in *Six of Crows* (2015) is a brutal one, and all the main characters have gone through tough times in their lifetime. Most of the main characters suffer from one or several disabilities, though some are more prominent. They are a range of mental, physical, and cognitive disabilities.

The type of mental disability that is represented in the novel is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as traces of anxiety disorder, which includes panic disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The ones who are most clearly affected by PTSD are the main characters Kaz and Inej.

### **6.4.1 Inej**

As a result of Inej's experiences with physical and mental abuse, she has developed several mental health issues. Her time as a sex slave has and probably will have long time consequences on her mental health. As she is still a part of the criminal world through being a member of the Dregs, her mental health continues to be affected as she is regularly exposed to violence. Although her transition from a sexual slave to life as a spy for a criminal gang made life more bearable for Inej, she is still being exposed to forms of physical and mental abuse. Being switched from one part of the underworld to another only made the abuse change form, and it became less pronounced.



During her time as a sex trafficking victim, Inej suffered severe trauma and abuse, and in the novel Inej shows signs of PTSD most likely as a result of this experience. It is during her experiences, such as when she is confronted with her past in the form of walking near the Menagerie, meeting Tante Heleen or seeing items connected to that time of her life, that the reader is able to observe these symptoms come forward that are often associated with PTSD. During a moment where Inej is forced to move near the Menagerie, she starts to display severe anxiety early on. It begins in the form of an item that reminds her, peacock feathers, which were usually worn by Tante Heleen, “Inej glimpsed peacock feathers in the parlor, and her heart stuttered. It was just a bit of decoration, part of a lavish flower arrangement, but the panic inside her didn’t care. It rose up, clutching at her breath.” (p. 149). She begins to panic because she associates the feathers with the individual that was the most prominent in her time as a sex trafficking victim. A small item such as peacock feathers that would usually be inconsequential for other people has become a trigger for Inej, because of its connection to her traumatic past.

As she moves past the Menagerie, “Inej forced herself to look at the Menagerie as she passed. It’s just a place, she told herself. Just another house.” (p. 149). Forcing herself to look at the place she fears the most can suggest a will to fight this mental disability. She does not want fear to guide her. Confronting your fears is often believed to help eliminate the fear, and by forcing herself to watch the place as she walks past, she is seemingly trying to face her fear of the house. Additionally, by trying to remind herself that it is merely just a house, she is trying to normalize the situation. While she continues walking, she describes how,

she was the predator now, not Heleen in her peacock feathers, not any man who walked these streets.

As soon as she was out of sight of the Menagerie, the tight feeling in her chest and throat began to ease. She’d done it. She’d walked alone on West Stave, right in front of the House of Exotics. Whatever was waiting for her in Fjerda, she could face it. (p. 149)

Feeling a sense of accomplishment by walking past a house she fears gives her the confidence to be able to tackle the next difficult task because, for her, this was an essential step in her recovery. Inej is a resilient woman, and the reader can observe her make an effort to work through her past to seek a better future.

Despite wanting to get better and trying to work through her problems, she is still very much affected by the memories of her past. After she passed the Menagerie, thinking she was in the clear, she runs into the person she fears the most, Tante Heleen. As Tante Heleen's enforcer blocks her path, her anxiety starts to rise anew, "Inej's vision blurred. *Trapped. Trapped. Trapped again.*" (p. 150). Tante Heleen grabs Inej, and while she is touched and threatened by Tante Heleen, Inej describes the experience as the following:

"Move, her mind screamed, but she couldn't. Her muscles had locked up; a high whine of terror filled her head [...] A humiliating sound emerged from Inej's throat, a choked wheeze [...] Black crowded into Inej's vision." (p. 150).

Inej's reactions suggest she is experiencing an anxiety attack triggered by intense fear, which is causing her to have a severe physical reaction. With a promise to get her back one day, Tante Heleen vanishes into the crowd, leaving Inej alone to deal with her words, "Inej stood frozen, shaking. Then she dove into the crowd, eager to disappear." (p. 151). Having created more distance between her and others, she can relax, and as the stressor of the anxiety attack is removed, the attack goes away along with it. As she describes removing herself from the crowd, combined with her affinity to being alone, suggests she also has a form of claustrophobia. This is a form of anxiety disorder that makes her fear being closed-in, which can cause her to experience a panic attack being in crowds.

During several occasions during the novel, Inej displays signs of the mental disorder obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), possibly as a result of her past. One instance is when she is preparing for a meetup with a rival gang:

Inej checked her knives, silently reciting their names as she always did when she thought there might be trouble. It was a practical habit, but a comfort, too. The blades were her companions. She liked knowing they were ready for whatever the night might bring. (p. 16)

Inej has experienced a severe lack of control and agency in her own life after being kidnapped and sexually trafficked. The previous lack of agency could have resulted in this type of disorder, because it can give her a sense of power over something, no matter how insignificant it might seem. Her blades have become her comfort blanket, as she mentions later on in the novel, "Her blades were reliable" (p. 152), they are perhaps one of the few

stable things in her life. Checking and reciting their names possibly gives her a sense of control that was previously lacking in her life. It becomes an essential ritual for her, but this habit could also have resulted in OCD.

#### 6.4.2 Kaz

The depiction of multiple disabilities in one character is rare. The character Kaz exhibits both physical and mental disabilities. However, he treats these disabilities differently from one another. Kaz has physical limitations after he broke his leg as a result of a fall from a rooftop at the age of fourteen. He treats this limp with pride, becoming a symbol. His cane became:

a declaration. There was no part of him that was not broken, that had not healed wrong, and there was no part of him that was not stronger for having been broken. The cane became a part of the myth he built. No one knew who he was. No one knew where he came from. He'd become Kaz Brekker, cripple and confidence man, bastard of the Barrel. (pp. 428-429)

Being identified as the crippled character could have easily been used to sentimentalize the reader. Nevertheless, Kaz is described as a fierce character, and although the reader empathizes with his character, we do not feel sorry for him. He, more often than not, conveys strength and not weakness.

One example is how Kaz uses other people's perceptions and judgment of him to his advantage, turning it into his secret weapon. For instance, in the meeting with the rival gang, as everyone has to strip themselves of their weapons:

“What about that?” Jesper asked, gesturing to Kaz's walking stick.

Kaz's laugh was low and humourless. “Who'd deny a poor cripple his cane?”

“If the cripple is you, then any man with sense.” (p. 19)

The cane is not only used for pain relief and support but as a weapon, both in the literal and figurative sense. Kaz expects others to underestimate him, and they perceive the cane as only an apparatus necessary for his physical limitation. His appearance with the cane is often misleading, and people might view him as non-threatening, simply a cripple with a cane. People do not expect him to be dangerous, which can become useful in certain situations,

such as in that meeting with the rivals: “Kaz’s cane swung in a sudden sharp arc. Geels screamed as his wrist bones shattered. The gun clattered to the paving stones.” (p. 36).

Due to Kaz’s traumatic experiences involving the death of his brother, he has developed a severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As a result, he began to use gloves to shield himself from physical contact,

The gloves were his one concession to weakness. Since that night among the bodies and the swim from the Reaper’s Barge, he had not been able to bear the feeling of skin against skin. It was excruciating to him, revolting. It was the only piece of his past that he could not forge into something dangerous.” (p. 429)

While the gloves also become a part of his persona, his relationship with them is more complicated than the cane. The gloves become a part of the image he created for himself, with people referring to him as Dirtyhands, and encouraging the various reputations surrounding the reason for the gloves.

He created a positive outlook and attitude towards having to walk with a cane, while his aversion to touch is viewed as a constant source of weakness. During their mission, the group has to trade places with a group of prisoners, which entailed being in a cramped space, Kaz describes the experience as: “He forced himself to breathe deeply, despite the smell of bodies. He’d kept his gloves on, something the guards might have easily taken note of, and a frustrating concession to his weakness, but if he hadn’t, he felt fairly sure he’d have gone completely mad.” (pp. 296-297). In his mind, being incapable of physically touching someone is considered his one weakness, and he resents this. The symbolism of the cane and gloves, and Kaz’s differing relationship with them, reveal that an individual can choose how to cope and use their disabilities. That people have the power to choose to view it as something negative or try to find a way to turn it around into something positive. It also reflects how some disabilities might be more challenging to overcome than others. Kaz is able to cope better with his leg injury but continually struggles with his inability to touch others. Disabilities come in different shapes and forms, and they affect people differently, which is reflected in not only Kaz but all the characters that display one or more disabilities in *Six of Crows* (2015)

### 6.4.3 Jesper

Jesper was originally meant to be a student in Ketterdam, but because of his restless energy, he quickly found himself lured into the criminal underworld. While the novel never explicitly states that Jesper Fahey has a form of ADHD, it is implied on multiple occasions. Other characters describe him as “constantly in motion.” (p. 19), “He always seemed to be in motion.” (p. 176) and “The frenetic energy of Jesper’s lanky frame.” (p. 176), which all indicate ADHD (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). Although he might not be able to explicitly name the reason for why he is not as calm as other people, he seems to be somewhat aware of not being like everyone else. He knows that he cannot contain it; the energy needs to have an outlet, which can often become a struggle in various situations. Such as when he gets excited, “Anticipation tugged at Jesper, a fizzing mix of fear and excitement that made it hard for him to sit still.” (p. 137), or when he is constricted, “Jesper prowled the deck, climbed the rigging, tried to get the crew to play cards with him, cleaned his guns. He missed land and good food and better lager. He missed the city.” (p. 206). He is not always in situations where he can have the outlet he craves, and that can become a struggle for him.

Jesper is an impulsive character, possibly as a result of his presumed ADHD, which has led to both negative and positive outcomes in his life. Being a member of a gang, his energy has become an asset, because he loves the fight, and he can channel his energy during fights. He describes the experience as:

Jesper always felt better when people were shooting at him. It wasn’t that he liked the idea of dying (in fact, that potential outcome was a definite drawback), but if he was worrying about staying alive, he couldn’t be thinking about anything else. That sound – the swift, shocking report of gunfire – called the scattered, irascible, permanently seeking part of his mind into focus like nothing else. (p. 154)

It is during the moments in a fight that he is finally able to focus. He receives positive feelings when he takes risks and is in moments of danger. However, he has sort of a love/hate relationship with this part of him. During a dangerous part of their mission, he explains how “it was risk filling up his nose and mouth, making him feel giddy and invincible. He loved it, and he hated himself for loving it.” (p. 373). He understands that he is different, that he is most likely the only one enjoying and wanting a fight. Knowing he is dissimilar from others

could be the reason for why he has moments like this, that of self-loathing. Knowing that it is not common and that other people usually do not enjoy danger, he struggles between his own feelings and what he thinks he should be feeling. People often have a great need to fit in, and when they do not, they often experience conflicting feelings, and that is most likely what Jesper goes through.

His moments of impulsiveness also make him reckless at times. Jesper loves a game of chance, and his implied ADHD could have influenced his apparent gambling addiction. It started innocently, the first week in Ketterdam; he and a few students went out to play, and he describes to Inej in a conversation the moment: “when the dealer gave the wheel a spin, I’d never heard a more beautiful sound. I won, and I kept winning. It was the best night of my life.” (p. 214). As Inej then appropriately responds, “And you’ve been chasing it ever since.” (p. 214). At that moment, his addiction was born, and it is a daily struggle for him to control the impulse.

#### **6.4.4 Wylan**

Wylan, as the son of the merchant that hired the crew for the mission, was originally recruited to serve as collateral. He appears to have a severe form of dyslexia. For that reason, he was disinherited and exiled from his family because his father believed he would not be able to take over the family business. Being dyslexic and analphabetic, he endured deep psychological abuse from his father. As he joins the crew, the father continues to torment him, in the form of sending letters he knows Wylan will not be able to read. In a conversation with Kaz and Jesper, Wylan’s father explains how he tried “specialists, tonics, beatings, hypnotism.” (p. 474), but nothing helped, and that he:

“finally had to accept that Ghezen saw fit to curse me with a moron for a child. Wylan is a boy who will never grow to be a man. He is a disgrace to my house.”

“The letters ...” said Jesper, and Kaz could see the anger in his face. “You weren’t pleading with him to come back. You were mocking him.”

Jesper was right. *If you’re reading this, then you know how much I wish to have you home.* Every letter had been a slap in the face to Wylan, a kind of cruel joke.(pp. 474-475)

Each letter was a way of reminding his son of his limitations. He resents his son of tarnishing the Van Eck name.

Even though he is not able to read or write, he is gifted in other areas; he excels at chemistry and math, as well as being a skilled artist and musician. However, all of these talents have throughout his life been overshadowed by his incapability to read and write. Although he did not fit in with the group at the beginning, he is eventually accepted and appreciated for the skills he brings into the group. Towards the end of the novel, Kaz acknowledges Wylan's courage, and explains how it does not matter for him that he has dyslexia because he has other useful skills:

Wylan had been red-faced, barely able to speak the words of his supposed 'affliction'. Kaz had only shrugged. Some men were poets. Some were farmers. Some were rich merchants. Wylan could draw a perfect elevation. He'd made a drill that could cut through Grisha glass from parts of a gate and scavenged bits of jewellery. So what if he couldn't read? (p. 477)

Kaz and the others in the group accepting Wylan, has a tremendous effect on his character development. For probably the first time in his life, he is valued and respected by others. The reader observes him gaining confidence, and as his father no longer restrains him, he can make individualized choices, subsequently gaining greater agency.

## **6.5 Multiculturalism**

As a reflection of the real world, there are significant cultural differences between the different countries in the Grishaverse. Certain countries appear to be more liberal, while others seem to be quite conservative. The behavior, values, thought processes, and communication methods of the characters in *Six of Crows* (2015) reflect their different cultural backgrounds.

### **6.5.1 Inej**

Inej Ghafa, as previously mentioned, is of Suli heritage, and was originally a part of a nomadic people from Ravka. Her cultural and religious background is displayed numerous times in the novel. Early on, she expresses that despite everything she had been through, she

“still believed her Suli Saints were watching over her.” (p. 43). Her life is substantially more violent than before her kidnapping, and this has brought on conflicting feelings in relation to her values as a Suli. Even if Inej’s lifestyle has dramatically changed in the last few years, she never forgets where she comes from, and integrates her beliefs in her life in Ketterdam:

feeling the grips of her daggers slide into her palms. Sankt Petyr, renowned for his bravery, on the right; the slender, bone-handled blade she’d named for Sankta Alina on the left. She recited the names of her other knives, too. Sankta Marya and Sankta Anastasia strapped to her thighs. Sankt Vladimir hidden in her boot, and Sankta Lizabeta snug at her belt, the blade etched in a pattern of roses. *Protect me, protect me.* She had to believe her Saints saw and understood the things she did to survive. (p. 151)

Having the weapons named after the Saints from her religion, she can stay close to her faith. It could also be a source of comfort for her, perhaps believing that the names could serve as some sort of protection. She believes that the crimes she commits are done out of necessity; she does not kill for the pure pleasure of it. During moments where she performs what could be considered a necessary evil for her, she uses her religion as a way to attain redemption for her crimes, such as when she “said a silent prayer as she slit one throat “ (p. 161) and “murmuring prayers of gratitude to her Saints.” (p. 332) when needing guidance during a moment of their mission. She is a character with strong beliefs, and it has probably played a large part when dealing with the traumatic moments she has endured after being kidnapped.

### **6.5.2 Matthias vs. Nina**

The Drüskelle and Grisha are taught to hate one another. They have highly contrasting values and beliefs. The contrasts are exemplified numerous times in the novel, especially during the interactions between Nina, the Grisha, and Matthias, the drüskelle. In the beginning, Matthias stays true to his beliefs and views as a drüskelle soldier. He despises the Grisha, which includes Nina, and at the start of the novel, his thought process reveals this: “He would run Nina Zenik to ground and make her pay in every way imaginable. Death would be too good.” (p. 125), “Her kind had no honour. She’d proven that.” (p. 189), and “They were all deceivers and spies, trained to prey on people like him, people without their unnatural gifts. They were predators.” (p. 241). As mentioned in the earlier section discussing gender roles (6.1), his feelings towards Nina change throughout the novel, and in turn, he starts to question his



beliefs. Furthermore, considering the group is assembled by characters from different cultures and nationalities, he is possibly able to gain some perspective of his nation. After being with the group for an extended amount of time, his conflicting thoughts are expressed after a conversation with his previous mentor, Brum:

*Driiskelle* colours. Matthias had worn them with such pride. And the things he'd felt for Nina had caused him so much shame. It was still with him, maybe it always would be. He'd spent too many years full of hate for it to vanish overnight. But now the shame was an echo, and all he felt was regret – for the time he'd wasted, for the pain he'd caused, and yes, even now, for what he was about to do. (p. 408)

While hating Nina, he was still having romantic feelings towards her, but he kept fighting his emotions because he was taught to hate the Grisha. He grew up with the belief that Grisha could only do evil. His beliefs were solidified the moment Nina got him arrested and sent to prison in Kerch; she proved to him that they could do no good. Learning that her actions were done in an attempt to save him and that her intentions were good, however, makes him realize that what he had been taught was perhaps not as valid as previously believed. This realization comes after learning why Nina has done what she has done:

Nina had wronged him, but she'd done it to protect her people. She'd hurt him, but she'd attempted everything in her power to make things right. She'd shown him in a thousand ways that she was honourable and strong and generous and very human, maybe more vividly human than anyone he'd ever known. And if she was, then Grisha weren't inherently evil. They were like anyone else – full of the potential to do great good, and also great harm. To ignore that would make Matthias the monster. (p. 409)

He can gain an understanding of the Grisha and is finally able to accept them as human beings, capable of doing both the wrong and right thing. After this revelation, he declares to his old mentor, Brum, whom Matthias forced into unconsciousness, “Matthias pressed his forehead once, briefly, against Brum’s. He knew his mentor could not hear him, but he spoke the words anyway. “The life you live, the hate you feel – it’s poison. I can drink it no longer”” (p. 411). At this moment, he is finally able to let go of his anger and animosity towards the Grisha.

Matthias is not only able to reflect on his previous prejudice towards the Grisha; he can understand why he originally had these negative thoughts. When referring to his former drüskelle comrades, he mentions how “They were monsters, he knew it, but boys as well, boys like him – taught to hate, to fear.” (p. 452). He understands that he was not born to hate the Grisha; it was something taught by others, and that he has the power to decide whether he wants to continue. At this moment, he is trying to prevent Nina from attacking a group of drüskelle, explaining to her that: ““They fear you as I once feared you,” he said. “As you once feared me. We are all someone’s monster, Nina.”” (p. 453). He can explain how there are two sides, and there is never just one solely bad individual or group. Moreover, he conveys how hatred is born out of fear and insecurities. We could interpret that the drüskelle feel the way they do towards the Grisha because they do not understand their powers; that it was perhaps born out of jealousy and envy because their magical abilities give them some sort of advantage. Furthermore, their religious beliefs and values could be incompatible with the Grisha’s abilities, but the thought process and justification behind this is unclear.

The Grisha’s animosity towards Fjerda, where the drüskelle come from, however, is much clearer. In an effort to eradicate the Grisha, Fjerdans and the drüskelle have been hunting and killing them for years. One of these times is during the heist group’s trek in Fjerda, as they are witnesses to the brutality of Fjerdan’s:

Three stakes had been driven into the icy ground, and three charred bodies were bound to them, their blackened, cracked skin still smouldering.

“Ghezen,” swore Wylan. “What is this?”

“This is what Fjerdans do to Grisha.” Nina said. Her face was slack, her green eyes staring.

“It’s what criminals do,” said Matthias, his insides churning. “The pyres have been illegal since—” (p. 247)

Matthias believed that the drüskelle have an order to the eradication, that they are to stand trial before being found guilty of their crimes as Grisha. However, as illustrated in this scene, the Fjerdans are merciless in their pursuit of the Grisha people. As Matthias tries to explain that the killing was at the hands of criminals, Nina responds with: ““Tell me the last time someone was prosecuted for putting a Grisha to the flames. Do you even call it murder when you put down dogs?”” (p. 247), and ““Do you have a different name for killing when you wear a uniform to do it?”” (p. 247). She is pointing out Matthias’s hypocrisy and contrasting

principles. This moment is probably one of many that assisted Matthias in becoming more reflective of his beliefs and values.

The portrayal of Fjerdans and drüskelle are highly contrasting to the Grisha. The Fjerdans have seemingly performed a lot more injustice and brutality towards the Grisha than what the Grisha have done towards the Fjerdans. There seems to be more reason for Grisha to vilify the Fjerdans than the other way, which is exemplified in the relationship between Matthias and Nina. This is shown when we observe how Matthias slowly starts to doubt his deep-rooted beliefs, and starts to sympathize with the Grisha as he manages to gain a broader perspective on society as he spends more time with the diverse group. This illustrates how opinions and beliefs can change when people socialize outside of their own culture.

## 6.6 Identity

All the characters in *Six of Crows* (2015) struggle with their identity in some form. Identity has been a pronounced component throughout the literary analysis of the various characters in the novel. Therefore, although identity is an overarching concept that relates to all the characters, here, I wanted use the case of one character to show its place in the novel.

### 6.6.1 Jesper

During an unexpected plot twist, the reader is made aware of a secret that Jesper has kept from the others in the heist group. As the males in the group work towards escaping a prison cell, Kaz instructs Jesper to use his powers to make a needle to use on the cell door, which is the moment they realize:

“You’re a Fabrikator,” Matthias said grimly.

“Just barely.”

“You either are or you aren’t,” said Wylan.

“I am.” He jabbed a finger at Wylan. “And you’re going to keep your mouth shut about it when we get back to Ketterdam.” (p. 311)

No one except for Kaz knew that Jesper was a Grisha, a Fabrikator. He has a power that focuses on composite materials such as chemicals, metal, textiles, and glass. Jesper has

hidden this part of him from almost everyone all his life, including himself in a way. As a result of this, he has suppressed his powers, which has resulted in little control of his powers. His insecurities have most likely been prompted by his father's reactions to him being a Grisha:

When Jesper had started to show his power, his father had been heartbroken. He'd encouraged Jesper to keep it hidden. "I'm afraid for you," he'd said. "The world can be cruel to your kind." But Jesper had always wondered if maybe his father had been a little afraid of him, too. (p. 375)

His father blatantly rejecting that part of him, pressuring him to keep it hidden from the world, most likely made Jesper conflicted and confused.

During the mission in Fjerda, the reader is able to observe as Jesper is having an identity crisis of sorts. Jesper is often portrayed as a wild and irresponsible teenager who worries about the next bet and fight, and perhaps he has not been exposed to the harsh reality of his supposed people, the Grisha, in the same way he is during the mission in Fjerda. During their mission, they see the result of just how much the Grisha have been subjected to, at the hands of the Fjerdans. Such as the burned bodies on the stakes, but also during the moment when Jesper and Wylan discover a wall in the Ice Court, which is the military stronghold in Fjerda, where they had adorned it with Grisha colors from fallen Grisha-trophies from the dead. Jesper expresses his confusing thoughts as he cannot understand why he was eager to risk capture and execution as a criminal, but not comprehending "Why was it worse to think about being hunted as a Grisha?" (p. 374). He also questions what would become of him if he had made different choices, "*What if I'd gone to Ravka instead of Kerch?* Jesper thought. *What if I'd joined the Second Army?*" (pp. 375-376). He begins to question his life choices; he is being torn between different cultural identities.

Jesper knows that he is a Grisha, but as he has never practiced, he does not feel as if he is enough of a Grisha, he has not had a sense of belonging with them. He is also afraid of the repercussions of the abilities he was born with, because he has been taught all his life that being a Grisha is wrong and dangerous. However, seeing what his people have and are still going through, he begins to question whether he should have done more to help those like him. He is questioning the choices he has made and what he should do going forward.

Towards the end of the novel, the reader can witness as Jesper gradually develops a stronger

connection with his Grisha side. He is coming more to terms with that side of him, and as he gains more confidence in his identity, he can attain a greater agency. Becoming surer of himself, will make him able to feel more in control, and make him feel a sense of agency that he most likely was lacking beforehand.

## 7 Didactic benefits

The new curriculum has created a greater focus on the health of not only the pupil but for all people in society (Ministry of Education, 2019). Through educating the pupils on how to maintain good mental and physical health, it can create a chain reaction that affects all of society, as pupils will hopefully use what they have learned in their day to day life. School is not exclusively a place where pupils have to learn the alphabet or the date of an important event; it should be an arena where they learn how to work as functioning people in society. This aspect of school is being enhanced in the new core curriculum (2019).

The making of health and life skills as an interdisciplinary topic will have a significant impact if appropriately integrated into the different subject curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2019). In this chapter, I exemplify possible didactic benefits of Leigh Bardugo's novel *Six of Crows* (2015) concerning how to utilize health and life skills in the English subject curriculum. The didactic benefits will, therefore, be in the context of learning good physical and mental health.

### 7.1 Overarching concerns in *Six of Crows*

The YA fantasy novel *Six of Crows* (2015) creates an opportunity for pupils to see a world and society that greatly reflects the real world that they live in. Although the novel is set in a made-up fantastical world that defies our laws of physics, it portrays characters and situations that are more authentic than in many other works of literature. *Six of Crows* (2015) provides the reader with a diverse group of characters, who have all grown up under different circumstances, and follows their journey as they work towards a common goal.

#### 7.1.1 An inclusive learning environment

In *Six of Crows* (2015), there is not one specific dominant narrative. It offers characters of differing social class, ethnicity, gender, gender roles, sexual orientation, national origin, culture, language, age, ability, body type, weight, and height, which are the traits that Miller argue constitute important parts of people's identities (2014, p. 57). One narrative is not being more valued than others; the author has not made the reader feel as if one trait or a singular character is more desirable or superior to another. Their various traits are merely traits that distinguish people from one another, and it does not necessarily have to be a good or bad

thing. Having such a vast collection of traits within the novel increases the likelihood that pupils can relate to one or more characters. It is important that pupils can see themselves in literary works such as novels, to see that there are others like them, where those like them are being accepted. The curriculum recognizes the importance of this matter as it states how school shall “*help each pupil to preserve and develop her or his identity in an inclusive and diverse environment.*” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 7). This could be achieved through the use of *Six of Crows* (2015), because of the diverse environment it portrays.

Furthermore, the novel normalizes diversity by not focusing too much on the differences, which is needed as “the population is more diversified than ever before” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p 8). The characters are not solely defined by their various traits. Characteristics that would typically be highlighted as a key trait, and perhaps taken advantage of in the sense of generating an emotion by the reader, fall into the backdrop. Kaz having a physical limitation could have easily been constructed in a way that made the reader feel sorry for him, but instead, his limitations are portrayed as an advantage. Furthermore, characters like Jesper and Wylan, who are bisexual and gay, are not having their sexuality becoming the most critical aspect of their identity; it is merely another piece of the story.

### **7.1.2 Identity and cultural diversity**

Leigh Bardugo creates a world in which identities that are normally alienated can flourish. The group of characters is able to triumph despite social stigmas. With the Grishaverse, Bardugo created a world where outcasts can be accepted, creating circumstances that are often lacking in the real world. The author proficiently avoids ableism (the discrimination against people with disabilities), heteronormativity (the belief that heterosexuality is the norm or default), fat-shaming (the action of humiliating someone judged to be fat), and whitewashing (only portraying white characters). It allows the characters to be viewed as normal and not being judged because of one or more traits that defy the traditional norms. These kinds of situations are what pupils should be seeing; a world in which defies traditional and outdated patterns of being. However, the fantasy genre does not always reflect the true state of society. Situations such as the domination of white culture and appearance in famous fantasy literature (Young, 2006, p. 11), as well as the construction of beauty and attraction that limit gender identity that can be observed in literary works, exemplify issues that have been and still are relevant in YA fantasy literature. *Six of Crows* (2015) is a modern work of YA fantasy

literature that adopts a new angle and can work as a tool to show a new way of looking at the world, both the real one and the literary one, and to work as a way to enhance cultural understanding, which is recognized in the core curriculum to “growing in importance” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 8)

The amount of gender stereotyping that has been performed in the literary world has been extensive, and can still be seen. However, *Six of Crows* (2015) is a book that challenges mainstream gender norms. It empowers both males and females and has created role models for readers. Exposure is imperative; pupils being exposed to different types of characters can make a significant impact in what could be considered normal. When meeting characters such as Nina that defies typical notions of beauty, attraction, and expected behavior of girls, it could contribute to making her traits normalized and respected. Concerning the topic “identity and cultural diversity” from the core curriculum, it emphasizes that school shall “make the pupils confident in who they are” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 8), characters such as Nina can contribute to this goal. Girls that fit the description of Nina, who might have been made to feel lesser because they did not fit the criteria of what is considered beautiful, could gain confidence in themselves because she proves that beauty can be so much more.

Even though the group of main characters represents diversity and acceptance towards the end of *Six of Crows* (2015), it is not always like this. Throughout most of the plot, it looks more like a mismatched group of characters forced to come together as a result of a common goal. The reader is witness to social and cultural differences that cause conflict and disturbance among the individuals in the group, as well as social issues and injustice occurring both locally and internationally in the Grishaverse. This is a reflection on situations that can occur and are transpiring in modern-day society. It illustrates that even though people are seemingly different from each other, they can be united through working together. It also asserts the importance of getting to know someone, as it is a crucial element when understanding our differences, and eventually coming to accept one another. Seeing similar situations in the novel, as well as what they might view in the modern world, could be beneficial for pupils when dealing with them in real life. This could be linked back to multiculturalism, to be able to co-exist across cultures (IFLA, 2016), which is a significant aspect of the core curriculum as it mentions the importance of human relationships and being able “draw boundaries and to respect others’ boundaries” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 16). Understanding cultural differences can thus make a significant difference when accepting others.



### 7.1.3 Social issues in a brutal world

Social injustice is one of many pronounced themes in *Six of Crows* (2015), such as the unfriendly dynamic between the Grisha and Fjerdans/drüskelle. The cultural differences between the Grisha and the Fjerdans are immense, with contrasting values and beliefs. These differences have led to a long-lasting animosity between the two. This conflict resembles modern struggles between different nations and people in the real world. The strain between people is often taught; they are not born with it, which is illustrated in the novel. The pupil has the opportunity to see the thought process of a person who becomes conflicted in his beliefs taught by his culture. Getting the opportunity to get into the mind of a person during such a time creates a unique window that could inspire critical thinking within the pupil. Although the interdisciplinary topic “democracy and citizenship” is not the main topic of this thesis, it could be incorporated when discussing this issue between the Grisha and Fjerdans, along with health and life skills (Ministry of Education, 2019). Health and life skills discuss the importance of “relations with others” (p. 16) and “boundaries” (p. 16), which could be combined with “democracy and citizenship” as they both are relevant when discussing social dilemmas in society. The relationship between the Grisha and Fjerdans is an illustration of conflicts that can happen in society; this means that pupils can learn about both interdisciplinary topics through the analysis of this issue in *Six of Crows* (2015).

Violence plays a significant role in many people’s lives, in some form or another, and pupils in upper secondary school are not an exception. For some, it comes in the form of watching it on tv or playing video games and not being directly exposed to it, while for others, it is much more severe and real. As mentioned in a previous chapter, a large portion of Norwegian children and adolescents have experienced violence in their home or from a family member at some point in their life (The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, 2015; Reneflot, 2019). It is also becoming a growing issue in Norwegian schools, where pupils are becoming more violent than before towards other fellow pupils and school workers (Ulvestad, 2019). These are just a few ways violence has been or is being exposed to pupils. Moreover, although some believe we should not be exposing young people to violent literature (Gurdon, 2011), I think, in agreement with Sherman Alexie, that violence in literature should be used in a way to help pupils (2011).

Exposure to violence can have major or minor consequences to both physical and mental health, and as health and life skills focus on promoting good health (Ministry of Education, 2019), working with the topic in literature can be beneficial when pupils deal with issues caused by violence. The character Kaz became violent as a result of trauma, and the continued exposure to violence, and knowing what he went through makes the reader understand how he came to be the person he currently is. Through the analysis of Kaz, pupils can begin to understand why people react or behave a certain way, make them question why, and perhaps come to realize the possibilities of underlying issues. It could also become a mirror for pupils that relate to Kaz's experiences as a way to gain greater self-knowledge. It can make them realize possible repercussions of it, that they might have even been unaware of. The time as an adolescent is for most turbulent, and mixing that with a troubled past, it could cause anyone to act out and make them insecure. The core curriculum emphasizes the importance of "a positive self-image" (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 15), and becoming aware of possible behavioral and mental health consequences caused by a violent environment is a big step towards working with improving one's health.

Slavery is a social issue that is much more invisible and underestimated in society than violence. *Six of Crows* (2015) portrays a mix of old and modern slavery. Sometimes it looks like direct ownership of a person, while in some cases, it is more about exploitation and control (anti-slavery, n.d.). During Inej Ghafa's time as a sex slave, she was viewed as Tante Heleen's property, which resembles old-fashioned slavery. However, the thought that she could pay off her indenture gives her a small sense of expectancy of being able to buy herself freedom by working. Though this turned out to be false hope because Tante Heleen would increase the amount on her indenture to keep her, this sort of exploitation resembles modern slavery, given that it looks like the victim has some kind of choice in the matter. Seeing the various types of slavery Inej have been subjected to, could make the pupils more mindful of how slavery is not just one thing but can come in many forms. Providing content in Norwegian schools that reflect the issue of slavery could incite critical thinking and make them more aware of social injustices that are happening in society. In this way, the teacher can incorporate the main value "critical thinking and ethical awareness" from the core curriculum in class (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 8).

A large number of young boys and girls experience sexual abuse (Reneflot, 2019). This means that there will be many pupils that sit in class, having experienced some form of sexual

abuse. However, because it is considered a controversial and disturbing topic, few people talk about the subject. Being a rarely discussed topic could result in it being highly probable that the teacher or fellow pupils will not be aware of possible struggles a pupil could have as a result of sexual abuse, because it rarely comes to light. Consequences of sexual abuse include a struggle with “identity, self-esteem, and sexuality” (1995, p. 102), and these are all elements that are focused on in the new core curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The interdisciplinary topic, health and life skills, works towards developing a “positive self-image and confident identity” (p. 15), and “sexuality” (p. 15) is one of the mentioned areas of relevance. With sexuality being explicitly mentioned means that educating pupils on the topic of sexual abuse is relevant in the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills. In *Six of Crows* (2015), the character Inej Ghafa does not explicitly tell the reader about her experiences with sexual abuse; it is more or less implied as she was stolen and sold to a pleasure house. Her behavior also suggests a troubled past. Being able to view Inej before, during, and after experiencing trauma, can illustrate to pupils the possible repercussions of sexual abuse. It could become a window for those who do not understand, and a mirror for the pupils who unfortunately do. Talking, informing, and lessening the controversy around the topic of sexual abuse can be methods teachers can incorporate to reach some of the aims set in the new core curriculum.

## **7.2 Teaching implications**

In an educational setting where teachers are responsible for choosing the assigned material, it is essential to be able to select material that can have a positive impact on each pupil’s health. Being a pupil in upper secondary school can be challenging in itself, as they are often in a time of self-discovery. Seeing as they spend much of their time at school, it becomes an essential place of development. Teachers have the opportunity to assist in this development, in both a positive and negative way.

The target audience in class will vary. There will most likely be pupils that have not experienced similar situations as those described in the book, who will be reading the novel to learn more about the issues. Then there will be the pupils who have experienced similar afflictions/situation as the characters, and could benefit from seeing themselves in literature.

Reading and being educated on the various topics being brought up in the novel, can raise awareness among the pupils in the classroom, and can be beneficial for the classroom environment. Normalizing diversity through reading about characters that identify as gay or struggle with a mental illness such as PTSD, can create a space where pupils understand and respect one another regardless of their differences.

Although, all of the characters seem to be quite extraordinary, pupils should be able to relate to them in one or another. They have moments of vulnerability and uncertainty that are similar to what most adolescents would experience during the period from a child to an adult. There are moments in the novel where they behave and react in way that is comparable to what an “ordinary” teenager would in the real world. This makes the characters relatable to a wide-ranging audience, and increases the likelihood of most if not all of the pupils to be able to see themselves in the literary work.

*Six of Crows* (2015) bring up a lot of different topics and themes, and some are considered more brutal than others. Knowing the pupils that you will introduce the novel to can be essential, because certain situations can be considered triggering for some people. Teachers should consider how to approach a novel such as this. If they are aware of pupils in class that have experienced trauma in the past, the teacher should be considerate of this during the project. Reading about situations such as the moment when Kaz witnessed someone he loved die, could provoke different reactions among pupils. What one could do, is to make the pupils aware of certain situations that will occur in the novel, and let them know that they should confer with the teacher if they have any concerns. If the teacher is concerned or a pupil does not want to read specific scenes, a possible solution can be to inform the pupil of which pages they can skip and to give a short summary of what happens. This alternative should only be used for those who are especially vulnerable, because even though some of the content is considered brutal, teachers should not shy away from the difficult topics.

*Six of Crows* (2015) is a lengthy novel, and although it has a lot of different components and themes, I would not consider it a difficult read for adolescents. However, introducing any novel that is written in a language that is not the pupil's native language can have its challenges. That is why, when teachers contemplate introducing a novel such as *Six of Crows* (2015) into their English lessons in upper secondary school, they have to take into consideration the types of pupils they have in their class. This type of book should be

introduced to pupils in either second or third year, assuming they have English as a subject, and the teacher should be confident that most pupils will be able to read the material. It is a book that will engage most pupils, and with the broad scope of characters and themes, there is a high likelihood that it will resonate with the pupils, and they will be able to relate to the content. Being a novel that can engage and be relatable for the pupils will incite motivation, and increases the probability of everyone completing the set goals for the task.

### **7.2.1 Suggestions for classroom implementation**

There should be a pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading strategy in place before the novel is introduced in class. There are a plethora of activities and tasks that can be completed before reading the novel *Six of Crows* (2015). The novel can also be utilized across different subjects, for example, in history and social science. There can be many parallels drawn between events that take place in *Six of Crows* (2015) and historical events in the real world. The injustice and social issues that are apparent between the Grisha and Drüskelle discussed previously could be compared with major historical occurrences such as the Second World War, among many others. History could be used both pre- and post-reading, that way, the pupils can discover similarities while reading the book, as well as incite critical thoughts after reading the novel.

Social science is already closely linked to the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills, and it would, therefore, be valuable to integrate that subject when working with the novel in the English subject. Prior to reading the novel, it would be beneficial to introduce the different themes that are relevant to health and life skills, which can be done in the social science subject. Educating and enlightening the pupils on the different themes that will be introduced in the novel can have a significant impact on how they analyze and examine the novel through the reading process and after. For example, teaching pupils about different disabilities could be instrumental in their ability to understand the characters. Failing to educate the pupils on a topic such as disabilities before reading, could result in them not being aware of particular character struggles, such as Jesper's identity conflict as a result of his ADHD. The pupils might not be aware of different types of disabilities or unable to distinguish and label them correctly. Providing pupils with relevant information can, therefore, be highly influential during the process of a literary project.

While the pupils read the novel, the teacher can monitor comprehension to make sure everyone is participating and active during the project. This can be done by discussing specific chapters, situations, or characters from the novel in class. Pupils will have differing levels of comprehension, and through examining the book in class, they can help each other realize content they might have overlooked or perceived in different ways. Creating dialogue in class can also work as a motivator; people often favor inclusion. For fear of exclusion, the pupils might feel inclined to read the assigned novel to be able to participate in class discussions.

Post-reading activities can include some type of literary analysis, similar to what has been done in this thesis. Assuming the pupils are familiar with the themes linked to health and life skills, they can be assigned work that connects the interdisciplinary topic to *Six of Crows* (2015). The teacher can have the pupils individually or in groups do assignments that require them to analyze the content in the novel concerning themes linked to health and life skills.

Health and life skills being an interdisciplinary topic in the new core curriculum for the purpose of promoting good health for the pupils, the teacher needs to assist the pupils in discovering how a novel, such as *Six of Crows* (2015), can be beneficial in this area. The pupils need to be made aware of the parallels the novel has to the real world, and give them the tools to discover how they can connect it to themselves and their lives. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but should be done during the whole process of the project. Pre-reading activities or tasks should be constructed in a way that will assist the pupils when reading the assigned novel. The teacher can also discuss the novel during the reading process, as way to help the pupils think about what they have read and what they should think about as they continue to read. Lastly, when everyone is finished with the book, there should be a task or activity that ties it all together. When the project is completed, all the pupils should be able to understand how a novel can be valuable to learn health and life skills.

## 8 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine the didactic benefits of YA fantasy literature for Norwegian L2 learners of the English subject in upper secondary school. Additionally, it has explored how YA fantasy literature can be utilized regarding the interdisciplinary topic “health and life skills” from the new national curriculum in Norway. The novel *Six of Crows* (2015) by Leigh Bardugo has been used to explore these possibilities. To explore how the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills can be used in relation to YA fantasy literature, an assortment of selected topics relevant to health and life skills has served as points of discussion when analyzing the chosen novel. The topics chosen are identity, agency, diversity, and brutality. Within the topic of diversity, it is broken into four sub-sections, which include: gender roles, disabilities, LGBTQ, and multiculturalism. On the subject of brutality, the topic consists of the three sub-sections: violence, slavery, and sexual abuse.

The literature review shows that YA fantasy can be a highly pedagogical genre. The theory section concerning the different themes linked to health and life skills and YA fantasy literature and the subsequent literary analysis of Bardugo`s novel *Six of Crows* (2015) have established that the literary work inhabits characteristics and themes relevant to the new core curriculum.

YA fantasy has a history of being a popular genre; it offers up a fictional world where anything can be possible. Being such a well-liked literary genre, it already has an advantage because it makes it easier to engage pupils in the assigned reading material. With all its fantastical elements, it can work as a way to escape reality, a reprieve from the real world. Though it has received negative criticism for being an escapist genre, it can also work as an immersion of reality, and this thesis presents how it can illustrate various situations authentically. YA fantasy has a way of approaching reality from a different angle, helping the reader understand themselves, others, and the world around them in an unconventional way.

The close reading of Bardugo`s novel *Six of Crows* (2015) has looked at themes related to the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills from the new core curriculum. Bardugo presents a fantastical world with a group of diverse characters from various circumstances. She portrays situations that are both relevant and relatable to young people. The novel creates mirrors for

pupils that have experienced or are experiencing similar instances in their own lives. It also works as a window for pupils that lack knowledge of such situations, educating them on issues related to health and life skills. Viewing YA fantasy literature as a metaphor for the real world, pupils will be able to perceive and understand human experiences in a unique way. It exposes social issues to pupils differently than other genres can. Observing similarities and correlations between YA fantasy literature and real-world situations can incite critical reflection and thinking with the pupils.

Concerning further research, conducting an empirical study in the classroom to see if the suggestions that were made in this thesis could actually work in real life, and the effectiveness of its use, can be valuable as this project is theoretical. This is a limitation that has previously been discussed in the methodology chapter, therefore, it would be useful to do further research on this topic in the form of an empirical study. That way we could explore practical classroom applications and different teaching methods, and we would know if the use of YA fantasy literature in the English subject classroom would be beneficial if implemented in upper secondary school as a way to educate pupils on the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills.

In response to Ruth Nadelman Lynn's (2005) question and the family member who described fantasy as a waste of time from the introductory chapter, I want to conclude, that fantasy does undoubtedly have a function beyond entertainment. This thesis validates and supports the idea that fantasy literature can be useful beyond being a source of entertainment; it shows how the literary genre can be used to meet central aims in Norwegian education. The didactic possibilities of working with YA fantasy literature that is outlined in this thesis show that the genre is highly relevant to the new core curriculum and English subject curriculum, which means that it can be beneficial to use literary work in that genre in an educational context in Norwegian upper secondary school. The genre can be used to achieve several of the core curriculum's objectives. Additionally, the selected novel for this thesis has characteristics and themes applicable to the core values of the education and training, principles for education and all-round development, and the principles for the school's practice from the core curriculum. In conclusion, YA fantasy can be an entertaining and exciting, as well as an educational genre for both teachers and pupils to work with when exploring the topic health and life skills.



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