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# **Critical Literacy and 12 Angry Men**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how the film can be used to promote critical literacy, which is rooted in the Curriculum (LK20). The examination is exemplified through the critical analysis of the film *12 Angry Men* (1957). The findings suggest that teaching critical literacy is a complex matter and the theoretical field is a “work in progress”. Despite this, it seems as though the film is well-suited for the purpose of promoting critical literacy. Further research into the general use of film in promoting critical literacy would likely be beneficial to the field of critical literacy.

## **Sammendrag**

Denne oppgaven undersøker hvordan film kan brukes til å promotere kritisk literacy, som er forankret i læreplanen (LK20). Dette har blitt undersøkt gjennom en kritisk analyse av filmen *12 Angry Men* (1957). Funnene indikerer at undervisning av kritisk literacy er et komplekst foretak og at det teoretiske feltet er “under utarbeidelse“. På tross av dette, virker det som at filmen er egnet for formålet å promotere kritisk literacy. Videre forskning i den generelle bruken av film til å promotere kritisk literacy vil antakeligvis være fordelaktig for kritisk literacy som felt.

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## 1. Introduction

A central aspect in one of the three core elements of the English curriculum, ‘Working with texts in English’, is critically assessing different types of English text. The core element says, “by reflecting on, interpreting, and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society” from The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet) (2020, p. 3). Further, the curriculum defines text as:

spoken and written, printed and digital, graphic and artistic, formal and informal, fictional and factual, contemporary and historical. The texts can contain writing, pictures, audio, drawings, graphs, numbers and other forms of expression that are combined to enhance and present a message. (NDET, 2020, p. 3)

As made clear by this definition, film can be defined as text. Statistics from *Statistics Norway* indicate that films are one of the more common types of text that young people consume. The statistics show that in 2019, people in the ages 16-24, 65% of them consume “video media”, which is defined as DVD/Blu-ray and paid for and downloaded or streamed online (SSB, 2021.) Hence why critical competence is becoming more relevant not only when reading text but also to understand that how one perceives the world is culture-dependent, which is an understanding that is central to the Core Curriculum and the English curriculum (NDET, 2021).

Given that pupils must be taught critical competence is something that is highlighted throughout the curriculum and the fact that film is among the more common forms of media consumed by young people, it is natural to assume that pupils should be able to apply that critical competence to various media they consume, film in particular, which is the type of media I want to examine in this thesis. I want to explore how critical literacy, a type of critical competence, can be promoted when analyzing films. The term “critical literacy” will be adequately defined in a later chapter; however, it essentially boils down to a few epistemic questions. Allan Luke phrases these questions as “What is ‘truth’? How is it presented and represented, by whom, and in whose interests? Who should have access to which images and words, texts, and discourses? For what purposes?” (2012, p. 4). Ultimately, the epistemic questions of critical literacy are curriculum questions of whose “truth”, whose version of culture, history and everyday life will be accepted and regarded as official knowledge. Thus, critical literacy is an overtly political aspect of teaching and learning about the cultural,

ideological, and sociolinguistic aspects of the curriculum (Luke, 2012, p. 5). It is primarily focused on using literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Critical literacy first was developed by Paulo Freire (1970) in Brazil through feminist, postcolonial, poststructuralist, critical linguistics, critical race theory and cultural studies (Luke, 2012, p. 5). It has its central aim to critique and transform dominant ideologies, cultures, economies, institutions, and political systems. By applying critical literacy as a practical way to approach the curriculum, it can merge discussions and debates that are social, political and cultural in nature, with an analysis of how texts and discourses work, where they appear and, in whose interests (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

### 1.1. Thesis statement and research questions

In this thesis, I want to discuss how analyzing film might help develop critical literacy, meaning to help students become “inquisitive, critical thinkers with ethical awareness” (NDET, 2020, p. 6). More specifically, I want to examine how critical literacy can be developed in the upper secondary English classroom, contextualized through the analysis of a feature film. Essentially, I want to suggest that learning to identify a film’s ideology and the film’s “modes of persuasion” used to convey that ideology can promote critical literacy and awareness. The following will serve as my thesis statement and main research question:

- *How can students in the upper secondary English classroom develop critical literacy through the analysis of film?*

I have chosen to analyze the film *12 Angry Men* (1957) to use as an example to conceptualize how film can be used to teach critical literacy. The reason for choosing this film is because it deals explicitly with the fact that world perception is culture-dependent. In turn, the film is about questioning the truth, which is a central idea to critical literacy. I will present the film in detail in my analysis in chapter 5., but briefly, the film is about a jury who discusses a case where a young man is charged with murder, and if found guilty, he will be executed. The film also ties directly in with the curriculum, as the notion that world perception is culture-dependent and being able to read text critically and read the world critically in order to promote tolerance and respect for cultural differences is central to both the Core Curriculum and the English Curriculum.

## 1.2. Conceptual framework

The idea behind writing about critical literacy in this thesis comes from the epistemic questions of critical literacy mentioned in the introduction – “what is “truth”? How is it presented and represented, by whom, and in whose interests? Who should have access to which images and words, texts, and discourses? For what purposes?” (Luke, 2012, p. 4). These questions need to be asked, or at least there needs to be an awareness of these questions. Luke continues that stories such as *Brave New World* and *1984* (Huxley, 1932; Orwell, 1949) remind us that society, human relationships and freedom depends on the free flows of knowledge (2012, p. 4). These stories teach us about the danger of autocratic control of information and the moral necessity of critique. However, Huxley’s and Orwell’s stories are exaggerations. It is important to note that with this thesis, with the examination of the applicability of critical literacy, the objective is not to teach pupils to change or transform the world in any revolutionary way. It is instead to teach them about critical literacy to create an awareness of how to “read the word and read the world”, to quote Freire (1970). It is to help pupils understand that there are potential inherent ideological, cultural, and political implications of texts and discourse, and thus ask the same questions that Luke asks about how text is presented, by whom and for what purpose.

Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie puts this into perspective in her TEDtalk “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009). Growing up in Nigeria, she only read British and American stories; she had a “single story” of the stories told in books, where all the characters were white and blue-eyed. When she was older and went to America to go to university, her roommate thought everyone in Nigeria lived in mud huts and was surprised at how well Adichie spoke English. Her roommate had a “single story” of Nigerians. Therein lies “the danger of a single story”. Adichie’s experiences demonstrate how impressionable and vulnerable we are when we face text, children and young people especially. Teaching pupils to be aware of the fact that there are, in fact, “several stories” is part of what critical literacy entails. With the complex and ever-growing textual landscape that technology brings, the ability to read and think critically and the ability to understand that there are inherent implications of text and discourse has become vital.

## 1.3. Relevance

In the cultural texts that pupils face today, the difference between information and advertisement, news and opinions, and fact and fiction is not always noticeable. The lines

between commercial and informative text are blurred, which everyone must contend with to some extent, especially young people. In today's postmodern society, pupils encounter a "textual landscape" significantly different and more significant in scope than what their parents may have grown up with. This is partly due to the ongoing trend towards digitalization. We are steadily moving beyond the traditional printed text toward a multitude of new technologies, multimodal texts, media and practices for information use and sharing. An element of the texts that they meet in their everyday lives may not always be reliable sources of information. Rather, in the dissemination of disinformation, some people have difficulties discerning what constitutes a reliable source of information. Both national and international research indicates that students put an alarming amount of trust into the text they face in everyday life, from textbooks and websites to social and printed media (Veum & Skovholt, 2020, p. 12). However, on a more positive note, today's digital society opens possibilities for sharing and accessing vast amounts of information from practically anywhere. It also enables several modes of self-expression on various platforms, such as social media (Davis, 2011). This means that in this textual landscape, students need to learn how to approach multiple texts, how they choose texts, assess and analyze, and in some circumstances, how they produce their own texts. Even though digital society can create and expand the possibilities of the individual's participation in established doxa, which is opinions or beliefs that are generally not questioned (Wæhle, 2019) However, this participation on its own does not necessarily equate to critical competence. Critical practices, such as thinking and reading critically, need to be learned in school.

One of the competence aims from upper secondary school states that the student is expected to discuss and reflect upon different cultural expressions, including film (NDET, 2021, p. 11-12). While critical competence is only inferred in this competence aim, it is explicitly stated in the 'Working with English text' core element as well as in the general core curriculum. In the "Core values of the education and training", one of the core values in the core curriculum is "Critical thinking and ethical awareness", where it is stated that school must help the students be "inquisitive and ask questions, develop scientific and critical thinking and act with ethical awareness" (NDET, 2021). This is also rooted in section 1-1 of the Education Act (NDET, 2020). However, these documents refer to "critical thinking" rather than "critical literacy". Critical thinking, or critical competence, is a rather broad term that may not necessarily entail reading a text with a "critical eye" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), which is why the term "critical literacy" will be used in this thesis as it applies explicitly to text. The term will be adequately



defined in a later section. Nevertheless, it is required of the student to be able to discuss and reflect on film according to the curriculum, as the goal of developing critical literacy is to enable students to analyze texts in inquisitive ways with the end goal of disclosing the ideology expressed in texts and, as such, develop ethical awareness. With the fact in mind that both critical literacy and film literacy is emphasized in the core curriculum and the English curriculum, the intention of this thesis is to explore the possibility of how a teacher might use a film to teach critical literacy in the English classroom.

‘Kunnskapsløftet 2006’ has been referred to as a ‘literacy reform’ (Berge, 2005, p. 165). This was due to the fact that Norwegian pupils scored below the OECD average in literacy on PISA-tests, which spurred a shift in focus towards literacy training. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an international study of school systems in various countries, orchestrated by OECD (Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development) and are held every three years. The tests focus on literacy, mathematics and science (NDET, n.d.). In 2015, the results from the PISA-tests showed that Norwegian pupils scored above the OECD average in all three areas (literacy, mathematics, and science) for the first time. The results showed especially positive results in literacy among pupils (NDET, 2016). However, results from the 2018 PISA tests indicate a decline in all three areas, especially in literacy. A report based on the 2018 PISA results from 2020 suggests that ‘critical assessment of the credibility of texts are challenging for Norwegian pupils’ (NDET, 2020). Nevertheless, since PISA tests were introduced in 2000, there has been a steady increase in results.

### 1.3.1. The importance of critical literacy: Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik’s study

Marte Blikstad-Balas and Marte Caroline Foldvik (2017) performed a study that suggests there is a need for a greater focus on teaching critical literacy in school. In the study, it was examined to what degree Norwegian pupils in upper secondary school practice critical literacy in the Norwegian subject. The English subject was not part of the study, but English and Norwegian are similar subjects in the sense that they both have a focus on text. While not directly related to the English subject, it can still be useful to look at the results from the study, as it gives insight into the general critical literacy practices of Norwegian pupils at the upper secondary level.

I will not go comprehensively into the study, such as method or design; however, it is necessary to provide some context to better understand the results and how this is relevant for

this thesis. The study involved seven pupils from three different classes at two different upper secondary schools located in the eastern part of Norway. The pupils were all in their final year attending a program that provides general study competence (generell studiekompetanse). The pupils were provided with three different texts, all of which were genuine texts, meaning that they were not created for the purpose of the study; they are publicly available to everyone. The texts were a report by *Fremtiden i våre hender* on the impact of meat consumption, an article called *Protein* published by *matprat.no*, an informational article about proteins in various foods, and the last text was a blog post called *Min virkelighet* by popular Norwegian blogger *Sophie Elise*. The pupils were asked to read the three texts and were then interviewed about them afterwards, with a focus on the credibility of the text (the ethos of the author) and how the pupils argued their perception of the author.

The study found that the seven pupils put no thought into the author of the text until explicitly asked about it, which Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik found alarming because the pupils did not seem to care that the author may have had an agenda that they wanted to convey.

Additionally, the pupils held the texts in “different standards” depending on who the author was. A major find in the study was that the pupils did not thoroughly examine the texts on their own initiative, meaning that they did not practice critical literacy unless they were asked concrete questions about credibility or intentions (Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017, p. 37).

When working with the text on their own, the pupils usually focused on if they found the text relevant or exciting or whether they could use it in some way. The results of the study suggest that there is a significant disparity between which competences the pupils should be equipped with, according to the current curriculum, and which competences they are actually equipped with. When faced with text, pupils are, according to the English curriculum, able to “develop knowledge and experience of linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as their insight into ways of living and ways of thinking” through ‘reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of text’ (NDET, 2020, p. 3). Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik’s (2017, p. 37) study seem to suggest that pupils have no ‘clear strategies’ when it comes to assessing a text as a credible source. There is not much to suggest that the pupils are accustomed to critically assessing text from previous schooling. The pupils do display some form of assessment when reading the texts; however, these assessments are often made based on assumptions (ibid).

The results from Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik’s study suggest that pupils regard the facts presented in the texts as synonymous with knowledge, with no desire to confirm if these facts

are correct. The pupils seem to automatically accept the facts as completely objective, which has been shown in previous studies (Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017, p. 29). It is generally accepted that a text can never be completely objective nor illustrate a complete picture of a particular issue. However, one can validate ‘the picture’ of the issue by comparing the original text to other texts and examine how they coincide and/or diverge. In the study, there is little indication of the pupils using this type of strategy, and the pupils did not express any intentions of performing these validations. If factual information is the determining factor for pupils and they put no thought into where the text came from or who made it, then there is a higher likelihood of them using information that is incomplete or, worst case, outright incorrect.

Critical literacy involves looking further than simply at the author of the text, and it also involves the intentions of the author and how the text is constructed in order to convey these intentions, and this is something that needs to be taught. If we expect pupils to practice critical literacy, the pupils need to be taught *how* to be inquisitive about a text. In the curriculum, it is clearly stated that the pupils should be able to assess a text critically and independently, which is a complex competence. Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik’s (2017, p. 38) argue that the reason for pupil’s lack of quality assurance of texts may be rooted in not trusting their own knowledge or judgement of that knowledge. They conclude that if the Norwegian subject is to be successful in teaching pupils critical literacy, they need to be taught specific strategies for critically assessing text. The pupils must be made aware assessing a text-based on assumptions of the author is not sufficient. “In brief, we need to look at how different texts create and maintain different perceptions of reality” (Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017, p. 38. My own translation). Naturally, this study was not directly related to the English subject as it was not part of the study. However, it is still relevant for the thesis as it helps give an idea of how Norwegian pupils actually practice critical literacy when working with text. Additionally, it is difficult to believe that how pupils practice critical literacy changes in any significant way when working with texts in English rather than Norwegian.

In order to promote critical literacy, pupils must gain experience in assessing and questioning which version of cultural, historical and contemporary “truths” that presents itself as official knowledge and is also considered as such. A common literacy practice in school has been to reproduce information, which is closely related to the fact that many assignments and tasks in teaching materials, such as textbooks, has emphasized the reproduction of factual information (Blikstad-Balas, 2019, p. 108). In fact, a recent study indicates that three textbooks in

Norwegian in upper secondary school that non-fiction texts are not portrayed as interpretable in the same way fiction texts are (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2016). This is unfortunate because this can give the impression that there is no need to analyse or interpret non-fiction texts. Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik's study suggests that some pupils are, in fact, under the impression that there is no need to be critical of non-fiction text.

### 1.3. Outline of thesis

The following is a brief statement of what each section will contain.

Chapter 2. will present the theoretical framework for the thesis. This entails defining the critical literacy term, which will account for how the term will be understood in this thesis.

Chapter 3. will present a literature review where critical literacy, in general, will be highlighted, as well as what critical literacy in the classroom entails and how it can be promoted in an education context. Next, chapter 4. will explain what it means to read film critically, which will tie in with my own analysis in chapter 5. Then, in chapter 5. I will present my analysis of *12 Angry Men* (1957). In chapter 6. the findings from the analysis will be presented and discussed in line with the thesis question and research question in the context of the literature presented in chapter 4. Finally, chapter 7. will contain a summary of what has been presented in the thesis and what my main findings are in regard to the implications and limitations of using film to promote critical literacy.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The thesis question revolves around how critical literacy can be developed through the analysis of film. In order to provide an answer to the thesis question, I have leaned on contemporary literacy theory. Literacy relates directly to text, which makes up a significant part of this thesis. How text is understood in this thesis is based on the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training's definition, with elements from cultural studies.

### 2.1. Text

Before going into the theoretical framework of literacy and critical literacy, I want to provide a framework for how text is understood in this thesis. In the introduction, it was established that text, according to the Norwegian curriculum, is defined as something beyond only the written word. It also includes images, sounds, numbers, and so forth. Additionally, a central aspect of the English curriculum is cultural understanding, and that is gained through the

consumption of text, or ‘working with texts in English’ (NDET, 2020, p. 3). In one of the competence aims of the English curriculum, it is stated that the pupil must be able to ‘discuss and reflect’ on different “cultural forms of expression”, which includes film (NDET, 2020, p. 12). As we have determined, the film is text, and texts are a form of cultural expression, but what is then cultural expression? If we expand on the curriculum’s definition of text, Chris Barker and Emma Jane offer their definition, which state that text includes all practices that signify, which means that cultural meaning is generated through the signifying practices of hegemonic text (2016, p. 13). This generation of cultural meaning includes text as the written word, but also objects and activities, such as clothes and sports. Because written words, images, sounds, objects and practices are sign systems that signify and generate meaning in the same way as language does, we can refer to them as cultural texts (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 13). Thus, all cultural expressions can be defined as cultural text. However, the meaning that different people read into cultural texts is not always universal. Using film as an example, a film critic is not likely to read a film in the same way as an average audience member would. Generally, readers will not necessarily share the same meaning with other readers, and a critic is simply a type of reader. One’s own cultural upbringing also affects how cultural texts are read. Moreover, texts are polysemic, meaning that it is possible that they contain a variety of meanings that has to be realized through readers (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 13). Nonetheless, meaning from cultural texts cannot be generated without the interplay between reader and text. The meaning derived from cultural text is therefore produced when the text is consumed by the reader.

In cultural studies, there are three prominent modes of approaching a text that draws from semiotics, deconstructionism and narrative theory. In the semiotic approach, the generation of meaning in a text through a particular arrangement of signs and/or cultural codes that are explored. In such an analysis, attention is drawn to the ideologies or myths of the text. This analysis can illustrate that film, for example, is not a mirror of reality but rather a representation of reality (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 39). Deconstructionism is associated with Derrida’s ‘undoing’ of the binary of western philosophy and its extension into fields of literature and postcolonial theory. To deconstruct means to undo, take apart or disassemble, and a deconstructionist analysis involves ‘taking apart’ a text in order to find and display its assumptions of reality. Deconstruction is not intended to simply reverse binaries but to reveal their implications. It is intended to expose ‘blind spots’ of a text, its ‘unacknowledged assumptions upon which they operate’ (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 40). In short, a

deconstructionist analysis aims to expose the relationship and possible tension between what a text intends to say and what it is constrained to mean. Text can be a number of things, but a common association with the concept of “text” is that texts are narratives; they tell stories. They can tell the story of Newton’s laws of motion, Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy or in the context of this thesis – the story of 12 jury members in the film *12 Angry Men* (1957). A narrative is defined as a sequential account that claims to be a record of events, although it does not have to be chronological or true for that matter (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 40).

Narratives are stories in a structured form that advance explanations of the ways of the world; they can offer frameworks for understanding and reference for how social order is constructed. Stories can take a number of different forms and utilize a plethora of characters, devices, subject matters and narrative structures. These elements can be constructed in various ways into a certain “type” of story or a genre. Genres offer structure to the narrative process and contain it, and it regulates the aforementioned elements in a particular way and a combination of elements to produce coherence and credibility (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 40).

In order to both teach and learn how to apply critical literacy, it is important to have a good understanding of the complexity of text. Yes, one can assume that most people are likely to connotate text with the written word, and the written word is naturally a significant part of what text is, but it is much more than that. This thesis naturally has a focus on film as text, and the analysis in section 5. will be through a “critical literacy lens”, but it will have elements from the approaches presented in the previous paragraph. Critical literacy entails identifying who made a text, who the text was made for and for what purpose, and approaching a text with elements of semiotics, deconstructionism and narrative theory can be helpful as it enables a better understanding of what it means to critically read text.

## 2.2. Theoretical origins

To properly understand and conceptualize what critical literacy means, it is necessary to first understand the term “literacy”. Literacy relates to the adjective *literate*, and historically, it was understood as a cognitive ability to read and write and was viewed as an ability that someone either did or did not possess. However, the modern literacy term stepped away from this binarity and is today regarded as a skill or competence that is trained over time to a more quantifiable level of proficiency. In line with society’s perpetual progression and change, the term changed and was broadened to encompass new digital media, forms of expression and social practices. The way texts are created, conveyed, and read is changing, and it is simply not enough to only be able to read and write in order to sufficiently handle the complex and

vast number of texts in modern society. One might wonder if it ever was enough to be able to *just* read and write, but nevertheless, the modern use of the term ‘literacy’ grew in popularity after the 1950s (Bulajic, p. 110, 2019). In more recent times, *The New London Group* (NLG) proposed in 1996 a new way to understand the literacy term. The reason for this was the societal developments that occurred in modern times, such as new ways of communication, which alters many aspects of our way of life. These changes in communications led to changes in institutions such as school, which was influenced by social, cultural, economic and technological relations in society. The group of researchers (NLG) deemed it necessary to change the theories of texts and literacy as the foundation changed as well. In total, there were ten researchers from around the world that made up the London Group located in the United States, several of which are recognizable researchers today as well. The members of the group were Courtney Cazden, Bill Cope, James Paal Gee, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Gunther Cress, Norman Fairclough, Sarah Michaels, Martin Nakata and Mary Kalantzis (Cazden et al., 1996, p. 62). NLG established the term “multiliteracies”, which takes into account that text is more than the traditional written word; it also encompasses images, sound, and other resources that may generate meaning. However, the term ‘multiliteracies’ seems to be synonymous with modern literacy term, as UNESCO’s definition of literacy suggests. UNESCO, the UN’s organization for education, science, culture and communication, defines literacy as: “Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world” (2018). Having said that, the research carried out by NLG is without a doubt essential as text has become a broad term due to advances in society. Based on UNESCO’s definition, it is made explicitly clear that literacy no longer pertains only to the ability to read and write, but how to consistently draw information out of various texts and the means to apply that information in a world that is in perpetual change and filled with easily accessible information.

Due to the vast amount of information that has been made readily available because of new technologies such as the internet, it is necessary to maintain a ‘healthy criticism’ of this information. The idea of ‘being critical’ is not necessarily that new; however, critical theory, the precursor to what we today know as critical literacy, can be argued to stem from the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School was a social and political philosophical movement located in Frankfurt in Germany. Their school of thought was inspired by Freud, Marx and

Hegel and is considered to be the origin of critical theory (Finlayson, 2005; Corradetti, 2013, p. 1). The purpose of critical theory can be summarized as: ‘[...] the same purpose as with any social criticism, to identify what is wrong with the world, and propose suggestions for improvement.’ (Grue, 2015, cited in Veum & Skovholt, 2020, p. 17). The Frankfurt School concerned themselves with political, economic, and social conditions that allow social change, which is realized through social institutions (Held, 1980, p. 15). In short, The Frankfurt School was concerned with being critical of established doxa and social institutions in order to promote social change. School is naturally a social institution, which brings us to Paulo Freire and his critical pedagogy.

In contemporary research, the work of Paulo Freire can be argued to be the predecessor of literacy and critical literacy as a field of study. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and the quote “reading the word and reading the world” has been groundbreaking within literacy studies. Freire emphasizes that both the word and the world ought to be read critically. Freire also stresses the necessity of being able to reflect and take action, and this requires literacy. Ignorance and apathy were direct consequences of poverty in the third world; thus, people could be ‘locked’ in an oppressive situation (Freire, 1970, p. 10). He describes traditional ways of teaching in what he refers to as the “banking concept” of education where teachers are subjects, and pupils are objects, that the teacher “fills” with them with the contents of the teacher’s narrative, or the “correct” knowledge. The pupils are made to be only recipients and objects in this teaching situation (Freire, 1970, p. 44-45). Because the teacher is the subject and the pupils are the object, the pupils, as they are filled with knowledge, are not likely to develop any critical awareness. Based on this “banking model”, Freire developed a method where dialogue is central, and the learning material is closely tied to what the pupils find important. Fundamental to Freire’s pedagogy is to adhere to the idea of being the subject of one’s own life, and therefore appropriate pedagogy should contribute to developing an awareness of compassionate responsibility and ability to participate, become independent and be able to reflect and assess.

Freire underlines the fact that there is no such thing as a neutral learning process, making the act of raising awareness a foundational aspect of learning. Dialogue and a critical approach to what is learned is the foundation of his pedagogy (Freire, 1970, p. 17-23). He perceives the pedagogy of the oppressed as a process based on liberation and human holism that happened over the course of two stages. In the first stage, the oppressed reveal the world of oppression they are a part of, and through taking action, they engage in transforming it. In the second



stage, the transformation has taken place, and the pedagogy will no longer “belong” only to the oppressed but will be a pedagogy for everyone in a continuous liberating process (Freire, 1970, p. 37). The asymmetrical power dynamic between teacher and student will cease, and the community in the learning situation where dialogue is dominant will thrive. The teacher is no longer ‘the one who teaches’, but ‘one themselves who is taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach’ (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Teachers and pupils become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow.

### 2.3. Critical literacy

Allen Luke defines critical literacy as: “[...] the use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique and transform the norms, rule systems and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (2014, p. 21). This definition points to critical literacy as a competence that involves the understanding of how language and text construct perceptions of reality, which highlights the fact that critical literacy is necessary as it allows pupils to identify *how* a text constructs a certain perception of reality and *why* the author has chosen to convey this perception and *who* it is aimed at. Thus, we can establish that critical literacy is explicitly connected to the ability to read critically, but also the ability to create meaning or change through linguistic action or cultural expression. Being able to read critically entails bringing social and cultural notions, such as ideology, conveyed in the text to light while identifying and challenging these notions, notions that may be portrayed as natural and universal. Critical literacy has an explicit goal of critiquing and transforming dominant ideologies, cultures and economies, and institutions and political systems. Critical literacy as a practical approach to curriculum it merges social, political and cultural debate, and discussion with the examination of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequence, and in whose interests (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

When searching for underlying notions and established truths in text, the linguistic and semiotic choices made in the text of how reality is portrayed need to be examined in order to actually be able to draw any assumptions or conclusions regarding these underlying notions and established truths. Placing the text in a context is key in this process, meaning that the reader must be able to place the text in a historical and cultural context. The reader must be able to identify the ideology, values or attitudes that the text expresses, which not only means simply identifying the author but also the cultural landscape in which the author wanted to create the text. The reader must be able to identify or reflect on who the text is “aimed at”, identify genre traits, what the final goal of the text is, and which linguistic and textual

strategies are applied to reach this goal (Veum & Skovholt, 2020, p. 15). In order to address these topics, critical literacy and the development of that literacy comes into play. The reader must be made aware of what to look for, and they need analytical tools and knowledge of a meta-language for analyzing language and text. By applying this meta-language, the reader can be enabled to closely examine the text and look at what linguistic and semiotic choices the author has made and what social actions and perceptions of reality these choices construct. However, critical literacy is more than the technical skill of analyzing a text, such as the understanding of the interconnectedness of text and society and how these affect one another. Critical literacy also entails being able to understand that the way reality is portrayed using text, imagery, and other semiotic resources have consequences. An example of such a consequence is that in popular culture, people with glasses are portrayed as nerdy and/or “tech-savvy”. This is what Fairclough (cited in Veum & Skovholt, 2020, p. 15) refers to as the *societal effect*.

Critical literacy is perhaps most commonly associated with how to apply and assess the reliability of sources; however, this is a slight simplification of the term. Being critical of sources is certainly a part of it, but it is a narrow understanding of what ‘being critical’ entails. In this understanding, the pupil is one-sidedly portrayed as the recipient without regard to the fact that pupils are also actors, much like Freire’s (1970) “banking model”. “The critical pupil” must be active and be able to ask questions, challenge and criticize existing texts and discourses (Molin et al., 2018, p. 2), along with being able to infer information from the text such as who the text is aimed at and the potential ideology expressed by the author.

### 3. Literature review

In this section, various literature on critical literacy in the classroom will be presented in order to highlight what critical literacy means in a classroom context, what previous literature says about the use of film as a teaching tool, what previous literature says about the use of cultural texts, including film, to promote critical literacy in the classroom.

Conducting a literature review is a method for an author to demonstrate their knowledge of a particular field of study and consists of already published information. Additionally, it informs the reader of the influential researchers in the field of study (Randolph, p. 2, 2009). A literature review typically consists of a summation of sources in an organized pattern. In a research context, it is used as a foundation to support new insights. Contrary to empirical research where data is collected, a literature review summarizes and synthesizes arguments

and ideas of others without adding new contributions. There are arguments that literature review plays a central role in delimiting the research problem, gaining methodological insights, identifying recommendations for further research, establishing the context of a topic or problem, and rationalizing the significance of the problem (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996, Hall, 1998, cited in Randolph, 2009, p. 2). Additionally, a literature review can provide a framework for relating previous findings to new findings in the discussion section of a dissertation or thesis. Randolph argues that it is impossible to say something meaningful about the new findings without establishing the previous findings (p. 2, 2009).

I have selected to use literature review for this thesis as it is intended to give an overview of what critical literacy means in a Norwegian upper secondary school context and to suggest that film can be used to promote critical literacy at the upper secondary level.

### 3.1. Critical literacy in a school context

In this section, previous literature on critical literacy in school and how it can be promoted, and what official steering documents say about critical literacy will be presented. As outlined in the first chapter, one of the main goals of education according to the Norwegian curriculum and Education Act is to enable pupils to become independent, critical, and inquisitive citizens and to participate in society to promote equality and justice. In order to achieve this, students must be provided with adequate literacy skills, and education plays an essential role in this providing. Despite this, and because of the ongoing trend of moving beyond traditional printed texts towards a multitude of new technologies and multimodal texts, the body of research that addresses the work in digitalized classrooms is growing, but it is limited.

Because of this, literature on analogue literacy practices will be included in this section as well. Additionally, there will be elements of general literacy practices, not necessarily specifically critical literacy practices. One final note, this literature is not necessarily from a Norwegian context. When transferring generalizations of educational approaches from one national/cultural context to another, caution is advised. However, the literature that will be presented comes from contemporary scholars in the field of critical literacy studies, and there are certainly points of convergence that is applicable in a Norwegian upper secondary school context.

American research on reading focuses on comprehension, higher-order skills, including inference and prediction (Luke, 2014, p. 23). This understanding of critical literacy, therefore, entails an internal cognitive process that relies on the background or “schemata” of the reader.

This is a rationalist postulation that defines critique as something that enables the identification of logical or factual error. In Enlightenment philosophy, scientific falsification and verification of knowledge are central to how higher-order thinking and linguistic complexity is defined (Haliday & Martin, 1995, cited in Luke, 2014, p. 23). Luke (2014, p. 23) states that this means that the understanding of reading in Anglo-American schools is associated with complex forms of reasoning and cognitive processes as a developmental acquisition. Luke (2014, p. 24) continues that in schooling, critical literacy is taught as an approach to text that enables the identification of “author bias” and the multiple possible meaning that can be derived from a text depending on the readers’ background. However, there seems to be a smaller focus on the recognition of text as something that engages cultural and political standpoints and less so on the recognition of text as something that carries socio-cultural exchange and power. The veracity or truthfulness of a text is something that can practically always be discussed, but there seems to be little emphasis on the ways that selection texts used in schools can serve social and cultural interests (Luke, 2014, p. 24). The way Luke describes critical literacy in schooling suggests that critical literacy can be understood as a search for something “wrong” in the deconstruction of texts and the way they are selected. This understanding is not entirely accurate as critical literacy revolves more around creating an awareness of the ideological and cultural implications of text than looking for something “wrong” that can be criticized. Additionally, in this understanding, the binarity of “right” and “wrong” is central, which is a central idea in modernism as a “structure of feeling” (Oxford Reference, n.d.). However, in today’s postmodern society, the lines are blurred, which necessitates critical literacy as a way to question established and dominant doxa. Critical literacy involves reading the world, naming it and renaming it, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities. It is about developing a capacity to “redesign and reshape” the world (NLG, 1996, cited in Luke, 2012, p. 9).

### 3.1.1. Official steering documents on critical literacy

The Education Act sets a precedent for training in school and already in the objectives clause in the education act, §1-1, it is emphasized that training “shall open up doors to the world and the future”, the pupils are to “gain insight into cultural diversity”, the training shall “promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking” and lastly the pupils must “learn to think critically and act ethically with environmental awareness” (NDET, 2020, p. 3). In other words, the purpose of education has idealistic objectives and is intended to provide development on both an individual and societal level. In the English curriculum, we can see

that these objectives are continued as the subject is important for “cultural understanding, communication, all-round education and identity development”, as well as to “acquire language and knowledge of culture and society” through “reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing texts in English” (NDET, 2020, p. 3). As mentioned in section 1.2. “Kunnskapsløftet” has been referred to as a ‘literacy reform’ which gives a strong indication that school authorities prioritized this type of competence. However, it is interesting that the term ‘literacy’ is not found in either the purpose of the education or the core curriculum. This may be due to the fact that “literacy” is challenging to translate to Norwegian into a single succinct term, but it does in no way mean that “literacy” is not part of the curriculum, as it is fundamental to the curriculum under “Basic Skills” (NDET, 2020, p. 11). Moreover, “developing the ability to think critically”, or variations thereof, are central to reading and are found throughout the Purpose of the Education, Core Curriculum and the English Curriculum (NDET, 2020).

### 3.1.2. How to promote critical literacy?

Critical thinking and reading are a central part of the work done in classrooms in nearly all subjects, and in section 2. there has been provided some theoretical framework for what critical literacy entails. However, there are implications to consider when transferring this theoretical framework to practice, as well as how teachers can operationalize critical literacy in their own instruction. Due to the fact that critical literacy is a theoretical field and not one ‘correct’ method for instruction, it becomes complicated. Transferring critical literacy from theory to practice is challenging and often requires innovation and trial and error from each individual teacher at each individual school (Luke, 2012, p. 1). It is first and foremost the teachers themselves that can develop new knowledge. In the international field of critical literacy, there are theories and research to draw upon when designing methods of teaching. This subsection will contain some suggestions as to how critical literacy can be approached, as well as how it could be operationalized in the classroom.

Hilary Janks proposes a model of critical literacy education that highlights four interdependent conceptual dimensions; domination, access, diversity and design (Janks, 2010, p. 23-26). According to Janks’ model, if pupils are to understand domination or power, they need broad access to texts, which includes the dominant texts within established doxa, as well as texts that represents different interests and experiences. Diversity is directly related to access, as it refers to the inclusion of different perspectives in the classroom. For example, if a teacher were to highlight the pupils’ differing perspectives in some fashion, this encourages

diversity which in turn encourages pupils to question assumptions that are regarded as universal truths and prejudices. This will support them in developing an awareness of different perspectives in texts. Additionally, such different or alternative perspectives can be introduced by teachers and used when designing or potentially redesigning texts. Applying different resources, such as traditional written texts or movies, becomes a mode for challenging existing doxa and/or discourses (Janks, 2010, p. 23-26).

Critical literacy researchers (Behrmann, 2006; Janks, 2010) underline the fact that pupils need to be encouraged to both read *with* the text and *against* the text. Reading *with* the text entails connecting one's own meaning, values and ideas to the text, which is necessary for comprehension, evaluation and analysis of texts in context, and is tied to higher order cognitive skills (Janks, 2010, p. 22). Reading *against* the text means critiquing the text which can provide a deeper insight into the word, by combining one's each individual social knowledge and experience, with the opportunity to either promote, challenge or completely disregard the ideological implications of the text. This is directly tied to critical literacy and involves that readers recognize texts as selective versions of the world (Janks, 2010, p. 22). In order to read *against* the text, it is important to possess a linguistic awareness and a meta language in order to discover, describe and critique linguistic and semiotic choices. Introducing a meta language can be done by for example introducing to the pupils what terms such as 'metaphor' and how they can be used to convey meaning. An example of what reading *against* the text entails can be for the pupils to attempt to read a text from a different perspective than their own, for example they can imagine that they are a different gender, have a different ethnicity or sexual orientation, and how this can affect how meaning is generated from the text. Veum and Skovholt (2020) suggest that producing a 'counter text' ("mottekst", my translation) as a way to approach critical literacy, because working with critical literacy entails both reading text and producing text. A "counter text" or a "counter narrative" can be understood as a text produced by a pupil that is from another perspective than what is common, or that challenges universal or established doxa (Veum & Skovholt, p.84-85). A "counter text" can also be created by *redesigning* an existing text, such as Janks (2010) suggests in one of her conceptual dimensions, design. To redesign a text entails that the pupils first critically analyze a text to determine which ideologies, values and/or perceptions the text conveys. The pupils then rework the text so that it conveys different ideologies, values and/or perceptions. The idea behind redesigning a text is that the pupils learn about how texts construct perceptions of reality and enable pupils to develop an

awareness that no text is neutral, not even the ones they create themselves (Veum & Skovholt, 2020, p. 85). Continuing with Janks' (2010) conceptual dimensions, diversity in texts is important as it allows pupils to understand that authors and creators of texts in general convey their own perceptions of the world. Reading different texts about the same topic, from different perspectives, allows pupils to reflect on who the author is, why the text was created and what it means to convey. Reading a variety of texts about the same topic helps pupils develop an understanding that there is no singular, universal truth, but how truth is portrayed in a text is entirely dependent on the perspective of the author (Behrmann, 2006, p. 488).

Reading multiple texts about a single topic can be rather complex, as it is necessary to read and connect information from several sources to one another. Bråten and Strømstø (2009) refer to this as reading "multiple-texts" ("multiple tekst", my translation). Reading multiple-texts entails acquiring, assessing, and applying various text-based sources of information in order to construct and convey a meaningful understanding of a given topic (Bråten & Strømstø, 2009, p. 386). In order to properly shed light on a topic or issue in today's society, one source of information simply is not enough – be it from a school textbook or a news article from NRK. In order to learn more about controversial and complex questions such as immigration, there is a plethora of information sources available, from newspapers to digital media. Furthermore, Bråten and Strømstø argue that this is a rule, rather than an exception, that these different sources of information contain different or even contradicting views (2009, p. 387). Reading multiple-texts can be argued to be intertwined with critical literacy, as critical literacy entails what texts say, who it is aimed and for what purpose. In order to this, it is necessary to compare texts to one another. Nevertheless, being able to synthesize some semblance of a personal conclusion in the face of several texts with potentially vastly different and contradicting views is challenging. Still, Bråten and Strømstø say that while it is challenging, they also argue that reading a diverse body of text is beneficial (2009, p. 387).

Current research suggests that pupils find it challenging to gain a compounded understanding of a given topic through the study of multiple texts on the same topic. This may be related to limited prior knowledge or the way the topic has been taught in school. Bråten and Strømstø refer to an American study that indicate that the pupils value simply the accrue-ment of information without any critical evaluation of the sources (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998, cited in Bråten & Strømstø, 2009, p. 387). This coincides with what Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik's (2017) study indicates. The fact that these two separate studies show similar results indicates that the pupils lack of evaluation of sources is a cause for concern, which again highlights the

importance of critical literacy. These results are less than ideal, but there is also current research that suggest a silver lining. With certain precautions taken, it is indicated that working with multiple-texts could lend pupils a deeper understanding of a given a topic compared to reading a single source of information, such as a school textbook, on the same topic. Furthermore, it is indicated that working with multiple-texts can lead to pupils creating a more complex and flexible mental representation of the contents of a text, which can prove useful when that information can be applied in a different situation (Bråten & Strømstø, 2009, p. 387). For instance, Britt and Aglinskas (2002) has indicated that pupils at the lower secondary level can benefit from working with multiple-texts. The pupils were tasked with investigating and gain an understanding of controversial historical events, in this case the Vietnam War, through reading a set of different texts about the topic. The texts the pupils read was from a varied selection, from official government documents to eyewitness accounts. When the pupils were compared to other pupils who had only used one source of information, a school textbook, the pupils who had worked with multiple-texts wrote substantially better essays on the topic. Meaning that they wrote more compounded essays and generally contained more information, compared to those who had read one textbook.

Britt and Aglinskas' (2002) study seems to suggest that working with multiple-texts is more beneficial when it comes to gaining a greater understanding of historical events and their nuances. It seems to be more beneficial in deconstructing the adage of "history is written by the victors" and its implications, which of course is a part of the "established doxa" that critical literacy aims to question. However, that does not mean that working with multiple-texts is *only* useful in the context of understanding a nuanced historical event. Working with multiple-texts revolves around the same idea that critical literacy does, the understanding of the inherent ideological and cultural implications of text and discourse and that how the world is perceived is dependent on several factors, such as subjective understanding. Pupils need not only learn how to become critical readers of historical texts, but also of the abundance of text of today, that is found both inside and outside the classroom.

However, even though Britt and Aglinskas' indications are positive, it does not mean that every pupil will benefit equally from working with multiple-texts about a given topic. It could even be argued that a pupil's understanding could be inhibited more than promoted when working with multiple texts. It depends on a variety of factors, such as the pupils themselves, the teacher, the task and the structure of the lesson. Bråten and Strømstø (2009, p. 389) suggest that even though there are outside factors that come into play regarding how much a



pupil will benefit from working with multiple-texts, it essentially depends on personal epistemology. Personal epistemology means how humans understand knowledge and how it is constructed on a personal level. Personal epistemology is an important aspect of critical literacy, as critical literacy entails questioning truths in established doxa and what is regarded as official knowledge, while personal epistemology essentially entails understanding where knowledge comes from. Hofer and Pintrich (1997) describe personal epistemology as being compounded of four dimensions; the perception of how simple or complex the knowledge is, how the knowledge is substantiated, how certain or uncertain the knowledge is perceived as, and where the knowledge comes from. Each of these dimensions are considered to be continuums, with naïve understanding on one end and sophisticated understanding on the other. It has been confirmed that when pupils attempt to understand an isolated text, they may be inhibited by what has been traditionally referred to as naïve personal epistemology, in that they may perceive the knowledge as certain and believable (Kardash & Howell, 2000; Schommer, 1990, cited in Bråten & Strømstø, 2009, p. 389). Meaning that the pupils are not reading the text critically. Working with multiple-texts is a more complex task than reading one single text, which means that personal epistemology probably becomes a more important aspect of learning in that context. It has been suggested in several studies that pupils are not critical of sources when they read, and when they are critical, they often use “shallow” and “irrelevant” criteria when assessing the credibility of a source (Britt & Aglinskias, 2002). Studies previously referred to in this thesis are examples (Blikstad & Balas, 2017; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998). Being critical of sources is an important aspect of critical literacy. The main idea of critical literacy is questioning the “truth” of text and being critical of sources (i.e. the author of a text) is a part of that process. Being critical of sources enables the reader to assess the ethos of the information in a text based on characteristics of a source. For example, a text authored by someone without documented competence likely carries less credibility than a text authored by someone with documented competence. Thus, personal epistemology is an important of both critical literacy and source criticism.

Between 2006 and 2008, Bråten and Strømstø (2009) conducted a comprehensive project where they examined the relationship between personal epistemology and reading comprehension. They collected data from more than 500 participants from third grade in upper secondary, as well as students from higher education. The participants each read seven separate authentic texts about various aspects of climate change. Bråten and Strømstø (2009) compared the relationship between the four dimensions of personal epistemology and the

understanding of multiple-texts. Regarding the results from the first dimension, how simple or complex the knowledge is perceived as, those who understand that climate change is a theoretical, complex and compounded issue seemed to understand the provided texts better. In brief, the participants on the sophisticated end of the dimension, demonstrated a better understanding of the texts. The results from the second dimension, how knowledge is substantiated, those more on the sophisticated end demonstrated a better understanding. The belief that claims should be substantiated or justified through critical thinking and cross-referencing seem to play an important role. In the third dimension, how certain or uncertain the knowledge is perceived as, Bråten and Strømstø's (2009) study suggests that those more on the sophisticated end of the epistemological dimension, are able better to substantiate their own personal opinion on climate change. Regarding the final dimension, where knowledge comes from, it is indicated that readers who acknowledge that the knowledge of climate change is transferred from *experts* demonstrate better reading comprehension than those who do not. It seems that when participants read challenging and contradicting texts about a complex topic that they are potentially unfamiliar with, they put heavy emphasis on the subjective generation of knowledge. Meaning that the reader is constructing their "own" knowledge about the topic, which means that they may potentially, subconsciously or not, disregard what the author and the text is intended to convey (Bråten & Strømstø, 2009, p. 396).

Bråten and Strømstø (2009) conclude the results from their projects with two implications of epistemology and source criticism. Regarding the epistemological implications, there is a need to teach pupils to find a balance between personal construction of meaning from the text and the understanding of the text's intended message. This means that there needs to be a greater awareness of the difference between constructing knowledge directly derived from what the texts conveys and constructing personal knowledge *based* on what the text conveys. Regarding source criticism, there is a clear need to develop the competence of how to assess sources, but research on this is largely conducted within the history subject. Because pupils and students need to be critical readers of both historical texts and the plethora of other texts technology has brought forth, there is a "desperate" need for more research (Bråten & Strømstø, 2009, p. 397).

From both Britt and Aglinskas' (2002) study and Bråten and Strømstø's (2009) project it is indicated that personal epistemology plays a significant part in pupils and students' development of critical competence. While the studies show that working with multiple-texts

can be beneficial, there seems to be a general lack of the foreknowledge required to read critically, not only when it comes to reading about a topic from one single source, but also when reading from several sources about the same topic. Overall, the studies presented in this thesis suggest that upper secondary pupils put little critical thought into the reading of a single text on different topics, as well as the reading of multiple texts on the same topic (Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017; Britt & Aglinskias, 2002; Bråten & Strømstø, 2009). Nevertheless, working with multiple-texts, while not perfect, seems to yield positive results for promoting critical literacy.

### 3.1.3. Literacy practices

From a Freirian (1970) perspective, education is fundamentally narrative in character. The relationship between teachers and students entails a narrating “subject” (the teacher) and listening “objects” (the pupils). The contents of this narration have a tendency to become lifeless and petrified. Education is, according to Freire, “suffering from narration sickness” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). However, Richard Beach, Gerald Campano, Brian Edmiston and Melissa Borgmann present various literacy tools that can address the question of how critical literacy can be promoted (2010). These literacy tools are based on their own experiences and research, and they can be used to engage students in critical inquiry, enact more empowering identities, and establish their sense of agency through making change, which in turn may “breathe life” into the lifeless and petrified state of “narrative education” (Beach et al., 2010, p. 2). It is important to note that the literacy tools presented by Beach et al. (2010) are not necessarily new, but they are grounded in historical legacies of literacy and cultural transformation. They state that literacy cannot be reduced to the acquisition of a single task, such as reading an article or taking an exam. A single literacy is replaced by multiple literacies, thus there are many different ways of being literate and a “critical” approach to literacy entails making the act of contesting worldviews visible (Beach et al., 2010, p. 14). The approach to literacy that Beach et al. proposes aligns with Janks’ four dimensions as well.

Literacy tools are not ends in themselves, but rather means to an end. Beach et al. (2010, p. 14) define literacy tools as something that includes any artifact, idea, or process that people use when they read or write, or otherwise use language to create meaning. They present a number of literacy tools that have four basic purposes: engaging in critical inquiry, creating spaces, enacting identities and establishing a sense of agency (Beach et al., 2010, p. 16). These interconnected purposes build a case for what they call “change-based assessment” and that the values of these tools ultimately rests on its effectiveness in identifying and posing

problems and envisioning alternatives for equity and justice. In a “change-based assessment” model, pupils are evaluated by more than just the features of their work, but by the extent that their work results in perceived, anticipated, and actual changes (Beach & Doerr-Stevens, 2009, cited in Beach et al., 2010, p. 23). Critical inquiry may involve the identification of various societal challenges, which may lead to a change in the pupils’ civic participation. Creating spaces involve quite literally to create both physical and virtual spaces where pupils can share ideas in a safe environment, which may lead to a change in pupil’s willingness to share their ideas. Enacting identities involve using literacy tools to enact alternative identities, such as a ‘participating citizen’. Lastly, establishing a sense of agency involves enabling pupils to ‘read their worlds’ accurately and empower themselves by doing so. Beach et al. (2010, p. 16) claim to align themselves with those who argue that literacy tools should be intrinsic to teaching and learning, where communities of learners are not only aware of literacy tools, but also able *use* them to investigate knowledge, build their own interpretations, and formulate understandings about the world. Beach et al. are American; however, their alignment seems to correspond with elements from the Norwegian curriculum, particularly from section 1.3 pertaining to ‘Critical thinking and ethical awareness’ (NDET, 2020, p. 6-7). This section highlights the facts that if new insights are to emerge, the pupils must ‘think critically about how knowledge is developed’ (NDET, 2020, p. 7). This can be related to the English curriculum as well, to the core element ‘Working with texts in English’, where it is stated that pupils shall acquire language and knowledge by ‘reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different texts in English’ (NDET, 2020, p. 3). However, there seems to be an incongruence between what the curriculum states what the pupils *should* know compared what they *actually* know, according to Blikstad-Balas’ and Foldvik’s study (2017).

Beach et al. (2010, p. 135) refer to Delainia Haug, a teacher at a high school in Minneapolis, who asked certain questions of her pupils in order to have them engage in critical inquiry of media representations, as a way to demonstrate *how* one might work with various cultural texts or expressions to promote critical literacy. She asked questions such as ‘Who created this message and what is it?’, ‘How might different people understand this message differently from me?’ and ‘What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?’ Precisely the same questions as the classical questions of critical literacy mentioned in the introduction, only worded differently. It is these types of questions and making notes of potential patterns in media portrayals that allows pupils to critique any representations or misrepresentations of everyday experiences (Beach et al., 2010, p. 135).

Beach et al. (2010, p. 158) conclude that a reason for focusing on engaging in critical inquiry, creating spaces, enacting identities, and achieving a sense of agency when using literacy tools, is that the focus can shift from “literacy instruction to instrumental acquisition” of how to use literacy tools and an understanding that literacy tools can be used to fulfill a larger purpose. Which may be useful outside of the classroom as it can enable pupils to become participating citizens, in line with the interdisciplinary topics of the English curriculum (NDET, 2020, p. 3). If pupils continually, with the help of teachers and each other, define and reflect on their purposes for using literacy tools, they may recognize that these tools are constructed to make changes in both themselves and the world. Lastly, as pupils gain more proficiency in using literacy tools, they can perceive themselves as agents of problem-solving change who applies literacy as something that can help them define their identities and ultimately improve their lives (Beach et al., 2010, p. 158).

### 3.2. Film in a school context

There are several reasons for why one might use film as a teaching tool, however, there are two reasons that I have found to be most relevant in the context of this thesis. The first being simply that it is part of the curriculum. One of the competence aims of the English curriculum states that pupils must be able to ‘discuss and reflect’ on ‘cultural forms of expression [...] including *film*’ (NDET, 2020, p. 12). The second reason is that if film is used well as a teaching tool it has a tremendous potential, which seems to be the general consensus among teachers in Norway (Bakken, 2016). In this section, literature on how film can be used as a teaching tool and how it can be used to promote critical literacy, as well as some general advantages and disadvantages, will be presented.

Anja Bakken (2016) conducted a survey where she examined the discourse of lower secondary school teachers of English, regarding the learning value of film. She found that teachers’ assumptions of film were regarded as equal in terms of teaching citizenship and democracy, as well as language learning. Bakken concludes that the teachers she interviewed regards film as a good tool to mediate between older, fictional texts, in addition to compensating for variations in the pupils’ language proficiency (Bakken, 2016, p. 18). An important factor to consider is that pupils and young people in general are exposed to various texts, for example popular culture texts, due to the advancement of technology and access to digital media. One can assume that most pupils have some sort of knowledge of narrative expressions and what a story entails as they most likely have watched films and/or television. They receive indirect knowledge of how narratives are structured and realized through texts.

However, Sylvi Penne (2010) points out the fact that children and young people are exposed to a variety of different authentic texts in English, such as song lyrics, films and television shows and clips on YouTube, leads to a somewhat skewed exposure. Children and young people are exposed to other media's narratives, not in favor of fiction. She refers to research that says, 'there are preconceptions in the world of books that are and will be the prerequisite for how children and young people can make use of other media' (Penne, 2010, p. 18). She continues that the lacking awareness of the 'language of new media' leads to a literacy problem:

Pupils face fictional worlds first and foremost through television and film, and it has likely become more common that many pupils cannot separate between fictional and actual worlds. They have not acquired the framework for a meta language for fiction, a competence that may strengthen other competences in a world of complicated media. (Penne, 2010, p. 18-19)

What Penne means by this is that it appears to be common among pupils that they lack the awareness of the fact that television and film are *representations* of reality, it is not a mirror image of reality or actual reality. Teachers' instructions often lack specific objectives for learning this type of meta language, which is confirmed by Bakken's (2016) interviews with teachers. Teachers use film because their own experiences dictate that films have learning value, but what this learning value actually is lacks documentation. Bakken splits the teachers' assumptions of the learning value of film into four categories, the referential value, the compensatory value, the emotional value and the language value (Bakken, 2016, p. 2). Regarding the referential learning value, Bakken demonstrates that when teachers talk about 'in-depth understanding' in relation to film, they seem to connect the referential learning value to the emotional. The referential value being a film as documentation of or a reference to reality, and the emotional value being film as a way to appeal to emotions and feelings. This means that films are useful tools that can be used in order to engage pupils in various subjects and topics by appealing to their emotions and feelings, as 'what cannot be understood through words, can be understood emotionally' (Bakken, 2016, p. 12). The compensatory value is explained by the teachers as something that can expand on, replace, or explain abstract or difficult to understand material in the text for weaker pupils. This is both in terms of language and topic by applying the visual depiction that is found in film. The language value is less emphasized by the teachers, however, it is regarded as an important part of the compensatory value, where the ultimate goal is to enable *all* pupils to understand the content of a text. The compensatory value therefore means film can be used to compensate for

disparities in the level of proficiency between the pupils. For weaker readers, film may therefore ‘adapt the acquisition of advanced matters to the abilities and maturity of the reader’ (Bakken, 2016, p. 12).

The literacy problem that Penne (2010) describes is a complex matter and is something that Norwegian school authorities has put a significant amount of work into trying to solve. As the PISA tests demonstrates, while there has been a steady increase of competence since 2000, the test results from 2015 and 2018 have shown that there has been a decline in literacy among Norwegian pupils (NDET, 2019). This indicates that the Norwegian school authorities has been successful to a degree in increasing literacy, but there is still room for improvement. In the English curriculum, at the upper secondary level, there is less focus on language learning, as in acquiring vocabulary and knowledge of grammar and syntax. In upper secondary, there is a larger focus on pupils *using* the English language to express themselves, read, reflect and discuss. Nevertheless, Bakken’s (2016) study demonstrates that teachers perceive film as a useful tool, but it seems to be unclear *what* actually makes it a useful tool.

As I have mentioned in previous sections, there has been advances in technologies which has led to new forms of communication and new types of media, particularly digital media. Due to the arrival of these new types of media, what we would normally associate with “text” can no longer be associated with *just* the written page, nor can ‘reading’ no longer be associated with *just* reading the written page. This we have established in earlier sections. Among these new means of communication and media we can find film, that combines different modes of expression. Film is by no means something new, but it has become one of the more commonly consumed forms of media that offers rich, multi-layered content that can be appealing to pupils (Eken, n.d.). Feature film is a cultural text that is potentially rich with ideologies that are not always visible on a superficial level. If teachers can provide pupils the opportunity to consider film in a wider context, give them the necessary tools to ‘read between the lines’, to see the ideological implications of a text, and assessing whether these implications are in agreement or disagreement, then feature film can help pupils in developing their higher order thinking, or critical thinking (Eken, n.d.).

Ali Nihat Eken proposes a few different ways to approach a feature film using *Billy Elliot* (2000) as an example, which is a film his pupils respond positively to (n.d.). Regardless of which film Eken uses, there are a few initial questions he always asks - what story does the film tell? How does it tell that? Moreover, why does it tell the story in this particular way? Additionally, he asks his pupils to put the film a social, economic, historical and cultural

context, which the initial questions can help in doing. Before actually watching the film, Eken suggests that the pupils can perform a close examination of the film's promotional material, such as trailers or posters. This can provide an indication of how the film intends to convey its message to the audience, how it intends to 'talk to' them, why it talks to the audience in this specific way, and whether there are any discrepancies to be found between what the promotional material claims the film wants to say and what it actually says. This will encourage to pupils to reflect on, or at least be made aware of, the film's production and who the target audience is (Eken, n.d.). Using film as a teaching tool can help pupils to engage in interdisciplinary topics, which are emphasized in the core curriculum as something that should be included in all subjects. In the context of *Billy Elliot* (2000), Eken suggests that the pupils can research the repercussions of the miners' strike of 1984-54 that took place in Britain when the film takes place, and they can also explore theories of gender and discuss them in the film's context (n.d.). Applying this to *12 Angry Men* (1957) is also possible, but it may be a bit more challenging to achieve as the director has purposefully left out certain identifiers of the film's setting. Nevertheless, the film is from 1957 which is quite different from 2021 in terms of cultural, social and economic aspects in society, which is something that the pupils can discuss. For example, does the fact that it is now an older film have any effect on what it wants to say? Eken continues that when working with film in the classroom, the teacher and pupils can look at how the film was received by audiences and how it was reviewed (n.d.). Pupils can explore what other people have responded to the film, specifically they can look at how factors like age, gender, ethnicity and so forth can affect how a film is received (Schroder et al., 2003, cited in Eken, n.d.). This can allow pupils to be made aware of the diversity usually found in audiences. Looking at how a film was received can be especially interesting with *12 Angry Men* (1957) since it is an older film. Pupils might compare reviews from when it released and reviews from today. Is the film received differently today? Is it likely that it will be received differently 20 years from now?

An analysis of the visual medium, such as a film, can allow pupils to examine portrayals of for example gender, class and heteronormativity. This examination is the starting point of an intersectional cultural analysis and critique, which in turn can lead to questions concerning who produces these portrayals, in what context and for what purpose. The ability to analyze and critique these various portrayals of "everyday life" ties in with the interdisciplinary topics of "Health and life skills" and "Democracy and citizenship" in the English curriculum (NDET, 2021, p. 3). Developing the ability to assess these portrayals critically may encourage



pupils to express themselves which can provide new insights into different ways of thinking and in turn, it may help the pupils gain a sense of achievement which can lead to a positive self-image and a secure identity. Likewise, these insights into different ways of thinking may greatly help the pupils understand that world perception is culture-dependent and open up the possibility of learning new ways to interpret the world, which is central to the curriculum.

Engaging with 'screen culture, popular culture, Internet culture' and new media in general is required of us as these are the 'new sites of education'. These 'sites' where people might learn, unlearn or even not get the knowledge and skills that are necessary in order to become critical agents (Pegrum, 2008, p. 145). This positions film in a way that stresses the fact that film in and of itself is not necessarily fruitful in an educational context, even though film is usually perceived as a useful resource when it comes to providing knowledge and awareness about the world that contemporary curricula require (Bakken, 2016, p. 18). Film is tremendously widespread and popular cultural phenomenon, and according to Mark Pegrum (2008), an under-analyzed one. Nevertheless, it offers a great context in which to explore and develop literacy (Pegrum, 2008, p. 145). Film is a medium wherein we can regularly encounter 'other' cultural discourses. This medium introduces pupils to stories a culture tells about itself, a story that 'tells the world' not 'as it is', but as we see it, as we would like to see it or as we would like others to see it (Kern, 2000, cited in Pegrum, 2008, p. 145). Film is inherently audio-visual and intertwines language, culture and context, which allows us to look through the 'lens' of other cultures and allows us to 'read the world' (Pegrum, 2008, p. 146). How film is studied can be informed in useful ways by social and critical discourses that remind us that all texts are situated, and all readings are partial (Lima, 2007, cited in Pegrum, 2008, p. 146), which in turn leads us towards the development of a critical approach that involves distancing, problematization and analysis (Pegrum, 2008, p. 146). Pegrum specifies that *foreign* film can have these advantages, however when using a film in the English classroom in Norway the film used is certain to be foreign, thus these advantages are naturally present in Norwegian English classrooms when applying film as a teaching tool.

Pegrum (2008, p. 146) continues that critical literacy can be developed through the examination of film, in its sociocultural frame where dialogue is accompanied by images of facial expressions of the people who are reacting to them. It is an ideal way to 'sensitize' pupils to the discourse practices in other cultures and societies and how these discourse practices both reflect and create social norms (Kern, 2000, cited in Pegrum, 2008, p. 146). However, it is paramount not to give pupils the impression that this is to compare cultures and

societies in order to establish one or the other as ‘better’. Through being supplied with ample and varied material, pupils should be enabled to understand that each culture is divided against itself in numerous ways, which of course also applies to their own native culture. When analyzing film to draw out different aspects of the film under consideration, there are different ‘lenses’ that can be adopted in order to draw out these aspects. For example, in a temporal analysis the pupils might see films with clear political or social text and subtexts that are evaluated in their sociohistorical moments as well as the present moment. Drawing from the paradigms of cultural studies, such as queer studies or gender studies, pupils might analyze a film based on gender or sexual orientation, or in the same vein they might focus on race and ethnicity. Approaching a film and applying critical literacy with a focus on various power differentials can provide ‘lenses for examining the inherent biases in the textuality of one’s own and other cultures’ (Pegrum, 2008, p. 147). Naturally, it comes easier to examine one culture and compare it to one’s own culture to look for potential congruence and/or divergence, but it is important to keep in mind that this is not to establish one culture as ‘greater’ or ‘lesser’ when compared to other cultures, it is meant to broaden our understanding of various cultural discourses and in turn develop critical, intercultural competence. Pegrum (2008, p. 149) concludes that film can, nor should be considered as an all-inclusive answer to all linguistic, cultural and critical needs. That being said, film is likely to play a role in guiding pupils’ towards being more able to make sense of the ‘textual landscape’ they find themselves in, thus the pupils may be given more options for the shaping of their own identities.

#### 4. Method

In this section, I will first go into some general ideas of film analysis, which includes looking at the various techniques that filmmakers use to tell their story, and how these general ideas of film analysis can be transferred to a classroom context, which essentially is general suggestions as to how a teacher might use a film in their instruction. Then, I will present how I intend to analyze *12 Angry Men* (1957) through a ‘critical literacy lens’ in section 5.

In the study of film, it is required to have at least a basic understanding of the techniques and methods that are used in filmmaking. As in practically all analyses, it is necessary not only to be able to identify these techniques and methods, but also to understand how they are being used to affect the overall tone, mood, theme and the feeling of the viewer, in order to engage with the text properly. The concept of *mise en scène* is an essential element of film analysis. It

derives from French and literally translates to ‘putting on stage’ and originally refers to how a theatrical stage was set in terms of lighting, costumes, and placement of props and actors (Stafford, 2010, p. 87). Now it is more commonly used when reading film. Tim Stafford refers to Marilyn Fabe who defines *mise en scène* as ‘all the elements of film direction that overlap with the art of the theatre ... the director’s choice of setting or design, props, costumes and make-up’ (2004, cited in Stafford, 2010, p. 88). However, Andrew Dix offers a definition that is more pertinent to the distinctive properties of filmmaking. Dix argues that when reading film, we must look beyond the techniques that are used in a play and look at the ones that are unique to film, such as ‘the implications of a camera’s proximity to its object’ and what is ‘indicated by the texture of the image itself’ (2008, cited in Stafford, 2010, p. 88). It is not strictly speaking necessary for a pupil to use terms such as *mise en scène*, but nevertheless pupils in upper secondary school should be capable of observing the elements that make up a *mise en scène*, such as camera angles, lighting and use of color, and make comments on how these aspects affects them as a viewer.

The positioning of the camera is probably the most important tool a filmmaker has in terms of ‘setting the scene’ for the viewer. For example, if the image, or ‘shot’ as it is commonly referred to as, is at a low angle, the director is likely wanting to emphasize the power or dominance of the subject in the shot. Alternatively, if the shot is at a high angle or a ‘bird’s eye’ shot, it can create a sense of power over the subject or even a sense of detachment from what is happening below. The positioning of the camera is something that is easy to overlook, but it is still one of the more crucial signifiers of narrative information. Usually, people watch movies to be entertained and perhaps pay little attention to how the camera is used. However, it is still important to be made aware of even the most ‘standard’ camera angles and how they can affect and contribute to our understanding of mood and character, especially when we want to critically analyze a film (Stafford, 2010, p. 88).

In order to make analyzing the use of camera angles less daunting for pupils, Stafford (2010) suggests a few simple questions that the teacher can ask of them: is the camera close or far away? Is the angle low or high? Is the camera moving or is it static? And lastly, how does the shot make us feel? (Stafford, 2010, p. 88). These questions are really one single question, “what type of shot is this?” But asking this single question of someone who is not experienced in film analysis and has little to no knowledge of the required meta language, would likely not yield any meaningful answers. Perhaps two of the more significant and widely used shots, making them easy to identify, is the long shot and the close-up. These two shots are on the

opposite ends of the tools a cinematographer has at their disposal, and what they entail are rather self-explanatory. The long shot is when something is filmed from far away, often to capture landscape, buildings or even a large group of people. The close-up on the other hand, usually entails an actor's head filling up the entire screen, often with a focus on the actor's face. But it does not need to be a close-up of a face, it can also be a close-up of an interaction with an item such as lighting a cigarette or applying lip stick. In between these two types of shot we find the medium shot, which is not particularly close or far away from the subject, usually framing half of an actor's body (Stafford, 2010, p. 88). The medium shot and the close-up are the two types of shots that are the most common in *12 Angry Men* (1957), especially the former. Lumet has chosen not to use long shots in this film, which can be assumed to be because it would be difficult to use effectively since the entire film takes place inside one single, relatively small room.

Stafford states that a simple way to look at these types of shots, is that the long shot is used to display action and the close-up is used to display emotion, while the medium shot can be used to display both (2010, p. 89). A long shot can be used for different reasons but is often used as an 'establishing shot' which tells the audience where the scene takes place and helps create an atmosphere. However, long shots are not used in *12 Angry Men* (1957), except for the closing shot outside the courthouse, but there are a number of close-ups. The close-up is usually the main method filmmakers use to engage the audience emotionally. Stafford quotes Béla Balász: "close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearances. You may see a medium shot of someone sitting and conducting a conversation with icy calm. The close-up will show trembling fingers nervously fumbling a small object – sign of internal storm" (2004, p. 315, cited in Stafford, 2010, p. 90). A close-up essentially forces the audience to consider the emotions of the character because it fills up the entire screen, and there is nothing else for us to examine. One of the more unique, but still essential, tools a filmmaker has at their disposal is editing. Editing entails putting the footage of the film into correct order to make the finished film (Stafford, 2010, p. 90). It may sound like a straightforward, mechanical effort, but it plays a key role in setting the tone of the finished product, i.e., the film. The editor, usually under the guidance of the director, is responsible for how long each shot will last, which shot will follow the previous one, the transitioning between scenes and integrating the soundtrack and score into the scenes. Using editing in different way can have a great impact on the mood of the shots or scenes. For example, to evoke a sense of action and thrill, the editor can use a quick succession of cuts

between shots, or alternatively the editor can use longer shots to evoke a sense of calmness or tension.

The use of camera angles, *mise en scène* and editing are a filmmaker's essential tools for setting the mood and tone of the narrative, but it is through make-up, costume and acting that the characters are realized. However, studying the craft of acting is not part of literacy in and of itself, but it is still necessary to discuss in an analysis of a film as it is something practically anyone can give their subjective opinion on and it can give a greater understanding of characters. When pupils are given examples of "intelligent" acting, an expressive facial expressions and body language they will be better equipped for reading a character through their acting (Stafford, 2010, p. 95). Make-up and costume are something that is relatively easy to point out and can give clues to the nature of a character. One usually does not base one's entire impression of a characters only by how they look and what they wear, but film is a primarily visual medium, which leads to audiences being more "visually discriminative", whether it is consciously or subconsciously (Stafford, 2010, p. 95). Meaning that audiences make up impressions based on visual input. Given that a film is often around 90 or 120 minutes long, we are not given the luxury of getting to know characters over a long period of time. Similarly, we are not given access to the characters internal thoughts as we might be in a novel. We are however, given access to the actor's facial expressions, body language and delivery of lines. Through the study of a character onscreen can encourage a closer examination of how information is transmitted visually, which normally happens on two levels: the *implicit* and the *explicit* (Stafford, 2010, p. 95). Stafford uses the character of Wolverine in the *X-Men* films to illustrate this and any visual reading of a character must take both these levels into account. Explicitly, Wolverine is tall and muscular, he has adamantium claws that are inseparable from his body indicating that he is experienced in combat and has a propensity for violence, and these traits are portrayed as central to his character. Implicitly, Wolverine is often portrayed wearing a leather jacket which is can be associated with rebellious masculinity. Additionally, he has a distinct hairstyle that is raised into fins on either side of his head, which is a nod to the original comic book source material, but it also mimics the shape and pointy ears of a wild animal, such as a wolverine. Combined, these characteristics suggest that Wolverine has a wild, untamed and animalistic side to his character (Stafford, 2010, p. 95-96). While not all pupils would be able to pick up on all visual clues when reading a character, they can be encouraged to draw conclusions about a character based on what they see.

In chapter 2.2. it was pointed out that critical literacy involves understanding how language and text construct perceptions of reality, and it involves understanding the interconnectedness of *how* and *why* a text constructs a certain perception of reality, as well as *who* the text is aimed at. The act of identifying methods and techniques filmmakers use can enable us to understand *how* a certain perception of reality is constructed through a film, which has been presented in the paragraphs above. From there, we can read into the *how* and then apply critical thought in order to identify the *why* and *who*. In short, we are able to read a film critically.

## 5. Analysis – 12 Angry Men (1957)

Before going into the analysis, there are a few things I want to address. Firstly, there are some implications to consider before potentially using this film in an upper secondary classroom. As *12 Angry Men* (1957) is an older film it is essential to put the film in a historical and cultural context, considering topics such as gender and race. Examples of this is that there are no women featured in the film, except from a few extras, and there are no African Americans featured in the film. Taking implications such as these into consideration, as the cultural landscape in which the film was produced was quite different from the cultural landscape of today, is worth keeping in mind when using an older film in a classroom context. The reason for bringing this up is because this thesis explores how critical literacy can be promoted through the analysis of film in an upper secondary classroom in accordance with the Norwegian Core Curriculum and English Curriculum. This thesis is not intended to explore how to promote critical literacy in general, but strictly in a classroom context through the analysis of a film.

Secondly, it is important to regard this analysis in the context of this thesis. It is not intended to be read as an isolated analysis, but rather as a part of this thesis as a whole. The theoretical framework, literature review and the analysis are all interconnected and interdependent, and combined, these elements are meant to lay the foundation for the discussion of the thesis and research question in chapter 6. It is essential to remember that this is *my* subjective analysis of the film, which will have an inevitable impact of how the film is analyzed, due to my own knowledge, experiences, and cultural background. Furthermore, this is an analysis through the lens of critical literacy which will also affect the analysis.

To start the analysis, I will first present a brief synopsis of the film in order to summarize the film's plot. Then I will present a brief overview of the narrative and technical devices used,

followed by a presentation of the more central characters. I have also divided the film into sequences to gain an overview of the story and how it plays out. Lastly, I will present the analysis itself, where I will identify and address what ideologies concerning central themes the film conveys, which I will do through the methodology presented in chapter 4.

### 5.1. Synopsis

*12 Angry Men* is a film directed by Sidney Lumet and was written for the screen by Reginald Rose. The film tells the story of a jury in a case where a young man is charged with the murder of his father. If the young man is found guilty, he will be sent to the electric chair. Apart from the brief opening scene and epilogue, the entire film takes place in a small jury room, supposedly in New York City, on the 'hottest day of the year'. The film shows nothing of the trial itself, except for the judge's perfunctory charge to the jury. He states that it is the jury's duty to "separate the facts from the fancy" (00:01:32) in a bored tone voice with the implication that a conviction is a forgone conclusion. The jury enters the jury room to discuss the case and give their verdict on what must be a unanimous decision, whether guilty or not guilty. The jury gives their initial vote and all jury members except Juror #8, who serves as the protagonist, vote guilty. The characters are not given names, only numbers. The protagonist, Juror #8, votes not guilty simply because he is not sure of the young man's guilt, he has reasonable doubt, and that is enough. As the film progresses, personal issues rise to the surface and conflict threatens to derail the entire delicate, legal process that will decide the fate of a young man.

Ultimately, the film is not about solving a crime. The film is about potentially sending a young man to die. In the first vote on whether the defendant is guilty or not, every jury member apart from #8 votes guilty. He says, "We're talking about someone's life here. We can't decide in five minutes. Supposing we're wrong?" And from there, the 11-to-1 vote gradually shifts.

### 5.2. Narrative and technical devices

When I first read the plot description of the film, I have to admit that I did not think it sounded particularly exciting, as the story is about 12 men sitting around a table in a room talking for around 90 minutes. However, watching the film convinced me otherwise. In order for such a story to be engaging, the script needed to be entertaining and intriguing, which I would argue that Reginald Rose managed perfectly. There are no ostentatious sequences of action or breathtaking imagery, the action and spectacle come from the delivery of lines from

the characters. Rose's script not only explores the postulate of "innocent until proven guilty" that is central to the film's plot, but it also tells a complex story by illuminating the characters and thus exploring a number of themes and issues, such as troubled family relations, prejudice and conformity, and the judicial system itself with its death penalty.

Aside from the brief opening and ending, the entire film takes place in a single room. Because of this, its tension does not come from action or set pieces, it comes from conflict of personalities, dialogue and body language. During the 95-minute length of the film, each juror is clearly defined as a character with their own backgrounds, occupations, personalities, beliefs, prejudices and emotional tilts. As mentioned in the synopsis, the characters are never given names, only numbers, Juror #1 through #12. This has the effect of essentially disallowing the audience to make up any impressions based on any superficial characteristics such as a name. It forces us to speculate and make assumptions about the characters. Due to the fact that the film is reasonably short it also gives the impression that the story takes place in real time. Throughout the story, the evidence is so thoroughly debated that it feels like the audience know it as well as the jurors do, making us feel like a silent 13<sup>th</sup> member of the jury. The evidence, that at least superficially is in strong favor of a guilty verdict, is deconstructed in such a meticulous way that it demonstrates to the jurors, and the audience, that there is always "two sides to a coin" and how important that is to remember when making a decision, particularly when it is a life-or-death decision. All of these techniques are used to accentuate the feeling of actually being there in the room with the jury. The film explores the prejudices of each jury member and why they initially believe the defendant is guilty and how they interpret the evidence, and Lumet essentially forces us to explore our own prejudices by not hand feeding us information about the characters. We have to think for ourselves, which relates back to why this film is suited for promoting critical literacy.

Lumet applied something he refers to as "lens plot" (Ebert, 2002). In order to make the jury seem smaller as the film continued, the lenses were gradually changed to longer focal lengths which gives the impression that the background is closer to the characters. Additionally, the first third of the film is shot from above eye level, then the second third was shot at eye level and the final third was shot below eye level. In the final third, the ceiling of the room comes into view as well. These techniques were applied to accentuate the feeling of claustrophobia which helped greatly in increasing the tension of the film. Techniques like these can appear quite subtle, but they still have a major impact on what the film makes the viewer feel. The viewer feels the same sort of tension as the characters do. Bit by bit, we learn more about the



evidence and the characters, keeping us on the edge of our seats and itching to learn what the verdict is going to be. Finally, at the end of the film in the final shot, as Juror #8 leaves the courthouse, Lumet changes to a wide-angle lens to “let the audience breathe”. This film is an excellent example of how lens choices and lowering the camera can have such a significant impact on the mood of the film. For example, a high angle tends to give a feeling of domination, while a lower angle has the opposite effect, it tends to give a feeling of being dominated (Stafford, 2010). In the beginning of the film, we view the characters from above eye level, we look down on them which suggests that we can comprehend and understand them. We make up impressions of these characters based on our own prejudices and experiences. However, towards the end, the characters loom over us and overwhelm us with their passion. Now we can actually understand them better because we have gotten to know them throughout the story, and we can better understand them based on the information about them that is inferred. Not only do Lumet and cinematographer Boris Kaufman employ different camera angles and focal lengths on the lenses to great effect, but editor Carl Lerner managed to accentuate these effects of anxiety and stress even further. In the first part of the film, the takes are often long, but they get shorter and shorter as the story progresses. In fact, half of the film’s cuts happen in the last 20 minutes. This has the same effect as the camera techniques do, it accentuates the tension the feeling of tension and suspense. When Lumet switched back to a wide lens to “let the audience breathe”, Lerner also switched back to a long take, again to let us breathe and to release the built-up tension. With these techniques and devices, Lumet has taken steps to accentuate the feeling of tension throughout the film and then he finally lets us breathe.

The choice to use these techniques to accentuate the feeling of claustrophobia and tension are, I believe, essential to the film because the feeling of entrapment the jury members must feel is likely the most important dramatic element of the entire film. The circumstances of the jury essentially force each jury member to face their own prejudices as they are challenged by the other jury members, mainly Juror #8. The prejudices of the jurors are challenged and in turn our prejudices of the audience are challenged as well. I will come back to this point.

### 5.3. Characters

The 12 characters featured in this film are all middle-aged, white men. As the film progresses, we get to know each of these characters. We learn that they are individuals with their own experiences, prejudices, values and beliefs. Each character is explored, and we can infer information of what they have experienced and why they hold their values and beliefs.

Nonetheless, each character is a middle-aged, white man, and with that there comes implications. There may be different reasons as to why the director has chosen 12 white men. It could be that Rose avoided to write female or African American characters as he did not believe he could write them without being offensive or that he could not write them as true, believable characters. On the other hand, it may be that the director wanted to make a statement against African Americans in some way, however, it is not my impression that neither Rose nor Lumet are racist, as the film takes a strong stance against racism, which I will go into later in the analysis. Since the film takes a stance against racism, the reason could be that the 12 jurors are white as a way to criticize the prejudices of the American population. After all, this film came out when segregation was still in effect. By making the characters white, and in turn perhaps more recognizable to the white American population, it challenged the audience to face their own prejudices, as the defendant is Hispanic, of low socioeconomic status, and has likely experienced racist and prejudiced behavior. Moreover, since the jury members are all white men, this may have the effect of making the audience prejudiced, by putting them all in one group and therefore assume that they all agree.

As mentioned, the 12 characters are all explored to the extent that we can understand their motivations, values and beliefs. However, they are not all explored equally. There are a few characters that are drawn into the spotlight more frequently and play a larger part in the narrative. Being that this is a story with a rather straightforward structure with a protagonist and antagonist, it is natural that these two characters are more central to the narrative than the other characters. Juror #8, makes himself known as he is the only one who goes against the initial vote of guilty, which means that anyone of the jurors who voted guilty is a potential antagonist and he is placed in the role of the protagonist. However, as the story progresses, we can make safe assumptions as to who the true antagonist is, which is Juror #3. We can assume that he is the antagonist because it becomes clear relatively early on that he is rigid in his opinions and is not used to having people disagreeing with him. He is convinced that the defendant is guilty, but so far in the story, are the other jurors. We learn about why they hold this belief, and we learn that this is because of their own values and convictions. We never actually learn if the defendant actually murdered his father or not, because that is not what this film is about. It is about how our own beliefs, prejudices and values impact how we perceive the world, and how we make choices. There are also two other characters who can be perceived as secondary protagonists and antagonists, represented by Juror #4 and #9. Juror #9

is the first juror to support #8 in his belief that the defendant may not be guilty, and #4 is the second to last juror who becomes convinced that the defendant is not guilty.

#### 5.4. Sequences

Since the entire story takes place in one single room, we essentially have one scene, however, there are clear plot points in the story that we can break down into 15 sequences and each sequence takes us towards a new direction in the action, towards a new objective. Dividing the film into sequences allows us to examine each plot point more closely, and in turn examine the portrayal of themes and issues. In this section there will be no analysis, it is intended to give an overview of the story's progression and I will come back to the analysis itself in the next section.

The first sequence is the end of the court session and it is the only time we see the defendant. We see a close-up of the defendant's face, at what seems to be a slight downwards angle. He is clearly young and appears to be Hispanic. He does not speak; he merely looks at the jury as they enter the jury room with a look of worry and fright on his face. The slight downward angle gives us a feeling over dominance over the young man and we are confronted with the fact that this boy's fate will be soon decided, and we are to take part in this decision. This takes us to the next sequence, the new objective, which is for the jury to discuss the trial and agree on a verdict. The jurors settle in in the jury room and figure out their plan by taking a preliminary vote. We are then pushed into the next objective and sequence as Juror #8 is the only one who votes Not Guilty. In the third sequence, the other 11 jurors try to convince Juror #8 that he is wrong. We are then pushed into sequence four, where the jurors discuss the knife, the murder weapon. This discussion ends with a proposition from Juror #8, where he suggests a secret vote where he will abstain. If there are still 11 votes in favor of Guilty, he will stand down and they will take the Guilty verdict to the judge. Sure enough, Juror #9 changes his vote and we are pushed into a new sequence of arguing which ends when the Foreman calls for a break as one man is in the restroom, which pushes us into sequence number six. In sequence number six both the characters and the audience are given some reprieve, but it is nevertheless an important sequence as it gives us some insight into the backgrounds of the jurors. For example, we learn that Juror #12 works in the advertisement business which in turn might give us an indication as to what sort of a person he is and why he voted Guilty, as the advertisement business is largely influenced by trends and not what is "right or wrong".

Sequence seven starts when the break ends, and their objective now is to discuss the passing elevated train and the testimony of the witness referred to as “the old man”. This discussion causes Juror #5 to change his verdict to Not Guilty. A new objective then arises when #11 wishes to discuss the defendant’s actions on the night on the murder. He says, “If he really had killed his father, why would he come back home three hours later?” So, the eighth sequence involves #11 questioning the boy’s actions, which ends with him changing his vote to Not Guilty. The new objective emerges, and we go into the next sequence as the jurors discuss the old man running to the door. This sequence ends with another call for a vote by an unexpected juror, #6, who changes his vote to Not Guilty. He generally does not say much throughout the film, but he does stand up to Juror #3 when he disrespects Juror #9. In the tenth sequence, we are given another break as the storm sets in, and the rain starts pouring down. At this point in the film the vote is evenly split for the first time, six in favor of Guilty and six in favor of Not Guilty. Sequence 11 begins when Juror #8 brings up the defendant’s memory of he claimed to be at the movies. #8 challenges #4 to remember the movie he saw when he was at the movies, as well as the second movie that was showing. Juror #4 struggles to remember the details of which movies he recently saw and understands that the defendant might struggle to remember certain details. Sequence 12 then starts shortly after this as Juror #2 brings up something he wants to discuss.

Juror #2 brings up the fact that the father was seven inches (~18 centimeters) taller than his son and it would be an awkward angle for the son to stab down into the chest of his father, because of the height difference. Juror #5 brings up the fact that that is not the way one would wield a switchblade knife in that way and stab down and shows us the proper way to handle that type of knife. At this point #7 changes his vote to Not Guilty, but it is clearly not because he has been convinced of the defendant’s innocence, it is because he wants to move things along so that he will be able to leave sooner. Throughout the film, Juror #7 has made it very clear that he wishes to get these proceedings over with so that he may go to the baseball game he has tickets for. Juror #11 confronts #7 about his sudden change of mind. #11 says, “If you want to vote Not Guilty then do it because you are convinced he is Not Guilty, not because you’ve had enough.” Then the sequence ends with #8 calling for another vote. In the next, 13<sup>th</sup> sequence, there is a significant shift in the balance of power as the vote now sits 9-3 in favor of Not Guilty. Then we get Juror #10’s racist tirade. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and penultimate sequence Juror #8 states that “We nine can’t understand how you three are still so sure.” Juror #4 decides to try to explain his position, and he makes an excellent argument as to why he

believes the defendant is guilty, for which #8 has no real answer to. This is a testament to *12 Angry Men*'s brilliant writing; the more Juror #8 accomplishes, the stronger the antagonistic forces get. The reversal happens when they discuss the woman and the indentations in her nose because of her glasses, and everyone but #3 votes Not Guilty, which pushes us into the final sequence. The finale comes with Juror #3, the most powerful antagonist of the story. In the end, Juror #3 is defeated. Not in the sense that the other jurors won, but in the sense that he is exhausted by being angry and trying his best to convince himself and the other jurors that the defendant is guilty.

## 5.6. Analysis

The film drops the audience in the middle of the narrative. The camera starts outside the courthouse, it then gradually takes us through the courtroom doors where we are met by the judge's deliberation to the jury, with the jury in the background. The trial itself is over and the audience knows nothing about what the prosecution or defense has argued. All we know is that a young man is charged with the murder of his father. Dropping the audience in the middle of the narrative is referred to as *in media res*, which comes from Latin and means "in the midst of things". It is the practice of starting a narrative in the middle of a usually crucial situation that is related to a chain of events. The narrative then moves forward, and exposition is delivered through flashbacks or retrospect (Britannica, 2020). It is a common practice in popular culture, such as in *James Bond* films, where the audience is dropped in the middle of the action. Following this practice emphasizes what I believe Reginald Rose intended to say with this story. By dropping us in the middle of the narrative with no knowledge of what has transpired Rose forces us to speculate and make assumptions, such as what has happened in the court proceedings and who the characters are. Essentially, Rose makes us face our own prejudices and encourages us to think critically about what we are shown about the case and its evidence.

Throughout the film, there were two overarching themes that stand out to me. The first one being prejudice and the second being conformity. Prejudice is defined as a "preconceived judgement or opinion", or an "adverse opinion or learning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge" (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Regarding prejudice, Allport states: "Man is not born prejudiced; rather, prejudice is learned. By its very nature, prejudice denies individual dignity and breaks the fundamental unity among people" (1954). Not only are we, the audience, getting to know the prejudices of each of the characters, but we also get to face our own prejudices when we make up impressions of who these characters are. The film plays

on the fact that we face our own prejudices with its ordinary and unassuming nature. Lumet has stripped any markers indicating a time period, any details about the setting and information about the characters needs to be inferred. The characters are not given names, only numbers, and the defendant is referred to as “the boy” or “the kid”. The witnesses as well, they are referred to only as “the woman” and “the old man”. All we know about the setting is that it is set in a courtroom in what seems to be New York City on an exceptionally hot summers day. By removing information about the characters and setting, we are forced to make up impressions that we consider to be true, unless we are given reason to think otherwise. This relates back to what I believe to be Rose’s intention with the story, he *wants* us to speculate and make assumptions. This is a prime example of what is often referred to as “the golden rule” of storytelling – “show, don’t tell” (reedsy.com, 2019). “Showing” means to illustrate, while “telling” means to state. This means that the audience is not told information directly, we are forced to create an image or impression of the setting and, more importantly, the characters, through information we can infer. The fact that so little is known about the setting also reinforces the idea that the film is a character driven narrative, and the omission of details about the setting makes it clear that the director wants to put the main focus on the characters. Further, the focus does not lie with superficial ideas of who these men are, but it lies with exploring their motivations, beliefs and ultimately – their prejudices. By doing so, Lumet encourages us to think *critically* about the words and actions of the characters. We *can* make up impression of the characters based on how they look, but they are not portrayed with any visual characteristics that stand out, reinforcing the idea that Lumet wants us to pay attention to their words and actions.

The effect of applying the “show, don’t tell” technique and the intentional omission of detail is two-fold. Firstly, as no names or specifics are mentioned, we no longer make associations regarding names. For example, we no longer think “German” when we hear the name “Schulz”. It is common practice in legal processes that jurors refrain from using names to remove the potential effect that they may have. Subconsciously judging other people on trivialities such as names does happen, whether we realize it or not. Lumet is able to strip down these characters to represent less specific individuals and a more general representation of the American population and in the jury room they act as representatives of the judicial system. It gives the impression that these men could be in anyone’s trial and we end up judging these characters by who they actually are, not *only* by our own prejudices. Rather, we do not learn who these characters *actually* are, but we learn what the director tells us about

them – what he wants us to know. Yes, they are all white men, but they display characteristics such as arrogance and prejudice that should be recognizable to most people, as these characteristics are not exclusive to any race or gender. Still, this is where it is important to place the film in a historical and cultural context. There are no women, no Asian or African Americans in the jury. At the time, when the film came out, there were relatively well-defined gender roles and The Civil Rights Act of 1964 would not be ratified until seven years after the film’s release. Thus, the use of the term “general representation of the American people” needs to be taken with a grain or three of salt. The second effect of this lack of specificity is that we, the audience, must consider more subtle and abstract concepts of what it means to be human. It gives us the opportunity to put ourselves in these characters’ shoes and catch a glimpse of ourselves, for better or worse. The jury in *12 Angry Men* (1957) is naturally not a true representation of the American population, but there are characteristics displayed by these characters that most people should be able to recognize. Just as the eponymous twelve men gazing out into the windows in the jury room, so too are we given the opportunity to gaze into the proverbial windows of ourselves and the world we inhabit. By drawing comparisons between these characters, the world they inhabit, and ourselves and the world we inhabit, we are encouraged to think critically about the fact that there may be congruence between them, even though this film is a mere representation of reality, not reality itself. This relates back to one of the epistemic questions of critical literacy – what is truth? We have to consider the fact that even though this film is fiction it can still carry truth.

A trial is principally meant to convey a non-biased retelling of the circumstances of a crime, and it is then up to the jury to decide if the defendant is guilty or not of committing that crime. I believe, that at its core, this is what Rose wanted to explore with his screenplay. The film is a critique of the judicial system in that a trial can never be truly non-biased, but on a deeper level it is a critique of how peoples’ backgrounds have a significant impact on how we perceive truth. An impact that we may never even realize is there at all. In a way, the film tells us that all objectivity is subjective. What we believe to be objective fact, is inherently understood through our own subjective experience, thus it is no longer objective. One could argue that in general, a retelling of circumstances is never truly non-biased, but as the audience, we are not retold through the prosecution of the defense, we are told second hand through the jurors. This provides an extra layer to how we need think carefully about how the circumstances are retold. The circumstances are not only shaped by how the prosecution and defense retell them, but they are then *reshaped* when they are told by the jurors to us, the

audience, because of the jurors' various backgrounds, preconceptions and experiences which affects how they understand the retelling of the events. Rose almost immediately shows that this story is not about the case itself, but rather about the jurors. It is about people and how their backgrounds affect their prejudices. Despite the fact that we are not brought up to speed on expository details, we know that the stakes are high. The judge states that the vote needs to be unanimous and if the defendant is found guilty then "the death sentence is mandatory in this case". The camera then pans over the jurors faces, one by one, when these important terms are laid out and we learn that these men are tasked with deciding whether or not to send a young man to his death.

Throughout the film there is a plethora of portrayals of personal prejudices right from the beginning of the film to the very end. One character who offers several portrayals of such prejudice is Juror #3, which is likely due to his overall role as the antagonist of the story. His prejudice is more than anything based on an apparent disdain for younger people, which may have been caused by his falling out with his son. He elaborates on this after the initial vote. It becomes clear to us that the deterioration of his relationship with his son has affected his perception of the defendant. Additionally, his prejudices make him hypocritical. For example, he claims that young people do not have respect for their elders, yet he shows no respect towards *his* elder, Juror #9, or anyone else around him for that matter. He makes sure to remind the other jurors often that he is not biased one way or the other and that you should always look at the objective facts, yet it is clear that his emotions are driving his opinion. He is friendly to the people he perceives as being on "his side" and rude and aggressive to those who are not. He ends up alienating everyone in the room and it becomes obvious that he has done this to other people in his life, such as his son.

On the other hand, is Juror #4, who is portrayed as hardly emotional at all. This ironically contributes to his own prejudices. He looks down on #3 for being emotional, he takes pride in his intelligence, rationality, and ability to remember details from the trial, to the point of coming across as arrogant. He holds his own intelligence and rationality in such high regard that it clouds his judgement, and what seems to be a lack of empathy, prevents him from realizing that the defendant might have trouble remembering certain details after seeing his father murdered on the floor in front of him. Both of these examples give us a glimpse into the irrationalities and prejudices that can play into any given member of a jury. The other main instigator of prejudice is Juror #10 who throughout the film shows his discriminative and racist behavior towards the defendant based on personal bias. This brings us to the stance



against racism I mentioned in section (characters) and why I believe Rose did not choose to portray twelve white men out of ill intent. Juror #10's racist behavior is more subtle earlier in the film, but towards the end he makes a long tirade about "how these people are". He refers to the defendant and his community as "them", effectively painting them all with the same brush and puts "them" all in the same category. By putting the defendant in a group which he labels "them", Juror #10 is being *otherist*. Otherism is phenomenon in which an individual or group are defined as "others" and labelled as not fitting in or not being a part of a particular group (Cherry, 2020). Southcott and Theodore state that otherism is "only ever negative" and that "to be otherist is to mark as inferior that which is not inferior in order to oppress it" (2020, p. 162). Juror #10's behavior leads to one of the more powerful moments in the film where he outs himself for what he truly is. All the other jurors are repulsed by #10's racist tirade, physically moving and facing away from him. After this, #10 loses all credibility in the eyes of the other jurors showing us that his overwhelming prejudice ultimately led to his demise. Here it becomes clear that Lumet and Rose take a solid stance against racism vicariously through the other jury members. The other jurors do not say a word, they simply turn away. Even Juror #3, who has throughout the film been the most adamant about the defendant's guilt, does as the rest and turns away without uttering a word. The other jurors' message to #10 is further enhanced by the camera angle. In the center of the shot, we see Juror #10 going on about how "they" cannot be trusted, "they" are all alike, and so forth. Around him, the other jurors step and face away from him, one by one. Juror #10 notices this and becomes more and more flustered, struggling to get his point across, while being met only with silent backs facing him. Then it seems as though #10 has a revelation and realizes that what he said was truly offensive and hurtful.

The second overarching theme I found is conformity. Conformity is expressed early in the film during the jury's initial vote on the defendant's guilt. Due to the nature of the vote being a show of hands, it becomes apparent from the glancing looks between certain jurors that there is a reluctance to go against the general consensus of a guilty vote. It was only Juror #8 who was brave enough to express his own concerns and go against the conformity of the group, and the other jurors appear surprised at #8's non-conformity. I use the term 'brave', but when Juror #8 expresses his concerns, he does not do so in a grandiose, heroic manner – he expresses his concerns in a non-confrontational and gentle manner. He says that he is not sure of the defendant's guilty and would simply like to discuss it. He also makes it clear that he knows he could be wrong, the defendant might as well be guilty, he is simply *not sure*. To

which Juror #10 immediately responds ‘There’s always one.’ with a condescending chuckle (00:11:46). Juror #3 also questions why #8 does not vote guilty, but in a less condescending tone, but it is obvious he shows some form of disdain towards #8 for disagreeing with the group. So, #8 is not brave in the traditional, heroic sense, but he is brave in the sense that he spoke his mind and stood by his principles. This act of bravery puts #8 in the role of the protagonist, he opposes the antagonistic forces. Here, Lumet and Rose guide us towards the idea that challenging conformity, or rather, established doxa, is necessary. Which again relates directly back to the basic idea of critical literacy. Juror #8 takes a stance; in that he does not conform to the general consensus of the group just for the sake of it. He seems to essentially embody the idea of critical thinking through a protagonist of a story.

Conformity is expressed throughout the film and is related to something called *normative social influence* from social psychology. Social influence is an umbrella term used to describe the various outside factors that cause an individual to think or act in a certain way. *Normative social influence* entails that individuals change their beliefs or behaviors, not to be correct necessarily, but rather to simply fit in with a group (Levine, 2020, p. 3-4). This form of social influence is demonstrated through Jurors #3 and #10 who harness the power of social influence to convince the other jurors that the defendant is guilty. They do this mainly by being louder than the others and bullying them to get their opinion across. Once someone disagrees with #3 or #10, they are quick to insult or question the beliefs of the other jurors. Juror #3 is particularly guilty of this, which clearly puts him into the role of the main antagonist. He starts off rather gently when #8 first expresses that he is unsure, but #3’s temper quickly escalates. Any argument that goes against #3’s convictions is swiftly met with anger, yelling and insults. Juror #3 clearly wants every member of the jury to conform to the ‘established truth’ which is that the defendant is guilty. The way conformity is expressed in the film speaks about the potential dangers that come with it. As we have previously established, critical literacy concerns itself with challenging dominant or established ideologies, values and ‘truths’. Juror #8 challenged the conformity of the group by asking the critical question of ‘how can we know?’. Had he not asked the question, the film would of course immediately be over, but disregarding that, a young man would have been sentenced to die. The matter of questioning dominant ideologies is given high stakes in this context as a life is on the line, however, it demonstrates that it is necessary to be critical, and it is illustrated with an extreme example.

Although the stakes are definitely high, it appears that, superficially, this jury proceeding is a simple matter. However, as we are introduced to this diverse group of characters and learn more about them, we learn that reaching a unanimous vote could be harder than first anticipated. These men come from a variety of backgrounds and careers, and they each consider the elements of the case from their own perspectives. This definitely complicates the proceedings, particularly as the initial vote is not unanimous. We learn that the reason for the vote not being unanimous is the nonconformity of a single man, Juror #8. During the initial vote, while all the other jurors, different as they may be, raise their hand to signal that they believe the defendant to be guilty, #8 stays quiet. The image of this room with a tableful of men staring at juror #8 for his dissent is a memorable one. He is effectively the entire reason for the film to take place, because had he voted guilty, there would be no story. However, instead, his decision to not conform with the rest of the jurors and to question the reliability of the evidence necessitates that they have a lengthy discussion about what they each believe to be true.

After the initial vote we can already make an assumption about what the film wants to say, which in a way comes back to the one the fundamental questions of critical literacy – “what is truth?” or rather in the context of the film, “what is *the* truth?” Is there such a thing? How can the jurors know if the defendant did in fact murder his father? The reason for Juror #8’s disagreement with the rest of the group does not come from the fact that he is confident that the defendant is innocent, in fact, he makes it explicitly clear that he does not know, he *cannot* know for sure, which is why he does not go along with the prevailing opinion just for the sake of it. The other jurors on the other hand, seem convinced, at least at first, of what the truth is and are obviously portrayed as frustrated with Juror #8 for not realizing the same truth as they are. When the other jurors ask #8 if he believes the defendant’s story he says, “I don’t know whether I believe it or not”, then they ask him what he wants to do next and he tells them he just wants to talk. Juror #8 maintains his position of ambivalence and rather than making an impulsive decision about his judgement of the case, he wishes to properly use the process of judicial discussion that is within their right, and frankly, to do what is expected of them as members of the justice system. The differing opinions between the jurors comes not only from how they each perceive the events that are alleged to have taken place, but also how they each perceive class, violence and masculinity. It seems as several of the jury members see the defendant’s history with violence as solid evidence of his capacity to commit murder, but #8 postulates that even though the defendant was raised in a violent and abusive household in a

slum, which certainly *can* make him violent, it does not prove anything about the murder. The fact that the defendant is perhaps accustomed to violence does not automatically equate to him murdering his father. This is where Juror #8's perception of the defendant differs from the other jurors - #8's perception does take the defendant's background into account, but he refrains from making any unnecessary assumptions. This continues to reinforce him as the protagonist and the idea that he as a character represents the idea of critical thinking. Rose and Lumet illustrate to us the essence critical thinking through Juror #8 and his challenging of the consensus of the group and his ability to view the case from several perspectives.

While Lumet has deliberately taken steps to anonymize all these characters, who are all middle-aged, white men, Lumet also takes time to zero in on each of them and shape each of their identities. Every one of these characters is not explored with the same level of detail, but we learn enough about each of them to understand their motivations. At certain moments, the camera follows individual characters more closely and sometimes it zooms in on their face, for example in moments when they are having an emotional moment or a crisis of faith. This emphasizes the insight that the viewer gains into each individual juror's perspective, and it shows the ways that their personal identities affect how they view the case and its evidence. At about 30 minutes into the film, Juror #8 has managed to convince one other jury member, #9, to see things from his perspective. Juror #9, who is an older man with a calm demeanor, and he agrees with #8 that this case deserves and is entitled to closer examination, and that it is a noble thing to want to understand the facts properly. Still, #9's agreement leads to more conflict among the men, but at the same time it brings #8 closer to getting the other jury members to examine the case with greater care and attention.

On the other hand, we have the antagonist, Juror #3. Through him, Rose and Lumet illustrate a character that serves as an opposite to Juror #8. However, while #3 is portrayed as an opposite to #8, he is not some cartoon villain who seeks to do evil for evil's sake. He is a character, that is certainly not without flaws, but we learn why he is unable to view the case in the same way that Juror #8 does. He is determined that the defendant murdered his father and needs to be punished. And, in a way, he is blinded by his own personal issues. We can infer why Juror #3 is so set in his ways that the defendant is guilty. After the initial vote, he reveals to Juror #8 that he is a father, and it is implied that he has used violence when raising his son. He tells the story of when he got into an argument with his 16-year-old son and that they have not spoken for two years after this argument. When he tells the story, it seems he is filled with regret which suggests that he has doubts about the methods of teaching his son to "be a man".

It is in this vulnerable moment that we realize that each of the jurors has their own individual relationship to the case based on their own experiences and associations. However, #3 quickly reverts back to anger when he realizes that he may be to blame for his distanced relationship with his son and shifts the blame to his son. “Rotten kids... You work your heart out!” he says. This develops Juror #3 as a character as something more than just an antagonistic force or a villain. Not only do we gain insight into his past, but more importantly we understand *why* he is so sure the defendant is guilty. He is not simply the antagonist only for the sake of creating conflict, but we learn his motivations for his antagonistic behavior, and to an extent we can even empathize with him. We are reminded that these characters are individuals and how they perceive the truth of the case is affected by their past experiences, for better or worse.

In general, the film follows a pretty straightforward premise. It consists of one man standing up to a group and trying to use the judicial system in the best and most thorough way possible, rather than taking anything for granted. The structure is also rather straightforward, as it is structured in such a way that we consistently see Juror #8 standing up to his fellow jury members, to which they respond by either arguing, ignoring him, or even intimidating him until #8 sees things “the right way”, or the group’s consensus. Thus, it is structured as a back-and-forth between two opposing sides that passionately disagree about what the verdict should be, which results in the titular 12 angry men. As the other jurors begin to listen to #8’s arguments and take them to heart, the dynamic between the men changes, but it still remains angry. When #8 argues that the downstairs neighbor, one of the witnesses, cannot realistically have identified the voice of the attacker while the elevated train was passing, he manages to convince some of the jurors. Then they begin to stand up for the more vulnerable members of the jury, such as #9 who suffers the bullying of the other jurors. For instance, Juror #6 stands up to #3, the most aggressive of the “opposition”, speaks disrespectfully towards #9. In this moment, two factions form in a way, each representing those who believe the defendant is guilty and those who do not. I believe that this is intended to illustrate Lumet and Rose’s that rational and critical thinking is necessary and does in fact serve a purpose. Juror #8 is able to convince some of the other jurors to view the case from different perspectives and thus, the films tell us that changing one’s mind is not something to be embarrassed about and should be normalized. Furthermore, it illustrates how it is necessary to see things from different perspectives because we do not always have access to objective truth, which the jurors do not have. Being able to notice and recognize the behavior of other people, both in groups and

otherwise, is essential to human interaction, but we cannot assume that all group behavior portrayed in film is what would happen in reality. However, many films are *realistic*, in the sense that they can portray characters who are psychologically complex, able to adapt to different situations and engage in social relations (Langkjær, 2011). *12 Angry Men* (1957) is one of those films in its portrayal of its characters. They are portrayed as complex characters, each with their own backgrounds. Waller et al. (2013) describes a technique referred to as “thin slicing”. It involves the ability to accurately judge future outcomes of certain situations based on “thin slices” of behavior, such as a video or recording of audio (Waller et al., 2013, p. 450-451). This thin slicing technique can also be applied to group interactions, not only dyadic interactions. The film plays on this thin slicing technique, in the sense that applying the technique inherently involves actively engaging with our prejudices by making assumptions on how the members of the group will interact, and how the two groups (or factions) will act.

After #8’s argument about how the witness could not have identified the attacker, we are provided with a glimpse into the life of Juror #9. #9 agrees with #8 in the sense that the old man, the witness, could not have heard the attacker clearly. Juror #9 also paints a psychological picture of the witness who wants his voice heard in the trial. #9 believes that the witness probably lied during his testimony because he has felt insignificant his whole life and found a situation where he could feel his voice being heard. As #9 explains this, the camera slowly zooms in on him, who himself is an older man. He then continues to explain the feeling of aging, becoming old and what comes with it – the fear of being irrelevant. His words come across as weighty and they probably come from his own experiences and seem to mirror his own search for relevance. It is clear that #9 sees parts of himself in the witness, both the performance of the actor and the use of camera strongly suggest this. The old man’s testimony and #9’s interpretation of why the old man wanted to testify is not necessarily related to prejudice but it can be related to conformity. The old man essentially wanted to fit in, he wanted to serve a purpose in his old age, and in his own mind that purpose was to help punish what he believed to be a murderer. Because of this need for a purpose, his ability to consider the fact that the defendant might not be guilty is lessened. By focusing our attention on Juror #9 who can relate to the old man, Lumet indirectly sheds light on the old man’s motivations, and in turn why conformity can be dangerous, even if it is assumed to be well intentioned. Additionally, this illustrates the fact that every jury member reads each testimony according to their own personal experiences and beliefs, which relates back to my point from

earlier about how the circumstances of the case are told and shaped by the prosecution and then *retold* and *reshaped* by the jurors.

From this point on, every time the jurors discuss the case another detail is brought to their attention that complicates how they perceive the case. As the story progresses, they realize that the case is not as straightforward as they first assumed, in fact, it is less straightforward than they assumed by a significant margin. Slowly but surely, Juror #8 is able to convince each of the jury members to look more closely at the details which underlines the fact that there is indeed “reasonable doubt” in this case. They let their initial prejudices get in the way and they realize that they took the facts for granted. Further, they realize that their own conclusion was perhaps made too hastily and begin to think about the case more thoroughly. The audience is pulled in different directions throughout the film, even to the point where one might question Juror #8’s motivations. In several instances, it can come across as if #8 is deliberately trying to halt the jury proceedings, as his fellow jurors suggest. He brings up details seemingly out of thin air and his arguments for the defendant’s innocence begin to falter. Nevertheless, #8 holds steadfast in his belief that there is enough ambiguity, or reasonable doubt, in this case that they cannot be sure that the defendant did commit the murder of his father. He latches on to the smallest suspicions and uses this to ensure that the defendant is given the judicial process he is entitled. At this point, when Juror #8’s arguments are less substantial, he still sticks to his convictions. I believe that Lumet and Rose, again through #8, wants to illustrate the idea that a person can be sure of a certain truth, there can be valid arguments against it. In this instance, Juror #8’s behavior is ironic. He is arguing “his truth” to someone who has “their truth”, mainly jurors #3 and #4, and when #8 hears arguments that goes against what he believes he does not change his opinion. In a sense, the tables are turned. In the beginning of the story, Juror #8 makes arguments, and the opposition does not agree with them, but later the opposition makes arguments against #8 and *he* does not agree with *them*.

As previously mentioned in this analysis, Lumet uses zooms and certain camera angles to emphasize the overarching themes of conformity and prejudice. One of the more clever uses of this is when Juror #8 demonstrates how fast the witness, the old man, had to get from his bed in his apartment to the door in order for him to see the defendant running down the stairs, Lumet zooms in on #8’s feet as he pretends to be the old man. In the shot, we only see #8’s feet as he moves across the floor, but we cannot not see the expressions or reactions from any of the other jurors. This close-up of the feet increases the feeling of tension and highlights this

moment as a crucial and definitive moment in the course of the film. Not only does Lumet's focus on #8's feet in this scene increase the tension of the scene, but it also forces the us, the audience, to come to our own conclusion. We do not see the reactions of the other jurors; therefore, we are not subconsciously influenced by it. Earlier on in the film, we are shown that the murder weapon, a switchblade, is not as uncommon as it first seemed, sowing the first proverbial seed of reasonable doubt. In fact, the switchblade can be argued to directly symbolize the reasonable doubt of the case. However, when Juror #8 demonstrates that the old man could not possibly have reached the door in time to see the defendant fleeing from the scene, effectively renders the old man's testimony unreliable. We can now say with certainty that the evidence presented so far does not merit a conviction and we have reached a crucial turning point in the story.

As tensions between the two factions, or societies, within this jury begin to rise, we learn that the discrepancy in opinion between the jurors are more than just disagreements on the facts of the case, a kind of political aspect is put forth. Juror #8 wants to give the defendant a fair trial and wants the jury to consider all facts thoroughly, some members of the jury, such as #3 and #10, consider this close examination of detail as some sort of misled and overly sympathetic political demonstration. They claim that #8 and those who agree with him that they are twisting the evidence in their own favor. At one point when he scolds his fellow jury members, #3 yells, "You all come in here with your bleeding hearts on the floor about slum kids and injustice!" As he sees it, this case open and shut, the facts indisputably prove that the defendant is guilty, but he fails to see these facts in the structural and political realities in which they are contextualized. In the way #3 overlooks the facts and sees only what he wants to see, he *projects* his own bias onto the other jurors. Projection is a defense mechanism in which someone recognizes their unacceptable traits in someone else to avoid recognizing these unacceptable traits in themselves (Vinney, 2021). By doing so, #3 suggests that the other jurors perceive the facts the way they do simply because of their "bleeding hearts", which is clearly denoted as a weakness by #3, furthering his portrayal as a prejudiced man.

Juror #3 is the antagonist of the story, and he is indeed an *angry* man, as it escalates into full-blown violence at one point. He lunges towards #8 to fight him but is ultimately held back by his fellow jurors. We can infer that underneath this disagreement there is deep frustration and resentment that derives from fundamental differences in life philosophy. Juror #8 argues the fact that #3's anger has little to do with the facts, but it has to do with his own personal vendetta and his desire to be an avenger. #8 says that #3 is clearly not out for justice or doing



what is right, he wants to enact some sort of revenge and punish the defendant. The title of the film tells us that these men are angry and before we even watch it, we know that these men will indeed be angry. This immediately tells us that these twelve men in the jury are not necessarily neutral, as a jury should be. It suggests that even though no-one is above the law, human emotion and prejudice might be. Regardless, in between the yelling, arguing and back-and-forths, there are occasions throughout the film with calm and “normal” conversations. Not only does this grant the audience some welcomed reprieve from the constant bickering, but it shows us the nuance of the characters. It shows us that while the film is in black-and-white, the characters, and the case for that matter, most certainly are not. For example, about halfway into the film the sky opens up and it begins pouring rain. At this point Juror #8 stands by the window looking out, and the foreman, Juror #1, comes up to him and tells a story of a time he coached a high school baseball team during a game in the middle of a raging storm. It is a surprisingly poignant and touching moment in a film that largely revolves around arguing and discussion between two men who hardly know each other. We see that these 12 jury members, in between their heated arguments and almost violent discussions, are able to find common ground and interact like adults who respect each other, and even find moments of intimacy. What Lumet and Rose effectively do in moments like these is that they humanize these characters, they make them feel more like real, individual human beings. Even though these men come from different backgrounds and strongly disagree on certain things, they are still able to show respect for each other. This development of character also enforces the fact that their own experiences and beliefs affect their perception of the truth.

I found that the storm that started before Juror #1 and #8's conversation, is more than happenstance, it carries significant meaning. Firstly, it symbolizes that we have in fact reached the halfway point as the vote stands 6-6. The jurors, and the audience, are given both literal and figurative relief as the ‘hottest day of the year’ begins to cool down by the rain. However, the fan in the jury room can also be argued to symbolize this relief. Up until this point in the story, the fan did not work, but when the vote stands at 6-6 Juror #7 is able to get it working. Giving them and the audience the same relief that the rain does. Secondly, the storm symbolizes the eventual catharsis that the characters go through when they face their own prejudices and preconceptions about the truth. This is especially reflected in Juror #3's outburst and change of heart towards the very end of the film. When the proceedings are over and the men leave the courthouse, the skies have cleared, and the weather is calm once more.

As the story moves forward and Juror #8 is able to present his arguments, he is able to convince more and more jury members onto his side. The other jurors realize that the evidence that was part of the trial is circumstantial and not as straightforward as it would seem, to the degree that no-one can be sure about what really happened on the night of the murder. While there are still jurors who stand their ground, such as #3 and #4, even the jurors who showed strong reluctance earlier in the story, such as Juror #7, become more convinced of the defendant's innocence as information has been more closely examined. Certainly, Juror #8's insistence and willingness to keep fighting has done some good, as it becomes more and more clear that his argument that there is reasonable doubt is stronger than that of his impulsive, oppositional fellow jury members. Sidney Lumet continues to apply close-ups to emphasize the emotions and the experiences by the jurors. When Juror #7 suddenly has a change of heart and changes his vote to "not guilty", Juror #11 confronts him, and in this confrontation, we see both their faces in a close-up shot. In the close-up of #11 we can see his face filled with a sense of righteousness when he questions #7, demanding that Juror #7 takes the vote seriously. #7, who throughout the film has shown a degree of apathy and no desire to be there, seems flabbergasted that he is confronted in this way with no real response as to why he changed his vote. These close-ups are not only used to emphasize the dramatic effect, but it also gives the viewer insight into their principles and their sense of justice. The close-up of Juror #11 emphasizes that he has a strong sense of justice and wants to do what he believes is right, as his face is filled with anger and he directly confronts Juror #7. On the other hand, the close-up of Juror #7 illustrates that he does not hold the same convictions that #11 does, at least not to the same extent. Again, reinforcing the idea that each member of the jury perceives the case differently based on their own experiences and beliefs.

While the jurors are clearly in disagreement on what is true and are often divided as they are split into factions or societies, unity between these two opposing sides does emerge. Juror #10 begins a racist tirade against immigrants and the people who live in the slum, who are inherently violent and dangerous according to him. During his bigoted harangue, each of the jurors, one by one, steps away from the table, facing away from him in a silent protest against his xenophobic rant. #10 loses all credibility among the other jurors and he loses his own confidence, and those he agrees with, such as Juror #4, are telling him to keep his mouth shut. This sequence, where #10 is ostracized by the rest of the jury, was shot in a very specific way by Lumet. As #10 begins his rant and the other jurors begin to get up from the table and step away from him, the camera is pulled back in a very slow zoom. This illustrates #10's

perspective wherein his influence as a juror is shrinking and his popularity as a person decreases. After his rant, he sits down at another small table in the room, in self-imposed ostracism, the other men sit back down at the main table, and the camera slowly moves back to it and the deliberation process. The way Lumet uses the camera here underlines the tension between the men and Juror #10's loss of credibility as is taken out of the jury proceedings, figuratively and literally.

Towards the very end of the deliberation process, a key observation is made by Juror #9, the fact that the other witness, the woman, had indentations or markings on her nose indicating that she wears glasses. All the jurors, except #3, now believe that the defendant is not guilty. Juror #3 then decides to double down on his convictions, instead of realizing and coming to terms with the fact that he now stands alone. He becomes more and more angry; he yells and spews vitriol at his peers. He maintains that the facts and evidence have been twisted over the course of the deliberation process, but he still believes that there is sufficient evidence to suggest a guilty verdict. The others respond that they cannot proceed with a guilty vote now that they have realized that there is reasonable doubt, but #3 scoffs at this and says that the evidence presented is reliable.

At the end of his angry rant, Juror #3 catches a glimpse of a photograph of himself with his son, from whom he is estranged. He breaks down and erupts into tears and manages to stammer out "not guilty" in between sobs. In this moment, we have reached the climax of the story and the vote is finally unanimous. We can see that #3 has been holding firm onto his personal conviction that the defendant is guilty because of his own inner turmoil. His own judgement and his respect for the judicial process has been clouded by his emotions and his deep sense of anger and disenfranchisement. He was angry with himself, he was angry with his son, and he wanted to punish both his son and ultimately himself vicariously through the defendant.

The film then ends. As a gesture of good faith, Juror #8 offers #3 his jacket, to which #3 somewhat reluctantly accepts as he is flustered and probably embarrassed. The jurors then leave the jury room. We move outside of the courthouse, where #8 and #9 have a brief chat and they introduce themselves to one another by name. After this, Juror #8 walks down the steps with a smile on his face.

Sidney Lumet has brought Reginald Rose's excellent screenplay to life. Rose's compelling script and storytelling combined with Lumet's technical filmmaking skills make this film a

true modern classic. It deals with a variety of issues and themes, most prominently conformity and prejudice. It shows us that standing up for your principles, and questioning established truth and ideologies is necessary in order for social justice to thrive. Ultimately, the film represents the key question of critical literacy – what is truth?

## 6. Discussion

Up to this point in the thesis I have presented a theoretical framework, a literature review, and my analysis of the film *12 Angry Men* (1957) which was intended to serve as the foundation of the discussion that I now will go into. I will discuss if it answers my thesis and main research question: How can students in the upper secondary English classroom develop critical literacy through the analysis of film? Furthermore, I will discuss advantages and disadvantages of using this particular film for the purpose of promoting critical literacy and the use of film in general.

We know that film has played a part in a Norwegian school context for quite some time, according to the curriculum pupils are expected to be able to reflect on and discuss film (NDET, 2020) and that teachers generally believe film to be a useful teaching resource is used properly (Bakken, 2016). The idea that film is regarded as a useful tool if “used properly” is worth examining. It comes down to how one defines the act of “using a film properly” in a school context. There are several ways to use a film as a teaching resource, but I would argue that there is no single universal way to use a film, it all depends on what the teacher wants the pupils to achieve. This illustrates that using film does come with its advantages and disadvantages. As a teacher, you have much freedom for how you want to use a film, and I am sure there are certainly methods that are better than others, but that also depends on what you want to teach. An important thing to consider when deciding what to teach, is to choose a suitable film for that purpose. While it is not possible to take any pupil’s level of proficiency into consideration in the context of this thesis, as I have collected no data on the matter, it is certainly possible to comment on what it is desirable for pupils to achieve, which is the development of critical literacy, as it is rooted in the curriculum. Critical competence is something that must be taught and the curriculum states that pupils are required to have this competence (NDET, 2020). With the curriculum in mind, I believe that *12 Angry Men* is well suited to promote critical literacy because it illustrates critical thinking and how precious it is. I do not believe that *12 Angry Men* is the *only* film that can be used for this purpose, but it is certainly a well-suited option. Furthermore, with this thesis it is not possible to comment on

the validity of using film to promote critical literacy in general, as I have only analyzed one film, and I can only comment on the validity of using this specific film. Bakken (2016) states that teachers find film to be a useful teaching tool, but it is unclear what specifically makes them useful. Thus, this thesis has shed light on why one specific film can be useful for one specific purpose – promoting critical literacy.

The thesis question and main research question of this thesis is: How can students in the upper secondary English classroom develop critical literacy through the analysis of film? The way this thesis question is formulated presupposes that it is in fact possible to do this it all – is it possible to develop critical literacy through the analysis of film? I would argue that the short answer is yes. It is, in theory, possible to read all types of texts critically in order to disclose any implicit or explicit ideologies, but it is necessary to transfer that into something tangible that can be taught to pupils in a meaningful way. However, to do this the pupils need prior knowledge, which entails both of what critical literacy actually is and film analysis is. The pupils need to be made aware of what critical reading is, how to actually read a text critically and which techniques and methods filmmakers can use to tell their stories, and how these techniques and methods can affect the story told. Based on what has been presented in the previous sections of this thesis, I would suggest that going straight to critical film analysis in order to teach critical literacy can be challenging, because it requires a solid foundation of knowledge of both critical literacy and film analysis. I would advocate to approach these two topics separately in order to provide the pupils with the necessary foundational knowledge. An idea to approach this would be to start with teaching the pupils what critical literacy means, then moving over to how to read critically with non-fiction texts to contextualize critical literacy, and perhaps provide a few simple reading exercises such as identifying what the text conveys and who it is intended for. Continuing, I would then move on to teaching the pupils about film analysis, both in terms of narrative theory and the craft of filmmaking.

However, it comes back to what the teacher wants the pupils to achieve. If the teacher wants the pupils to conduct a thorough and in-depth critical analysis of a film, the pupils need comprehensive knowledge of critical literacy, the craft of filmmaking, narrative theory and an awareness of the meta language that comes with it. An alternative approach to what I suggested above could be to flip it around, in a sense. Instead of starting by building an extensive foundation of critical literacy, film analysis and so forth, one could start at a more basic level by introducing how camera angles and lenses can affect the mood of a film in simple terms, such as presented in chapter 4. In that chapter, I referred to Stafford (2010, p.

88) who suggests dividing the question “what type of shot is this?” into several questions. Is the camera close or far away? Is the angle low or high? Is the camera moving or static? And most importantly, how does the use of camera make us feel? Dividing the initial question into several questions essentially streamlines and simplifies the idea of critical analysis making it less daunting for pupils. Starting with the more basic ideas of critical analysis is likely easier for pupils to understand and would likely be a worthwhile teaching method to critical analysis. However, at one point it is natural of a teacher to expect progression in the pupils’ proficiency in critical analysis. When that progression is expected and what amount of progression is expected again comes back to what the teacher wants the pupils to achieve and the teacher’s general expectations of the pupils.

In line with Stafford (2010), I would suggest introducing critical analysis of film by starting to look at the use of camera angles. This is because being able to identify camera angles is something that almost everyone should be able to do as it is a matter of simply observing. From there, the pupils should be able to comment on how the camera angle affect what we see on screen and how it makes us feel. Therein lies the critical aspect. After the pupils have commented on how the shot makes them feel, they might be able to reflect on *why* it makes them feel that way, or rather why the director *wants* us to feel this way. As mentioned in the literature review, pupils are likely to already possess some existing knowledge of stories and narratives such as narrative structure. This is knowledge they have gained from previous schooling and the various media they have consumed, such as films or TV-series, which means that pupils are at least familiar with how a film “works” and that implies that it could be easier to teach this knowledge more in-depth to the pupils. However, this is in a way double-edged, as Penne’s (2010) “literacy problem” describes. The pupils are probably picking up some knowledge, but because they learn these things on their own it is not necessarily put into to context, such as a meta language, and that could mean that a significant amount of time and resources has to be spent “unlearning” certain assumptions and conceptions about film and narrative. Moreover, this is made more challenging as it is up to each individual teacher to formulate an instruction plan to teach this meta language that is required for analyzing film.

When using film in a classroom, a common approach to it is film analysis, and with film analysis comes some instructional challenges, or at least some aspects that need to be considered. Choosing a suitable film is important, not only when it comes to subject matter but also making sure that the film is accessible enough for the pupils. Bergman’s *The Seventh*

*Seal* (1957) or Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) are likely not suitable as introductory films to film analysis for pupils at the upper secondary level, as they are oblique parables and they are demanding to analyze. That is not to say that those two films are not worth analyzing, but they are likely not suited for analysis in an ordinary upper secondary classroom. When choosing a film, one needs to take both the subject matter and the pupils' level of proficiency into consideration. Regardless of the film choice, there is one other significant challenge to address before beginning to analyze a film with the pupils, and that is to teach pupils *how* to analyze a film. At the very least, the pupils need a basic idea of the narrative techniques and technical devices filmmakers use to tell their story, which I have gone into in section 4. But overall, using film in a school context is likely to be useful if used in a thought-out way, in terms of film choice, learning aims and method. There are certain considerations that a teacher must make, such as subject matter, choice of film and pupils' level of proficiency. Additionally, a "traditional" film analysis does not usually take the ideologies of the text into account. That is, when analyzing film, it is not common to disclose any implicit or explicit ideologies, nor does it usually question the "truth" the text conveys, which is central to critical literacy. A traditional film analysis typically concerns itself with identifying aspects of the film, such as plot, setting, motivations of characters, themes and issues. Additionally, it does not usually examine the technical and narrative devices used to convey these themes and issues. A critical literacy analysis, or critical analysis, on the other hand, explicitly aims to disclose the ideologies of the text, who these ideologies are aimed at, and what these ideologies are intended to convey and what they are constrained to convey. Nevertheless, approaching film with the intent of analyzing it in the more traditional sense would likely be a great introduction to critical analysis.

If one were to use only one film to teach a certain topic or competence, such as critical literacy, a problem immediately presents itself and it needs to be taken into account. Ironically, this problem is related to the idea that critical literacy enables pupils to learn how to see things from different perspectives. Using only one film inherently means that the pupils are presented with only one perspective. This means that, in general, using only one film would go against one, or possibly two, of Janks' (2010) dimensions in her model of critical literacy education that was introduced in section 3.1.2, the interdependent conceptual dimensions. These concepts are interdependent, which means that if one concept were to be disregarded, it would severely impact the other concepts as well, and the concepts as a whole cannot be used as intended. Using only one film would primarily go against the concept of

access. Access entails that pupils must be granted access to a variety of texts which means access to texts that are both within and outside of established doxa. Moreover, diversity would be affected as it is directly tied to access. A lack of the diversity dimension would disallow the inclusion of different perspectives from different texts. However, strictly speaking, using only one film would not deny pupils access or diversity in the literal sense, as the pupils would naturally have access to different texts outside of this hypothetical lesson. But it would gravely limit both access and diversity, which means that Janks' (2010) model as a whole cannot be applied in this scenario and the pupils' access to text would be outside of a classroom context

Two of Janks' dimensions could still be applied with only one film, albeit in a limited fashion, namely that of domination and design. More specifically, Veum and Skovholt's suggestion of producing a "counter text" through redesigning an existing text. This precludes that the pupils critically analyzed the film to determine its ideologies. From there they would rework the story so that it conveys a different ideology. As an example, the pupils could imagine that the story of *12 Angry Men* was flipped, that Juror #8 was the only one who voted guilty and then wanted to convince the other jurors the defendant was in fact guilty. This drastically changes the whole story and its ideology, effectively reproducing the text so that it stands outside of established doxa, and this could lead to fruitful discussions in the classroom. Also, using one film can give pupils insight into power structures through the domination dimension, but again, it would be limited since it would be from only one film. This could remedy the fact that only one film, or text, is used, but it would not be more than that – a remedy. Using only one film inherently goes against Janks' (2010) model of literacy education. Moreover, using only one film and redesigning it can give the impression that different perspectives are binary, in the sense that there are only two perspectives, one "good" and one "bad". In turn, this goes against the idea of critical literacy in general, as critical literacy is intended to disclose ideologies from both outside and inside of established doxa, and this presupposes that there are more than two opposing perspectives or ideologies to examine. Lastly, using only one film is not entirely in line with the core element of "Working with texts in English" from the English curriculum, which states that pupils must be able to work with "different types of texts in English (NDET, 2020, p. 3). Similar to Janks' (2010) dimensions, working with multiple-texts, introduced in section 3.1.2., would not be possible to apply to *12 Angry Men* (1957) because of the fact that it is one single film. Working with multiple-texts entails reading several texts on one particular topic or issue, to view a topic or issue several



perspectives in order to gain a deeper understanding (Bråten & Strømstø, 2009). Nevertheless, multiple-texts is still something that is illustrated in the film. In an abstract sense, the jurors of the film can be argued to represent multiple texts. The jurors have each made up an impression of the case based on what has been told by the prosecution and defense, and then we, the audience, “read” the jurors as they share their perspectives of what they perceive to be true.

It seems clear that using only one film to teach critical literacy does not align with Janks’ (2010) model. However, that does not mean that Janks’ model needs to be completely disregarded. Even though the dimensions of the model are interdependent, they can be addressed separately to an extent. In the context of using *12 Angry Men* to promote critical literacy, access and diversity is addressed through the fact that *12 Angry Men* is an older film and was released in a different cultural landscape than that of today. Domination is addressed because the film explores power dynamics within a group. Lastly, design is a dimension that is not dependent on any specific type of text so it can technically be applied to anything. Superficially, it appears that using only one film, *12 Angry Men*, to teach critical literacy with Janks’ model is challenging as it would be difficult to include all four dimensions, but it would not be impossible. It would not be possible to follow her model as she intended, but it is certainly possible to find some applicability, as I have gone into above.

In this this thesis, I have stated that I believe that *12 Angry Men* is a well-suited film to teach critical literacy and there are several reasons as to why I believe this. The main reason is because it aligns perfectly with the core idea of critical literacy, which I briefly mentioned in the analysis. Critical literacy entails questioning truth and dominant ideologies in established doxa, which is exactly what Juror #8 does in the film. He questions the “truth” that the defendant is guilty, and he challenges the dominant ideology of the group. The film illustrates the dangers of accepting truth and not questioning it with an extreme example. Secondly, a reason for why I think this is a well-suited film has less to do with critical literacy, but it is simply because the film is so *good*. It is an exceptionally well-made film with a simple premise, an excellent script delivered by a varied cast who combined with thought-out filmmaking techniques tell an engaging story. It deals with a variety of themes and issues and serves as a poignant critique of both society and the human condition. Thirdly, the film is well-suited for film analysis in general because of how well-made it is on a technical level. It is film with a simple premise and straightforward structure, but it demonstrates how camera and editing can accentuate a simple story, delivery of lines and its central themes and issues.

In short, the film itself is an illustration of critical thinking and its importance. In the film, the stakes are high. If Juror #8 had not been critical of the evidence shown in the trial, a young man would have been executed. The film is not about whether or not the young man is guilty, the film is not about the crime. It is about the fact that how we perceive the world is *subjective*, that there is no *objective* truth, and this is something that we all must be made aware of. Lastly, the film asks the same question that is the foundation of critical literacy – what is truth? This is the main reason for why I believe this film to be a great choice for a teacher who wants to teach their pupils about critical literacy.

However, even though I believe this film to be well-suited for promoting critical literacy, it does not come without its challenges and implications. For example, I would not recommend using this film in the classroom to every teacher. What the teacher wants to achieve and the proficiency of the pupils are definitely factors here, but the film does require some maturity because it deals with mature subject matter, and the fact that the film is more than 60 years old could lead to some pupils writing it off simply because it is old. The fact that it requires maturity is one of the reasons why I believe it can be useful for upper secondary, but likely not at lower levels. Pupils may also find the film boring because the film does not contain any action or suspense in the traditional sense, the film is about 12 men talking for 90 minutes. But again, that depends on the pupils. As I mentioned in beginning of chapter 5., there are also some implications about using an older film that need to be taken into account. Because *12 Angry Men* (1957) is a film which is more than 60 years old, the cultural landscape in which it was produced is different than the cultural landscape of today. This necessitates the need to put the film in both a historical and cultural context. Certain aspects of society were different at the time when the film came out, and the two aspects that are likely to be the most prominent ones are that of gender roles and racism. The latter is especially important to consider in an American context, because at the time of the film's release African Americans had limited rights in the U.S. *12 Angry Men* (1957) does take a strong stance against racism, but it is important to keep in mind that even though this film can be considered progressive for its time, that does not mean that other films released around the same time hold the same views against racism. It is also important to remember that gender roles were more defined during the film's release and it does not reflect the gender roles of today. The film does not take any particular stance on gender roles, but the fact remains that the cast is all male, which can be contrived to carry an implicit stance against women.

Furthermore, aside from the challenges with the film itself, there are also challenges and implications to consider about the idea of teaching critical literacy. Studies such as Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik's (2017) and international test scores such as PISA (NDET, n.d.), indicate that both critical literacy and literacy is something that Norwegian pupils should improve. These results suggest that there is an incongruence between what pupils are expected to know according to the curriculum and the reality of what they know. That is *not* to say that the Norwegian school system has failed in any way, as results from PISA tests show that Norwegian pupils generally score above average on PISA tests (NDET, n.d.), but it does demonstrate that there is room for improvement in how Norwegian pupils are taught critical literacy. For instance, Luke (2014, p. 24) states that there is generally little focus on the identification of "author bias" in teaching, the idea that text carries ideological and cultural implications. The focus seems to surround the identification of literary devices, such as metaphors, and less around the fact that in texts there are sociocultural exchanges that carry power. Therein also lies the main challenge of critical literacy – there is no universal model for a teaching method. Critical literacies are a "work in progress" (Luke, 2012, p. 9). Essentially, how teachers apply methods, tools and philosophies of critical literacy is entirely contingent on the teacher's and pupils' relations to power, their experiences and backgrounds and lastly, the educators' ability to enable and disable "local contexts of policy" (Luke, 2012, p. 9).

## 7. Summary and conclusion

I believe, despite some implications and challenges, that *12 Angry Men* (1957) is a well-suited film for promoting critical literacy. The implications and challenges are not very serious and should not have any meaningful impact working with this film with pupils at the upper secondary level, as long as the teacher addresses them. Presupposing that the teacher addressed the implications and challenges of the film, it should be a meaningful way to teach pupils about what it means to be critical and the value of it. However, in this thesis I have not addressed any specific teaching method for using this film for the purpose of promoting critical literacy, because as with critical literacy, there is no universal model for using film in the classroom. I have shed light on why I believe this film can be useful for this specific purpose, through the literature presented and my own critical analysis of the film.

Be that as it may, this thesis is not without its limitations. The aim of this thesis was to examine how film *can* be used to promote critical literacy and I contextualized that through

the critical analysis of one film. The intention of this thesis was not to examine the critical praxis of Norwegian pupils when reading film. Nevertheless, this means that I cannot make any comments of the usefulness of film in promoting critical literacy in general, but again, this was not my intention. The theoretical field of critical literacy is limited and in the words of Allen Luke (2012, p. 9) it is “a work in progress”. This does *not* mean that critical literacy as a theoretical field is too limited to say anything meaningful, but it does put limitations on a thesis of this scale. Although, I would argue that the limitations are relatively mild considering the fact that the theoretical field is definitely not too limited to examine how film *could* be used to promote critical literacy in accordance with the Curriculum. In any case, from what has been presented in this thesis, one can make certain assumptions – if *one* film is suited for promoting critical literacy, that would suggest that other films would be as well. It is certainly something that merits further research, but it would most likely be of a much larger scope than this thesis. An idea could be to perform a study similar to what Blikstad-Balas and Foldvik (2017) did. In their study, they asked pupils in upper secondary to read three texts and the pupils were interviewed about the texts afterwards. Performing a study similar to this, except have the pupils watch films instead of reading texts and interview them about the films afterwards, would certainly lend some insights into how pupils read film and would perhaps add to the field of critical literacy. Another aspect of the use of film in teaching is the aspect of intercultural competence. It has not been central to this thesis, but it is definitely central to the English Curriculum in the Core Element of “Working with texts in English” (NDET, 2020, p. 3). A significant part of the English subject is developing an understanding of other cultures, or intercultural competence. Film is a medium wherein we can regularly encounter “other” cultural discourses, that is, cultural discourses that are different from our own. Film can introduce pupils to stories that a culture tells about itself, a story that “tells the world”, not “as it is”, but as we see it, as we would like to see it or as we would like others to see it (Kern, 2000, cited in Pegrum, 2008, p. 145).

The intention of this thesis was to suggest that film can be a useful tool in promoting critical literacy in an upper secondary classroom. I have presented how critical literacy is related to the Core Curriculum and the English Curriculum, as well as studies which suggest that Norwegian pupils apply little critical thought into reading texts. Various relevant literature has been presented, such as the theoretical foundations of critical literacy, general literacy practices, how critical literacy can be promoted and the role film has played in a school context. In chapter 4., I presented the methodology of critical film analysis through Stafford

(2010) and how that would be applied my own analysis. In chapter 5., I critically analyzed the film *12 Angry Men* (1957) which shed light on why this film would be suited for the purpose of promoting critical literacy. Chapter 1-5 were laid the foundation for the discussion of the thesis question: How can students in the upper secondary English classroom develop critical literacy through the analysis of film?

Teaching critical literacy is a complex matter but given the ever-growing amount of text that has been made available through technology it is something that is completely necessary. Throughout the curriculum it is clearly stated that both critical thinking and literacy is something that must be taught and is especially prominent in the Interdisciplinary Topics and the Core Curriculum (NDET, 2020). The PISA tests indicate that there is an overall steady increase in Norwegian pupils' literacy (NDET, n.d.), but studies suggest that pupils generally do not apply a lot of critical thought when reading text (Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017; Bråten & Strømstø, 2009). As discussed in chapter 6., using one film does not align with Janks' (2010) dimensions of critical literacy, as it is not possible to engage with all four dimensions through only one film. With that said, *12 Angry Men* (1957) is a great example of what it means to be critical and illustrates the value of critical thinking well. There is no universal model for how to teach critical literacy (Luke, 2012, p. 9), but Janks' model (2010) is certainly a good starting point to what may serve as a foundation for the practice of teaching critical literacy. While not without its challenges and implications, *12 Angry Men* (1957) seems to be an excellent choice if a teacher chooses to promote critical literacy through the analysis of film.

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