

Ida Høgås

Teaching about sexual harassment and violence in the classroom using Children's and Young Adult Literature

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Rhonna Robbins-Sponaas

November 2021



Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Ida Høgås

Teaching about sexual harassment and violence in the classroom using Children's and Young Adult Literature

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
Supervisor: Rhonna Robbins-Sponaas
November 2021

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

Abstract

This thesis argues that children's and young adult literature can be valuable assets for discussing sexual violence inside primary classrooms. To discuss possibilities and limitations using children's and young adult literature, Barbara Dee's *Maybe He Just Likes You*, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* are discussed and used as examples. By looking at previous research, statistics, and other literary works, this thesis argues why books discussing sexual violence, such as the three above, could be used as assets for classroom discussions with adolescents. Even though teachers sometimes are understandably resistant about teaching such books in their classrooms because of possible resistance from students, administrations, and parents, I argue for the value of these books being available for adolescents in a safe environment. Literature about taboo topics, such as sexual violence, can be an essential first step toward helping adolescents come to terms with the challenging phases of their lives as they are transitioning to adults.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven argumenter for at barne- og ungdomsliteratur som tar for seg seksuell vold kan være verdifulle hjelpemidler for å diskutere dette tema i grunnskolen. Med Barbara Dee's barnebok *Maybe He Just Likes You*, og ungdomsbøkene *Thirteen Reasons Why* av Jay Asher og *Speak* av Laurie R. King som eksempler, er denne påstanden diskutert opp mot tidligere forskning, statistikk og andre literære verk. Oppgaven argumenterer for at bøker som tar for seg tema som seksuell vold kan gjøre det enklere for både lærere og elever og ha meningsfulle og trygge diskusjoner om et vanskelig tema. Selv om lærere, med god grunn, kan være tilbakeholdende med å ta opp slike tema med barn og ungdom, argumenterer denne oppgaven for viktigheten med å gjøre det i trygge omgivelser slik som klasserommet. Motstand fra elever, administrasjon og foresatte oppstår ofte, men denne oppgaven ønsker å vise at litteratur som omhandler seksuell vold kan være et viktig steg for å hjelpe unge med de utfordringene som måtte komme ved overgangen til voksenlivet.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people. Many thanks to my supervisor, Rhonna R. Sponaas, for invaluable feedback and guidance through this project. Thank you for much-needed critical advice, which helped me create a thesis that I am proud to finish. I am fortunate to have been part of the 'Lektor program' at NTNU, allowing me to write a thesis that matters both personally and hopefully for others.

My family deserves endless gratitude for unconditional love and support through this process. Thank you for encouraging me whenever needed. Lastly, a special thanks to my partner, Hans, for always listening and motivating me on days of confusion and lost hope. Thank you all for encouraging and supporting me no matter what. This Master's degree would not have been possible without any of you.

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Sammendrag</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Chapter 1: Children and Young Adult literature about sexual violence</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 2: Using literature to discuss boundaries and consent</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Chapter 3: Why read about sexual violence in the primary classroom</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Chapter 4. Conclusion</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Works cited</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Relevance to education</i>	<i>29</i>

Chapter 1: Children and Young Adult literature about sexual violence

Adolescence can be a challenging time for many children and young adults (YA). It may be their first encounters with parties, alcohol, sex, sexuality, mental health issues, and other unfamiliar territories. Transitioning from childhood into adulthood can introduce severe and challenging problems for adolescents. Challenges such as sexual harassment and sexual violence can happen at a whole new and different level. Sexual harassment can broadly define as unwanted sexual attention or improper sexual behavior. Sexual behavior, in this case, covers verbal, physical, and visual behavior that the recipient recognizes as undesirable (Skoog et al. 1). Sexual harassment and sexual violence are considered taboo subjects by many, and therefore often avoided and feared. Cambridge Dictionary defines "taboo" as a subject, word, or action avoided for religious or social reasons. Data and research show that sexual harassment and sexual violence is a problem among adolescence. Still, despite the excessive numbers found in research, taboo subjects such as sexual violence have not been given the attention they deserve, especially in school.

According to statistics from Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), The United States' largest anti-sexual violence organization, about 63 000 children were victims of sexual abuse yearly between 2009 and 2013. RAINN importantly states that data on sexual violence is not something you can easily measure. First of all, many victims never report the assault for fear or lack of proof. Another reason is the lack of one single source providing a complete picture. The primary data source used by RAINN is the *National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)*, an annual study conducted by the Department of Justice in the United States. Their research interviews more than 150,000 Americans each year, asking questions about sexual assault experiences. Sexual violence is a sensitive issue for many, and statistics show how many of us have experienced or know someone who has experienced sexual violence. According to RAINN's data, there is an average of 433,648 victims (age 12 or older) of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States. Most of these assaults are happening to victims under 30 years old. According to their data, ages 12-34 are at the highest risk for rape and sexual assault. The fact that these subjects may be unpleasant to talk about does not make them less critical. Skoog et al. address the fact that there is no secret that the problem of sexual harassment and violence is extensive in early adolescence, "however, research on sexual harassment in late childhood (ages 10-12 years) is still in its infancy" (1-2). The focus needs to change, and it needs to change quickly according to the number of children experiencing sexual violence.

In their project, Peer Relations In School from an Ecological perspective (PRISE), Therése Skoog, Kristina H. Gattario, and Carolina Lunde point out a gap in research on sexual harassment during the developmental period of adolescence. They are conducting a longitudinal study set to finish in 2022. This study will provide insightful data on the prevalence of sexual harassment, its consequences and effectively intervene against and prevent the problem (1). In 2011, Catherine Hill and Holly Kearsal did a survey for The American Association of University Women (AAUW) on sexual harassment in school. Hill and Kearsal present new evidence on sexual harassment in middle and high school in their report "Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School." Hill and Kearsal's report includes evidence about students' experiences with being sexually harassed, harassing someone

else, or witnessing someone get harassed. The report found that close to half of the students participating in this survey had experienced sexual harassment during the 2010-11 school year. The results also said that 87 percent of students said sexual harassment affected them in negative manners (2). The survey also asked students for ideas to reduce sexual harassment, and 31 percent suggested in-class discussions (4). This thesis will argue that children's and young adult literature about sexual harassment and sexual violence would be valuable in conversations meant to intervene and prevent sexual violence.

Most people have their first contact with literature through children's literature. We encounter books explaining the world through pictures and illustrations or listening to older generations read stories as children. From a young age, we find pleasure in fairy tales and stories about almost anything. John Sutherland explains that the practice of reading literature for fun is something that stays with us as we grow up (3). Through time, we can see a shift in the literature aimed at children as it has developed from only being meant as a pleasure to becoming more educational. It has emerged primarily when the real world has been challenging to explain to young children, such as in times of war and crisis. Sutherland recognizes that explaining politics, history, or the meaning of this world to young children can be challenging (3). The same applies to explaining issues such as sexual violence. With *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis as an example, Sutherland demonstrates how literature can communicate topics in a way children might understand better. By incorporating fantasy and imagination, complicated realities in Lewis's book war become more relatable to the younger generation. Explaining to a child that two countries are fighting each other because of political disagreements might confuse the child with several questions. Explaining, however, that a witch is trying to kill a lion because she wants to rule a land named Narnia might not. The child's imagination is allowed to make sense of what is happening through literature. Similar approaches to how Lewis explains war are found in children's literature explaining sexual harassment and sexual violence, though not the same way. In Barbara Dee's novel *Maybe He Just Likes You*, for example, we will later see how she use a children's game to address boundaries.

Literature has been, and likely always will be, constantly changing. Our society is in constant development, and so is literature. First of all, literature aimed primarily at children did not exist to the same degree before the eighteenth century. As mentioned, older generations mainly told fairy tales and stories to children, and the few books that existed for children consisted of pictures and illustrations. Second, literature available to children at these times sought to teach the children about morals, etiquette, or religion. Many people viewed children as innocent, pure human beings, not people ready to deal with the brutal realities found in the real world. This view changed gradually during the eighteenth century, and Sutherland notes that the reading public emerged as a force in and on literature due to urbanization and growing property (108). In this period, fiction and other forms of literature explicitly aimed at women and other groups emerged. Until the eighteenth century, men or the wealthy part of society was the typical target for literature. With the advancement of different library systems and books becoming cheaper, literature came within reach of a broader public, including women and children. This development within literature changed the market, and people started to demand different kinds of literature.

Though many viewed this new development in literature as liberating and exciting, it also raised a great deal of concern. With literature more available for the common public, the opportunities to spread information simultaneously increased. Sutherland explains this by noting that "Authorities, everywhere and at every period of history, are always nervous about books, regarding them as a naturally subversive and potential danger to the state" (161). This concern has led to regulations, censorship, restrictions, and political control regarding literature. Hannah Meretoja and Pirjo Lyytikäinen remark how the continuing debate around literature and how some literature is still being censored or banned is a testimony of how literature still has a considerable effect in society (17). Children's literature is no different regarding censorship and regulations; if anything, it has received more concern than literature aimed at any other age group. While children's literature was viewed by many as a new and liberating way to explain the world to children, not everyone considered the space given to imagination and fantasy a good thing. Children's literature has avoided sexual harassment and assault. Some believe the subject of sexual harassment is dangerous for innocent children.

Conversations about taboo topics, including sexual violence, are regularly avoided in educational settings, likely due in large part to the stigma surrounding these topics. The numbers of how many children experience sexual harassment or assault each year are high, demonstrating why sexual harassment is vital to discuss with children. Nussbaum indicates that the ability to acknowledge others and their inner lives is something that the education system should cultivate in us (27). She further elaborates on how this ability could be developed by imagining the experiences of others through literature. For this development to be encouraged, the students should feel safe in the classroom environment. Safe in this context means safe to express feelings, ideas, and questions freely. Many scholars, including Janet Alsup, address how puberty is a challenging time of our lives, often accompanied by confusion and self-doubt (158). She emphasizes that many adolescents will encounter difficulties during the transition from childhood to adulthood, including challenges related to their bodies. Another scholar highlighting the challenges of puberty is Kathy G. Short. As a teacher, Short wished to introduce reading literature as an aid for her students to understand themselves in this challenging time and to understand the world in general (49). Primary school can be a challenging period of life, and some children will be introduced to several problematic aspects of life while attending school. Issues labeled taboo, such as sexual violence can be challenging to discuss, especially for children and young adults without the right tools to help them.

Children and Youth Service Review published a study from 2016 showing that a third of sixth graders and more than half of seventh-graders reported having experienced some form of sexualized harassment (León 2). Some writers still seem to avoid writing literature about sexual violence aimed explicitly at adolescents. Many adolescents report not having good conversations about sexual violence until they are in high school, perhaps because their school does not facilitate it. For example, in the Norwegian curriculum for science, students are not expected to discuss questions concerning sexual health before grade 10. Before grade 4, Norwegian students are supposed to discuss the scientific process of reproduction. Before grade 7, they will discuss physical and mental changes due to puberty, but the curriculum does not explicitly mention discussions about sexuality and its challenges. The numbers disclosing the number of children sexually harassed at a young age prove that grade 10 would be too late for many young adults to have these conversations. Everyone's main goal should be to prevent sexual harassment from happening at any age, including young ages, which means children need to have

conversations about this *before* it becomes a reality, not *after*. Several environments and contexts are suitable for discussions about these issues, including the school and classrooms. Studying and reading about these subjects with guidance from a teacher can be essential to educate children and young adults and help them navigate life with the right tools.

Literature can be valuable to discuss challenging subjects such as sexual violence because some children and young adults might recognize themselves in characters and dare to speak about topics they usually avoid. Some students might better understand why others behave as they do, especially if they behave differently than what the student might expect. Some students might also learn and realize that their actions, although meant as innocent, might affect somebody else differently and negatively. Jeremy Hawthorne notes how literature is vital for many people in their discovery of their personalities. More importantly, Hawthorn notes how fiction is one of the means whereby we learn to alter our behavior in the real world (89). Reading literature about sexual violence can help children and young adults better understand its consequences and what it entails. By this, they can alter their sexual behavior out in the real world.

Sexual violence is a taboo topic written more and more about the last decade in children's and young adult literature, but the subject is also often avoided. The issue of sexual violence is addressed differently through different texts. Some writers describe the event of rape, some writers focus on the aftermath of sexual violence, and some instead manage the events leading up to sexual violence. In children's and YA literature, some authors portray sexual violence as the protagonist experiencing sexual assaults, someone witnessing sexual violence happening in their home or elsewhere, or events of sexual harassment. To discuss the variety of sexual violence, the terms used are primarily sexual violence, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment. When talking about sexual assaults, many people use the term rape, but the term sexual violence seems to cover more aspects of the problem discussed. There is a lot of stigma surrounding taboo topics, and the same applies to sexual violence. The language used to discuss sexual violence can help avoid stigmatization, and scholars will use more technical terms. We can express stigma around sexual violence through language using labels such as "slut" or "whore". People are commonly also afraid of being labeled "that person" or "a liar" or people saying "she/he probably wanted it." This stigmatization around sexual violence creates a barrier, and people often choose to stay silent. Teachers fall prey to this silence too.

This thesis will look at the YA novels *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) by Jay Asher, *Speak* (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson, and the children's novel *Maybe He Just Likes You* (2020) by Barbara Dee to discuss the portrayal of sexual violence in children's and YA literature. The thesis will discuss these novels to demonstrate how literature can start meaningful conversations with adolescents about boundaries, consent, signs, and ways to ask for help in the school context. Literature is unique in that it offers an opportunity to engage with the lives and thoughts of the narrators, especially the ability to remain close to real-life situations (Nünning 98). Jay Asher's novel depicts sexual violence in ways such as sexual harassment through comments and photos, the protagonist witnessing a sexual assault, and then being sexually assaulted by the same man a week later. In comparison, while sexual violence is only one of several things affecting Hannah in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, sexual violence, especially sexual assault, is the leading

trauma in *Speak*. Laurie Halse Anderson lets the reader know that something has happened to the protagonist and that whatever happened made Melinda stop speaking. As the novel progresses, the reader learns that Melinda was sexually assaulted during an end-of-summer party. When she finally speaks up and talks about what happened, she is liberated and starts healing. This novel demonstrates different aftermath of sexual assault than Jay Asher's novel. *Maybe He Just Likes You* shows how an innocent game made up by some young boys can turn into sexual harassment and a traumatizing experience for seventh-grader Mila.

It is hard to find or make a set definition of children's literature and what it entails. However, it is possible to discuss ways in which children's literature often is defined. More specifically, it is vital to discuss how children's literature is usually characterized by and through adults. Children's literature is written for children, often about children, but commonly by adults. The fact that adults are writing children's literature is essential to consider when studying children's literature because it creates a gap between the writer and the audience. One can question if children's literature is at all for children. Adults as writers of children's literature simultaneously make the child into what some refer to as 'the other.' Perry Nodelman summarizes the children as 'the other' by stating that when we try to provide someone with a voice, we are silencing it instead (30). In Nodelman's notion, we can see that adults speak instead of the child rather than for the child. He discusses how speaking for the child is a way for the adult to cover brutal realities that the adult believes childhood holds, such as violence. In many cases, children's literature reflects how adults think life should be for children. Thus, the voice of the actual child goes unheard, and they are rarely allowed to interfere. All in all, it is the adult who decides what children's literature should be. Both scholars and society, in general, will most likely always disagree on what children's literature is and should be.

Since the development of academic studies, literary genres have served particular functions. Especially modern literature is freer of specific time, place, or community (Isomaa 138). There are many opportunities in children's literature, and imagination and fantasy are commonly present. Children sometimes view the world with a vivid imagination in their quest to make sense of aspects of life. Lewis Carroll's well-known children's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is an excellent example of imagination being used to help children understand some challenging aspects of growing up. The book begins with little Alice watching her sister read, "And what was the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversation?" (from Chapter 1). This comment illustrates the notion of how children were starting to demand books for pleasure. In many ways, this book represents the struggle of surviving the confusing world of adults. Alice dreams of a world of nonsense, but as she wanders through Wonderland, a world of absurdity, she gradually learns that everything cannot be nonsense. Through her journey in Wonderland, she questions why everyone obeys given rules without asking why and reacts to her unjust trial. As she realizes that the world is not a fairy tale, she wakes up from her dream. The author is demonstrating in some ways that we need to teach the child how to survive the adult world, not escape it. Through books such as Lewis Carroll's, we can help children understand and prepare them for the world they will become part of soon. Through literature, children are allowed an opportunity to be exposed to things they might not encounter elsewhere.

When discussing adults deciding what children's literature should be, we refer to more than just the adult writer. Publishers, reviewers, critics, and not less importantly, the parents all participate in deciding how children's literature should be defined. The adult is inside and outside the genre, emphasizing Nodelman's idea of children as "the other." The adult idea of childhood and what is healthy or harmful for a child to read about shapes the content of children's literature. The adult provides the premises of what should be characteristic of this genre. Most children's literature through time is hopeful, cheerful, and light. The tone is often encouraging and optimistic, and the children are considered innocent creatures. Besides, most children's literature seeks to serve the purpose of educating. Education about the brutality of the world is often overlooked, which is unfortunate. When the child's needs and wishes end up outside the writing process, their vivid imagination might not get enough space, and they might find the books less interesting.

Nodelman interestingly discusses what he calls 'the power of the adult' and 'the child as the other' as opposites. He explains how adults often use their knowledge of childhood, based on their own experiences, to dominate and monitor children and children's literature (31). Adults, he notes, often write in the hope that children will accept the version of life they have laid out for them in their books (32). Usually based on how the adults believe the world should be. The adult is attempting to write a manual for how children should be and behave, hoping they will become the fictional characters they invent when writing. Hawthorn addresses how characters and actions in literature can represent real life even though they are imaginary (5). By molding the child, children are in some ways less unpredictable to the adults. The adult writer tends to avoid writing about subjects they do not know how to talk about with children. Nodelman elaborates on this thought by saying that "our discourse about childhood often replaces and even prevents our real perception of the brute realities of childhood" (30). Further, he emphasizes how children's literature is often silent in terms of taboo topics such as sexuality, perhaps so that we can still believe children are innocent. Many believe that children do not need to know about it, even though this is not the case.

Children's literature often avoids taboo topics, but they tend to be more prevalent in young adult literature. Literature has frequently depicted adolescents and young adults throughout history. Literature written for and about young adults is often "having themes and conflicts of interest to young people" (Alsup 160). The adolescent world is a popular world to engage with for writers of YA literature. Kathy G. Short addresses how the popularity of books such as Harry Potter led to publishers becoming significantly more aware of the potential market for books written primarily for young adults (288). Young adults have gradually started to demand more books written to and for them, rather than classical and canonical works. According to Susan Groenke and Lisa Sherff, young adults value YA literature because these works are written with adolescents and the young adult reader in mind (2). Young adults are searching for literature relevant to their own lives, and they search for something they want to read rather than something they have to read. Gadamer approaches the issue of cultural education with the concept of *Bildung*, referring to the process of using culture to "distance oneself from oneself" while taking "viewpoints of possible others" (Meretoja 28). Gadamer also claimed that through the encounter of the other, we become aware of ourselves, which is why reading about others experiencing sexual violence can help students become aware of their views and perspectives.

Novels have become popular in young adult literature for more than one reason. Novels are prose often dealing with human experiences and events that are close to our realities. Themes close to the realities of life are popular amongst young adults, and novels are therefore well suited for young adult literature. Hawthorn further notes that fictional stories introduce us to aspects from the social world with which young adults can empathize but only observe because they are not constrained to act (4). Literature can create a space for the young adult reader to escape, feel emotions, and reflect upon writing without including them personally. In addition, when the book is closed, there are no responsibilities to the young adults. They can choose to discuss further the content of what they read or never talk about it again. YA literature provides insight into present-day issues and realities in a way not only available for young readers but also relatable to them; this is commonly more motivating for everyone when reading a subject. The concept of *Bildung*, introduced through Gadamer above, is a concept well introduced into the world of children's and young adult literature. The popular *bildungsroman* is "a type of novel concerned with the education, development, and maturing of a young protagonist" (Collins Dictionary). A *bildungsroman* typically follows the protagonist from youth to adulthood, both psychological and physical.

Where children's literature is usually written as stories about children and childhood the way adults think it should be, young adult literature attempts to incorporate themes and thoughts that young readers find familiar. Young adult literature often aims to function as a "constructive tool for allowing readers to read, think about, and discuss experiences" (Wasserman, 2003, para. 2). *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Speak* both typical address themes for young adult literature and the familiar coming-of-age story. Both novels touch upon love, friendship, school, death, loss, sex, and sexuality. Both books pay attention to the sometimes-challenging transition from childhood to adulthood. *Maybe He Just Likes You* is also a coming-of-age story addressing harassment and unwanted attention at a younger age than *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Speak*. Through the novel, Mila learns how to stand up for herself and finds her voice growing from insecure into confident about herself and her relationships with others. Through books such as Barbara Dee's published in 2019, we are witnessing a rising trend in children's literature, aiming for the same as young adult literature. More children's literature is incorporating and addressing themes such as sexual violence.

The classroom can be a safe place to discuss sexual violence, but as previously mentioned, even teachers avoid addressing this subject due to, for example, stigmatization. By avoiding taboo topics such as sexual violence, educators contribute to validating the stigmatization surrounding the issue. This validation makes it harder for adolescents to break their silence as victims and to disrupt sexual violence from happening (Groenke 29-30). Teachers can help eliminate the stigma surrounding sexual violence by openly talking about it, but children and young adults should be part of the process and conversations. Short argues that "Children need to have a voice in both identifying and pursuing the tensions and questions that matter to them within a literary study" (50). She elaborates further on the importance of students answering questions and being critical about the questions themselves. Answering difficult questions can be challenging for children and young adults without guidance and necessary literacy knowledge. Karin K. Flensner and Marie Von Der Lippe emphasize that controversial issues, such as sexual violence, involve questions where different value systems,

interests, and perspectives come forth, causing room for disagreements (276). Students need to feel comfortable discussing controversial issues and disagreeing with their peers, and teachers can help accomplish such an environment by encouraging respect and common ground rules. Scholars have even suggested replacing the common term 'safe space' with 'communities of disagreement' within the educational context (284).

In previous research conducted on sexual harassment in the school context, the investigation site has generally been secondary school and, therefore, for the experience of adolescents (Renold 416). While research on adolescents in secondary school is legitimately important, numbers demonstrate that primary school should not be dismissed as a site of investigation when researching sexual harassment in school. Even though having students read, or reading out loud, has benefits, perhaps the most valuable part of reading inside a classroom is the conversations and discussions following. Students sharing their thoughts about a text can lead to dialogues to critically explore their understanding (Short 49). Guided by their teacher, it can be possible to have meaningful conversations about sexual violence. Literature plays a vital role in pushing back against stigmatization and promoting learning. Short elaborates on the fact that children's literature in elementary school has primarily been reading material used to teach different skills or attributes, and she considers this to be a problem(50). For elementary school students, children's literature is a valuable tool for critical and creative education. Practicing dialogues and democratic discussions are essential for students to become capable social citizens, including children and young adults. Some educators are too focused on using literature for set purposes, like conveying information, forgetting the value literature poses alone. Unfortunately, this is often due to limitations set by administrations and curriculums.

Thirteen Reasons Why, Speak, and Maybe He Just Likes You creates several educational opportunities besides discussing sexual violence. Books such as these are prominent examples of how the technical aspects can impact its meaning. The value of literature itself has become one of the key topics in modern literary studies. Vera Nünning addresses how "the function that reading fiction can fulfill as well as to the relation between literature and ethics" (95) has become a field of interest. By looking at and combining various fields, Nünning studies the value of literature for life. She points to the field of neuroscience as especially promising in discussing how fiction can change and affect our attitudes, opinions, and personal traits. Literature can function as a tool to teach students empathy and understand other people's feelings and actions. Saija Isomaa adds to this by discussing values within different genres, distinguishing between intended function and realized function (140). With fiction, the intended function might be to evoke or modify moral emotions, while the reader might not leave with this realization (146). The feelings produced by literature do not necessarily unfold with every reader.

Many YA literature writers use the epistolary style, which allows the story's protagonist to get a deeply personal investigation. Emily Wasserman argues that interior monologue can lead to constructive change for the protagonist and the reader (2003, para. 5). Epistolary novels can broadly be defined as novels that include any type of documents used to communicate the story. With society and technology evolving, new forms such as texts, emails, and tapes have become more present in epistolary novels. *Thirteen Reasons Why* is an excellent example of an epistolary novel using another format than the standard letter format, with Hannah telling her story through pre-recorded

audiotapes. The narrative technique is an integral part of any literary analysis, including “choice of narrator and narrative situation, the creation of a plot with its underlying story, selection and variation of perspective and voice (or ‘point of view’)...” (Hawthorne 109). Hawthorne emphasizes how both who tells the story and why it is told can make a significant difference. “Source and medium affect the selection, authority, and attitude towards what is recounted in the narrative - and thus, of course, the effect on the reader or listener” (116). The three novels are all written in the first-person narrative. The protagonists tell the stories, and the first-person narrative gives them an authentic voice. This sort of narrative helps bring the reader closer to the protagonist of the story.

Chapter 2: Using literature to discuss boundaries and consent

Never has there been a more significant global focus on sexual assault and harassment than after the unfolding of the #MeToo movement, which started in 2017. Stories of sexual assaults and harassment emerged across various social media platforms, and politicians, celebrities, and regular people came forth to tell their stories. It quickly became apparent how comprehensive the problem of sexual violence is, both in business and in general. While many challenged companies, organizations, and politicians to change their systems and do more about this problem, another lesser-known movement tried to make noise. The movement was called #MeTooK12; K12 is an expression for kindergarten to grade 12. This movement aimed to shed light on the sexual harassment of children and young adults in the school context. According to an American Association of University Women (AAUW) survey, more than 80 percent of students will suffer sexual harassment before graduating high school, mostly from other students (Hill & Kearl 10). These numbers highlight why not only companies and organizations should be challenged to change their systems, but schools need to work on their systems too. The classroom should be suitable for schools to help students because students perceive the environment as safe.

To fix a social problem, such as sexual harassment and violence, scholars suggest that preventional work should start as early as possible (Hill & Kearl; Skoog et al.). Hill and Kearl note that students who took part in their survey, who had experienced sexual harassment, reported having trouble studying and finding the motivation to attend their education (30). Unfortunately, only 12 percent of the students participating in Hill and Kearl’s survey experienced that their school did a good job acknowledging sexual harassment. Many schools lack a good enough system to handle the sexual violence that might happen there. This fault can be traced back to administrators lacking knowledge and understanding about the scope of the problem when it comes to sexual harassment at the school arena. Therefore, education aimed at the school can work just as preventive as educating the students. The administration at a school should set an example for their students; the students will detect the attitudes of the teachers and other adults, and they might replicate. Being a good example is especially important when it comes to the top administration. “Studies show that administrators such as principals tolerate sexual harassment or do nothing to address it, teachers and students have less incentive and less support to do anything about it” (Litchy & Campbell, 2011; Meyer, 2008; in Hill & Kearl 30). Knowing how to respond and report sexual harassment is vital for teachers and students to fight and prevent sexual harassment.

In recent years, the public has openly discussed sexual harassment - its realities, its consequences, prevention methods, and the legal and moral responsibilities individuals and organizations have to help prevent and respond to sexual harassment. Suppose schools teach students that sexual harassment is never appropriate and can have significant consequences for both the harassed and the harasser. In that case, those students might be less likely to sexually harass each other, sexually harass people when they enter universities or the workforce, and get more prepared to respond to sexual harassment later in life. Teachers might be anxious to talk about sexual violence with their students, but knowledge of facts central to sexual harassment among adolescents can foster efficient prevention. It is a sensitive topic, and it can be challenging to discuss (Skoog et al. 2). However, students would benefit from discussing these themes through accessible literature in a safe and controlled environment. By introducing relevant literature, students can identify with a book and compare relevant content with their knowledge and experience. Luke and Freebody argue for the importance of "critical practices that enable readers to question how a text shapes their point of view and challenges their assumptions" (as cited in Short, 52). Assumptions about sexual violence are one aspect young readers should question to learn how to prevent it from happening. Therefore, books introduced about sexual violence should be of relevancy and possible for adolescents to relate.

Late childhood and adolescence are periods of our lives central to general physical, sexual, and social development. Girls and boys hit puberty during this period, and scholars indicate that this is the time in life "children are typically confronted with and start engaging in peer sexual harassment for the first time" (Skoog et al. 2). One of the leading causes of sexual harassment between peers is puberty. This period in adolescents' life is a time to develop identity, to find out who they are and whom they wish to be. Using young adult literature addressing identity development can capture the students' interest and teach them to think critically inside and outside the classroom (Perry 59). Literature can assist when starting discussions on elements such as consent, boundaries, and sexual violence in general. Tonya Perry notes how varied quality YA literature has expanded the voices that have access to and engagement in reading (59). In a classroom context, wisely picked literature can open valuable dialogues between teachers and students.

Books handle sexual violence and its different aspects differently based on factors such as genre and expected audience. *Maybe He Just Likes You* by Barbara Dee focuses on how a lack of knowledge and understanding about boundaries can result in sexual harassment and crossed lines. As a children's book published in 2019, this novel is an excellent example of how sexual harassment has become more prevalent in the last decade of children's literature. Critics might say that children are too young to understand, or be exposed to, themes such as sexual harassment and sexual violence. Research (Hill & Kearl 2011; Skoog et al. 2019; Nielsen 2021) shows that children are exposed to sexual harassment already in primary school. Children are commonly viewed as innocent beings in need of protection. Still, children are affected by their surroundings and adapt to the environment they are exposed to just like everyone else. The common assumption of children as innocent creatures has led to special protection and monitoring of what literature children are exposed to. This assumption is not new, and it has been with us for centuries. All back to the eighteenth century, Rousseau presented children as pure young trees born innocent, only corrupted approaching society (Miller 3); critics believe this to be true in contact with books. Dee's novel demonstrates that viewing the child as

innocent and monitoring their content can lead to a lack of understanding and knowledge about essential subjects such as sexual harassment. At least if we read what happened to Mila due to a lack of experience and knowledge. Children cannot know anything about things they do not learn.

A discussion emerging from the focus on sexual violence education and literature in school is what content should be considered appropriate or not. Literature's role and its supervision have been recognized since the late eighteenth century. There have been several changes in what is recognized as appropriate content for children and young adults. From primarily religious and educational literature, written to improve morals, children's and YA literature is now more than ever reaching to teach social and mental control. In many cases, the adult decides what children's literature should be about and what content is considered suited and appropriate for children. As adults make these decisions, they are also at the center of debates around appropriate content. Alyson Miller notes how

Children are at the center of the most vitriolic and numerous public debates, as gatekeepers, such parents, schools, libraries, community agencies, and church contest what type of material--and what type of ideas--are appropriate for the developing minds of the nation (1).

Barbara Dee's children's novel *Maybe He Just Likes You* focuses on preventing sexual violence by looking at sexual harassment between young children, in this case, seventh-graders. No one is getting sexually assaulted, which is typical for many novels written for an older audience. Still, there are actions done without consent that are sexually loaded and therefore defined as sexual harassment. The book addresses various essential aspects of sexual harassment that could be important to discuss with children, such as crossing boundaries. Discussing specific events and themes can give the child a broader understanding of sexual harassment and its consequences, in addition to an opportunity to discuss with a critical eye. The deep thinking that discussions of sexual harassment provide allows the children a chance to look at the life of others in a way they have never considered (Perry 60). Dee primarily focuses on the line between what is 'just fun' and what it means to cross the line in her novel. Seventh-grader Mila is experiencing some unwanted attention from boys in her grade, confused about boundaries. They are randomly bumping into her, which could be accidental, but Mila reacts to the fact that they are not apologizing. Through the novel, it becomes evident that the boys do not understand Mila's boundaries and are crossing them. When Mila tells them to stop, they only react by telling her to have a sense of humor, like it is not severe. Mila's situation is an excellent example of how children might not know that some of their actions can be poorly received, in this case, because they do not understand the consequences and scope of what they are doing.

Teachers, parents, and other outsiders might view behavior such as what the boys do in Dee's novel as innocent. Still, it is essential to acknowledge that this behavior might affect children poorly. Mila demonstrates several times during the story that she does not like how the boys behave towards her, but neither the boys nor her friends seem to understand why she is reacting. The lack of understanding towards Mila is an example of why it is essential to teach children about boundaries and how actions can affect someone in ways not intended. *Maybe He Just Likes You* and other novels for children

grant several opportunities to start conversations about boundaries and sexual harassment inside classrooms naturally. The children are allowed to discuss things that generally would be unnatural for them to discuss. They can talk about boundaries through characters such as Mila instead of themselves, which might not be as intimidating. Some children might not even know what boundaries mean or entail or which to be aware of, and having something to compare and relate to might help them learn. A teacher could elaborate by discussing both physical and mental boundaries, how boundaries can vary from person to person, and why it is important to respect the boundaries of others. By using literature as a starting point, students get a chance to ask questions without being afraid that classmates will link the content of the questions to them. They could, for example, ask "what if Mila had done this or that instead" or "Would it be considered wrong if the boys did this to Mila?" and base their questions regarding Mila on personal questions they might have.

While sexual harassment and sexual violence are rather new topics in children's literature, it has been present in young adult literature for much longer. Respect for boundaries is commonly discussed in YA literature, but also the more severe issue of consent. These two issues, boundaries and consent, are closely connected and often addressed within the same novels. Literature aimed at children tends to be monitored by adults, and adults are concerned about the content of children's literature. Concerns are also raised about the content of YA literature and often discussed, but it seems more complicated to affect young adults' decision of what to read. In addition, young adults are constantly exposed to these subjects either way, but they are also more equipped to handle them. This supervision, or monitoring, of content, is for several reasons easier once it involves children. Jack Zipes argues, for example, that children rarely buy their books. Children's books are often gifted on special occasions (in Miller, 3). Young adults are in some ways more independent and have more opportunities to choose literature themselves. In addition, young adults today have easier access to more information faster than any generation before them. Most adolescents today have access to unlimited texts, not only books but graphic novels, videos, internet articles, and much more (Perry 61). This extended access to literature changes how literature is used and understood. Content that earlier would be seen as inappropriate and perhaps hidden from young adults is now available beyond any control.

As society evolves, so does the need for time-appropriate material. In light of movements such as #MeToo, public conversations about sexual violence have created a more extensive focus and increased the number of discussions. The need for information regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence has increased during this movement and inspired authors to address the issue of sexual violence more than ever. This interest has resulted in a continuous growth in literature facing sexual harassment and sexual violence. Globalization and the rise of social media have had an enormous impact on literature and whom it reaches. Several novels that have discussed sexual harassment and violence have been rediscovered through exposure and discussions shared with a broader audience. An example of this is Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why* from 2007. Ten years after the book was published, Netflix released a TV series based on the book. The differences between the novel and the adaptation have several explanations. They are, first of all, published with a 10-year gap. Society had gone through several significant changes in 2017 compared to 2007, such as advancements in technology. In addition, what occupied our society in 2007 was not

necessarily the same in 2017. The #MeToo movement, which started the same year as the Netflix series came out, is an excellent example of discussing sexual violence more openly than before.

Thirteen Reasons Why is a YA novel following Hannah Baker's story after she committed suicide. She let people who impacted her life know how their actions affected her by leaving thirteen audio tapes explaining. Most of the different actions Hannah sheds light on are in some way or another connected to unwanted sexual attention. *Thirteen Reasons Why* address sexual violence both in verbal and physical forms; anything from inappropriate comments, lists, non-appropriate physical touching, and non-consensual sexual behavior is present in the novel. The variety makes the novel an excellent example for discussions concerning boundaries, harassment, and consent with students meanwhile or after reading the book. In addition to dealing with boundaries, it shows the downsides of name-calling, labels, and stigmatization. For example, through the novel, Hannah is called a tease and a slut, causing her to doubt everyone and trust no one's intentions. A conversation about this issue might result in students taking more precautions around their peers. Vera Nünning discusses how literature can develop empathy and the capacity to understand other people's intentions and feelings (95). For several scholars, empathy seems vital for changing the reader's attitudes (Meretoja & Lyytikäinen; Isomaa). Changing the readers' attitudes is an essential aspect of decreasing stigmatization.

The novel addresses how ruining a rumor can be for a person and what a rumor can lead to eventually. Even a small action can give someone else the idea that certain things are okay to do. Hannah explains and provides several examples of how one small innocent action can lead to something no longer perceived as innocent. Asher illustrates this in his novel with a best of/worst of list, meant as a harmless joke, actually resulting in unwanted sexual attention. Hannah having her name put on that list leads to several boys around her believing it cool to touch her ass and make comments about it. A simple list, in Hannah's case, resulted in incidents of unwanted sexual attention. As in *Maybe He Just Likes You*, the boys might not even understand that what they are doing is wrong or badly affecting someone. If educated and schooled about boundaries at a younger age, they might avoid incidents such as these. Minor incidents, such as a guy inappropriately touching someone's ass, might not seem the biggest problem for everyone. Some might even find it innocent behavior, but that does not mean everyone perceives it as appropriate. Children and young adults need to learn that we all have different boundaries that need to be respected. Our boundaries are first and foremost personal, meaning that mental and physical boundaries can vary from person to person. The view on an incident depends on how the participants experience it. As Flensner and Von Der Lippe explain when discussing the perception of a safe space, what is experienced as safe by some may be experienced as unsafe by others depending on power relations and personal issues (283).

In both *Maybe He Just Likes You* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* there are incidents involving seemingly innocent actions perceived as inappropriate by the recipient. Touching someone somewhere private without consent is the core of sexual harassment, regardless of the extent of the action. Both Mila and Hannah, the protagonists of the novels, experience unwanted physical and verbal attention multiple times by several people. Some of the incidents get executed by people they believe have no bad

intentions; this is common and important to discuss. Violation of trust can affect people badly and cause significant issues. At a young age, we learn how wrong bullying is and that it involves teasing about something more than once and over time. Anti-bullying content takes up a great deal of the school curriculum, and schools should focus on sexual harassment. Children and young adults need to learn that sexually loaded comments and behavior, comparable with bullying, can affect the receiver badly and significantly impact their lives and well-being. Hannah Baker is an excellent example to discuss boundaries with young adults because her character provides several different examples to discuss. Students can discuss why they believe separate incidents in the novel affected her the way they did and how they think it could have been avoided or what could have helped.

Maybe He Just Likes You and *Thirteen Reasons Why* both portray and discuss different incidents involving questions of boundaries. Still, *Thirteen Reasons Why* elaborates on the issue of crossing boundaries even further. As mentioned, boundaries and consent are closely connected, demonstrated well through Asher's novel. The book's most violent and perhaps dramatic scene is Hannah witnessing another girl being sexually assaulted at a party. This situation opens an opportunity to have an essential discussion concerning consent. The girl sexually assaulted is heavily intoxicated and in no responsible state to consent to anything. Fortunately, the boy who brought her in has the same realization and chooses to respect her, but when he leaves, another later enters the room and assaults the unconscious girl. Discussing this scene itself serves as a significant opportunity for young adults to reflect on why this type of behavior is wrong. It can also open a more comprehensive discussion of what consent is, why it is crucial, and what the consequences of non-consensual behavior could and should be. This particular scene from *Thirteen Reasons Why* is valuable for discussions about consent and what to do as witnesses of sexual violence. At the point of the assault, Hannah is hiding inside a closet, unable to move, unable to scream, unable to react. Later, however, she reflects that both she and the first boy could have stopped the assaulter. She even said to herself that she was no better and that "*we let it happen. It's our fault*" (Asher 231). Discussing responsibility, ways to interrupt sexual harassment or assaults, and ways to get help can benefit children and young adults if they ever find themselves in a similar situation.

Children's and young adult literature that address sexual harassment or sexual violence have a tendency to focus on the specific events and incidents, following their protagonist as they go through it, and how the events affect them. Laurie Halse Anderson chose a different approach when writing her novel *Speak*. At the beginning of the book, we learn that something has happened to Melinda, the protagonist of *Speak*, but unlike the other two novels, we do not get details of precisely what. She does not reveal what happened to the reader or anyone in the novel, but we get a feeling Melinda would rather forget what happened; "I'm not going to think about it. It was ugly, but it's over, and I'm not going to think about it" (Anderson, 5). Even though the reader does not learn what has happened right away, the novel is valuable for young adults to read in the way it gets them to think and guess what is going on with Melinda. As they read, they will start looking for signs of what happened. Young adults can therefore become more aware of signs, practice their reflection skills, and learn what to look for in real life if someone they know should go through something similar. What is interesting with *Speak* is that Laurie Halse Anderson based it on her own adolescent experiences. Even though she

wrote the novel as an adult, her adolescent feelings and thoughts shine through the page, tightening the gap between the adult author and the targeted audience.

Throughout Anderson's novel, the reader is invited into Melinda's thoughts and feelings while navigating through life. We get to be part of her process and witness how what happened is affecting her. What might be the first clue to the incident having anything to do with sexual violence is Melinda describing that parts of her body feel like belonging to someone else: "It looks like my mouth belongs to someone else, someone I don't even know." (Anderson, 17). Again the fact that Anderson is writing from her own experiences is perhaps making these feelings seem more natural and not just written to make young people understand. This comment made by Melinda serves as an excellent opportunity to teach students that a sense of disconnection from themselves is a typical sign and reaction after a traumatic experience. The feeling of disconnection can also be detected while reading about Hannah Baker in *Thirteen Reasons Why*. Melinda and Hannah are both withdrawing from social life, showing signs of depression in many ways if knowing what to look after. It could be valuable to discuss what makes us believe they are withdrawn and depressed and what we can do to help young adults. Melinda discloses that she was raped and provides the reader with why she chose to stop speaking. Her explanation also suggests a reason why her friends do not talk to her. She never told them what happened, so they believe she simply crashed the party by calling the cops. The effects of Melinda's trauma become even more remarkable because she is alone (Alsup 161). Hopefully, an example such as this will encourage students to speak if something similar happens to them.

In *Speak*, we do not learn about the rape until the end of part three, but when we do, several matters surface. The assault on Melinda happens after she flirts with a senior at the party and because she likes the flirting, and in addition, having had some beer, she blames herself for what happens next. This situation brings up the matter of boundaries and consent. Even though she never verbally said no, she never said yes either. She even revealed that he covered her mouth with his hand, depriving her of the opportunity to speak. This scene perfectly discusses why respecting boundaries is so important, and that consent includes both verbal and physical agreement. Melinda never consents to a sexual act, making this incident an event of sexual assault. As in both *Maybe He Just Likes You* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Speak* raises the questions of the line between flirting and non-consensual behavior. This passage also demonstrates the difficulty of asking for help, especially in Melinda's case, because she did not understand the scope of what happened. This discussion opens several significant possibilities for educating young readers about consent and ways to ask for help. Teachers should teach adolescents that they can ask for help no matter the extent of the situation and discuss incidents they are unsure are appropriate without fear. Research demonstrates that many victims restrain from asking for help because they blame themselves for what has happened (Hill & Kearn; RAINN)

Speak and *Thirteen Reasons Why* are two very different novels, but they also have several similar problems. The discussion of boundaries and consent is present in most YA novels discussing sexual violence, and the two novels are no exception. Another interesting matter discussed in both young adult novels and *Maybe He Just Likes You* is the schools' involvement or lack thereof. In both *Maybe He Just Likes You* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the protagonists seek help from a guidance counselor without luck.

Melinda does not believe the school will help and sarcastically comments on how the school is supposed to be there to help and how guidance counselors are always available, but what they mean is, "Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say" (Anderson, 9). The matter of expectations and whether schools are answering to these is an important matter to discuss. Children and young adults should get help from adults present in their lives, and they spend much time at school. Valuable for every school would be asking their students if they feel they could get help there if needed, and if not, what would have to change.

Chapter 3: Why read about sexual violence in the primary classroom

Reading about sexual violence can affect whoever is reading in both positive and negative manners. As mentioned, children and young adults are especially prone to be influenced by what they are exposed to. Their identities are still developing and constructed, making it easier for them to be influenced by what they read and other people's opinions. The classroom is one of the most central developmental stages for young people, and as discussed, the school has been disclosed as a leading scene for sexual harassment between young people (Skoog et al. 3). Thus, it would make sense to direct attention to preventing sexual violence in schools, especially inside classrooms. Leigh A. Hall and Susan V. Piazza discuss how to use the classroom as a space where students can consider and test out changes in beliefs, gender roles, and power structures. The classroom serving as a safe environment can provide the students with an invaluable opportunity to shape their own and one another's lives (32). Definitions of a 'safe space' are often characterized by common rules, guidelines, and respect. However, Flensner and Von Der Lippe question whether a space that requires strict rules to be safe can be considered safe at all (277). They instead describe a good classroom environment as a community of disagreement where respect is essential.

The classroom can serve as a safe place to have meaningful conversations about sexual violence for several reasons. For one, children and young adults spend about 5 to 7 hours per day at school. They always have access to adults there, and, in addition, it is a place with set rules and expectations when it comes to the social culture. Adolescents go to school with the purpose of learning and being educated. Hall and Piazza argue for the importance of developing the students' abilities to take a critical literacy stance when reading inside the classroom (32). A critical literacy stance means thinking critically while reading and questioning and challenging what they read. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, sexual violence should be considered an important matter in adolescent education. Notably, if a teacher wants to teach sexual violence prevention through literature, the teacher should carefully consider which texts to choose. The issue of sexual violence might be unfamiliar to many of the students, and Short notes that this might cause resistance and confusion (53). Hall and Piazza elaborate on this thought, saying that students are likely to resist reading and discussing texts that would "require them to examine their own beliefs or actions" (32). Therefore, teachers should choose texts with the right intentions and positively impact the adolescents they teach. Both teachers and students should be aware of the purpose of reading the selected text to engage in meaningful conversations about sexual violence.

Reading to learn and acquire knowledge about specific topics is already a significant part of the school curriculum, but reading should be equally essential for personal purposes.

Reading for personal purposes does not mean only reading literature one will personally enjoy, but also reading literature that serves personal growth and development opportunities. According to Meretoja and Lyytikäinen, literature usually focuses on the situated subject “marked by identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and age” (9). Short remarks that personal reading development involves choosing significant literature for the reader and finding content that the reader considers substantial (58). What is meaningful for the reader changes from one reader to another. Still, young adults are often concerned with social issues and time-relevant subjects, which is typical for the YA literature genre. Personal reading can therefore be significant for identity development. Hall and Piazza also address how critical literacy can impact and affect the students’ reading experience. While learning to engage in critical literacy, the students become more aware of their views and how they interact with different texts (32). In addition, the students might realize how their social and cultural background can influence how they interpret a text. Students that learn how to read with a critical mind might take a more active involvement in the messages found in texts, which means that a student with developed skills in critical literacy will be more likely to learn something when reading a text addressing sexual violence.

School is a context where both personal and social identity can be developed and encouraged. Monique Verhoeven, Astrid M. G. Poorthuis, and Monique Volman note how a school is a place where adolescents’ identity development can be supported through help from teachers when they introduce new ideas, activities, and possibilities (36). Literature is a way to introduce students to these new subjects, such as sexual violence, and YA literature can include literature that offers positive messages about surviving or recovering. These YA novels might educate and help prevent later assaults as they introduce ideas about sexual violence that are worth discussing and might not elsewhere be discussed. Learning to engage in critical literacy is vital if the students are supposed to engage and learn from challenging texts addressing challenging topics. Hall and Piazza argue that the way students engage with and interpret texts “is likely rooted in how they think they need to read and respond to texts to be successful in school” (33). Therefore, it is crucial that schools encourage critical discussions and not only what is believed to be the correct answers when educating adolescents. Teachers play an essential role here, giving instructions and prompting the students to think critically. In Norway, critical thinking is even a part of the core curriculum provided by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The ability to think critically is a skill they will need later in life, and they need to develop their own identity.

The previous chapter explored sexual harassment and violence, illustrated in *Maybe He Just Likes You*, *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Speak*. The different novels all demonstrate scenarios, reactions, and ways to handle different situations linked to sexual violence. Even though they are three unrelated novels written by three different authors, we can detect similarities and related themes in all of them, such as questions on boundaries and consent. While it might be apparent that sexual harassment and sexual violence remain a problem among children and young adults, the question of why schools should take more responsibility might still be unclear and up for many discussions. The schools alone are not liable or responsible on their own. However, school is a substantial part of children's and young adults' lives and plays a vital role in their development and education. Learning about sexual violence in the primary classroom, and discussing it through literature, has both advantages and disadvantages. The content of various literature can start many valuable and great discussions, but at the same time, these

discussions can get out of hand or affect someone negatively. The next part will discuss these advantages and disadvantages, possibilities, and limitations by looking at themes present in all three novels examined, including consent, boundaries, and sexual violence prevention.

Sarah Sparks notes how the #MeToo movement has caused the last few years to become "a wake-up call about the need to start laying that foundation of consent early" (24). Consent is a term that starts many discussions, but the core idea is that everyone should respect one another's boundaries. Sparks' comment agrees with the data presented by RAINN, demonstrating that approximately 63,000 children were victims of sexual abuse each year between 2009 and 2013. This evidence builds up the argument that schools should teach about sexual violence, its scope, and its consequences. Data collected by RAINN also disclose that females ages 16-19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assaults. In the process of lowering these numbers, it will be valuable to educate adolescents about consent and boundaries and all that it includes. In their research, Sasson and Paul (2004) point out that "unacknowledged victims are less likely to disclose their assault to friends and family, which increases the risk for poorer psychological outcomes and prevents victims from getting needed support and services" (37). Sexual harassment and sexual violence often happen because boundaries are ignored or misunderstood, making education about consent a vital life skill to help adolescents navigate adulthood and avoid misunderstandings.

In the United States, different consent laws are active depending on the State the action takes place. In Norway, it is part of The Rape Provision of the Penal Code (Straffelovens voldtektsbestemmelse). On October 13th, 2021, a consent law was approved and accepted after many years of protests and movements working for a more specific consent law, giving Norwegian citizens more power over their bodies. The discussion of consent laws can be both time-relevant and exciting to review with students. Do adolescents consider today's laws enough? If not, how do they believe a consent law should work? What do they believe consent requires? Students could use the sexual assault scenes mentioned from *Thirteen Reasons Why* to discuss these questions. Adults might consider these questions and discussions inappropriate for young adults at school, but these subjects will likely emerge either way. *Thirteen Reasons Why* gained new popularity after the Netflix series in 2017, and adaptations are made more frequently. The scenes and issues addressed in these novels and adaptations are likely to be discussed among young adults both in and outside the school arena. At least within a classroom, an adult has the opportunity to supervise the conversations and ensure that stigmatization and misunderstandings are avoided by guiding the students and prompting them to be reasonable.

Consent concerns all kinds of physical boundaries and the need to respect them. Children can benefit from a novel such as *Maybe He Just Likes You*, a story about boundaries and crossing the line between children attending primary school. Even with an increasing volume of children's literature addressing sexual harassment, texts children can relate to is still limited. Knowledge around personal boundaries can help prevent later harassment by giving children a better understanding of when, where, and why sexual harassment occurs. Learning about who can be and become victims of sexual harassment can also help outline and suggest ways to act against it (Skoog et al. 8). Questions concerning whether it is too early to teach children about consent will always

be present, but as Spark notes, "the CDC found 8 in 10 teenagers didn't get sex education until after they'd already had sex" (24). There are many decisions for the teacher to make and several aspects to consider, including children's literature addressing sexual harassment. For example, should the children read by themselves, read the whole novel, only excerpts, or if the teacher should read out loud. Learning about sexual harassment and sexual violence at a young age does not necessarily mean that adolescents have to learn all at once or every detail. Novels such as *Maybe He Just Likes You* provide opportunities for meaningful discussions about boundaries, such as this comment by Mila: "Still, it was the kind of contact that meant you should apologize" (Dee p. 12). Teachers can use this quote as an excellent starting point for discussing with children what sort of physical contact is considered appropriate or not.

It can have a huge impact later in life, both for the children and the people they encounter, if they learn that no means no, both verbally and nonverbally. Miscommunication and misunderstandings between people are a significant part of the problem when it comes to sexual violence. Spark addresses how studies suggest that "women are more likely to judge consent on verbal communication, and young men relied more on nonverbal cues" (25). If children do not learn to stop sexual harassment by communicating, how will they know when to stop if someone says no to sexual interactions later? It can be challenging to talk about sexual harassment with children but even harder for them to speak up without the right tools. Novels such as *Maybe He Just Likes You* provide several examples of why it is vital to educate children about boundaries. Mila is telling the boys to stop the harassment several times. The children can discuss if anything could have been different if the boys had more knowledge of what personal boundaries entail. Novels such as *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Speak* demonstrate how serious it can get if someone does not accept set boundaries or somebody says no. Spark also notes that teenagers are poor at making decisions about risk behavior, including sexual harassment and violence, especially if they are under social pressure. Knowledge is power, and educating teenagers in risk evaluation could be life-changing for some.

Novels such as *Maybe He Just Likes You*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and *Speak* offer several opportunities to introduce essential terms, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. They also demonstrate some limitations when using literature to discuss complex themes such as consent and boundaries. First of all, consent would be easier to describe and define than boundaries. Some might easily misinterpret boundaries due to them being personal and often vary between people. On the other hand, consent is an agreement between two people, though unfortunately not always respected. One scene in *Thirteen Reasons Why* is an exceptional example to discuss the dilemma of boundaries. Hannah finds herself in a hot tub when a boy, the same one she witnessed assaulting someone a week before, gives her unwanted sexual attention. She never says no, but she never expresses that she wants it to happen either. He can see that she is crying but continues to touch her inappropriately, serving as a prime example to discuss non-verbal consent. Hannah discusses in her tape the fact that she did not react: "*But in the end, I never told you to get away... and you didn't*" (Asher, 265), but still, it had an effect on her and was not okay. Similar situations can often lead to comments such as "It's her own fault" and "she should have said something". These comments can overshadow the real problem that an assault has happened and is therefore essential to discuss with the students. Talking about the effect of language can help teachers decrease stigmas inside the classroom.

While several novels, such as *Maybe He Just Likes You*, *Speak*, and *Thirteen Reasons Why*, offer opportunities for valuable life lessons and classroom discussions, teachers might not be able or allowed to use them. Choosing what literature to use in education may be restricted at some schools and might not be up to the teacher. Some schools follow scripted programs or provide a required curriculum (Smith, Hazlett & Lennon 10). Another issue for some schools concerning their literature selection is financial constraints. In addition, even though teachers want to provide a supportive, nonjudgmental environment that allows students to discuss and engage in challenging topics, the teacher can never be sure how their students behave or react to different subjects. Some students might resist and unintentionally or intentionally create an unsafe environment for other students. As mentioned, Flensner and Von Der Lippe address how what some perceive as safe might be perceived as unsafe for others (283). They, therefore, emphasize the importance of students actively participating in making the ground rules and sharing their expectations. In addition, students should be encouraged to challenge their comfort zones and explore issues such as sexual violence even though they find them challenging.

It can be valuable to enhance students' communication skills by discussing how comments and perceptions from friends could affect a situation to prevent future harassment. The language used when talking about sexual harassment can affect how those listening are receiving the content. *Maybe He Just Likes You* provides several examples to discuss with children inside the classroom on how victims can be affected by how we communicate. As the title prompts, Mila's friends do not understand that the boys' behavior is bothering Mila. They suggest that the boys are flirting with her and maybe just like Mila. Their attitudes and comments are making it harder for Mila to stop the ongoing harassment. She becomes hesitant if her friends are right about it all being flirting and that perhaps she is overreacting. A girl in Mila's class recognizes that the boys behave not okay, but her approach toward Mila might be valuable to discuss. This girl told Mila that "If it were me, I wouldn't allow it" (Dee, 56). This comment implies that Mila allows the boys' behavior to happen, forgetting that the boys and their actions are the real problems. Discussing these scenes could make children more aware of their language and how words can affect people differently. In addition, this is an excellent opportunity to teach that victims should not blame themselves and that no uncomfortable situation is too big or small to be addressed.

Teachers are provided with a unique opportunity to prevent sexual harassment from happening in school. Hill and Kears suggest two ways for teachers to address sexual harassment: one, educating students about what it is, what its effects are, and how harassers are punished. The other way they suggest is to stress that trying to be funny, or acting stupid about it, are not excuses to conduct sexual harassment (33). In Dee's novel, Mila's teacher helps Mila understand by putting words to what is happening: "Sexual harassment -- and that's what this sounds like to me, Mila --[...]" (249) and explain why she understands it as such. This comment from Mila's teacher helps Mila realize what sexual harassment is and that she was right to react to how the boys behaved. This novel offers several opportunities, such as this one, to introduce words such as consent, boundaries, and sexual harassment. Examples found in the book demonstrate how important it can be that a teacher helps their students navigate and understand the world. Teaching students that sexual harassment is never appropriate and has significant consequences for both the harassed and the harasser can be valuable

for prevention. With knowledge about consequences, adolescents are less likely to sexually harass others when they enter other institutions, such as universities or workplaces, later in life. The classroom is an excellent arena for building a culture of respect and encouraging friendship and tolerance of differences (Hill & Kears 34). Hopefully, it will stick with the students and help them in other contexts.

It would be essential to discuss the dangers of defining someone by their challenges to reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence stigma. These conversations will be a step towards eliminating misguided and wrongfully acquired labels. Novels such as *Speak* will hopefully help students recognize the dangers of labeling and stigmatization by seeing how it affects Melinda and how the fear of being labeled is one of the reasons she stops speaking. Sasson and Paul (2014) note that how we describe or talk about acts of sexual violence will "ultimately affect the recipient's perception of the act, including attributions made about the victim and perpetrator" (36). Therefore, it is essential for students to better understand how language and labels affect our view of sexual violence and relate to it. The language used by authors in YA literature might be intentionally challenging to demonstrate the harmful consequences that this language can have. This language can be analyzed, criticized, and discussed by the students inside a classroom, making the challenging language a valuable lesson. This type of language could, though, if not read in a guided manner, work opposite of its intention giving students an excuse to use the same language and perhaps, teaching them the vocabulary they did not already know. Studies show that verbal and written forms of sexual harassment are more common than physical harassment (Hill & Kears 20). Schools and teachers can help create a culture of respect and equality, including the language used and hopefully lowering verbal sexual harassment numbers.

Sexual violence comes in several variations and degrees, and children and young adults should be aware of this for numerous reasons. Sasson and Paul note that having a set mind of what terms such as 'rape' implies could put "overly restrictive frameworks around victims' experiences, which do not usually conform to this stereotype" (36). *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Speak* are prominent examples of how victims' experiences of sexual violence are never the same and that people react differently. They are also examples of how challenging it can be for a victim to describe and put words to what they have experienced after sexual assaults. As discussed above, in *Maybe He Just Likes You*, Mila also struggles to explain what is happening due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of sexual harassment. All three novels illustrate how many victims deny what has happened to them. Both Hannah and Melinda take a long time before they use words such as rape, and they both postpone telling anyone about what happened. One of the reasons for this is that they fear how others will respond. They are both scared of being labeled or that someone would suggest that the assault was their fault. These thoughts are one of the reasons why it is so important to take these discussions into the classroom. The perception of recipients is essential in eliminating stigmatization and making it easier to engage in conversations about sexual violence.

Language and labeling are two demanding and complex themes to discuss. Although we have discussed how enhancing students' communications skills would be valuable, it also serves some challenges. Adolescents might, for example, use their expanded and perhaps newly taught vocabulary to harass someone sexually. As we have seen, research demonstrates that verbal and written forms of sexual harassment are prominent and more frequent than physical sexual violence. Focus on different labels can

enhance the feeling of “otherness” or “outsiderness” for victims or people struggling with various disabilities and challenges. The language used within literary works could also increase stigmas rather than decrease them. For example, in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Clay calls suicide “a disgusting word” (Asher, 164), and Hannah refuses to call what happened to her rape. The language used in these novels is in many ways encouraging students to be critical, but it can be misleading how in *Speak*, Melinda must disclose her experience to be able to heal. Even though asking for help is essential, some can believe it is her fault that she has been hurting because she has not spoken. Trauma affects everyone differently, so what will help is different for everyone too. The survey executed by Hill and Kearl verified that students have different reactions to experiencing sexual harassment. Their data show that about half of both girls and boys who participated reported having ignored it. While 31 percent of the girls told the harasser to stop, only 13 percent of the boys said the same (26). Gender is only one of many factors to why we react differently.

A good starting point to help others is to be aware of typical signs. People will react differently to sexual harassment and sexual assault, but being aware of some warning signs can get far. The primary purpose of educating students about sexual harassment and sexual violence is to help them navigate life, encourage them to respect each other’s boundaries, help those who need help, and not deter them from asking for help themselves. To help others or seek help, they need specific knowledge about the issue of sexual harassment and violence and which signs are typical for this issue. A valuable asset to discuss possible signs of trauma with children and young adults is to use literature. For example, in *Maybe He Just Likes You*, Mila gives several signs of being uncomfortable with the boys’ behavior. In both *Speak* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the main characters show several signs of struggling, including symptoms of depression and anxiety. Both depression and anxiety are commonly developed after experiencing something traumatic, such as sexual violence. Both Hannah and Melinda are isolating and withdrawing themselves from friends and family. Classroom discussions about why someone would distance themselves from others could make students more aware and alert if this happens to someone close to them. Some children and young adults might not have the opportunity to discuss these matters elsewhere. Some parents might be good at educating and discussing sexual violence with their children, but this is not a given for everyone.

When discussing how Mila could have asked for help or a student in a similar situation, it is natural to suggest confiding in and seeking help from an adult. Sometimes, though, it might be easier for children to confide in friends or other less authorial figures. Teachers are provided with an excellent opportunity to discuss with children how important it is to help each other and listen when someone comes to you. Mila did not know how to ask or talk about it, which is an excellent example of why knowledge about ways to get help and talk about issues can be substantial. Knowledge about signs and issues can help reduce the fear of seeking help, both personally and for others. The aspect of seeking help is perhaps where *Maybe He Just Likes You*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and *Speak* all fail during the novels. All the main characters seek help from a guidance counselor or trusted adult without much luck. They are also confiding in friends in different ways, but none meet the support they need. Stories such as these may keep students from seeking help for, or from, a friend, a loved one, or themselves. Stephanie M. Crumpton emphasizes that authorial figures might trigger students who have experienced a sexual assault because it reminds them of the power relationship that might have taken place

during the assault (138). Power roles often play out inside a classroom between teacher and students and need to be considered. Teachers also need to carefully consider whether these novels might send wrong messages to students who find themselves relating to the characters and their experiences. Students may deter from seeking both professional help and confiding in those close to them. If choosing to use these novels, these issues are even more important to discuss with the students.

Some YA literature can trigger, or even inspire, the opposite of a wanted reaction. Content can affect people differently depending on several aspects, such as the readers' background and experiences. Crumpton discusses how even trigger warnings can be triggers in themselves (140). Platforms such as social media expose adolescents to challenging themes such as sexual violence without supervision or guidance. Perry explains how adolescents today have access to an expanded literature block, unlike any generation before them (61). In a classroom, content that can be damaging can be avoided, or at least discussed responsibly, with guidance from teachers. While doing a literature review to research the role of school on adolescents' identity development, Verhoeven et al. found extensive literature showing how schools and teachers unintentionally may significantly impact adolescents' identities in a negative way (55). Hall and Piazza address, for example, how teachers can foster a critical stance and help students take more control over their own beliefs (37), but teachers can unintentionally guide students towards their ideas instead. The teachers' beliefs might not be the best for the student. Environmental influences can also contribute to the students' belief without recognizing it, such as movies or literature used in the school context.

Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* has been criticized for romanticizing and glorifying sexual violence and suicide. Children's and YA literature addressing issues such as sexual violence Anne M. Smith, Lisa Hazlett, and Sean Lennon conducted a survey study to discover the reasons for the use or nonuse of young adult literature in the classroom. One of the questions in their survey asked the teachers whether they had refrained from using some adolescent literature due to censorship concerns, and 31 percent of the participants responded with 3, 4, and 5 on a Likert scale (1 being never and 5 being always). The results suggest that teachers have some concern for censorship (8-9). The novel has caused extensive discussions for its descriptions of sexual violence and suicide. Clay, the second protagonist, notes how Hannah's suicide inspired him to grow as a person. Some can read that someone's suicide encourages others to become better people. The encouragement can provide people with suicidal thoughts with a compelling reason to finish their plans rather than give a realistic depiction of consequences caused by suicide. Comments such as Clay's may lead some to believe that the effects of sexual assaults might not be that bad. These consequences may also lead some to conclude that there are benefits to doing drastic actions such as suicide or sexual violence, for instance, getting attention from people around. Hopefully, students who read novels such as *Speak* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* will recognize the dangerous effect of sexual violence and other topics discussed rather than get inspired. We should hope that this is what students leave with after reading these works is what Hannah says in her tapes, that "everything... affects everything" (Asher, 202) and that everyone can do something to make it better. Teachers and adults play an essential role in ensuring that this is the outcome.

Although all three novels have some limitations regarding positive messages about seeking help, they all provide suggestions on dealing with challenging situations. The

novels also offer resources where the reader can find help. *Maybe He Just Likes You* ends with a meeting between Mila, the boys who harassed her, and several adults. Mila is allowed an opportunity to explain how the boys' actions have affected her. Discussions can center around if this is the right way to handle this situation, but the boys take responsibility for their actions. Mila's case also initiates a school-wide program in the novel focusing on consent, boundaries, and sexual harassment, something every school should be inspired to do. *Speak* has a page at the end of the book dedicated to a list of websites and numbers to organizations that offer support and service to survivors of sexual assault. *Thirteen Reasons Why* has several websites with resources for support and assistance. For example, 13reasonsWhy.info is a site where everyone can choose in which country they are seeking help. The novel also provides names of places to learn how to help someone else in a crisis. Still, these suggestions might not reach children and young adults or help at all.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

Sexual violence is one of the many issues today's society is facing. The number of children who get sexually assaulted each day is too high, and the process and work to lower these numbers will be long and challenging. Literature aimed at adolescents addressing sexual violence is suggested as valuable assets in the fight against this issue. Knowledge represents power in many situations, and educating adolescents about sexual violence can prevent future assaults. Novels such as *Maybe He Just Likes You*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and *Speak* can all encourage students to think more critically, be aware of their actions and consequences following, learn more about others' boundaries, and advocate the importance of asking for help. These and other novels aimed at young readers are especially valuable to confront taboo topics such as sexual violence in a manner that adolescents will understand and relate to. Literature aimed at specific age groups, such as adolescents, often uses language and issues of interest to their readers. That means most children's and young adult literature have characters and themes that the adolescent reader can relate to, including time-relevant issues.

Research and different studies demonstrate different limitations and challenges that can occur when discussing sexual violence and other challenging themes with adolescents. *Thirteen Reasons Why*, especially, demonstrates the importance of carefully choosing which works to use in discussions and guiding students through difficult conversations about sexual violence. Every teacher should carefully consider if the works they want to use are suitable for the targeted group or class they have in mind. A popular novel might not be popular for the right or good reasons. Stories confronting issues such as sexual harassment and sexual violence have an extra responsibility to their readers and so do teachers when choosing them. Not only do they need to represent challenging topics accurately, but they should also deliver positive and encouraging messages to the reader. These demands put a great responsibility on the teacher when choosing which works to use in the classroom. Evaluating which novels to use for discussions about sexual violence is anything but easy. As discussed, teachers need to consider the book's themes, the language, how it deals with labels, and what message students will leave with.

Children and young adults can have powerful voices, and students should be encouraged to use them if they want to see positive changes. There are without a doubt not enough conversations about social issues such as sexual violence. As noted, teachers often avoid conversations about taboo topics in educational settings, partly due to the subjects' stigma and concern around their influence on children and young adults. Starting the conversation within the classroom as a safe environment can encourage students to bring the conversations outside the school and raise their voices and opinions. Studying and reading about sexual violence can help educate adolescents and give them valuable tools to help them navigate through life. A better understanding of the issues will help raise awareness and acceptance, and that again will hopefully help eliminate stigma. The stigmatization around sexual violence only creates an obstacle, and it leads to people, including teachers, choosing to stay silent. Sexual harassment, sexual violence, and other taboo topics need more attention in educational settings. The increasing volume of texts addressing these subjects is a positive start, but we can do more. These subjects may be challenging to talk about, and teachers might experience resistance from parents and administrations. Still, none of these reasons makes the discussion around sexual violence any less critical.

The ongoing development and discussion of what content should be viewed as appropriate for children and young adults have raised a great deal of concern. The discussion includes disagreements on when and where to introduce children to challenging and complicated subjects such as sexual harassment and sexual violence. The debate on appropriateness continues, and there will probably always be disagreements around when children are ready to be exposed to these subjects. Data provided and discussed demonstrates the vast numbers of children being sexually harassed and assaulted each year. These numbers reveal the scope of the problem concerning sexual violence among children and why children should engage in discussions about sexual violence already in primary school. Data provided by Skoog et al. has shown how children are often confronted with peer sexual harassment for the first time in late childhood. They identify that sexual harassment is a universal problem among children and young adults. These facts are some of the main arguments for starting conversations about sexual harassment and sexual violence with children and young adults already in primary school.

Literature stays with most people through life, both for pleasure and for educational purposes. Research shows that literature aimed at children earlier either wanted to teach morals, etiquette, and religion or created just for pleasure with pictures and illustrations rather than facts. During the eighteenth century, literature changed due to urbanization, new library systems, and literature generally becoming more available to a broader public. With this change, the demand for different kinds of literature emerged, including children's literature. Through time, children's and young adult literature have developed to address a broader range of subjects, such as social issues and taboo topics. Literature had been used for educational purposes long before this. Still, issues earlier viewed as inappropriate for children have slowly made their way into children's and young adult literature. The reasonably new urge to discuss sexual harassment and sexual violence with children and young adults has had a considerable impact on the content of many books published today.

This thesis has demonstrated how literature could be valuable assets to start conversations about sexual violence with children and young adults inside the classroom. Scholars such as Smith, Hazlett & Lennon, Perry, and Skoog have provided evidence of how children's and young adult literature is a great way to give students perspectives on issues they have few other ways of gaining. Children's and young adult literature provide adolescents with an opportunity to read something that they can connect to their lives and their interests. Being able to relate to what they read can motivate and help students engage with its content and reflect on the issues addressed. Motivation to read about social issues such as sexual harassment is evident for the adolescents to learn from and engage with what they read. Giving children and young adults access to a novel they will enjoy, and want to read, can make the discussions about sexual harassment more pleasant and meaningful for both the students and the teacher.

Many aspects of sexual harassment and sexual violence are not discussed above, and there are many possibilities for further research. Both *Speak* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* have been adapted to screen, and a comparison of these adaptations could give valuable discoveries and provide helpful discussion. Especially the Netflix series *13ReasonsWhy* could be interesting to discuss due to its graphic visuals and a greater focus on gender and sexuality than the book. The series, released in 2011, would also be more time-relevant than the 2007 novel. Other possible directions could be to discuss that all three books have white protagonists and all lead characters are female. It could be interesting to apply cultural relevance and a social justice framework when approaching these issues. Choosing novels with different cultural relevance would ensure that more students can relate. One could also question whether novels with more positive depictions of disabilities, therapy, and getting help would have worked better for classroom discussions than some novels discussed in this thesis.

Using literature to start discussions about sexual violence inside a primary classroom can serve both advantages and limitations. While some might argue for other approaches, what is clear is from the research and data discussed in this thesis is that sexual violence should be discussed with children and young adults in some way or another.

Works cited

- Alsup, Janet. "Politicizing Young Adult Literature: Reading Anderson's *Speak* as a Critical Text." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2003, pp. 158–66, search.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/politicizing-young-adult-literature-reading/docview/216915221/se-2?accountid=12870.
- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. Hodder and Stoughton, 2019.
- Asher, Jay. *Thirteen Reasons Why*. 1st ed., Razorbill, 2011. "Children and Teens: Statistics | RAINN." *RAINN*, 2021, www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens.
- "Bildungsroman." *Collins Dictionary*, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bildungsroman. Accessed 11 Nov. 2021.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: The Original 1865 Edition*. Independently published, 2021.
- Crumpton, Stephanie M. "Trigger Warnings, Covenants of Presence, and More: Cultivating Safe Space for Theological Discussions about Sexual Trauma." *Teaching Theology & Religion*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2017, pp. 137–47. *Crossref*, doi:10.1111/teth.12376.
- Dee, Barbara. *Maybe He Just Likes You*. Reprint, Aladdin, 2020.
- Flensner, Karin K., and Marie von der Lippe. "Being Safe from What and Safe for Whom? A Critical Discussion of the Conceptual Metaphor of 'Safe Space.'" *Intercultural Education*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2019, pp. 275–88. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/14675986.2019.1540102.
- Groenke, Susan L. "Raising 'Hot Topics' through Young Adult Literature." *Voices from the Middle*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2010, pp. 29–36, library.ncte.org/journals/vm/issues/v17-4/10788.
- Groenke, Susan, and Lisa Scherff. "Young Adult Literature in Today's Classroom." *English Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2009, pp. 1–3. *National Council of Teachers of English*, teachingliterature.pbworks.com/f/TeachingLiteratureYA
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Studying the Novel*. 6th ed., Bloomsbury USA, 2010.
- Hall, Leigh A., and Susan V. Piazza. "Critically Reading Texts: What Students Do and How Teachers Can Help." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2008, pp. 32–41. *Crossref*, doi:10.1598/rt.62.1.4.
- Hill, Catherine Alison, and Holly Kearn. *Crossing the Line*. AAUW, 2011.
- Isomaa, Saija. "How Are Literary Genres Valuable? A Value-Pluralist Approach to Genres." *Values of Literature*, edited by Hanna Meretoja et al., Leiden Boston, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pp. 137–49.
- León, Concepción de. "Why More Children's Books Are Tackling Sexual Harassment and Abuse." *The New York Times*, 17 June 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/books/childrens-books-middle-grade-metoo-sexual-abuse.html.
- Meretoja, Hanna, and Pirjo Lyytikäinen. "Why We Read: The Plural Values of Literature." *Values of Literature*, edited by Hanna Meretoja et al., Leiden Boston, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pp. 1–22.
- Meretoja, Hanna. "A Sense of History - A Sense of the Possible: Nussbaum and Hermeneutics on the Ethical Potential of Literature." *Values of Literature*, edited by Hanna Meretoja et al., Leiden Boston, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pp. 25–46.
- Miller, Alyson. "Unsuited to Age Group: The Scandals of Children's Literature." *College*

- Literature*, vol. 2014, no. 2, 2014, pp. 120–40. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/lit.2014.0025.
- Nielsen, Alyssa. "Time's Up: Schools Need to Teach Students About Sexual Harassment." *BYU Law Digital Commons*, 2021, digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview/vol46/iss3/10.
- Nodelman, Perry. "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1992, pp. 29–35. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/chq.0.1006.
- Nünning, Vera. "Cognitive Science and the Value of Literature for Life." *Values of Literature*, edited by Hanna Meretoja et al., Leiden Boston, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pp. 95–116.
- Perry, Tonya. "Teaching Students to Think Critically." *Teaching towards Democracy with Postmodern and Popular Culture Texts*, edited by Patricia Paugh et al., SensePublishers, 2014, pp.59–75.
- Renold, Emma. "Presumed Innocence." *Childhood*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2002, pp. 415–34. *Crossref*, doi:10.1177/0907568202009004004.
- Rudd, David. "The Development of Children's Literature." *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, edited by David Rudd, Routledge, 2010, pp. 3–14.
- Sasson, Sapir, and Lisa A. Paul. "Labeling Acts of Sexual Violence: What Roles Do Assault Characteristics, Attitudes, and Life Experiences Play?" *Behavior and Social Issues*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2014, pp. 35–49. *Crossref*, doi:10.5210/bsi.v23i0.5215.
- "Scope of the Problem: Statistics | RAINN." *RAINN*, 2021, www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem.
- Short, Kathy G. "Reading Literature in Elementary Classrooms." *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, edited by S. Wolf et al., Routledge, 2018, pp. 48–62.
- . "What's Trending in Children's Literature and Why It Matters." *Language Arts*, vol. 95, no. 5, 2018, pp. 287–98, coe.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/whats-trending-childrens-literature.pdf.
- Skoog, Therése, et al. "Study Protocol for PRISE: A Longitudinal Study of Sexual Harassment during the Transition from Childhood to Adolescence." *BMC Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2019. *Crossref*, doi:10.1186/s40359-019-0345-5.
- Smith, Ann, et al. "Young Adult Literature in the English Language Arts Classroom: A Survey of Middle and Secondary Teachers' Beliefs about YAL." *Study and Scrutiny: Research on Young Adult Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1–24. *Crossref*, doi:10.15763/issn.2376-5275.2018.3.1.1-24.
- Sparks, Sarah. "Consent: Lessons Beyond #MeToo." *Education Week*, vol. 38, no. 17, 2019, p. 24, search.proquest.com/trade-journals/consent-lessons-beyond-metoo/docview/2168981346/se-2?accountid=12870.
- Sutherland, John. *A Little History of Literature (Little Histories)*. Illustrated, Yale University Press, 2014.
- "Taboo." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/taboo. Accessed 27 Nov. 2021.
- Verhoeven, Monique, et al. "The Role of School in Adolescents' Identity Development. A Literature Review." *Educational Psychology Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2018, pp. 35–63. *Crossref*, doi:10.1007/s10648-018-9457-3.
- Wasserman, Emily. "The Epistolary in Young Adult Literature." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2003. *Crossref*, doi:10.21061/alan.v30i3.a.12.

Relevance to education

Teacher Education, including an M.A in Language Studies (MLSPRÅK), is a five-year program at NTNU. The first practice period is for many students their first meeting with everything that being a teacher entails. Many students will realize the amount of work every teacher has to put into lesson planning every week and learn the challenges of choosing or deciding what content to use inside the classroom. Realizing that teachers would have the opportunity to influence what their students read was a turning point in my educational process. This realization opened up new possibilities for the way teachers can help their students in their identity development, and this thesis explores how literature can aid this process.

Through literature classes, we have learned the importance of good literature and its impact on its readers. Through PPU (Practical and Pedagogical education), we have learned the vital role a teacher has in students' education and making them good social citizens. Choosing relevant and good literature should be a part of this process. We have the opportunity to create a safe space for students to discuss complex topics and to guide them into having meaningful conversations within reason. This thesis could encourage us to start critical thinking before including literature about sexual violence in the classroom.

This thesis is relevant for teacher education in many aspects, but most importantly perhaps, for addressing the importance of thinking twice when choosing content for classes. Thoroughly considering content applies to everything and not only sexual violence or other taboo topics. Today, with social media taking up a considerable part of adolescents' lives, we need to pay even more attention. If a novel goes viral, they will be informed and aware of what it is about. If the book addresses challenging topics, it can be worth discussing these within the safe space of a classroom. That way, the teacher can ensure that students' pre-assumptions, or lack of knowledge, do not color their thoughts.

While many children's and young adult literature in the last decade have provided effective and essential content about several mental health issues, such as depression and different disorders, sexual violence is in many ways unrepresented in today's literature discussions. By investigating possibilities and limitations through this thesis, I hope to participate in the work towards less stigmatization. Like the famous young adult author Chris Crutcher once said: "I can't think of a subject that is taboo for me unless it's one I simply don't know anything about"!

