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Diverse Characters, Diverse Abilities

Examining Disability in *The Secret Garden* and
Finding Nemo

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Rhonna Robbins-Sponaas

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Abstract

This master's thesis supplies a thorough examination of how disability is portrayed and represented in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Andrew Stanton's movie *Finding Nemo* (2003). Extensive research has been dedicated to exploring the inclusion of disabled characters in the well-known movie *Finding Nemo* over the last two decades. However, the novel *The Secret Garden* has yet to receive the same level of analysis. By analysing the portrayal of characters with mental and physical disabilities in literature, we can determine if they are included fairly and accurately to represent society. The thesis investigates whether *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* correspond with the predominant understanding of including disabled characters in their publication times. Moreover, the thesis analyses and explores how the literary works present and represent disabled characters, whether negative or positive, in terms of how the characters view themselves and how other characters treat and them.

The thesis's premise is that the portrayals of disabled characters in the two works are different, and in a classroom context, both works should be included to provide a broader and fair understanding and representation of disabled people. By exploring the representation of disabled characters in literature, this study reveals their significance in providing valuable insight into the experiences of disabled people.

By clarifying the significance of inclusive literature and offering an analytical framework, this thesis underscores the value of integrating works such as *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* in educational settings. Ultimately advocating for a perspective on teaching literature which resonates with students' diverse experiences in the real world. The thesis proposes a potential approach for assessing the representation and inclusion of disabled characters in literary works. By employing this method, teachers can effectively incorporate literature featuring disabled characters more prominently within classrooms.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven gir en grundig analyse av hvordan funksjonshemming blir fremstilt og representert i Frances Hodgson Burnetts roman *The Secret Garden* (1911) og Andrew Stanton's film *Finding Nemo* (2003). Det er blitt viet betydelig forskning til å utforske inkluderingen av funksjonshemmede karakterer i den velkjente filmen *Finding Nemo* i løpet av de siste to tiårene. Imidlertid har romanen *The Secret Garden* ennå ikke blitt analysert i like stor grad. Oppgaven undersøker om *The Secret Garden* og *Finding Nemo* samsvarer med den dominerende forståelsen av inkludering av funksjonshemmede karakterer i deres utgivelsestider. Videre analyserer oppgaven hvordan de litterære verkene presenterer og representerer funksjonshemmede karakterer, enten negativt eller positivt, med tanke på hvordan karakterene fremstiller seg selv og hvordan andre karakterer behandler dem.

Oppgavens premiss er at fremstillingen av funksjonshemmede karakterer i de to verkene er forskjellige, og i en klasseromskontekst bør begge verkene inkluderes for å gi en bedre og mer rettferdig forståelse og representasjon av funksjonshemmede. Ved å utforske fremstillingen av funksjonshemmede karakterer i litteratur avslører denne studien deres betydning for å gi verdifull innsikt i funksjonshemmede menneskers opplevelser.

Ved å oppklare viktigheten av inkluderende litteratur og å legge frem et solid analytisk rammeverk, understreker denne oppgaven verdien av å inkludere verk som *The Secret Garden* og *Finding Nemo* i utdanningssammenhenger. Oppgaven argumenterer for en tilnærming til undervisning i litteratur som resonnerer med studenters varierte erfaringer i den virkelige verden. Oppgaven foreslår en mulig tilnærming for å vurdere fremstillingen og inkluderingen av funksjonshemmede karakterer i litterære verk. Ved å bruke denne metoden kan lærere effektivt inkludere litteratur med funksjonshemmede karakterer mer i klasserommet.

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Contents

Abstract	v
Sammendrag	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1: Defining Disability	1
Chapter 2: <i>The Secret Garden</i>	7
Chapter 3: <i>Finding Nemo</i>	13
Chapter 4: Disability Literature in the Classroom	23
Works Cited	30
Appendix: Relevance for Teaching	35

Chapter 1: Defining Disability

Children's literature is a well-used resource to educate children, where choosing the content is highly important (Thomas 112; O'Sullivan 641). Inclusion and diversity are important in Children's Literature, where equal representation includes, but not limited to, encompassing disabled characters. It is crucial to be mindful of how Children's Literature include disabled characters, as what children read contributes to how they see themselves represented. By gaining insight into the lives and situations of others, Children's Literature can bring nuance to the reader's understanding of what disability is and how to treat disabled people. Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Andrew Stanton's movie *Finding Nemo* (2003) show a broad representation of disabled characters within different literary periods, namely realism and post-modernism. Because of their broad representation, both works show to be valuable resources for teachers to bring into their classrooms. *Finding Nemo* was first released in film form, and this version of the story is included in this thesis.

The novel *The Secret Garden* (1911) and the movie *Finding Nemo* (2003) both include physical and mental disabilities, where physical disabilities are visible, and mental disabilities are invisible. The terms "physical and visible" and "mental and invisible" are essential for some key characters in the two works, specifically for Colin in *The Secret Garden* and for Nemo and Dory in *Finding Nemo*. These characters are portrayed and presented differently, resulting in them representing disabilities in different manners. Depending on how the works present, portray, and describe the disabled characters, the audience's understanding of what disability is may differ depending on what they read or watch. As such, combining *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* give a fuller picture than only looking at texts from one literary period, or merely looking at a singular work; combined they can show how different disabled people live their lives, as well as the importance of inclusion, compassion, and kindness.

How characters are presented to an audience is equally important to how these characters represent disabled people. To "present" something means to show or offer it, and to "portray" something means to depict a person or thing through drawing, writing, or other media (OED). In *The Secret Garden*, the chapters leading up to the reader's first encounter with Colin are essential. Similarly, the beginning of *Finding Nemo* is important as it is the viewer's first time seeing Nemo. The audience encounters a character for the first time when it is presented in a text or movie; how the character and their actions are described throughout the story is equally important as the first presentation. In disability studies, to represent disabled people refers to both political and aesthetic issues. It can refer to an image that stands in for something else or a mechanism by which one person or group can express the wishes of another (Bérubé 151). Combining these meanings is crucial because it shows how a fictional character can represent an individual and a larger group of disabled people at the same time. Representing disabled characters in literature is powerful because it structures people's understanding of disability (Garland-Thomson 523), especially for those who have not met anyone with a disability before. How a disabled character is described, presented, and represented in any literary work can define or redefine readers' or viewer's understanding of that specific disability and disability in general, depending on their previous knowledge. Therefore, it is especially essential to

present and represent disabled characters accurately and respectfully in Children's Literature.

Both *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* fall within the genre of Children's Literature; however, Children's Literature (CL) is challenging to define and confine within a set framework. Scholars have produced several definitions trying to define CL; on the one hand, CL is defined as texts produced for and read by children (Hintz & Tribunella 51). On the other hand, the notion that literature is written for and read by children has been problematised, as adults often choose what texts children are exposed to (Hintz & Tribunella 52). These conflicting definitions of CL arise because the intended recipient and the actual recipient are different. Although CL might be designed for children, meaning children would receive and read these texts, adults often buy and create CL. Because adults primarily produce CL, they ultimately decide what messages children should receive from literature and what content they should be exposed to. In short, although CL is intended for children, adults are responsible for purchasing or creating texts. Therefore, adults portray disabled characters based on how they want children to view and understand disabled people.

Regardless of the challenges with defining CL's framework, it has been a common understanding that these literary works have been produced to educate children. During the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries, children's books were predominantly didactic and moralistic because of the widespread belief "that children should be quiet, hardworking, and intent on learning to be good" (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson 229). While CL was initially intended for educational purposes, it also serves as a source of entertainment for children. This dual purpose of CL has created a contradiction, which has been evident since the mid 18th century (Hintz & Tribunella 68). Therefore, it can be said that both older and modern CL include elements that aim to educate children, such as promoting kindness towards others, while still providing entertainment. *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* entertain children, as they are fictional stories about young characters, which children can find enjoyable. In addition, *Finding Nemo* was first released in movie form, ultimately being made for the pleasure of its audience and not primarily for educational purposes. However, both works hold aspects that can teach children about morals and can therefore be provided for educational purposes, especially looking at their inclusion of disabled characters.

Fictional characters can have both physical and mental disabilities, observable in both *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*. Daniel L. Preston and Lisa S. Fink express the importance of focusing both on disabilities that are physical and can be seen, as well as those that are hidden (56-57), and while *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* feature disabled characters, their disabilities are not explicitly highlighted. At first it may seem that *The Secret Garden* present a negative representation and *Finding Nemo* a positive one, but a closer analysis reveals that both texts are more nuanced. Whether the protagonist has a disability that is the primary focus of the plot, the two literary works include diverse types of characters with various disabilities. Because the texts were published in different periods and formats, their presentation, portrayal, and representation of the disabled characters differ. Thus, *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* mirror the variety of CL that include disabled characters; Colin has a physical disability as he sits in a wheelchair, Nemo has a physical disability because of having a smaller fin, and Dory has short-term memory loss, a mental disability. In short, the literary works represent mental and physical disabilities in different characters and describe the disabled characters differently through different

words and phrases. Combined, they hold varied representations of how disability has been and is represented in CL.

The presentations and perceptions of disability are complex and influenced by societal views of what is good or bad. A positive trait may be redefined as unfavourable in the presence of a prominently perceived negative quality. Conversely, a minor negative feature may be seen as positive. To determine whether literature portrays disabled characters positively or negatively, there are many factors to consider. This thesis understands the positive and negative presentation and representation of disabled characters in three ways. In the first understanding, positive representation refers to the modern understanding of including disabled characters as ordinary members of society, with favourable characterisation and presentation, without the plot explicitly focusing on their impairment. Negative representation is recognised in older literature¹ as a characteristic used for something different than representation, with characters often looking to eliminate their disability. These understandings do not remove the possibility of seeing negative representation in newer literature and positive representation in older literature. In the second understanding, positive representation and presentation of a disabled character is recognised when the character and/ or those around them treat and describe them in a way that portrays them as being valuable and capable. Negative representations and presentation would be the opposite; the disabled characters and/ or the characters around them refer to them and treat them in a degrading manner. For the third understanding of negative and positive presentation and representation, a positive portrayal occurs when disabled characters are included as natural and integrated members of society. The disability is not the story's focus, and the character receives the necessary assistance to live with the disability. In contrast, a negative portrayal occurs when disability is seen as a problem that needs fixing. Sometimes, individuals with disabilities may talk about their disability condescendingly because of their struggles and lack of support. In such cases, the disability may be portrayed negatively by the disabled characters and, by extension, the audience or reader. Likewise, some disabled people may experience discomfort with their body or mind, believing overcoming a disability can lead to a positive change in their life.

Defining 'disability' is challenging; some scholars point out that the concept is so complex that it is difficult to define clearly (Adams et al. 5-6; Preston & Fink 56). Many try to suggest how the term can be interpreted, and Preston and Fink argue that the concept of 'disability' can be just as challenging to define as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity (56), all of which are ways people identify themselves. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin move disability away from these other forms of identity and argue that 'disability' is even more fluid because it can happen to anyone at any time. They explain how "[d]isability encompasses a broad range of bodily, cognitive, and sensory differences and capabilities" (Adams et al. 7), including mental and physical disabilities.

The concept of mental disabilities can be defined separately from the broader term disability. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th ed. (DSM-5)* points

¹ In this thesis, older literature includes literature from pre-contemporary eras. However, it is impossible to set a date to the beginning and end; here, it is understood to be from medieval till approximately the end of realism. *The Secret Garden* is included in this term with its release in 1911. In contrast, newer literature refers in this thesis to literature published from the late 20th century until today, thus including *Finding Nemo* from 2003.

out that there can never be one set definition of what mental disabilities are but defines some requirements of a mental disability or disorder as

a syndrome characterised by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other essential activities (20)

There is a broad spectrum of what is considered 'mental' and 'disability,' and by including cognition, emotion regulation, and behaviour, a person or character does not have to have learning challenges to be considered to have a mental disability; other elements, such as loss of memory or changes in emotions, are equally important. By including social, occupational, and other activities, *DSM-5* shows that a person with a mental disability can behave like anyone else in a social setting. Still, they might have challenges because of their mental disability, resulting in distress for the person.

The three terms 'disability,' 'impairment,' and 'handicap' are often used interchangeably, particularly outside of the medical practice sector; however, they have different meanings (Carter). As a result of the synonymous use of the terms, scholars might have used them to refer to the same type of character when analysing literature. According to Sheena L. Carter at the Emory University School of Medicine, the WHO's definitions from 1980 are the most cited, where impairment is "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function," disability is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being," and handicap is "a disadvantage for a given individual that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal" (Carter). Carter continues by stating that the terms are traditionally used as follows:

impairment refers to a problem with a structure or organ of the body; disability is a functional limitation with regard to a particular activity; and handicap refers to a disadvantage in filling a role in life relative to a peer group (Carter)

The common interchangeable use of the three terms can create confusion and conflict between scholarly texts. As a result, I have chosen to rely on Carter's definitions in understanding mental and physical disabilities; disability restricts or makes it difficult for a person or character to do a specific task or activity.

In older literature, the theme of disability and its characteristics often vanishes, as disability is often linked to other noticeable issues in the text. According to Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, the topic of disability has been lost in the way we read older texts; the theme of disability often links to other more prominent issues in the text, such as critical moral questions, where a lost foot can represent an addiction, or a simple-minded person can represent innocence. As a result, the characteristics of disability have often not been necessary for the characters, and readers are easily led to perceive the disability as a textual device (Barker & Murray 1-3). The descriptions of disabled characters effectively remove them from the norm and are separate from the able-bodied characters, actively forcing the disabled to become 'others'. The descriptions of deformations and physical

disabilities stand for something other than the actual disability, such as a villain or someone unkind having a disability. Still, as soon as these characters change to not being the villain anymore or become kind, their disability is gone. The purpose of the disability was not to include and represent disabled people in literature; the purpose of the disability was to include a moral in the story. This can be seen in *The Secret Garden*, where Colin is a spoiled unkind boy with a physical disability, forcing him to sit in a wheelchair. However, as he learns to be kind, his disability also heals. Further, as Marker and Murray emphasise, disabilities sometimes provided "an example that shocks, create fear, or invites pity" (2). In *The Secret Garden*, when the adults speak ill of Colin without even knowing him, it may evoke feelings of pity for the boy being judged based on his disability. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder point out that "literary and historical texts have rarely appeared to offer disabled characters in developed, 'positive' portraits" (15-16), and readers would, therefore, expect only to find negative representations of disabled characters in older literature. Disabled characters being included as a moral to the story is considered a negative representation because the disabled characters are not represented for being themselves, and the way disabled people are negatively represented as a moral of the story can easily be missed.

Older literature expected disabled characters to have a backstory for their disability and an ending where there is a cure for the disability, or they overcome the disability (Dunn 94; Wheatley 17). Combining this expected way of including disabled characters in older literature with how CL was used for educational purposes, it can be assumed that disabilities were used to teach children what not to do and how not to behave, or they would face the consequences of being like the disabled characters. As the characters improve their behaviour, their disability is cured, as seen with Colin in *The Secret Garden*. Because disabled characters were not given portrayals where they developed positively and flourished, and their disabilities were instead a means to an end, their representation can be understood as primarily negative in older literature; disabled characters were not included to have an equal representation but rather have a function within the storyline. In this way of including disabled characters, the characteristics of the disabled disappear; the disabled characters are often simply seen as victims of villains, such as Dumbo in *Dumbo*, Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*, and Hook in *Peter Pan* (Resene), all movies intended for children. The combination of storylines and the roles of the disabled characters have often resulted in a historically negative portrayal of disability in disabled characters.

Terms and phrases affect how characters have been labelled and described, especially how disabled characters were described negatively in older literature. Historically, there was often a clear line between characters with and without disabilities using specific terms and phrases to describe the disabled characters; authors used terms and phrases with predominantly negative connotations to describe disabled characters, emphasising how older literature has had negative representation. Examples of this are terms like ability, inferiority, freak, monster, and madness (Mitchell & Snyder 2; Holdsworth 192; Wheatley 19; Scrofano 4). Using the term 'ability' as an opposite to disability focuses on characters capable of doing something, which negatively portrays those unable to complete the given task. Using these negative terms would teach children that the disabled characters were not role models and should be treated differently, and children did not need to strive to be like these characters. Both physical and cognitive "inferiority has historically characterised the means by which bodies have been constructed as 'deviant'" (Mitchell & Snyder 2), indicating a split between the inferior and superior. The characters referred to as either inferior or superior would, in this case, be compared to the

abilities of characters; those who were able to complete specific tasks would gain superiority, leaving those unable as inferior. The two terms 'freak' and 'monster' show the historically negative portrayal of disabled characters where "[c]ultural and historical constructions of the freak and the monster have been almost invariably tied to disability" (Holdsworth 192), showing how some authors create "clear relationships between monstrosity and humanity that allow us to consider a character's monstrous difference as a disability" (Wheatley 19). It is essential to be aware of how disabled characters are described in *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*. It is especially interesting to look at how disabled characters are described, what descriptive words are used to describe them, both by themselves and the other characters and whether it corresponds with the collective understanding of disabilities in older literature compared to modern literature.

In recent decades, there have been modifications to the understanding and definition of disabilities; scholars' changing understanding of disability has been influenced by the shift from the 'medical model' to the 'social model.' The former considered physical and mental disabilities within the same category, viewing them as medical reasons for a person's limitations. In contrast, the latter model emphasises that disability arises partly due to environmental barriers. This newer understanding combines biological and societal factors, revealing how society's structures often disregard the disabled (Preston & Fink 56). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 and the Vision of Accessibility reflect similar views, highlighting the impact of environmental barriers on disability (Adams et al. 8). This change in understanding from the medical to social model affects how disabled characters are portrayed in works like *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, and based on their years of release, it is easy to presume that the former likely focus more on the biological aspects of disability and the latter highlights the impact of societal barriers. However, the change in the definition and understanding of disabled people does not necessarily alter how authors perceive and depict them in their works, as some scholars argue that many writers still base their disabled characters on the medical model and standardising people. Mitchell and Snyder argue that the depiction of disability in literature often lacks depth and nuance because these characters are often based on the medical model, thus reducing it to a static trait. This failure to recognise the social complexities of disability means that it is not given the same level of consideration as other elements in the plot or literary analysis (19). The portrayal of disabled characters in literature is influenced by both the author's and society's understanding of disability. As a result, older and newer works may depict disabled characters through the medical and social model, regardless of when they were produced (Dunn 94). It is possible for recent literature to have the same portrayal of disabled people as older literature; the change in definition may not necessarily change the author's perception of disabilities. For instance, *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* could have similar depictions of disabled individuals even though they were written decades apart.

The following chapters will work to show that *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* portray their disabled characters differently and that the works' diversity is evident when analysing the characters Colin, Nemo, and Dory. In turn, their presence in the literary works shows to be valuable for teachers to include in the classroom.

Chapter 2: *The Secret Garden*

Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote *The Secret Garden* in 1911, making it the eldest of the two primary works in this thesis. The story follows Mary Lennox, a girl moving from India to her uncle in Yorkshire, England, where she meets Colin and Dickon, among others. Colin is Mary's cousin, who is confined to move around in a wheelchair, and the twelve-year-old Dickon lives on the moors. Colin is one of the two protagonists in the story and, therefore, essential to the plot and story development. He is an example of a character whose disability is not at the story's centre. Although there is a lack of research devoted to focusing on Colin as a disabled person in *The Secret Garden*, he is often included in other research as an example of representation of a disabled character, as well as being a character of importance within the plot (Cormier; Jenkins; Shah et al.; Smith). Colin is an example of how CL previously mainly sought to teach children to behave and become kind citizens.

The reader's first encounter with Colin lays the foundation for the expectations tied to him as a character with a disability; the negative portrayal of his disability is formed from when he is first presented. The reader quickly learns that Colin's disability confines him to his bed, and he is kept in a distant room. The way Colin is first presented is in a predominantly negative manner; Mary hears Colin's agonising screams several times at the Misselthwaite house, building up towards the reader's first encounter with Colin: "I am like this always, ill and having to lie down [...] If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan't live" (Burnett 144). Through these descriptions, Colin suggests that his disability hinders him from living an ordinary life; he must lie in bed because he is sick. Colin cannot join activities other children his age are doing and is saddened by this confinement. As the reader learns about his disability, it can seem like the disability is the reason for the negative portrayal of him. In the scene described above and the ones leading up to when Mary and Colin meet, the screams build up an understanding of Colin's physical and mental pain, which his placement far away in the house further emphasises. He has to stay in bed because he cannot walk around on his own, showing how his physical disability affects him. This can be perceived as negative for child readers, as it would be natural for them to want to run around playing and being free. This first encounter is important in laying the ground for how the reader understands Colin; his disability hinders him from living a normal life, thus showing the reader how negative disabilities can be for the person being disabled.

The references to Colin's possible early death show that he is firmly aware of his disability and how it negatively affects his future (Burnett 193, 201); if he, contrary to expectation, survives, he knows he will be a hunchback. Whether he lives or dies, he knows that he will not be able to have a normal life. The story reveals that Colin uses a wheelchair to move around, which helps him achieve a more normal life. When the chair is first mentioned, it is referred to negatively: "I would let them take me there [the secret garden] in my chair" (Burnett 149). The chair can be understood as a negative element because Colin indicates he does not want to use the chair, but he accepts the way of transportation anyway for a more significant cause: Colin wants to experience the secret garden. Instead of stating, 'I will make them take me there in the chair,' he uses the verb 'let,' thus showing the reader that using the chair is not something he likes to do, and because he has to use it, it can be understood as an element which points out the negative sides of his disability; the chair functions as a reminder of what he is unable to do. The choice of the term 'let' also invites pity from the reader, corresponding with how older literature often used

disabled characters to tempt sympathy and pity (Barker & Murray 2). Having to move around in a chair takes away some of Colin's freedom, which can be linked back to the purpose of CL as educational, where the children are taught that they will lose their freedom being disabled, so they should not behave like Colin. The wheelchair portrays Colin's disability negatively because it acts as a negative reminder for Colin; he must use it because he has a hunchback, further reminding him of his early death.

In addition to describing himself, Colin also compares himself to Dickon, contrasting their health and abilities, further emphasising a negative view of physically disabled characters. Colin explains how Dickon will push him in the wheelchair, stating that Dickon is "A very strong boy I know" (Burnett 219). Through this description, Colin automatically portrays himself as weak; Colin is too weak to roll his wheelchair, and because Dickon is strong, he can do it for Colin. Moreover, Colin compares Dickon to an animal charmer, ultimately removing himself from being human; "He's a sort of animal-charmer, and I am a boy animal" (Burnett 175). Firstly, this puts the two boys in a hierarchy where Dickon is in control, and Colin is inferior. Colin turns himself into someone who needs to be charmed into control by Dickon. Making the disabled person 'inferior' to someone else makes them less worthy; Colin views himself as less worthy than Dickon. While he does not use terms like 'monster' or 'freak,' the term 'animal' can be understood as equally negative, thus showing how *The Secret Garden* corresponds with the common use of negative terms when describing disabled characters (Mitchell & Snyder 2; Holdsworth 192; Wheatley; Scrofano 4). In this way of using the term 'animal' as a description of himself, Colin's disability has reversed the two boys' social standings; Colin, living in a mansion, is initially positioned higher up in the hierarchy than Dickon, the boy from the Moors. Due to the disability and Colin's comparisons, Dickon moves up above Colin in this hierarchy. This way of portraying the disabled characters brings the reader to an understanding that when you are disabled, your status within society automatically diminishes to one which is lower than the able-bodied people.

By describing himself as animal-like and not human, Colin also removes his humanity and ability to control himself. Colin distances himself from his emotions and actions by removing his humanity. Because of his disability, Colin does not have control over his body and needs a charmer to control him, which is Dickon. Colin views his disability as removing control over his body and thus negatively impacting himself. This can be connected to Dickon's treatment of animals as equal to humans; Dickon does not treat Colin differently than the other human characters, showing how even though Colin almost views himself as an animal in a degrading manner, animals are also family and should be treated equally according to Dickon. Where Colin's removal of his humanity can be a way to show how inferior his disability has made him, Dickon's equal treatment pushed back on that portrayal; they are all equal, disabled or not, human or animal. Already here, there is a change in how Colin is portrayed as a disabled character; Dickon is a small change to Colin's environment: environment being what hinders Colin, according to the social model. By changing who Colin is surrounded by, the view and presentation of his disability also change, albeit it being a small change at this point.

In addition to how Colin talks about and describes himself, the other characters in the novel also impact how Colin is portrayed as a disabled character; the staff at Misselthwaite have a unanimous negative attitude, assumptions, and opinions regarding Colin and his illness. In several instances, regardless of their positions at the house, the staff regards Colin as 'a cripple,' 'invalid,' and 'half-witted' (Burnett 183, 194, 227, 283). The term 'cripple' is a reoccurring stereotype of disability in older literature (Roshini &

Rajasekaran 552), and when putting it together with the other terms, the novel presents a view of disability through the more minor characters' attitudes as something negative. By giving the more minor characters a voice on Colin's disability, the novel offers more than one portrayal of disability. Because these attitudes are present in Colin's home, the reader encounters these characters frequently and is given an understanding of Colin's disability as something that affects not only him but also those around him. The way he acts, arguably because of his disability, affects the adults around him and their daily lives, and vice versa; the way those around Colin treat him on the assumptions of his disability affects how he behaves as well as his day-to-day life. In addition to the perspectives of those close to Colin, the opinions of minor characters are also presented, which have a negative impact on how he is depicted.

Colin and his disability are subject to negative opinions from other adults in Yorkshire, in addition to those more local at Misselthwaite. One other adult from Yorkshire stated that "[t]he thing he had heard oftenest was that he might die at any moment and there had been numerous fanciful descriptions of a humped back and helpless limbs, given by people who had never seen him" (Burnett 235). When talking about Colin, the adults seem to primarily focus on his condition and how it has negatively affected the boy, which corresponds with understanding disabilities through the medical model. Although these comments are not directed directly towards Colin, they give the reader an understanding of how disability should be viewed and understood according to the adults; the adults at the mansion and in Yorkshire view Colin's disability as something they know and are superior to. The adults' negative attitudes towards Colin and his disability are likely due to rumours and perceptions that have spread throughout Misselthwaite and beyond. It is possible that someone exaggerated Colin's condition at some point, leading to a muddled understanding of his situation. As people gossip and pass on information, their views of Colin's disability become conflated, making it difficult to determine whether they pity him or find him repulsive. If the story only presented the adults' thoughts and attitudes regarding Colin and his disability, and not the other children's, the portrayal of the disabled character would be vastly different; because the adults focus on Colin as a liability, he, as a disabled character, would merely function as a negative part of the story. It is possible that at the time *The Secret Garden* was released, parents and adults did not want children to behave as Colin does at the beginning of the story, in addition to not wanting children growing up treating other people the way the adults treat Colin in *The Secret Garden*. Not only do adults have their say in how Colin, a person with a disability, is perceived, but Mary and Dickon also contribute their own perspectives. By doing so, they shed light on how differently people with disabilities are treated, as the way Mary and Dickon portray Colin often contrasts with the other adults' portrayals. It is worth noting that Colin primarily interacts with the staff at Middelthwaite. His portrayal changes significantly once he leaves the house more frequently to spend time with other children his age.

The staff and other adults from Yorkshire talk about Colin noticeably differently than the children, Mary and Dickon. The difference between the children's and adults' portrayals is clear: "Dickon's glance at him was delicately cautious. Neither he nor Mary had ever asked if anything was the matter with his legs" (Burnett 251). The children acknowledge Colin's disability but do not always comment on the disability. As a result, the two children treat him with greater respect by not asking about his legs, compared to the staff at Misselthwaite. This is because the children view the world and Colin's illness differently than the adults around them, in addition to having regular contact with each other. On the one hand, it is worth considering whether the adults would treat Colin the same way as

the children if they spent more time with him. On the other hand, however, the adults' portrayal of Colin and his disability corresponds with the medical model of understanding disabilities, thus allowing the reader to understand the impact different environments have on a disabled person through the contrast between the adults and children. In addition, the reader better understands Colin's disability with two different portrayals; Colin is not only introduced based on how the adults view him, highlighting the importance of understanding how the social model works. In an environment that accepts Colin and his disability, he can flourish and live a normal life, equal to any other child his age. Moreover, because Mary and Dickon tailor their trips to the garden according to how it would be easiest for Colin to join them, they adjust the environment so as not to hinder the disabled character. Thus, the change from negatively portraying Colin and his disability towards a positive one is seen in the changes he goes through after spending more time with the other children and changing his environment.

Readers must acknowledge and understand that the adults and children in *The Secret Garden* understand disability differently. Mary sees beyond Colin's disability and focuses on him as a person instead of seeing him as a spoiled childish boy like the staff did. Mary uses the term 'invalid' to describe how Colin is not; "he scarcely looked like an invalid at all except that his face was so colourless, and he was always on the sofa" (Burnett 172). Mary can reverse how the reader understands Colin and his disability based on what the staff has portrayed him as previously. As a result, she can take back the autonomy of the reader's perspective of Colin as a disabled character. Although Colin could not do certain things, Mary did not perceive him as an invalid. Mary's description of Colin as 'colourless' rather than pale can, in addition, substantiate the suggestion that adults and children understand disability differently in the book; where an adult might have described Colin as pale, Mary merely saw that he had less colour in his face, compared to herself. Children reading the book might not notice this as childlike; however, they can achieve a more detailed understanding of Colin based on this description. When the staff see a spoiled disabled boy, Mary sees beyond the disability and focuses on how Colin is as a person. The reason for this is the simplified description of Colin made by Mary. Instead of overanalysing and having to find the correct or proper descriptive words, Mary probably used the first term she thought of. The interaction between the children is challenging to picture with Colin and the other adults; because of the children's similar ages, the way they communicate and view the world would be more similar. Although this is not something children need to be taught, it can be worth considering how similar this is to the real world, where adults might not always understand children and their communication.

Mary and Dickon do not hold a continuous negative attitude towards Colin and his disability; however, at one point, Mary suggests that Colin's concern about a lump on his back is tied to a mental disability. She uses the term 'hysteric' to describe Colin's behaviours when he expresses concern about the lump on his back; "If you did it was only a hysterical lump. Hysterics makes lumps" (Burnett 201). The term "hysterics" or "hysteria" has been tightly connected to mental disability. In addition to describing "women's emotions through accusations of mental disability" (Schalk 181), the term 'hysteric' has historically been used to describe disabled people, which in turn dehumanised them (Mitchell & Snyder 15). Mary seems to hint at the fact that Colin's physical disabilities are tied to a possible mental disability; his thoughts about himself affect him in a way that gives him a physical disability. In her statement that "hysterics makes lumps," Mary suggests that Colin's belief in his physical disability may be causing it. His fear of developing a hunched-back and dying young affects his physical body in a way that disables

him. This raises the question of whether Colin's belief in a physical lump on his back is a manifestation of a mental disability. In older literature, hysteria was often associated with mental disabilities and could teach children not to be frantic and rather behave themselves and be calm and collected. Today, however, it could be used to teach children that they should not invalidate others' feelings. Colin's physical lump, real or not, represents his disability and affects his life, whether purely physical or due to a mental disability. The connection between a character's mentality and physical activity is undeniable. The reader is shown how Colin is complex as a disabled character and, in turn, how complex disabilities can be. Henceforth, Colin serves as a representation of the journey that a disabled person may experience. His character highlights the impact of physical and mental disabilities on one's life, with an evolvment from being portrayed in a negative way, towards a positive one.

In *The Secret Garden*, Colin is a complex and crucial character who helps drive the plot forward. Despite being portrayed negatively by himself and others for much of the novel, the reader can see the complex life of a disabled character as Mary and Dickon offer positive descriptions of him, resulting in Colin's portrayal being more nuanced. This is achieved by highlighting how he responds positively to kind treatment from children, in contrast to how he behaves based on the adults' mistreatment of him. Although there are still negative comments about Colin at the end of the book, these are directed towards his past behaviour. Colin serves a purpose in the story beyond just a moral lesson, as the plot of the novel is not about how Colin overcomes his disability, but rather about Mary finding and regrowing the secret garden. His important role in the story has a powerful impact on how readers perceive disabled characters; his presence is essential to the plot rather than being included merely for diversity. *The Secret Garden* is a novel that students could greatly benefit from including in their curricula, which will be explored later.

Chapter 3: *Finding Nemo*

The children's movie *Finding Nemo* was released in 2003 and its representation of disability is researched extensively. The story features multiple characters with both mental disabilities and physical disabilities and explores various characters' backgrounds, showing character development and growth throughout the movie. The story's protagonist is the clownfish Marlin, who is on a quest to find his son Nemo after some divers on a boat abducted him. Nemo ends up in a fish tank in Sydney, where he meets and befriends new fish and sea creatures. On the journey to rescue his son, Marlin meets a blue tang fish named Dory; together, they cross the ocean, meeting other sea creatures who, in turn, help in the search for Nemo.

Various disabilities are represented through the movie's characters. For depth, relevance, and focus, the following analysis regards two main characters, Nemo and Dory, rather than briefer analyses of more characters. Nemo and Dory are two of the story's three main characters, in addition to the protagonist, Marlin. Michael Bérubé states that "the dynamics of disability compel us to recognise that there will always be among us people who cannot represent themselves and must be represented" (572). Commenting on Bérubé, Megan R. Brown reflects that "[t]hese pictorial and textual fish phrases provide avenues to bridge the theoretical gap between the medically diagnosed disabilities and the reality of socially constructed practices that influence the lives of those who have a disability" (208). Using fish as characters with disabilities creates representation equal to all; a non-disabled person does not perform as a disabled person, and the fish simplifies the understanding of what disability is. Together with *The Secret Garden*, this movie contributes to a modern understanding of literature that represents disabled characters because of its newer date of publication, and it can, therefore, also show whether it follows newer understandings of disabilities or holds attitudes similar to older literature.

Although *Finding Nemo* is a relatively new movie, it holds some parts that can be connected to how disabled characters were portrayed in older literature. Many descriptions used in older literature created a link between the disabled character and negativity, leading to a perception of disabled characters as different and negative, which is not primarily seen in *Finding Nemo*. However, in one instance, Nemo's little fin is called "gimpy": "I know your son [...] he's got a gimpy fin on one side" (*Finding Nemo* 01:17:56-01:18:00). The pelican Nigel says this to Marlin. The word "gimpy" describes a lame and crippled person and is also used to describe disabled people (OED). This term can be seen as correlating with older literature, which diverges from how *Finding Nemo* generally addresses disabilities. In terms of changes in definitions of disability and an evolution in how disabled characters are portrayed, this part of the movie shows how some people still do not follow a modern understanding in conjunction with the social model, as discussed earlier. As such, the inclusion of this small comment by Nigel reflects how some are not educated on which words are harmful to use and which are not. As Nigel does not repeat this term at any other time, it can be assumed that he did not use it maliciously but is simply uneducated. This also allows for more nuance when analysing works from eras decades apart; it is important to avoid the idea that modern creators know better than older creators, thus allowing for more than one way to present and represent disabled characters within the same literary work.

Finding Nemo is a modern movie which reflects the changes in recent decades from understanding disabilities through a medical model to a social model. The idea that a

disability is created by barriers created by society, following the social model (Preston & Fink 56; Adams et al. 8; Siebers 738), is a clear focus in the movie. Rather than adapting to Nemo having a small fin, Marlin hinders his son from being able to do certain things; at the beginning of the movie, Nemo gets stuck in a plant, and Marlin expresses that Nemo is unable to get out and needs help from his dad (*Finding Nemo* 00:05:52-00:05:58). Marlin is not hostile towards Nemo because of his disability but has prejudice towards his son, as Marlin expects Nemo not to be able to fend for himself. It is crucial to distinguish between Nemo and Colin in this context. Nemo's father hinders him because he fears for Nemo's safety. In contrast, in Colin's case, the adults around him refer to his disability as something negative, which portrays him negatively. In short, the different reasons why adults in *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* treat and negatively describe the physically disabled are important to recognise and see the differences.

The difference between Nemo and Dory, who suffers from short-term memory loss, is important because it shows how the social model works. Nemo has grown up with a father telling him what he cannot do because of his little fin, and as a result, he believes he cannot do certain things. One example of this is when he is in the fish tank telling Gil he "has a bad fin", and Gil explains that a bad fin has never stopped him (*Finding Nemo* 00:30:06-00:30:14). On the opposite side of this is Dory, who seemingly has never experienced anyone telling her she cannot do things, as she is positive and believes she can both read human and talk whale (*Finding Nemo* 00:24:26-00:24:32, *Finding Nemo* 01:05:56-01:06:46). The different surroundings around Nemo and Dory have allowed them to grow differently as disabled characters. Nemo, Dory, and Colin are presented and portrayed differently, showing three ways a disabled character can be presented. Despite these differences, all three characters are given ample room for growth in storylines that do not solely focus on their disabilities. As a result, these stories serve as examples of how to effectively include disabled characters without putting a focus on disability.

The movie can also be understood as being heavily influenced by recent changes in how mentally disabled characters are portrayed in fiction. Dory is a character with a mental disability who is aware of this herself. In the story, she is not portrayed as mad, which diverges from how mentally disabled characters were often portrayed in older literature (Scrofano 4). Dory never says anything extraordinary which could suggest that she is mad, nor is she perceived as mad by any of the sea creatures she and Marlin meet, such as the turtles, sharks, and other fish. Because of how Dory behaves and how the other characters treat her, she comes off to the viewer as a regular blue tang fish with short-term memory loss.

The only exception in how other characters treat Dory is Marlin from the start of the movie through most of the story. In their first encounter, Marlin says to Dory, "Something is wrong with you, really. You're wasting my time" (*Finding Nemo* 00:18:50-00:18:54), and shortly after describes her as a fish causing delays because of her mental disability (*Finding Nemo* 00:41:25-00:41:32). Although Marlin's view and treatment of Dory initially are based on his suppositions, this can also be viewed as a representation of how disabled characters were treated in older literature. Combining his attitude towards Nemo and Dory, Marlin is a barrier to the disabled characters. Marlin's attitude towards and perception of Dory persists during most of the movie, as he calls her "insane" when she explains she can speak whale; "you're insane! You can't speak whale" (*Finding Nemo* 01:05:56-01:06:46). However, towards the end, after the two fish have gotten to know each other, Marlin's perception changes, as seen in his dialogue with Dory at the end of the movie: "Dory. If it wasn't for you, I never would have even made it here. So thank you" (*Finding Nemo*

01:22:35-01:22:44). What is interesting, however, is that the other fish Marlin and Dory encounter on their journey to find Nemo do not describe nor dismiss Dory as mad or different. Disabled characters face different interactions with different people, depending on people's prejudices and other factors. Disabled people face obstacles that non-disabled people do not have to conquer in their daily lives, and the evolution of Marlin's perception of Dory and her disability can function as a way to educate the viewers on how they can better address disabled people, which in turn can create a more regular shift towards the social model for understanding disabilities.

Nemo initially sees himself as equal to his school friends, but this changes as the story progresses. His confidence is evident as he tells his father, "I can swim fine, dad" (*Finding Nemo* 00:13:20-00:13:24), and he believes he has equal swimming skills to his new friends. Nemo's disability does not hold him back; he strives to prove this to himself and his peers. However, his father's caution may cause him to doubt himself sometimes, as seen when he swims to touch the boat. The interaction between Nemo and his father is important, as it can either show Nemo's self-confidence or his desire to prove his father wrong. This emotional complexity reveals that Nemo's disability may influence his decisions. Nemo is taunted by his classmates, who claim he is unable and too scared to touch the boat, and his father forbids him to touch the boat:

Octopus: Sir [Marlin], he [Nemo] wasn't gonna go!

Fish: Yeah, he was too afraid!

Nemo: No I wasn't. [...]

Marlin: You can't swim well.

Nemo: I can swim fine, dad, okay?

Marlin: No, its not okay. You shouldn't be anywhere near here. [...] You think you can do these things but you just can't Nemo (*Finding Nemo* 00:13:12-13:26).

Following this interaction, Nemo swims to the boat, taunting his dad whilst keeping his bigger fin close to the boat: "Don't you dare. If you put one fin on that boat. Are you listening to me? Don't touch the bo- NEMO!" (*Finding Nemo* 00:14:30-00:14:50). Right after Nemo touched the boat, a diver grabs him. Looking at how CL was initially supposed to educate children, the sequence is seen as educational in two ways. While this scene can teach children to believe in themselves and not allow any adult or classmates to stand in their way, it can also serve as a lesson about the consequences of not listening to parents.

Nemo's attitude towards his disability transforms when he is away from his father's protective presence. His father's concern has led to an overprotective stance, influencing Nemo's belief in his capabilities. This altered mindset appears when Nemo is given the chance to explore independently. For instance, when Nemo tells his friends, "Hey guys, wait up" (*Finding Nemo* 00:12:14-00:12:18), his smaller fin works twice as hard to keep up. This change in mindset can be attributed to his father's influence and Nemo's fear of not being equal to others. As Nemo's perspective evolves, he struggles with accepting his uniqueness while battling self-doubt. These internal conflicts result from external judgments that affect his self-worth and resilience, showing the viewer the importance of self-acceptance. Nemo's father's overprotective stance has influenced Nemo's belief in his own capabilities. When allowed to explore independently, Nemo's mindset changes, and

he struggles with accepting his uniqueness while battling self-doubt. These internal conflicts highlight the importance of self-acceptance and resilience, pointing to allowing disabled people to have independence and grow confidence.

As mentioned, Nemo's capturers took him to a fish tank in Sydney, and his self-perception changes significantly throughout his time in the fish tank. At first, he expresses uncertainty about his abilities, confessing, "My fin is bad" (*Finding Nemo* 00:30:06-00:30:14), which contradicts his earlier claim of being an excellent swimmer. Nemo's dependence on his father becomes clear when he cries out, "Daddy, help me!" (*Finding Nemo* 00:29:38-00:29:44), echoing his father's scepticism. He faces challenges inside the tank, and Nemo's confidence in his own capabilities falter, as shown by his exclamation, "I can't do it" (*Finding Nemo* 00:49:53-00:50:00). This repetition highlights Nemo's growing belief that his disability is a hindrance, something which can allow disabled viewers to relate to Nemo. An important part to acknowledge when looking at how disabled people are presented and represented is whether they portray situations disabled people go through. In this, self-doubt is not something to strive for, but it allows the viewer to see that the disabled character grows and gains confidence. It is easier to relate to and understand the struggles when the disabled characters show true emotions and attitudes about their disability. Nemo's journey within the tank exposes him to new perspectives, leading to personal growth and a reassessment of his strengths. Nemo learns from the other fish in the tank, and his view of himself changes to believe he can do what the other fish can, plus more.

After some time in the fish tank, Nemo decides to break the water pump on his own and later helps the herd of fish in the ocean break free from the fishnet, showing the strengths of his disability. In the first segment, Nemo decides to try a second time to break the water pump; the only difference this time is that he is doing it alone. Without saying anything, the viewer can see on Nemo's face that he is determined to succeed this time (*Finding Nemo* 01:00:16-01:00:35). The second segment occurs after Nemo escaped from the fish tank and reunited with his dad. As some fishers capture loads of fish in a fish net, Nemo wants to help them break free, but his dad fears losing his son again. Nemo reassures his dad, saying, "I can do this" and "Lucky fin" (*Finding Nemo* 01:27:42-01:27:52). Nemo's view of himself has changed, and he is more confident. In contrast to the movie's beginning, his decision is not based on a will to contradict his dad but rather a genuine belief in himself. This change can correlate with how the fish in the tank treated and viewed him, unlike his dad. Those with physical disabilities can do the same as those without disabilities if they are given the opportunity, support and facilitation based on their disability; their disability does not measure their strength. The importance of how people treat those with disabilities and that the way disabled people are treated greatly affects them is an important and valuable lesson to learn, one which is simplified in *Finding Nemo* by using fish as characters.

How Nemo views himself has also been affected by how other characters view him. Gil from the fish tank, who also has a different fin, is outspoken in how he views the positive potential Nemo brings and never comments on Nemo's small fin as a problem. After Nemo excuses himself for not being able to stop the water pump because of his "bad Fin," Gil responds by saying, "never stopped me" (*Finding Nemo* 00:30:07-00:30:15). In addition, as Gurgle states about Nemo that "He's not a great swimmer. No offence, kid," Gil's response is, "He's fine. He can do it" (*Finding Nemo* 00:40:05-00:40:13). These two instances show that Gil never focuses on Nemo's disability as a challenge or disadvantage. Preston and Fink point out that the correlation between Gil's damaged fin and Nemo's small

fin “allows Nemo to understand that a physical deformity need not negatively affect the life led” (58), allowing the reader to do the same through the eyes of Gill. In Gil’s eyes, Nemo is equally as good as the other fish and has even more potential because of his generally small size, and “[n]ever once does Gil tell Nemo he can’t do something” (Preston & Fink 58), showing Nemo’s view and understanding of himself and his disability changed from how he viewed it at the story’s beginning to after being in the fish tank; Nemo was greatly affected by new attitudes towards his small fin. This amplifies the understanding of the environment around the disabled characters as powerful, as Marlin creates a contrasting environment filled with fear and hindrances, compared to the one Nemo experiences in the fish tank. Like Colin, Nemo also changes the story. Colin’s biggest transformation is due to the people around him; while *Finding Nemo* also focuses on this, there is a greater emphasis on the shift in attitudes of those closest to Nemo, particularly his father. The two works portray disabled characters differently, allowing more nuance to the discussion of what is a positive and fair representation of disabled people. Different does not necessarily mean one is preferred above the other.

Marlin views Nemo’s disability negatively from the beginning of the story, in the sense that he is overprotective of his son and believes it hinders his son from doing certain things. He believes the small fin is something everybody else needs to be aware of and considerate of, as Marlin is afraid he could lose Nemo. In the beginning, when Nemo gets stuck, Marlin exclaims that Nemo needs help, depicting Nemo as “‘less able’ than other fish” (Preston & Fink 57), showing the viewer that disabled people are less able because of their disabilities. Marlin never says anything directly negative about Nemo’s small fin, as he is hyping it up by calling it a ‘lucky fin.’ On the one hand, this could prove that Marlin does not look at the disability as something negative. On the other hand, however, Marlin is trying to cover his belief; Nemo cannot do everything the other fish can because of his physical disability. This can be seen as he explains to the other children about Nemo’s small fin; “he was born with it, kids. We call it his lucky fin” (*Finding Nemo* 00:09:15-00:09:20). Calling the fin “lucky” automatically shows that it is something positive, which could be an excellent way to cover up his thoughts and attitudes towards it. It is important to take note of the possible reasons why Marlin acts and treats Nemo the way he does, as this is also something family members of disabled people can relate to. There is a possibility that the overly positive descriptions of Nemo’s small fin as “lucky” can be a cover-up for Marlin’s fear for his son.

The children Nemo meets at the school have similar attitudes to how Gil in the fish tank treats Nemo’s disability. The children ask, “What’s wrong with his fin? He looks funny,” when they first see Nemo. After Marlin explains, they start comparing the fin with their quirks: one has a shorter tentacle, the other is H₂O intolerant, and the third is obnoxious (*Finding Nemo* 00:09:08-00:09:33). In this exchange, the children show that they are aware of Nemo’s fin being different from others, but rather than focusing on it as being different, they start comparing it to how they are different. The children “acknowledge the difference and take it in stride, creating an atmosphere free (at least for the moment) of disability” (Preston & Fink 57), and they do not view the small fin as something weird or a problem. The school children’s response to Nemo lets the viewer understand how they behave and respond differently than grownups such as Gil and Marlin. Preston and Fink point out that “[w]hat is particularly nice about this exchange is that the kids share their differences with Nemo as well, establishing that they are all different in that they each have different attributes, but on some level that makes them the same, too” (Preston & Fink 57). As soon as the exchange is over and the school children have all shared their

quirks, they never mention or focus on Nemo's small fin again and treat him equally to themselves. This small but powerful exchange between the children shows the viewer that acknowledging other people's disabilities does not have to mean that they ask questions or discuss the disability. The encounter between Nemo and the other children is a reflection of how children behave differently compared to adults when treating people with disabilities; the children are open and share their quirks, while the parents do not. Though sharing their quirks, this scene from *Finding Nemo* can show children that no one is perfect, and everyone has something that is uniquely their trait.

In *The Secret Garden*, Mary and Dickon's treatment of Colin parallels how school children treat disabled Nemo. This comparison highlights a divide between the positive and open attitudes of most children and the negative and prejudiced attitudes of adults towards disability. Therefore, the use of *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* in educating children is important, as adults greatly influence children's understanding of disabilities as they grow up. Together, *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* show that children may be less judgmental towards people with disabilities than adults, and this difference may be more relevant to the adult audience, as children may be more focused on understanding how to treat others. To be clear, that does not mean that children should not be introduced to and learn about disabled people through these literary works; attitudes are learnt from adults around the children, and to change understandings about and attitudes towards disabled people, there needs to be an openness already when they are children.

Combining Nemo's physical disability with Dory's mental disability highlights the importance of how an environment can change a disabled person's view of their own abilities. Nemo and his father view Nemo's disability as a hindrance to what Nemo can and cannot do from the movie's beginning. However, as the story progresses, Nemo's understanding changes, which he can show his dad, who also changes his view of his son's disability. In contrast to Nemo, Dory has a mental disability, which is not as easy to see because it is not visible on her body. However, she explains that she "suffers from short-term memory loss" (*Finding Nemo* 00:18:26-00:18:30), and the viewer is made aware of her disability for the rest of the story. This can be seen in correlation with what Preston and Fink point out, that "the focus is not on 'fixing' the person with the impairment, but rather how society can improve integration of people as they are" (56). Other characters' views of Nemo show the social model's point about rising partly from environmental barriers, as Nemo's change in behaviour can be observed in correlation to how the fish around him treat him and his disability. Because Dory has never experienced society pointing out her disability negatively, nor having to 'fix' her disability, her stark contrast to Nemo's experience illustrates how society and people treat those disabled influence people with disabilities.

How Dory is presented to the viewer for the first time affects their understanding of Dory and her disability. Dory first appears when Marlin searches for Nemo and she offers to show him where a boat went. As they swim together, Dory forgets she was helping Marlin and exclaims, "Will you quit it? I'm just trying to swim here. What? The ocean isn't big enough for you? Or something like that? [...] Stop following me, ok?" (*Finding Nemo* 00:17:47-00:18:02). This monologue shows the viewer that within a couple of seconds, Dory forgot she agreed to help Marlin and that she was the one telling him to follow her. After Marlin exclaims this, she once again says that she saw a boat and can guide Marlin to it. Marlin responds that she has already said this, and Dory explains her mental disability: "I'm so sorry. See, I suffer from short-term memory loss" (*Finding Nemo* 00:18:26-00:18:30). This interaction shows that Dory is aware of her disability, and how

it affects both herself and others. In turn, her actions here also affect how the viewer perceives her; because she forgot that she was guiding Marlin and responded the same way twice, the viewer is already aware that she has a mental disability, and with her stating that she suffers from short-term memory loss, this fact is even more clear.

Compared to Nemo and Colin, Dory is the only character whose disability is only mental and, therefore, invisible. In the readers' and viewers' first encounters with Nemo and Colin, their physical appearances are described, and the audience is soon given information on how they are limited to moving around compared to other characters their age. However, Dory explicitly says and describes her mental disability, allowing the audience to understand how she is disabled. The difference between the physically disabled Nemo and the mentally disabled Dory allows for a more realistic representation of disabled characters, as it shows the different challenges. Mentally disabled people have to inform others that they are disabled, and the differences between the presentations of the characters can show the viewer that mental disabilities are invisible. Therefore, unless the disabled person or character informs that they are disabled, others will never know.

At one point in the movie, Dory's disability causes her distress, and her personality changes drastically for a short period of time; she loses her memories and becomes unsure, afraid, and unable to move forward. The phrase "I can't remember" demonstrates her struggle with her disability. The passage where Dory resents her disability is after she and Marlin believe Nemo is dead. Marlin wants to forget everything they went through together, and in a monologue, she expresses her fears, showing vulnerability and how she feels,

Stop! Please don't go away... Please. No one's ever stuck with me for so long before, and if you leave... If you leave... I remember things better with you, I do! Look, P. Sherman 42... 42... Bah! I remember it, I do! It's there! I... I know it is, because when I look at you, I can feel it! And I... I look at you, and I... I... I'm home. Please, I don't want that to go away, I don't want to forget (*Finding Nemo* 01:23:03-01:23:45)

Dory lets the viewer know how she feels about her disability, showing that she is aware of forgetting things and how this affects both herself and others negatively. After having lived alone for what is presumed to be a long time, her time with Marlin has resulted in her remembering things for more extended periods. When confronted with the possibility of losing this, she has negative feelings about her disability. After Marlin leaves her, the viewer sees how negatively Dory's disability can affect her. She is left in a completely unknown place, is in severe distress not knowing where she is, but believes she has lost something; "I don't know where I am. I don't know what's going on. I think I lost somebody, but I... I can't remember" (*Finding Nemo* 01:24:51-01:25:00). Marlin's treatment of Dory as his friend and companion affected Dory, and as soon as he left her, her disability affected her in a drastic way, which was caused by him leaving.

Connecting this to the social model, Dory's change is seen as a result of the environment around her. Her disability causes her distress, and the phrase "I can't remember" shows that she has tried to figure out where she is and why she is there. The distress can be understood as her reacting to her disability. This contrasts with how Dory's personality has been up to this point; when her short-term memory loss affects her, and she loses her memories, her whole persona changes, and she is almost understood as a different fish. This means that when her disability affects her more and she remembers

less, her personality seems to fade away and be replaced by another character who is unsure, afraid, and does not know how to move forward. In this view of herself, Dory shows vulnerability and how her disability can sometimes affect her negatively. Dory seems to be affected by her disability rarely; however, this passage shows the viewer that attitudes towards and regarding one's disability are complex. Similar to how anyone views themselves, disabled characters can view themselves and their disabilities as positive and strong and sometimes as negative and weakening. In contrast to Dory, whose personality changed for the worse at a point towards the end, Colin in *The Secret Garden* got well and healed from his disability after changing his environment, which is why it is important to neither look at only one disabled character in one story isolated, nor one segment of said character alone. To give viewers and readers a more nuanced and fair representation of disabled people, Nemo and Dory, combined with Colin, show how disabled people experience the world and the obstacles created by society.

Throughout the movie, Dory is aware of her short-term memory loss and does not often let it negatively affect her; she usually seems very confident. As the story progresses, many of Dory's skills are revealed, such as speaking whale and being able to read. Dory has forgotten these skills; "I can read? That's right" (*Finding Nemo* 00:24:26-00:24:32). When meeting a whale, Dory suddenly starts speaking whale, and Marlin doubts her skills; "Dory this is not whale. You're speaking, like, upset stomach" (*Finding Nemo* 01:05:56-01:06:46), in addition, Dory exclaims later; "A whale? You know I can speak whale" (*Finding Nemo* 01:09:58-01:10:01). These instances show that Dory believes in her skills, as she continues to read, taking her own time, and finally deciphers the text, even if she has forgotten her capabilities and skills. Secondly, although Marlin doubts her whale-talking skills, she does not waiver and continues to try to reach out to the whale. Dory never views herself negatively, which can also be seen in the phrase she uses, "Just keep swimming" (*Finding Nemo* 00:32:35-00:32:57; 01:03:27-01:03:32). As she is aware of her disability, her attitude to keep going even though bad things happen shows that she does not let her disability stop her, nor let it affect how she lives her life. An example of this is how she constantly uses the wrong name when referring to Nemo; "Your son Kiko?" (*Finding Nemo* 00:42:55-00:42:58); "His son Bingo" (*Finding Nemo* 01:05:29-01:05:34); "Not much fun for little Harpo" (*Finding Nemo* 01:11:02-01:11:07); "Bye Elmo" (*Finding Nemo* 01:32:14-01:32:18). Although the other fish around her correct her in these instances, she never puts herself down or apologises for saying the wrong name. In turn, how Dory perceives herself and her disability shows the viewer that there is nothing wrong with this disability; Dory can do anything the other fish can, and sometimes more. Her disability is not a negative aspect of her life, as she also repeats the right name for Nemo when she is corrected. Some fish around her adjust the environment to her disability and help her, showing the viewer more prominently how society can help adjust to disabled people so they can do the same able-bodied people can.

Throughout the movie, Marlin shows a clear negative attitude towards Dory's mental disability. After Dory swims around repeating the address and tries to remember it, Marlin tells her he wants to continue without her and says that she is "one of those fish that cause delays" (*Finding Nemo* 00:41:27-00:41:32). Because of her short-term memory loss, Marlin views her as a hindrance between him and his son, as Dory holds him back. After continuing their journey together, Marlin ends up yelling at Dory at one point; "No you can't [speak whale]! You think you can do all these things, but you can't, Nemo!" (*Finding Nemo* 01:12:39-01:12:44). By calling her Nemo, Marlin projects his feelings for his son onto Dory. How he treats her and her disability needs to be understood as complex.

Sometimes, Marlin projects his feelings, but at other times, how he treats Dory is based on her mental disability. The latter can be seen towards the end of the movie, where he gives Dory credit for helping him find his son; "Dory. If it wasn't for you, I never would have even made it here. So thank you" (*Finding Nemo* 01:22:35-01:22:44). Marlin is grateful for Dory and that although he negatively perceived her disability at the beginning of their journey; she was a contributing factor to getting his son back. Marlin changed his attitude towards Dory and Nemo, showing the viewer that everyone can change if they are willing to learn and educate themselves. This is important, because such change in attitude from a non-disabled character allows for a fair representation of both the disabled characters and the characters around; for someone to change their attitude, they might just have to grow and learn more about the disabled character.

When analysing *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, adding some nuance to the discussion is essential. Where *The Secret Garden* might only hold negative portrayals of disabled characters at first glance, *Finding Nemo's* portrayals and representation might only seem positive. However, thorough analysis makes it clear that both texts are more complex, which is also beneficial for students to discuss and reflect on. The portrayal of Nemo in the story is not entirely positive. Therefore, he is included as any other fish and is equally represented. However, Merlin treats him differently because of his smaller fin, which explains why Nemo feels compelled to touch the boat. Alongside the primary plot of Marlin searching for his son, the story also explores Nemo's growth in dealing with his disability. Dory helps highlight the importance of the environment in a modern understanding of disability, thus bringing even more nuance and depth into the understanding of disability, and why *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* should be used in classrooms. Neither book is only negative nor only positive. They both hold nuance that results in disabled characters being included and, as a result, both are examples of literature to include in a curriculum.

Chapter 4: Disability Literature in the Classroom

During the last decade, many researchers have focused on how *Finding Nemo* was revolutionary because it included disabilities while not building the plot around these qualities (Matthew & Clow; Brown; Preston & Fink), making it a good resource to include in the classroom. The movie engages students while at the same time including the important subtheme of representation of disabled people. In contrast to *The Secret Garden* where Colin has to actively use a wheelchair and often talks about his hunchback, the focus of *Finding Nemo* is less on Nemo's smaller fin and more directed towards Marlin's quest to find his son. As such, *Finding Nemo* focuses even less on the theme of disability than *The Secret Garden*. In this, Dory's representation as a mentally disabled character would be more similar to Colin as she, on several occasions, mentions her short-term memory loss. Neither work's storyline focuses explicitly on disability, rather, *The Secret Garden's* main focus is finding and bringing to life the secret garden, and *Finding Nemo's* is Marlin's quest to finding his son. By not having storylines exclusively focusing on the disabilities, *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* represent the disabled characters more equally with their peers, as the characters appear as normal as the other non-disabled characters.

It is crucial for current and future teachers to be conscious of what literature they bring into their classrooms. In this, it is essential for teachers to plan how they want their students to work with the literature presented. Analyses of *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* give a thorough theoretical understanding of why teachers should use these works. While the literary analyses of *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* are significant in showing how the disabled characters are portrayed, presented, and represented, examining practical examples of how teachers can employ and use various parts of the works is important as well. For the context of English classrooms in Norway, the Knowledge Promotion Reform in 2020 (LK20) is important to be aware of, and its core elements are directed towards children at any level.

Because teachers should encourage students to critically analyse the texts with which they are presented, and not merely compare the different media (Maples et al. 78), they need to accommodate their lessons in a way that allows for critical thinking. A movie can be a valuable resource for children in classrooms because it includes a realistic effect that differs from linguistic representation (Carroll 79, 83) in that the students get visual information rather than having to read it. For some students, watching a movie allows them to see more clearly the story, as texts, or linguistic representation, can be challenging for some students to see as reflection of the real world. Therefore, it is even more essential that the teachers do not use movies as a prize for completing other work, as the content can be equally if not more meaningful for the children compared to only reading novels. For *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, we can say that using movies in the classroom can broaden students' understanding of how popular culture portrays disabilities; by analysing movies such as *Finding Nemo* as a form of literature, students can develop more positive and inclusive attitudes towards difference and challenge negative stereotypes (Maples et al. 84), while also helping students develop critical thinking skills which can be applied to non-print forms of text. Developing an awareness of the need to think critical can also be taught by analysing and working with movies such as *Finding Nemo*. To prepare students for future society, teachers must allow students to identify and address negative stereotypes while focusing on how knowledge and education can help remove these stereotypical understandings of disabilities.

Teachers do not have to focus on the theme of disability to include *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* in their classrooms, as children with disabilities could benefit from merely seeing a representation of themselves in classroom texts as mirrors reflecting their lives. At the same time, it is also important for non-disabled people to encounter texts functioning as windows into lives different from their own. By including works that involve disabled characters, teachers invite students with disabilities “to see themselves in the school literacy curricula” (Collins, Wagner & Meadows 116). In addition to the importance of gaining acceptance and decreasing fears of disabled people, it is equally essential for students to encounter window texts, as children who are constantly exposed to reflections of themselves, through mirror texts, may develop an inflated sense of self-importance and value (Bishop 7). In the core elements of LK20, it is explicitly stated that students need to see “their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context” (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2019), and by incorporating *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, the teacher can invite disabled students to see themselves, in addition to allowing able-bodied students to see disabled characters.

For students to encounter both window and mirror texts, teachers should consider where inclusion literature can fit naturally into existing themes and topics in all content areas. The activities used to encourage understanding and reflection of any work can be applied to inclusion literature (Andrews 424). For example, both *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* can be useful for working with different dialects. If choosing *Finding Nemo*, a teacher can gather two or three scenes and work on different English dialects. They can ask the students to identify and compare the different dialects after looking at and comparing a passage with Nemo and Marlin, a passage with Nemo in the fish tank, and one where Marlin meets the sea turtles (*Finding Nemo* 00:05:30-00:07:15; *Finding Nemo* 00:26:04-00:28:57; *Finding Nemo* 00:51:25-00:54:47). *The Secret Garden* can be useful for looking at dialects that differ between social classes. In addition, this contemporary novel includes a lot of historical aspects from England at the turn of the 20th century, making it helpful in working with historical elements. Here, the teacher can also combine historical perspectives with disability.

Whether a teacher chooses to focus on the theme of disability or incorporate disability literature when working with other themes, they must be conscious of how the disabled characters function in the stories. Andrews points out that when deciding what works and stories to include, teachers should be aware that the storyline does not solely focus on their disability but reveals it naturally. In this, it is also important to avoid one-sided portrayals and biased depictions and choose relatable stories about everyday struggles that appeal to a broad audience. The works should depict disabled characters as multi-dimensional individuals with their own experiences and development, not perpetuating negative stereotypes, allowing disabled characters to be as complex and interesting as any other literary character (Andrews 423-424). To follow this guidance from Andrews, a teacher can use a passage from *The Secret Garden* where Colin is in his wheelchair in the garden and combine it with Nemo’s first day at school from *Finding Nemo* (Burnett 237-241; *Finding Nemo* 00:05:30-00:07:15). Together, these parts show physically disabled children that they are represented in literature, and if combined with Merlin’s first encounter with Dory when she points out her mental disability (*Finding Nemo* 00:16:48-00:18:43), students with the same or similar mental disability as Dory also feel represented. A teacher can use these passages like the examples in the paragraph above, encouraging the students to focus on identifying dialects or working with historical aspects that are recognisable in 20th century literature. Due to *The Secret Garden* and *Finding*

Nemo's representation of disabled characters, teachers could, with many possible ways, include these works to work with disability themes.

An important aspect in both *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* is the differences in how other characters treat and portray the disabled characters and how the disabled characters treat and describe themselves. Whether the disabled characters are based on the medical model, the social model, or a combination of both, the teacher need to be aware of and address the difference when deciding what to include, as the difference in these models are especially important for non-disabled children to understand. Investigating how both adults and the other children treat Colin in *The Secret Garden* can allow students to understand better that their actions can have an impact beyond themselves. A way to incorporate this in the classroom is for the teacher to divide the children into groups where they read two segments of the story, one where the adults are talking about and describing Colin (Burnett 235), and the other one when Mary stands up for Colin (Burnett 252-257). Following this, the teacher can ask the students to write a response to what they just read. This session allows the students to be creative and not set any other boundaries on this textual response, aligning with the understanding of children developing their written skills through indirect practice (Hyland 8-9). Core elements in LK20 explain that it is important for students, regardless of age, to reflect on, interpret and critically assess "different types of texts in English [for the pupil to] acquire language and knowledge of culture and society" (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2019). Whether the children have encountered disabilities and disabled people before or not, it is valuable to approach disability literature in a way that displays diverse societies, in addition to the range of disabilities and how differently disabled characters have been and still are portrayed in literary works.

Through working with how other characters in the stories behave towards the disabled characters, teachers can create lessons where students work with the importance and evolution of the social model, in contrast to the medical model mostly used to define disability in earlier works. Being aware of the consequences of how people define disability is important for students to work with. To be able to do this, there needs to be an understanding of what these models are. LK20 expresses that teachers must let students practice their language in practical and authentic situations from the beginning (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2019). Asking the students to discuss in smaller groups before creating their medical and social model definitions would allow for an authentic situation where they must communicate in English. The teacher could then support the work on definitions by providing examples from *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, and, in this, create a learning environment where theory is tied together with practical and/ or textual examples.

To give context to the two models, an example is the short segment in *Finding Nemo* where Nigel the seagull called Nemo "gimpy" (*Finding Nemo* 01:17:56-01:18:00). In contrast to *The Secret Garden*, where many adults refer to Colin as a cripple (Burnett 255), the sequence in *Finding Nemo* can show students the importance of educating themselves on how to talk about disability; it shows students the evolution of how words have been used to describe disabled people, and that although Nigel did not use the term "gimpy" in a degrading manner, the receiving person, or character, could have found this description hurtful. For younger children, the use of fish instead of people can help them understand this message and work with the movie and the theme of disability more easily. The goal here would be for the children to understand that although they did not mean to make a negative comment about their classmates, how their classmates received the

comment might be different; knowledge about disabilities can help students better understand how their words have consequences.

Students can learn how their actions have consequences and see how their words can affect disabled people through working with *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*. Literature can affect readers' emotions and perspectives, increasing awareness and sensitivity towards diversity; reading about disabilities can promote acceptance and understanding, reducing fears and negative stereotypes (Andrews 421-422), allowing for a positive change within children and adults alike. A teacher can focus on one or all three characters' development, as Colin, Nemo, and Dory all show growth based on their environments. Taking Dory as an example, students could better understand the extent to which disabled people can be affected by their disability through working with a combination of two segments, the first being where Dory plays with the turtles and the second being when Marlin leaves her in Sydney (*Finding Nemo* 00:53:45-00:54:00; *Finding Nemo* 01:23:03-01:23:45). In the first segment, the viewer can observe Dory as laughing and playing with the younger turtles. This is in stark contrast to the second segment, as Dory mutters to herself that she is lost, clearly portraying to the viewer that she feels insecure and helpless as she has forgotten where she is and why she is there. For this lesson, it could be valuable to watch the two segments separately and task the students with discussing how they perceived Dory. Then, the teacher could ask the students why Dory changed so drastically from the first to the second segment. For those children and students who do not know much about disabilities, this could be a valuable lesson in learning more about disabilities and understanding how much the environment affects and changes a disabled person's behaviour.

Suppose working with only Dory is insufficient, or the teacher wants to incorporate more specifically how other characters' words affect the disabled characters; the teacher can add segments with Colin and Nemo or combine all three characters in one lesson. If the teacher has a class with older students, the students can be divided into groups that are given one of the three characters. Combining Dory's segments from above, the differences in how Mary and Ben Weatherstaff talk about Colin in the garden (Burnett 251-257) and the differences in how Marlin and Gill treat Nemo based on his small fin (*Finding Nemo* 00:13:00-00:15:00; *Finding Nemo* 00:29:30-00:30:35) can be the subject of discussion. Working alone, in pairs, or in smaller groups would benefit the children before bringing their thoughts to the whole class. First working individually, before moving on to groups, and then bringing the work to a plenary conversation can be useful; students think for themselves before discussing with a few classmates, in a way of scaffolding and sharing pre-existing knowledge (Yildiz & Celik 148-149). This can decrease the fear of speaking up in a plenary discussion, allowing for a more open and positive environment in the classroom. At the end of this lesson, the groups could present their findings on how differently other characters treated the disabled and how that, in turn, affected the disabled's actions and responses.

The way Colin is portrayed as a disabled person in *The Secret Garden* aligns with the stereotypical view of disabled people in older literature, as he overcomes his disability at the end of the story. Colin is such a complex character that he can give students a more comprehensive insight into and understanding of disabled people. The novel uses people-first language, which is considered more progressive, and can help discuss the negative impacts of labelling (Andrews 423), allowing students to consider the positive aspects of calling Colin "a child with a disability" instead of "a disabled child." As the examples in the last sentence show, people-first language puts the person before the disability, rather than

letting the disability define the person. Texts using stereotypical disabled characters can be included in the classroom if the teacher guides the students to realise the stereotypes and how they affect disabled people, thus diminishing the power of these stereotypes (Maples, Arndt & White 81). By doing so, the classroom becomes a place where students can gain knowledge and understanding about the intricate challenges faced by people with disabilities. This understanding encourages students to develop a more inclusive and empathetic language framework beyond just fiction, which they can apply to their interactions in the real world.

In older literature, disabled people were often described using terms and phrases that were associated with villains or portrayed as characters who needed help. However, as it is not practical for students to avoid a significant portion of literature, it is important for them to understand why certain terms and phrases were used in the past and why they are not acceptable now. As terms and phrases that were deemed acceptable at the beginning of the 20th century might be unacceptable today (Andrews 422-423), identifying the stereotypes in the novel also allows the children to be better aware of their vocabulary and use of language, something which the teacher needs to be conscious of in creating tasks, so that these lessons does not further stereotypical understandings about disabled people.

Passages from *The Secret Garden* which can be helpful are when the adults talk badly about Colin (Burnett 235, 283), when the children are in the garden and Ben Weatherstaff finds them (Burnett 252-257), and when Colin compares himself with Dickon, stating that Dickon is an animal charmer whilst Colin himself is an animal-boy (Burnett 175). The way Colin reverses the hierarchy between himself and Dickon, shows a stereotypical way of bringing pity and sympathy for the disabled character (Andrews 423). Teachers can use this passage in two ways and combining them is optional. First, students can identify both ways of writing in order to gain sympathy. Second, as it is also important to discuss the problematic portrayal of disabled characters, the students can also discuss why it can be problematic that the disabled character is described in a way to gain sympathy by comparing and contrasting Colin with the able-bodied Dickon. Although the stereotypical representation of disabled characters can be included in the classroom, it is even more critical that the students can identify and challenge these attitudes to limit "outdated and unhealthy assumptions about real people with disabilities" (Maples et al. 77). By incorporating these historical insights into the classroom, students can raise awareness about the harmful effects of stereotypes and develop a greater understanding of the intricate challenges faced by people with disabilities. The classroom becomes a place where students can gain knowledge and understanding, allowing them to identify and break down harmful assumptions. Ultimately, lessons like these help students raise awareness about the harmful effects of stereotypes and get rid of negative assumptions, leaving the classroom with a deeper understanding of how to interact and communicate with people with disabilities respectfully and empathetically.

When working with and comparing *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, students and children can learn about the representation of disabled people in literature, the evolution of literary content, and get insight into different types of disabilities. The representation of disabled characters in literature should be multi-dimensional and not perpetuate negative stereotypes, in order to get rid of the Us-Them narrative (Rieger & McGrail). Teachers can use passages from *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* to encourage reflection and discussion among students, as these works hold a variety of representations of disabled characters. When Nemo meets his new classmates, they share

their quirks with him, a passage valuable when teaching children that disabilities can be very different (*Finding Nemo* 00:09:08-00:09:33). Combining this with the passage where Colin is being pushed around in his wheelchair and when Dory remembers she can read (Burnett 237-243; *Finding Nemo* 00:24:15-00:24:32), the teacher can allow the students to discover, identify, and discuss the various aspects of different disabilities from the literary works. It is important to avoid basing disabled characters on social understandings of disabilities and instead provide insight into their lives. This is why teachers need to be highly aware and reflective of which literature they bring into their classrooms. Teachers can use passages from *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* to encourage reflection and discussion among students, as these works hold a variety of representations of disabled characters.

When asking whether *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* represent disabled people fairly, the question arises as to whether Colin is merely a means to an end and not a positive representation of a disabled person. On the one hand, Colin changes and overcomes his disability after spending time with Mary and Dickon in the garden, and the story follows Colin and his disability closely. In contrast, characters like Nemo and Dory do not lose their disabilities towards the end of their stories, but it is rather the environment in which they find themselves that changes. On the other hand, there is indeed also a change in Colin's environment, as his challenges are portrayed differently by the people he is surrounded by. In the beginning, he is predominantly around adults, and his portrayal as a disabled person, and his view of himself, gradually changes with the other children. This change in environment coincides with the changes in his disability, showing just how complex disability and the representation of disability are. A literary work is not merely positive or negative in its portrayal of disability. It needs to be understood that there is more nuance to this discussion, and one cannot simply deem *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* as having either positive or negative representations of disabled people. Both hold important aspects that can be understood as positive and negative, something which makes them even more suitable to include in the classroom. Highlighting the stereotypical understanding of disabled people in *The Secret Garden*, a teacher should be able to incorporate both works or choose one of them, and the students would benefit from the variety of the two works.

Building on the analyses of the literary works, the different suggested sessions include focusing on the theme of disability and sessions working on other themes from the curricula, and depending on the time available, a teacher can use the literary works separately or combined. In addition to allowing disabled students to see themselves represented in the curricula, teachers can use literary works which include disabled characters to help children develop compassion and understanding. In this, it can be essential to teach the students about the social model and how it changes their understanding of disabilities. The suggested sessions and their content can be adapted to work for older and younger students and larger and smaller groups of students. Once again, the teacher plays a crucial role in lesson planning due to their thorough understanding of their students. This allows them to make necessary adjustments tailored to the needs of each class.

As this thesis has showed, looking at how a literary work includes disabled characters is important; teachers can analyse other works and analyse how they correspond with the predominant understanding of disability at the time of their release, how do the disabled characters portray and treat themselves, and how do the other characters treat the disabled characters? By being aware of these points, a teacher can

easier decide whether to incorporate the work in the classroom, something which also gives the teachers background for how to incorporate one or several works that include disabled characters.

The analyses of *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* has worked to create theory-based suggestions on incorporating these literary works into classroom teaching. Investigating whether the proposed lessons suit students of different ages in lower and upper secondary schools would be worthwhile. Based on the findings, giving teachers the flexibility to adapt the suggestions to their classes is crucial. While this may result in significant changes, understanding how children respond to the novel, movie, and disability theme is more important than following the suggested lessons as a rigid blueprint. Another approach to further research is to involve more literary works which include disabled characters while not explicitly focusing on them in the story development. Some examples include A. A. Milne's short stories of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, M. W. Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, and B. Sharpsteen's movie *Dumbo*. These literary works could give even more depth to the question of how disabled characters' representation has evolved during the last centuries, in addition to possibly giving more insight into inclusive literature that can be brought into the classroom, resulting in more suggestions for lessons with literature including disabled characters. Inclusive literary works such as *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo* are essential for teachers to bring to their students in safe and thoroughly planned settings.

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Appendix: Relevance for Teaching

Working with representation of disability in literature has showed me how much representation matters, and even more importantly the way literary characters can represent a larger group of people hold a lot of power. I am left with a great respect for knowledge and education in greater forms than school-settings, and I am grateful for learning more about how disabilities have been included and portrayed in literature.

I realise now that teachers will never be fully educated. While working on this thesis, I learned that what is now included in this finished product is only the surface of the massive piece of history of disability in literature. Thanks to the in-depth examinations I conducted on *The Secret Garden* and *Finding Nemo*, I now have a list of valuable lessons that I am eager to put into practice in my own career as a teacher. These lessons have also given me ideas for how to incorporate other inclusive literature so that I end up creating an open and welcoming classroom.

Writing this thesis has showed me the importance of planning and allowing for schedules to change, as I did not always reach all my goals as time went on. As a result, I am left with a greater feeling of reassurance; if I am unable to do it now, I will be able to do it later, which is not the end of the world. This lesson is something I think will be important for me as a future teacher as well; sometimes things do not go according to how you planned it, and you need to improvise.

Because of all the time consumed to writing on, reading and researching for, and revising this thesis, I now have a greater respect for those who write research papers, as it is a lot of hard work. At the same time, I am also sitting here with a lot of appreciation and respect for myself, as this whole thesis is something I can call mine. Having pride in my own work is something I will bring with me when I become a teacher, and I also hope to teach my future students that what they create is always something to be proud of.

Working on this thesis has shown me both why it is essential to give reasons for what literature to include in my classroom, but also how much history affects these decisions. Most importantly, as a future teacher, it is highly relevant for both me and my students to have more knowledge about the importance of inclusivity in classrooms. Inclusion is not limited to disability, and through working on this thesis I have developed a newfound respect and understanding of doing research on topics, novels, and movies, to bring my students something which they can learn and grow from. An essential lesson I have learned through writing and working on this thesis is the importance of preparations and thorough planning before teaching a class. I am left with a great understanding and respect for the work, we as teachers need to do before choosing a lesson's context, especially when deciding what literary works to bring to our students.



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