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Multimodal Representations of Empathy and Agency in Social Justice Graphic Novels

Forging Inclusive Practices in the Norwegian
Lower Secondary EAL Classroom

Master's thesis in Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education
for Years 5–10

Supervisor: Libe García Zarranz

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore how empathy and agency can be taught in the lower secondary English as an Additional Language (EAL) classroom in Norway through the use of graphic novels. To investigate this matter, I have developed two research questions: 1) How are empathy and agency presented in contemporary social justice graphic novels? and 2) What is the potential of emphasizing empathy and agency to promote an inclusive learning environment in Norwegian EAL lower secondary classrooms? In this thesis, I have conducted a qualitative study at the intersection of literary and educational studies, combining the methods of multimodal and narrative analysis (Serafini, 2010, 2014; Riessman, 2008). I have analyzed and discussed two graphic novels with a clear social justice focus. Namely, *Kindred* (2017), written by the African American writer Octavia E. Butler and adapted by artists Damian Duffy and John Jennings, and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), written by the Black Canadian writer Wayde Compton and adapted by the Filipino Canadian illustrator April dela Noche Milne. The mentioned primary texts can both elicit a profound emotional response from the students, as they tell a story about a slave narrative and a migration fable respectively. I have drawn on affect theory in education (Dernikos et al., 2020; Stewart, 2020) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education (Ladson-Billings, 2023) as theoretical frameworks, together with the Norwegian national curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a; 2019b). My findings concern how the Black characters and characters of color are represented multimodally with agency, thus resisting stereotypes and victimization. These texts further invite readers to consider the limits to empathy, a key point I have found relevant in my study. Finally, I have included some critical reflections on how social justice graphic novels can be utilized in the English subject to promote critical thinking, equity, democratic values, and allyship within and beyond the classroom. I hope this thesis encourages other teachers in lower secondary schools to use authentic literature to promote ethical competence and other inclusionary practices.

Keywords: affect theory in education; critical race theory in education; lower secondary literature; contemporary graphic novels; social justice; multimodal analysis; narrative analysis.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven har som mål å undersøke hvordan empati og handlekraft kan undervises i engelsk som tilleggsspråk-klasserommet på ungdomstrinnet gjennom bruk av grafiske romaner. For å undersøke dette har jeg utviklet to forskningsspørsmål: 1) Hvordan fremstilles empati og handlekraft i samtids grafiske romaner som har et fokus på sosial rettferdighet? 2) Hvilket potensiale har vektleggingen av empati og handlekraft, for å fremme et inkluderende læringsmiljø i engelskfaget på norske ungdomsskoler? I denne oppgaven har jeg gjennomført en kvalitativ studie som befinner seg i skjæringspunktet mellom litteratur-og utdanningsvitenskap, der jeg har kombinert metodene multimodal og narrativ analyse (Serafini, 2010, 2014; Riessman, 2008). Jeg har analysert og diskutert to grafiske romaner med tydelig fokus på sosial rettferdighet. Nemlig, *Kindred* (2017), som ble skrevet av den afrikansk-amerikanske forfatteren Octavia E. Butler og tilpasset av kunstnerne Damian Duffy og John Jennings, og *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), skrevet av den afrikansk-kanadiske forfatteren Wayne Compton og tilpasset av den filippinsk-kanadiske illustratøren April dela Noche Milne. Disse primærtekstene kan begge fremkalle en dyp emosjonell respons hos elevene, ettersom de henholdsvis forteller en slavehistorie og en migrasjonsfabel. Jeg har benyttet meg av de teoretiske rammeverkene affektteori i utdanning (Dernikos et al., 2020; Stewart, 2020) og kritisk raseteori i utdanning (Ladson-Billings, 2023), i tillegg til den norske læreplanen (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a;2019b). Funnene mine omhandler hvordan [the Black characters and characters of color] representeres multimodalt med handlekraft, og dermed motstår stereotyper og offerroller. Disse tekstene inviterer leserne til å vurdere begrensningene for empati, noe som er et avgjørende poeng i min studie. Jeg har også inkludert kritiske refleksjoner rundt hvordan grafiske romaner med fokus på sosial rettferdighet kan brukes i engelskfaget for å fremme kritisk tenkning, rettferdighet, demokratiske verdier, og det å være en alliert både i og utenfor klasserommet. Jeg håper denne masteroppgaven oppmuntrer lærere på ungdomstrinnet til å bruke autentisk litteratur for å fremme etisk kompetanse og andre inkluderende praksiser.

Nøkkelord: affektteori i utdanning; kritisk raseteori i utdanning; ungdomslitteratur; samtids grafiske romaner; sosial rettferdighet; multimodal analyse; narrativ analyse.

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Camilla Farbrot, Trondheim 2024

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List of Abbreviations (or Symbols)

| | |
|------------|--|
| BIPOC | Black, Indigenous, and People of Color |
| CRT | Critical Race Theory |
| EAL | English as an Additional Language |
| LK06 | The Norwegian National Curriculum of 2006 |
| LK20 | The Norwegian National Curriculum of 2020 |
| NTNU | The Norwegian University of Science and Technology |
| <i>TBR</i> | <i>The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration</i> (2019) |
| US | United States |

1 Introduction

In this initial section, I open by introducing the background and context of my thesis. This includes an elaboration of my motivation for researching this topic and the relevance of teaching empathy and agency in the Norwegian EAL classroom. Next, I establish the purpose of this study and outline the main two research questions. Subsequently, I reflect on my positionality, as it has taken an important part in shaping my project. Finally, I provide an overview of my thesis and its structure.

1.1 Background and Context

Over the course of my twenty-five years of life, I have experienced a diverse array of emotions. It is even conceivable that, during my life span, I have traversed through the entire spectrum of emotions. As a self-proclaimed overthinker, I often tend to revisit and reanalyze particular moments. Although I do enjoy mentally returning to my experiences of genuine joy and happiness, I believe that my encounters with feelings of anger, grief, and frustration also occupy a significant portion of my time spent reflecting. The latter-mentioned emotions can, for instance, stem from witnessing injustice and ignorance. In general, it appears as though there is a lack of will to acquire knowledge about other perspectives and backgrounds than one's own. Political theorist Achille Mbembe (2019) has conceptualized a kind of affect that he names "racist affect," which "...is partly about how negative and dark emotions circulate between bodies taken as signs of strangeness" (para. 5). In other words, Mbembe (2019) argues that this affect includes how one can develop adverse emotions towards individuals seen as different or unfamiliar. This notion prompted me to contemplate an occurrence that took place during my high school exchange year in the Pacific Northwest region of the US. Essentially, living in this country was both enriching and enlightening, but it also exposed me to sets of beliefs that I had yet to encounter in Norway at that age. One day, I accompanied some of the American people I knew to watch a festive parade. At one point, a group of Sikh people wearing *dastārs* walked past us. Next, one of the individuals I was with expressed something along the lines of: "we better go into hiding now before one of these Muslims blows this place up." These utterances overwhelmed me, and I found myself lost for words. Essentially, I was appalled by the lack of knowledge and hostility conveyed, and I was curious as to how this thought could surface at all. Eight years later, this is an instance that remains with me, and it has been stored in my memory alongside other episodes of hate that have frustrated me in a similar manner.

Furthermore, thinking about ethics, some individuals may look the other way in the face of bigotry, racism, and xenophobia, as they may not feel obliged to advocate for inclusivity and citizenship. Perhaps, one does not recognize the responsibility to show interest in the prevalence of oppression if one is not personally subject to it. In contemporary society, I find that the term *empathy* is employed too lightly and that one trivializes its genuine meaning. It has become so simple these days to claim that one is empathetic, and then avoid the responsibility of actually attempting to understand the feelings of another. Regarding how some white people perceived the assassination of Marquette Frye and the following Watts riots in 1965, writer and scholar Wayde Compton

(2022) expressed that “[t]o understand it would require active listening in good faith, for many a step too far, a task asking too much from their critical and altruistic faculties” (p. 73). This is a notion I believe can be extended to encompass the exploration of other incidents of injustice in general. It appears as though it is too demanding for some individuals to bear the responsibility of simply listening and being an ally these days. In a world that is becoming increasingly vicious and cruel, there must be a larger focus on the development of prosocial behavior, which can be targeted explicitly in schools (Barton & Garvis, 2019). In addition, in my position as a pre-service teacher, I believe it is relevant to have the students be aware of their ability to act and make choices through a focus on agency, and that these choices have ethical repercussions.

Working with literature in educational settings has emerged as a means to acquire knowledge about diverse experiences and backgrounds. According to literary critic Jonathan Culler (2000), stories can have a significant impact on society as they can be “...teaching us about the world, showing us how it works, enabling us... to see things from other vantage points, and to understand others’ motives that in general are opaque to us” (p. 91). The essence of Culler’s (2000) argument is that stories have the potential to teach people about various aspects of society, including perspectives from others than oneself. Statistics Norway (2024) has found that 20,8% of the Norwegian population are either immigrants or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. Norwegian society is thus a heterogeneous one that includes individuals with unique backgrounds and experiences, which is something that should be acknowledged in schools. Despite the pedagogical potential that lies within a classroom consisting of diverse backgrounds, it appears as though the Norwegian educational system is still based on ethno-oriented values that can contribute to perpetuating the racism and discrimination present in society (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Harlap & Riese, 2014). Moreover, it is pertinent that students become aware of this injustice, and that they can, through democratic participation and involvement, contribute to promoting equality and inclusivity for all of Norway’s inhabitants. Educational scholar Eir-Ann Edgar (2020) has noted that “[t]exts that call on students to empathize with characters have the strongest effect of creating engaged readers, sparking conversation, and perhaps even getting students to consider their actions beyond the literature and beyond the walls of the classroom” (p. 68). However, it is possible that the students’ assumed perspective-taking can turn out to be a projection of another’s experience, which can essentially minimize the importance of empathy (Pedwell, 2014). One can question whether there should be a larger focus on exposing students in the EAL classroom to literature that engages and inspires them, while making them consider their capacity to act, rather than having the development of empathy as the main objective.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

To explore how to learn with and teach about empathy and agency through the use of graphic novels, I have developed two research questions. The first is connected to an exploration of the corpus of analysis, and the second is linked to pedagogy and the English subject. My research questions are 1) How are empathy and agency presented in contemporary social justice graphic novels? and 2) What is the potential of emphasizing empathy and agency to promote an inclusive learning environment in Norwegian EAL lower secondary classrooms? Moreover, I believe that through these two research questions, I can get a holistic overview of the potential that lies within the exploration of two graphic novels with a clear social justice focus, to teach about empathy and agency.

Furthermore, the first text I have examined is *Kindred* (2017), which has adapted Octavia E. Butler's original novel (1979) into a multimodal form to tell the trauma of slavery in the Antebellum South. *Kindred* (2017) was illustrated and adapted by artists Damian Duffy and John Jennings, who have also collaborated on adapting Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (2020). The second graphic novel explored is *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), which addresses issues related to migration in an impactful manner. It was written by the Black Canadian author Wayde Compton and illustrated by the Filipino Canadian artist April dela Noche Milne. In this study, I have focused on introducing the teaching about empathy and agency in the Norwegian lower secondary school, as 8th- 10th graders are more aware of historical and contemporary events, and to a larger extent seek to impact society.

Researching how to forge inclusive practices, through graphic novels with a social justice focus, can contribute to promoting multiple significant aspects of the Norwegian national curriculum (LK20) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a;2019b). LK20 expresses in its core curriculum (2019a), in section 2.1 Social Learning and Development, that "[p]rimary and secondary education and training is an important part of a lifelong process which has the individual's all-round development, intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion for others as its goal" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training). In other words, Norwegian schools are responsible for providing students with a holistic education. Moreover, in the core values of LK20, it is also possible to connect the relevance of exploring this matter to 1.1 Human Dignity, exemplified by how "[s]chools must consider the diversity of pupils and facilitate for each pupil to experience belonging in school and society" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). Furthermore, my research can target section 1.6 Democracy and Participation, where it is stated, among other objectives, that "[a] democratic society is based on the idea that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes. Protecting the minority is an important principle in a democratic state governed by law and in a democratic society" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). Additionally, connecting my topic specifically to the English subject curriculum, one can see that after year 10, students shall "explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world" and "explore and present the content of cultural forms of expression from various media in the English-speaking world that are related to one's own interests" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). Hence, I hope my research in this study can cultivate and fulfill fundamental objectives that are established in LK20.

1.3 Positionality

It has been imperative for me to continually review to what extent my positionality impacts this study, as I have aspired to write about minoritized perspectives in a humble manner. The Métis writer and scholar, Warren Cariou (2020), has elaborated on humility's fundamental role in acquiring knowledge or seeking advice. Cariou (2020) has contended that "[i]n order to listen, you must be humble enough to put your own thoughts out of your mind, to make that effort to follow the thoughts of another person in a sustained, respectful, and engaged way" (p. 6). The essence of his assertion concerns how one needs to be present, actively engage with, and respect the thoughts of another to truly listen to what is being communicated. Additionally, Cariou (2020) has put forth how one should approach Indigenous literature with the notion that there are aspects of the work that one cannot understand completely, or should not know at all if

one is not part of the community. In my opinion, this is an ethical impulse that can be extended to perspectives and experiences that differ extensively from one's own, including those of African American¹ and Black Canadian individuals, as these are at the center of this study. I am a young white woman from Norway, studying to become a teacher. Moreover, I am writing about the prevalence of racism and discrimination in a society where I have not personally been on the receiving end of that. I have witnessed how these forms of oppression work, I have friends who have been subjected to such treatment and listened to their experiences, but I can never fully embody and understand the impact racism and discrimination have on each unique individual. Black feminist educator bell hooks (1989) has emphasized that "[w]hen we write about experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination" (p. 43). I am writing about the presence of racism, discrimination, hostility, and exclusion regarding minoritized individuals in Norway, a society where I belong to the ethnic majority. Moreover, I do not consider myself the sole "authoritative voice" (hooks, 1989, p. 45) when discussing these tendencies, but as I have grounded my thesis in two recognized theoretical frameworks and peer-reviewed research, I believe I can offer some additional contributions to the field, alongside work by minoritized individuals. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that although I aspire to acquire knowledge on this topic and possess a genuine interest and curiosity in understanding the perspective of another, I lack some personal insight. Nonetheless, I recognize Cariou's (2020) plea for critical humility and have attempted to dignify that notion in my research.

Next, I must emphasize that my intention in this thesis resists portraying marginalized communities as ruined, hopeless, or victims, as I do not want to reproduce "damaged-centered research" (Tuck, 2009, p. 409). Unanga scholar and educator, Eve Tuck (2009) has written an open letter calling on communities, researchers, and educators to review the long-term effect of research that aims to document the suffering and vulnerabilities of individuals. Tuck (2009) suggests a desire-based framework that concerns "... understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). In essence, Tuck (2009) urges one to focus on hope and wisdom, instead of solely documenting suffering and pain. I see the importance of a desire-centered approach to research, and I have sought to reflect Tuck's (2009) appeal in my thesis. Along similar lines, Gerald Vizenor (1998), a scholar of Native American literature, has thoroughly argued for a focus on *survivance* in his research. Vizenor's (1998) concept of *survivance* attempts to encapsulate the resilience and agency displayed by Native American Peoples, with a focus on blending survival with resistance. Furthermore, Vizenor (1998) argues that *survivance* is "...more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of *survivance* are an active presence" and he claims that *survivance* narratives include "...an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (p. 15). In other words, Vizenor (1998) disapproves of the emphasis on victimhood in relation to narratives regarding Native American Peoples, and wants to assert their presence, identity, and sovereignty instead. It is necessary to acknowledge that I am aware that writing and learning with Indigenous knowledges and stories is radically different from writing and learning with Black knowledges and stories, which is

¹ In this thesis, I alternate between using the terms African American and Black. I am aware of the complexity and uniqueness of each term, but following the various primary and secondary sources consulted, my thesis uses the terms interchangeably (Williamson, 2014; Popescu, 2018; Friedman, 2021).

the focus of my thesis. Nonetheless, I believe that there can be some potential commonalities, particularly regarding my focus on the representations of minoritized subjects and groups, respectively.

Furthermore, professor of educational psychology, Richard R. Valencia (2010), has put forth the prevalence of deficit thinking in the education system and dismantled this notion. Valencia (2010) conveys that deficit thinking is an "... endogenous theory—positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior" (p. 6-7). Moreover, Valencia (2015) asserts that one should rather gain an understanding of the larger political, economic, and cultural contexts that can influence the learning outcome for students of color. It is though likely that educational achievements can intersect with the presence of racism and discrimination in schools. In a similar fashion to Valencia (2010), I believe this idea of "blaming the victim," as established through the deficit thinking theory, is problematic. Instead, one should examine how the educational system can perpetuate systematic racism and discrimination, which I explore through my thesis.

1.4 Thesis Structure and Overview

This thesis is divided into five chapters, including this introductory part. The succeeding chapter includes an elaboration of the two theoretical frameworks that hold significance for my research: affect theory in education and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education. Next, chapter three provides an overview of my methodology and research methods, including multimodal and narrative analysis. Furthermore, chapter four analyzes and discusses the two selected graphic novels, *Kindred* (2017) and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), with the support of my theoretical and methodological grounding. Lastly, the concluding chapter contains some final remarks on my research findings, their implications, and some limitations to this study that invite further research on this topic.

2 Theoretical Frameworks

In this chapter, I present my two main theoretical frameworks, affect studies and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, focusing particularly on how they relate to education and the EAL classrooms in a Nordic context. As I emphasize the notion of empathy for my thesis, it is relevant that I provide a thorough description of what is meant by it and its potential limitations. Next, I explore pedagogies of discomfort, and an examination of this approach makes it possible to see the connection between my two chosen frameworks, particularly due to how it can be seen as uncomfortable for students and teachers to talk about race and racism in the classroom.

2.1 Affect Theory in Education: Nordic Context

To grasp what affect theory in education encompasses, it is beneficial to briefly explore what is meant by *affect*². As scholars describe affect in connection to various phenomena, this is a term that has no simple definition. However, educational scholars Bessie P. Dernikos et al. (2020) claim that "... affects are the forces (intensities, energies, flows, etc) that register on/with-in/across bodies to produce and shape personal/emotional experiences" (p. 5). In essence, one can say that affect may not only refer to feelings and emotions but is also connected to the events that urge one to be affected (Dernikos et al., 2020). Affect can begin as a sensory experience, but it may unexpectedly intensify and augment the body's capacity to act and respond to external stimuli (Dernikos et al., 2020). Additionally, the philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi (2002) has described affect to be "autonomous" (p. 35), elucidating that it appears before conscious thought. Moreover, individuals can thus become aware of transient events, before having codified and stabilized them through language (Dernikos et al., 2020). In other words, one can react to stimuli before one can put the sensation into words.

Education overall, including the EAL classroom, can benefit from including a focus on affect in various ways. According to anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2020), affective teaching is about approaching subjects not as a predetermined entity, but focusing on how subjects can evolve into understandable forms or states, their firm commitments, as well as their instances of weaknesses or inability to persist. Stewart (2020) also adds that telling a joke, a story, or having a moment of silence can be used to sustain intellectual exploration, rather than being an obstacle to transmitting knowledge from the teacher to the student. Dernikos et al. (2020) have explained that when affect influences teaching, events in the educational environment can be impacted, and students and teachers can be activated and deactivated in various manners. On this note, the EAL classroom consists of students with unique backgrounds and experiences, and various emotions thus circulate, ranging from feelings of joy to sadness and discomfort. In my view as a future teacher, it is thus central to contemplate the relevance of affective

² In this thesis, *affect* is used interchangeably with the terms *feelings* and *emotions*. While I am attentive to and acknowledge the distinctiveness of each term, I follow the terminology applied by the scholars cited in the section on affect theory in education (e.g. Barton & Garvis, 2019; Pedwell, 2014). Thus, the terms affect, feelings, and emotions are sometimes used synonymously for this thesis.

teaching in the Norwegian EAL classroom. LK20 states that “English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). In other words, one of the main objectives of the EAL classroom is to foster the students’ abilities to become global citizens who can communicate with individuals from unique backgrounds, and thus respect the diverse manners in which people think, act, and express themselves.

In striving to grasp someone else’s perception of society, I would argue that it is fundamental to integrate affective teaching. Furthermore, I have experienced affect to be important in the contexts that I have taught. For instance, students become more intrigued by and invested in a topic if it is introduced in a manner that makes them feel something. Whether the students have experienced joy, anger, frustration, or sadness, it appears that that emotional component is content that will be remembered and further contemplated. During one of my teaching practices at NTNU, I conducted a lesson in a 9th-grade EAL classroom on the #BlackLivesMatter movement and police brutality in the US. Still, I remember the anger and frustration shown by many of the students when they saw a clip of the comments directed to a man holding up a #BlackLivesMatter poster in Harrison, Arkansas. Moreover, it was intriguing to watch their reactions when discussing statistics on police training lengths and fatalities caused by law enforcement in the US, and other relevant statements regarding the topic. The previously mentioned activity was a reflection task to foster critical thinking and ethical awareness, and such activities have the potential to foster prosocial behavior in the students as they can help them reflect on their realities vs. other ways of living³. In addition, selecting specific texts to read in the classroom can be another tool to activate the students to feel something. Nonetheless, it is also relevant to consider that lessons where topics such as race, racism, and in general the experience of differences, can contribute to giving the students a sense of discomfort, which can largely impact the learning experience.

2.1.1 Empathy and its Potential Limits

Empathy has been discussed at length by various affect theorists and is frequently understood as the capability to perceive another individual’s perspective and imaginatively feel this person’s thoughts, emotions, and predicaments (Pedwell, 2014). Nonetheless, empathy is more intricate, and often entangled with other fundamental terms such as *sympathy* and *compassion*. Cultural studies scholar Carolyn Pedwell (2014) notes that distinguishing empathy from these two mentioned terms is grounded in empathy’s enhanced component of identification and taking the other’s perspective. Furthermore, empathy carries an elevated emotional charge, in the sense that it involves more than a simple imaginative dimension, but an experience that has the potential to instigate personal and social transformation (Pedwell, 2014). According to educational scholars Georgina Barton and Susanne Garvis (2019), being compassionate, rather than empathetic, can potentially serve individuals’ well-being and resilience. This perspective advocates that, by being compassionate, one might reduce the risk of burnout, as one is likely to be more capable of recognizing when it is necessary to create an emotional distance from feelings like hurt and pain. However, this distance that comes with being

³ Regarding this, it is relevant to note that the Black Lives Matter movement also takes place in Norway (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022). However, this classroom activity focused on the movement within the US.

compassionate might hinder one from fully taking on the other's experience (Barton & Garvis, 2019).

When examining empathy, it is relevant to consider potential differences in individuals' empathic tendencies toward others. It is not uncommon to think that empathy has both cognitive and emotional factors (Kim & Han, 2018). The cognitive element is concerned with understanding others' perspectives, and the emotional component delves into how one reacts to the feelings of others (Kim & Han, 2018). Furthermore, scholars in counseling psychology Hwan Kim and Sumi Han (2018) highlight that evaluating cognitive empathy can be connected to the extent of perspective-taking, but measuring emotional empathy can be more complicated. Psychologist Mark H. Davis (1983) proposed that the concepts of empathic concern and personal distress were affiliated with emotional empathy. Moreover, Kim and Han (2018) note that "[p]ersonal distress means a tendency to feel pain or distress when seeing unhappy people. In turn, empathic concern is not only a vicarious experience of other people's feelings, but also a tendency to help and care for them" (p. 77). In other words, personal distress and empathic concern are two completely different emotional responses when empathizing with someone. Additionally, Kim and Han (2018) found in their study that personal distress tends to have a self-focused and dysfunctional property to it and that it positively correlates with depression, self-criticism, and negative perceptions of oneself. This is of relevance to the teaching of empathy in the EAL classroom, as students will have various reactions while reading and examining *Kindred* and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration*.

Educational contexts can benefit from a focus on empathy and compassion, and this can be promoted through various media. Barton & Garvis (2019) claim that in a world that is seemingly becoming increasingly cruel and vicious, children are in immediate need of learning prosocial behavior. Moreover, they argue that schools serve as an arena to teach children attributes that are necessary for survival and societal advancement (Barton & Garvis, 2019). Along similar lines, Edgar (2020) has researched how empathy can be developed in students through reading and writing about literature, and how selecting texts that activate empathetic responses can amplify their capacities to be global citizens. Edgar (2020) argues that if the students empathize with the characters of a chosen text, it can result in further engagement in society. While Edgar (2020) also commented on the potential limits of empathy, she also noted that "...[she] find[s] that teaching texts in conjunction with the cultural and historical context works to avoid this issue" (p. 72). Thus, Edgar (2022) asserts the possibility for students to develop empathy through an examination of literature.

Literary scholar Suzanne Keen (2006) has further researched the development of narrative empathy. Keen (2006) notes that reading fiction can release the readers from the responsibilities regarding self-protection through skepticism and suspicion and "...they may respond with greater empathy to an unreal situation and characters because of the protective fictionality, but still internalize the experience of empathy with possible later real-world responsiveness to others' needs" (p. 220). The essence of Keen's (2006) argument is that the empathetic reaction readers experience through fiction, which they engage in without preservation, can be applied in society as well. Moreover, Keen (2006) claims that empathy toward fictional characters "...appears to require only minimum elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization" (p. 214). In other words, she states that to develop empathy for a fictional character one only needs to experience basic elements of identification with the

character or the situation. Moreover, genre, setting, and time period have the potential to enhance or hinder an empathetic response from the reader (Keen, 2006). In addition, Keen (2006) conveys that if a reader experiences empathetic distress, as a result of empathizing with a character whose actions conflict with the reader's moral beliefs, the author has effectively channeled empathy through their writing. Also, questions regarding the possibility of developing narrative empathy in the EAL classroom can help target some objectives in LK20.

A focus on the students' social learning, and thereby their prosocial abilities, is extensively documented in LK20. In the core curriculum, it is stated that "[p]rimary and secondary education and training is an important part of a lifelong process which has the individual's all-round development, intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion for others as its goal" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). By introducing this focus area, LK20 elaborates on how Norwegian schools should provide students with a holistic education that touches upon multiple aspects of human nature. Moreover, the core curriculum also expresses that "[l]earning subject matter cannot be isolated from social learning. Bearing this in mind, in the day-to-day work, the pupils' academic and social learning and development are interconnected" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). In other words, the integral relationship between subject matter and social learning should always be emphasized in the students' daily lives. This is an aspect that critical pedagogy, as proposed by hooks (1994), addresses through what she calls *engaged pedagogy*.

The Norwegian EAL classrooms should thus contribute to fostering the students' prosocial abilities, while being attentive to their well-being (hooks, 1994). In the English subject curriculum, it is stated that "[t]he subject shall give the pupils the foundation for communicating with others, both locally and globally, regardless of cultural or linguistic background" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). Essentially, the English subject should prepare the students to use English to communicate with individuals from various backgrounds, and to achieve successful communication, cultural sensitivity, and prosocial competence are key components. Furthermore, LK20 has also conveyed, in connection to the need to cover interdisciplinary topics in the English subject, that "[t]he subject shall develop the pupils' understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent. This can open for new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). In establishing this objective, LK20 communicates that the students should be curious about other cultures' perspectives and ways of living. Furthermore, a focus on cultural awareness, curiosity, open-mindedness, and a desire to prevent prejudice, can ultimately lead to enhanced prosocial abilities for the students.

Importantly for this study, feminist and anti-racist theorists (Pedwell, 2014; Ngo, 2017) have identified the potential limits of empathy. Pedwell (2014), for example, raises the concern that genuine empathy can be challenging and time-consuming to achieve when an individual's background or circumstances differ significantly from one's own. Furthermore, Pedwell (2014) introduces how efforts to experience the emotions of others might run the risk of being a projection and appropriation made by privileged individuals, which can potentially reinforce existing social hierarchies. Feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed (2014) adds to this by stating that "...empathy sustains that very difference that it may seek to overcome: empathy remains a 'wish feeling,' in which subjects 'feel' something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels" (p. 30). By making this statement, she notes that failing to recognize the

diverse aspects that distinguish individuals from one another can cause a failure to understand another's genuine emotions, which ultimately diminishes the significance of empathy.

It is relevant to address whether empathetic connections are reciprocal and dialogical across social and geo-political divides, or if only individuals who hold social privileges are entitled to be the empathizer (Pedwell, 2014). According to Pedwell (2014), it is significant to recognize the various roles when empathy is employed to discover if dominant geo-political power dynamics are perpetuated. This scrutiny becomes crucial if the roles of "the empathizer" and "the sufferer" become repeatedly apparent and predictable (Pedwell, 2014). Also, gender studies scholar Andrea Lobb (2022) has argued that the empathy shown by white feminists is also a conflicted emotion intertwined with the asymmetrical power dynamics of race. Lobb (2022) provides an interpretation of how (white) empathy can reinforce, rather than challenge, the systems of racial privilege and oppression. Moreover, she claims that when empathy and intimacy are uncritically viewed as 'good' qualities, this ambivalent capability avoids critical examination (Lobb, 2022). To address Pedwell's and Lobb's concerns, with my thesis in mind, it is relevant to employ authentic literature to challenge these stereotypes. When selecting the graphic novels, I did not want to choose narratives where the Black characters are solely suffering and someone to "feel sorry for." Instead, I aspired to explore texts where the characters were strong, courageous, and exercising their agency against oppressive systems, and acting as role models for the students reading them.

Feminist philosopher Helen Ngo (2017) has contributed to promoting awareness regarding the potential limits of empathy. Ngo (2017) has questioned initiatives that have aimed to welcome members of racial and religious majorities to a simulation of what it is like to "walk in the shoes" (p. 109) of someone from a marginalized background. The article contends that initiatives such as creating apps where the user can experience racism and establishing a "Hijab day" to see people's reactions to wearing a hijab are intended to foster understanding and empathy (Ngo, 2017). However, Ngo (2017) is concerned that these projects that supposedly simulate the experience of racism can become tourism, where one can enter and exit as one desires. Instead, Ngo (2017) proposes that "[r]ather than 'walking in the shoes of another' in order to generate 'empathy'..., we might think about how empathic listening, coupled with critical self-reflection, might help whites to activate their moral imagination and become more effective allies" (Ngo, 2017, p. 120). The attempt to give individuals a first-hand experience of racism, to promote empathy, can be harmful, but there are other means to enhance allyship among the population. Regarding this, I remember that when I was in 8th grade, the teachers simulated how it must feel to live in a nation where the caste system is still enforced for an entire day. They divided my middle school into various casts, and the students were treated accordingly, by for instance giving out free lunches or permission to stay in certain areas of the school. Although the intentions were probably to show how unjust the world can be, I would argue for this activity being a form of "discrimination tourism" as well. With the graphic novels I have chosen, I focus on the latter of Ngo's (2017) comment, to prepare students in grades 8-10 to become global citizens, rather than attempting to give them an unrealistic and potentially harmful experience of how it must be like to be someone else.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis resists reproducing research that portrays marginalized communities as hopeless and victims, to focus instead on presenting desire-based research (Tuck, 2009). Tuck (2009) introduces how desire-based research "...def[ies] the lure to serve as 'advertisements for power' by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope" (p. 416). In making this comment, she urges one instead to emphasize elements and attributes that are desirable. Centering back to my study, it is key to examine who the empathetic individuals are in the graphic novels that I am analyzing. In *Kindred* (2017) it becomes apparent that it is the Black characters that are compassionate and/or empathetic. The main character, Dana, repeatedly finds herself forgiving inhuman and vicious behavior from a slave owner, as she can understand how it cannot be easy being him either. Lacuna, the main character in *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), is also more concerned about others while facing her obstacles. Even when others have made her life more difficult, she still takes time to contemplate how they must feel when she is exercising her agency. The primary texts I have chosen to analyze and discuss can show students in the EAL classroom that it is not only people who hold social privileges who can be compassionate and/or empathetic.

While lingering a moment on Lacuna's initiatives for activism and change, it is relevant to consider *agency*, the second term my thesis revolves around. Historian William H. Sewell Jr. (1992) has argued that agency "...is the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array" (p. 19). In simpler terms, he conveys that agency refers to how the actor reevaluates and utilizes a variety of tools and applies them within a cultural framework. Adding to this, philosopher David Weissman (2020) has stated that agency "...signifies purpose, cause, and appraisal in agents who control circumstances and themselves to some degree" (p. 11). In making this comment, he states that agency is concerned with examining an actor who can exert some control over their surroundings and their actions. A focus on agency is also emphasized in the Norwegian curriculum. LK20's core curriculum establishes that "[t]he school's mission is the education and all-round development (Bildung) of all pupils" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). In other words, schools should be equally concerned about the development of the entire individual, as they should value each subject. It is suitable to connect agency to the Norwegian word *danning*, which translates to all-round development (Bildung) in LK20. *Danning* entails the ability of self-determination and is concerned with acquiring knowledge that has the potential to create personal and societal changes and to develop as an autonomous citizen (Torjussen, 2011). Lars Petter Storm Torjussen (2011), a Norwegian professor in the department of education, has written thoroughly about the impact *danning* has had on Norwegian schools. Furthermore, Torjussen (2011) claims that schools should be arenas where children develop from individuals who are told what to think and do, to people capable of acting and reflecting without depending on others. Therefore, with a focus on *danning* schools should prepare their students to become autonomous citizens who can make an impact on society, which corresponds to objectives within pedagogies of discomfort, as I explain next.

2.1.2 Pedagogies of Discomfort in the EAL Classroom

In my view, pedagogies of discomfort exists as a category within 'affect theory in education', so it is advantageous to apply this approach to my thesis as well. Educational theory scholars Michalinos Zembylas et al. have written extensively about this topic (Zembylas, 2015; Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012).

According to Zembylas and Elena Papamichael (2017), pedagogies of discomfort is an educational framework for engaging students and teachers in issues of difference, race, and social justice through the disruption of their emotional comfort zones. Moreover, Zembylas and Claire McGlynn (2012) state that the feelings of unease and discomfort that develop from talking about certain issues can lead individuals to question aspects of society, which may foster a desire for change. Although Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) have reflected on how compassionate emotions for individuals who are treated unjustly do not guarantee activism and change, these feelings are still a crucial factor in either fostering or preventing the attainment of greater justice.

However, it is relevant to acknowledge that LK20 states in the core curriculum that “[i]f pupils feel anxious and uncertain, learning may be undermined” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). In this regard, there have been concerns about the appropriateness of pedagogies of discomfort that deliberately induce feelings of discomfort, suffering, and pain in students, for the sake of learning (Zembylas, 2015). In this regard, Zembylas and McGlynn (2012), for instance, address the ethical and pedagogical implications that follow such an approach to teaching, in a study they conducted in a classroom consisting of 10- and 11-year-old students in Northern Ireland. They found that the appropriateness of such an approach is dependent on having the teacher consider multiple factors, such as the students’ ages, the ethical implications, the risks, and the possibilities for constructive effects (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012). In addition, Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) saw that the activity applied to cause feelings of discomfort affected the participants differently. The students in the Norwegian EAL classroom will also respond in various manners when they experience discomfort in the learning environment, which is of relevance to the teaching of racism and discrimination in the English subject.

Adding to this, it is fundamental to acknowledge whose discomfort is repeatedly ignored in educational settings in Norway. It is possible to question how minoritized students, teachers, and faculty must feel when they are not being considered, included, or even being seen or heard in general. In addition, it is significant to consider the multiply marginalized students. In other words, those children who, for instance, come from various linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds simultaneously. The centrality of race, and how it intersects with other categories such as language, gender, and socioeconomic background, is at the core of critical race theory, which is why I decided to employ this frame for my thesis. By selecting graphic novels with strong Black characters and characters of color, who have a will and who exhibit empathy and compassion for others, I aspire to empower all the students in my classroom. Secondly, all students can benefit from promoting prosocial behavior, understanding, and appreciation for diversity. This is evident as one can find harmful tendencies, as explored through critical race theory in education, both globally and in Norway.

2.2 Critical Race Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework and set of ideas that emerged in the United States (US) in the mid-1970s (Ladson-Billings, 2023). CRT exposes how racism is structural, and normalized in American society, and therefore integrated into how the country is run, instead of being a theory that focuses on the subtle microaggressions that occur every day (Harlap, 2022). On this note, Taylor (2023) argues that “[t]he assumptions of White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable” (p. 3). In other words, the benefits of

being white are so well rooted in society to the extent that they might appear as inherent. Additionally, it involves how the civil rights movement primarily benefits white people, and that the movement only serves as an agent against racism if it does not threaten white people's superior status (Harlap & Riese, 2014). Moreover, the legal scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2017) claim that races are socially constructed, and society invents, manipulates, or discards them when convenient. The pedagogical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (2023) adds to this by stating that individual perception and biological designation contribute to the classification of who is considered white, or more precisely, who is regarded as *not* white. This theory has extended beyond a US context as well, including the Nordics, so the area's historical, cultural, and social context should then be considered (Ladson-Billings, 2023).

It is also relevant to examine the intersectional dimension within CRT. Intersectionality acknowledges how social identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and others intersect and interact in the face of both privilege and oppression (Davis, 2014). Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) claims that "[b]ecause the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 140). The essence of Crenshaw's (1989) argument is that it is necessary to take intersectionality into account when investigating phenomena like racism and sexism, and therefore examine the combined impact of the two, as evaluating each form separately provides an incomplete portrayal of oppression. Along similar lines, English literature scholar, Maureen Moynagh (2022), argued that "[t]he archive of slavery reproduces the violence of slavery itself in its failure to afford access to the subjectivity of the slave, especially the female slave" (p. 89). Thus, intersectionality adds a dimension to the CRT framework that should be addressed.

Furthermore, CRT made a substantial contribution to the field of education as well, which is key to this thesis. Harlap and Riese (2014) state how CRT, when viewed from a pedagogical standpoint, aims to transform the structural and cultural facets of education that perpetuate subordinated and dominant racial positions both within and beyond the classroom. Moreover, they argue that although schools traditionally play a conservative role that can contribute to maintaining and supporting existing hierarchies, they can also foster the development of a more egalitarian and socially just society (Harlap & Riese, 2014). Harlap and Riese (2014) claim that CRT can offer a framework to analyze and change discriminatory school practices. Additionally, CRT approaches to education want teachers to be agents of social change (Harlap & Riese, 2014). From a CRT perspective, the curriculum sustains a consecutive script where being white is superior, and thus voices representing something differently than the white worldview are filtered and shaped during the education system (Harlap & Riese, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2023). It is then possible to examine the curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment to discover how CRT can be present in the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 2023), in a Nordic context.

2.2.1 Presence of CRT in the Norwegian Educational Context

As CRT emerged in the US, it might be difficult for some to grasp how the theory can be connected to Norwegian society as well. Particularly George Floyd's assassination sparked the debate regarding the appropriateness of perceiving Norwegian society through a CRT lens (Haugsgjerd & Thorbjørnsrud, 2021; Brekke, 2021; Elgvin, 2021). Some Norwegian scholars believe this theoretical framework does not at all apply to the Norwegian context (see for instance Brekke, 2021). To respond to this, sociologists

Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021) argue that although race and processes of racialization appear differently in Norway as opposed to what can be seen in the US, CRT can still be applied to comprehend the implicit and influential hierarchies present in Norwegian society. Additionally, the organization Nordic Culture Point (2021) hosted a panel discussion led by Afro-Finnish-Swedish researcher and activist Jasmine Kelekay, where topics of Black feminism and culture in the Nordics were reflected upon. The discussion centered around four Black women from various Nordic countries sharing some of their personal experiences as cultural producers living in that area. The panel members argued that despite the common belief among many citizens within Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, which holds that racism is not prevalent in ostensibly progressive and inclusive societies, they each had experiences that contradicted this notion. Furthermore, Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021) have argued that Norway has traditionally had a relatively homogenous population, where the citizens have trusted one another at an unconventional level. Then, as Norwegian society has experienced increased immigration⁴, like other European countries, the social trust has been affected, sparking some resentment from individuals within the host population, and leading to challenges regarding socio-cultural integration (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021). However, it is important to acknowledge that one has seen that the Indigenous people in Norway have been subjected to racism and Othering over an extended period (Olsen, 2022), prompting questions about this supposed traditional uniformity in society. For instance, some Sámi populations experienced the erasure of languages, land, and culture (Olsen, 2022). Decolonial scholar Stine Helena Bang Svendsen (2022) has, thus, noted that one can look at the politics toward new minorities in the context of politics targeted at Indigenous people and national minorities. Essentially, racism and ethnic discrimination take place in Norwegian society (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Nordic Culture Point, 2021), and it has been for a long amount of time (Olsen, 2022; Svendsen, 2022).

It is then highly relevant to see how racism and discrimination appear in Norway. Harlap and Riese (2014) explain how referring to race in Norway can often be seen as taboo, something that extends to the language employed in the curriculum. Some individuals have even expressed that they are "colorblind," to assert that an individual's origin does not matter (Svendsen, 2022). Despite this notion of colorblindness that exists, research shows that Black and other racially marginalized people experience stigma and structural, institutional, and cultural barriers in areas such as the labor market, education, sports, and housing (Fylkesnes, 2019; Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020). Moreover, Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021) state that non-Western immigrants, asylum seekers, and Muslim communities are examples of people who are regarded to belong in this "category." Adding to this, it has been established that second-generation immigrants who speak the language fluently and have appropriate educational qualifications still face such discrimination (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Forthun Hoen, 2024; Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019). Additionally, the Indigenous Sámi people and the Kven have been discriminated against in the same manner (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021). According to Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021), "[r]ace is, however, an analytically problematic term partly because 'race' in a Norwegian/Nordic context is sometimes substituted for concepts such as 'ethnicity,' 'culture,' 'multiculturalism,' 'diversity,' or 'Muslim,' terms that indirectly signify racialization" (p. 2). They here point

⁴ It is important to acknowledge that immigrants are not a homogenous group. Moreover, some immigrants may be welcome in Norwegian society whereas others are not.

out how the term race might not always be employed, but other terms carry connotations or implications related to racial categorization or differentiation. Terms like these are not necessarily too apparent in LK20's competence aims (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a;2019b). However, "diversity" is a common term throughout the entire curriculum, and phrases like "different societies," "ways of living," and "ways of thinking" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a; 2019b), are employed in the English competence aims after 7th and 10th grade and might carry some similar connotations.

It is possible to examine more closely how CRT can be noticeable in Norwegian classrooms due to educational policies and the curriculum. First, Harlap and Riese (2014) have stated that politics concerning the educational system in Norway have had a long-standing "ethno-oriented" attitude towards the majority culture, where Christianity and the humanistic heritage of values have had a significant impact. As a result, the curriculum needs to reflect these notions, and particularly the previous curriculum in Norway, LK06, was criticized for some of its content (Harlap & Riese, 2014). Norwegian professor Kjetil Børhaug (2007) has argued that LK06 incorporates noticeable features that establish a clear distinction between "us" and "them"; that is between ethnic white Norwegian students and students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the general part of LK06, there was, for instance, a section named "[t]he integrated human" stating that the students shall be able to "[t]o measure the moral common good and consideration for others in our culture - and provide the ability to chart one's own course" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006). This objective from LK06 has for instance an emphasis on "our culture" vs. "others," which supports Børhaug's (2007) reasoning. Moreover, Børhaug (2007) states that this division creates problematic tension regarding objectives for integration and the multicultural society. The newly implemented curriculum, LK20, has gone through quite a substantial renovation, and one can witness altered wording regarding topics related to diversity (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). Nonetheless, it is still grounded in fundamental white Norwegian values, and it may take time before it is fully implemented in Norwegian schools.

Furthermore, CRT can be applied to assess the daily practices in Norwegian classrooms, including the English subject, because of the teaching materials available and selected, and the academic aid offered. First, Harlap and Riese (2014) claim that textbooks tend to convey the majority culture's ideas and values. Additionally, decolonial scholar Helen Margaret Murray (2023) has researched how textbooks can reproduce stereotypes regarding Indigenous people, and how this can apply to teaching minority cultures in general. Murray (2023) suggests that to prevent this from happening, teachers should be educated about minority cultures, and sensitize them to the importance of challenging stereotypes regarding cultural diversity. Moreover, to foster intercultural sensitivity and empathy in the classroom, she desires for teachers to be empowered to address social justice topics through receiving appropriate training (Murray, 2023). Furthermore, in interviews, students with a minority background have conveyed that they have been perceived to have fewer prerequisites for learning or being less intelligent, based on their appearance. They have also reported that teachers expect less from them (Harlap & Riese, 2014). Adding to this, *master scripting* is a notion that is

reflected in Norwegian schools and refers to how minority students need to exert more effort than majority students to achieve the same results (Svendsen, 2022).

In addition, CRT can be connected to Norwegian schools in the sense that certain topics, such as race and racism, make teachers uncomfortable to teach (Faye, 2021), echoing what Zembylas and Papamichael (2017) contend. Johannessen and Røthing (2022) further state that teachers are reluctant to teach subjects that can be seen as controversial or sensitive, especially if they can create confrontations or intense arguments because it feels unsafe. Moreover, pedagogy scholars Audrey Osler and Hein Lindquist (2018) have argued that the terms race and racism tend to be avoided in Norwegian society. By restricting the vocabulary in this manner, it becomes challenging for teachers to adequately address topics of race and racism, and feel comfortable doing so (Osler & Lindquist, 2018). Shortly before the submission of this thesis, a teacher at a school in Oslo was filmed and accused of being a racist when reading a text where the N-word was included, as part of a lesson on racism (Teachers at Oslo Cathedral School, 2024; Majid, 2024). Consequently, 36 teachers at Oslo Cathedral School (2024), signed a chronicle that established that they fear being called racists for showing primary sources that are important parts of history and that they often feel like they are walking on eggshells regarding the teaching of sensitive topics, such as racism. If the teaching of racism is viewed as being racist, then there is a need for changes in society (Majid, 2024). Along similar lines, Ahmed (2015) contends how shedding light to racism and sexism can result in the person being accused of causing problems or being overly sensitive. Although it would be more comfortable, for some, to avoid discussing topics of race, racism, and sexism, for instance, in the EAL classroom, the teaching of these matters must be put on the agenda to promote citizenship and ethical awareness.

To contribute to creating an inclusive learning environment in Norwegian schools, Harlap and Riese (2014) have formulated a list of some factors that should be considered, drawing from multicultural education theory and CRT in education when composing it. First, they have stated that what is on the syllabus should be examined (Harlap & Riese, 2014). On that note, they have included that the schools should evaluate if the content includes multiple perspectives, the types of examples that are used in textbooks, who has created the content, what is said about "the other" in the content, and what is conveyed as the normality (Harlap & Riese, 2014). Next, they state that teachers should evaluate their classroom practices. The teachers can investigate if they adapt the teaching to their entire student body, to what extent they value all their students' resources and inputs, if they question how recognition and respect for diversity can be developed, and if the students are encouraged to use personal experiences during academic exploration (Harlap & Riese, 2014). Harlap and Riese (2014) also advocate for teachers to do some self-reflection. Regarding this, they, for instance, urge teachers to contemplate if they are willing to explore their limitations regarding understanding others, reflecting on their relations to individuals they can consider different from themselves, and if they are curious about the students' complex identities (Harlap & Riese, 2014). The mentioned factors are examples of features that can welcome a diverse learning atmosphere, and with my research, I aspire to contribute to promoting these notions in the EAL classroom.

Understanding the potential presence of CRT in education can help promote concepts that are emphasized in the Norwegian national curriculum. LK20's core curriculum section 1.6 Democracy and Participation, for instance, introduces relevant focus areas regarding equality and democratic values (Norwegian Directorate for

Education and Training, 2019a), which are central to my thesis because of its focus on promoting equity and participation. Among its objectives it is stated that “[p]articipating in society means respecting and endorsing fundamental democratic values, such as mutual respect, tolerance, individual freedom of faith and speech, and free elections” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). In other words, Norwegian education, including the English subject, should reflect and support democratic values that aspire to ensure equality in the population. Furthermore, LK20 holds that the “...democratic society is based on the idea that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes. Protecting the minority is an important principle in a democratic state governed by law and in a democratic society” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). Essentially, the curriculum highlights, through this passage, that democratic nations should foster inclusivity, ensure equality, and the protection for all its citizens’ rights, regardless of majority or minority status. I have sought to shed light on these objectives from LK20 in my research. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks of affect theory in education and CRT in education have been imperative for the analysis and discussion of my primary texts, in addition to the research methods that are discussed at length in the next chapter.

3 Overview of Research Methodology and Methods

In the following chapter, I outline and provide a justification of the methodology, and methods that I have used for this thesis. As theory and methodology are often interdependent in literary studies, the theoretical frameworks that I have elaborated on in the previous chapter support my analysis and discussion as well. I have applied a qualitative approach to answer my two research questions: 1) How are empathy and agency presented in contemporary social justice graphic novels? and 2) What is the potential of emphasizing empathy and agency to promote an inclusive learning environment in Norwegian EAL lower secondary classrooms? I begin this chapter by explaining some broad characteristics of qualitative research and then turn to the research methods that I have used for this thesis—namely, multimodal analysis and narrative analysis. Within my multimodal analysis, I have applied a social semiotic approach, through Serafini's (2014) tripartite multimodal analysis. Next, I present and discuss my selected primary texts which constitute the corpus of my analysis and discussion. To conclude, I address some ethical considerations pertinent to my thesis, including reflections concerning validity, reliability, and positionality.

3.1 Qualitative Research in Education and Research Methods

If one is interested in making an impact on applied social sciences or practical fields, such as education, health, social work, administration, or additional arenas of social activity, it is regarded as valuable to conduct qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The notion of qualitative research has no simple definition, and there have been some debates regarding the most suitable description of this type of research frame (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, sociologist John Van Maanen (1979) explains qualitative research, in a manner that I find intriguing: "...an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 520). In simpler terms, it involves the methods applied when capturing the depth and complexity of various occurrences within society, rather than a focus on the frequencies of phenomena. Furthermore, qualitative research is common to the field of education (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Freebody, 2003). Educational scholars Liz Atkins and Susan Wallace (2012) have argued that the purpose of doing research in education is "...to improve the effectiveness of our professional practice and the systems within which we operate to support learners in their learning" (p. 12). Moreover, educational research has played a role in informing, advancing, or obstructing policies and practices in the field (Freebody, 2003). Bearing these aspects in mind, I have found it suitable to conduct qualitative research, with a focus on education, as it has allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of whether two graphic novels can contribute to teaching 8th-10th graders about agency and empathy in the Norwegian EAL classroom.

This qualitative study sits at the intersection of literary and educational studies. The reason why I wanted to conduct a literary study, rather than a classroom data

collection, is because this topic can be valuable to use as a theoretical tool for in-service teachers. My thesis thus combines qualitative methods such as multimodal analysis and narrative analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of my corpus. Through a multimodal analysis, I have examined the influence that the interaction between text and images has in telling stories of displacement, slavery, and immigration with an explicit social justice impulse. A narrative analysis, in turn, has allowed me to gain more knowledge of the stories that are told in these graphic novel adaptations⁵. Combining these two methods has enabled me to capture the intricateness of telling complex stories in multimodal ways.

3.1.1 Multimodal Analysis

For this thesis, I have analyzed and discussed two graphic novels, and thus I found it relevant for me to conduct a multimodal analysis. Linguist Theo van Leeuwen (2020) states how multimodality is a term that has "...broadened to denote the integrated use of different communicative resources such as language, image, sound, and music in multimodal texts and communicative events" (p. 465). In other words, multimodality is a concept that includes an expanded range of communication modes. Furthermore, a significant component of a multimodal analysis entails the examination of the relationship across and between the modes in multimodal ensembles and interactions (Jewitt, 2014).

3.1.1.1 Social Semiotic Multimodality

The multimodal analysis method that I am using for this thesis draws on the theoretical orientation of social semiotics. Fundamentally, semiotics is interested in the concepts of signs, and how these signs are interpreted by individuals (Serafini, 2022). Moreover, to comment on the broad description of the concept of signs, literacy education scholar Frank Serafini (2022) notes that "[t]o some extent, anything can be considered a sign if it is meaningful to someone in some particular way at some particular time" (p. 36). In general, it is possible to say that individuals use signs to make sense of the world, as signs can be a way for attributing meaning to what they encounter. Adding a social dimension to semiotics, one is interested in seeing how this meaning-making emerges in social environments and through interactions (Kress, 2010). To elaborate on what is meant by social semiotics, Serafini (2014) states that it "...is concerned with meaning in context and the semiotic resources, modes, and social and contextual factors that affect the ways humans represent and communicate ideas, identities, and ideologies" (p. 36). When I draw upon social semiotics for my thesis, I have looked at how the chosen graphic novels convey a focus on social justice, and how they might be perceived by the students in the EAL classroom, by acknowledging the social and contextual factors that influence this communication.

3.1.1.2 Tripartite Multimodal Analysis

Serafini (2014) has provided a tripartite framework, including various approaches for interpreting multimodal texts, that I have found relevant for my multimodal analysis of *Kindred* (2017) and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019). The framework introduces the 1) perceptual, 2) structural, and 3) ideological dimensions of interpretation, which can be helpful to consider when navigating through multimodal ensembles. Serafini (2010) asserts that the analytical dimensions are interconnected and

⁵ I am aware that adaptation has been central to the study of children's and YA literature (Tarbox, 2020), but the art of adaptation itself has not been the focus of this thesis.

that it is challenging to disregard the relationship between them. The reason why I find this interconnection central to my analysis and discussion is that I can explore the nuanced ways in which the teachers and students in the EAL classroom can engage with the text affectively, linguistically, and contextually.

The first dimension, the perceptual, focuses on the denotative meaning of images, and what is perceived. However, Serafini (2010) also notes that apprehension is not innocent or naive, and what is seen is colored by personal experiences, prior knowledge, and socio-cultural and historical contexts. When examining the perceptual analytical dimension, it is possible to consider what is perceived through one's vision, denotation, inventory of contents, and navigating and naming visual elements (Serafini, 2014). The perceptual analytical dimension is important to my study because I am exploring what the teachers and students may perceive when looking at the graphic novels.

Next, the structural analytical dimension refers to "Grammar, Structures, and Conventions of Visual Images and Multimodal Texts" (Serafini, 2014, p. 43), and it examines how a text is composed. Although the word "structural" can give some connotations to strictly focusing on grammar and structure, "structural" in Serafini's (2014) framework draws on a variety of disciplines and fields of inquiry including the field of visual communication, literacy education, and systemic functional linguistics. Moreover, the structural dimension looks at semiotic theories of meaning, investigates meaning, themes, and messages in the texts, examines connotations, and explores symbols and recurring patterns (Serafini, 2014). This dimension is relevant to my study as I examine the messages, including the themes of empathy, compassion, injustice, and agency, and the symbols that are present in the graphic novels to gain an understanding of what is conveyed through the multimodal narratives.

Finally, the ideological analytical dimension includes a focus on how the viewer's understanding of multimodal texts is dependent on the social, cultural, and political contexts in which one encounters them. When focusing on the ideological analytical dimension, Serafini (2014) states that it is possible to regard the context, culture, and history of a production. Moreover, one can look at the social meanings of actors and events portrayed in the texts. In addition, one can examine text and images as social artifacts. A focus on sites of production and reception is also possible (Serafini, 2014). Drawing on this dimension for my thesis is key because I am interested in seeing how social, cultural, and political matters in society, such as immigration and the prevalence of racism, influence how one perceives the stories that are being told.

In addition to a robust theoretical apparatus, Serafini's (2014) tripartite framework has provided me with a holistic approach to analyze *Kindred* (2017) and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), particularly when exploring their perceptual, structural, and ideological dimensions. As Serafini's (2014) dimensions draw on one another, it would be difficult to rule one category out, but there are some compositional elements visible in the structural analytical one, that are not highlighted in my thesis. For example, I have not placed a strong emphasis on grammar, and structures, as linguistic elements are not the focus of my thesis. However, I found it relevant to consider other aspects of the structural dimension, such as themes that are relevant to the EAL classroom like empathy, compassion, injustice, and agency. Moreover, it is also applicable to examine the connotations within my texts. Furthermore, in addition to a thorough exploration of how the written text and images interplay in my graphic novels, I

have found it pertinent to look at the story that is told more explicitly through a narrative analysis.

3.1.2 Narrative Analysis

Considering that I have wanted to examine how two graphic novels can teach about empathy and agency, it has been relevant for me to look at the texts' narratives more profoundly. Sociologist Catherine Riessman (2008) has pointed out that the term "narrative" is frequently used synonymously with "story." Moreover, Culler (2000) argues that not only do stories give their audiences pleasure, but, at the same time, they can teach individuals about the world. Thus, narratives can also reveal what is accepted in society and what can be flawed (Culler, 2000). Furthermore, a narrative consists of events that the speaker deems as important, and it is organized and conveyed in a manner that can be meaningful for a particular audience (Riessman, 2008; Bold, 2012). As it is possible to introduce the same event in multiple manners, the creator's point of view affects what is told, and that can be dependent on what has captured their attention (Riessman, 2008; Bold, 2012). Riessman (2008) also states how "[i]ndividuals use the narrative form to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and even mislead an audience" (p. 8). In this comment, she shares some purposes for using narratives, and among these examples, one can see the need to engage an audience. It has been relevant to study the narratives of my chosen graphic novels to see how the students and teachers in the EAL classroom can be potentially engaged by what is told through them.

To assess the effects the narratives of the selected graphic novels have on their audiences, it is relevant to perform a narrative analysis. Narrative research is suitable to apply if one wants to capture detailed stories or lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is an approach that was necessary to perceive the complexity within my selected graphic novels. Also, a narrative analysis enables individuals to make sense of stories, by looking at their form and content (Riessman, 2008; Sandberg, 2022). The narrative data that is analyzed can originate from various sources, such as from interviews and observations, but also through documents, literature, pictures, or other means of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Also, a narrative analyst has an interest in focusing on several elements, and when I am performing a narrative analysis, for my thesis, I am investigating the purpose of the narrative, the audience it is meant for, the construction of the events, what the story accomplishes, and whether there are inconsistencies with counter-narratives (Riessman, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although narrative approaches often interpret specific stories, they still serve the function of making one move toward making a broader commentary (Riessman, 2008). For my thesis, I am looking at the prevalence of empathy, compassion, injustice, and agency in the graphic novels that have been carefully chosen for my research.

3.2 Selection of Corpus

Graphic novels generally include a combination of images and text in the stories, which can support language learning in the EAL classroom (Hecke, 2011; Bland, 2023). These multimodal texts can provide struggling readers with images of the storyline, while introducing them to extended storylines, character constellations, and moral themes (Hecke, 2011; Bland, 2023). In addition, as students often have prior and potentially positive experiences with comics, reading graphic novels in the EAL classroom can be motivating for them (Hecke, 2011). On this note, Hecke (2011) also states that when students have a positive attitude toward graphic novels, they are more likely to be

interested in the topics being introduced, and their willingness to participate increases. Also, graphic novels can contribute to an enhanced emotional response for their readers (Phillips, 2017). One can see multiple reasons why graphic novels should not be neglected in the EAL classroom, and I have, for my thesis, chosen to explore the potential of using graphic novels to teach about empathy and agency. LK20's competence aims after year 10 include the relevance of emphasizing graphic novels in Norwegian English classes at the lower secondary level. The curriculum conveys that students shall "[r]ead, interpret and reflect on English-language fiction, including young people's literature" and "[u]se sources in a critical and accountable manner" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). These objectives establish that it is valuable to incorporate English-language fiction in the EAL classrooms and that the students should evaluate and utilize various materials critically and responsibly.

To answer my research questions, the selection of the corpus for this thesis has been connected to finding graphic novels that tell stories that have the potential to make an impact on 8th-10th graders based in Norway. Migration and slavery, as real historical and current processes, are complex topics that need to be emphasized in schools, through various forms and media. Introducing these matters through graphic novels can contribute to fostering understanding of these issues. In addition, it was important for me to not only ensure that the stories that are being told portray people with various backgrounds and experiences, but to include works produced by diverse authors and illustrators. Therefore, there is an inclusion of writers and illustrators of various nationalities, genders, and racial identities. While doing so, I am not including the representation of diverse authors in the EAL classroom for the sake of representation (Nordic Cultural Point, 2021), but I am choosing authors from multiple backgrounds because I value how the texts get shaped by that formally as well. Other graphic novels, such as, *I am Alfonso Jones* (2017), *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020), *Borders* (2021), *It Won't Always Be Like This: A Graphic Memoir* (2022), and *Displacement* (2020) could further serve an important function in the EAL classrooms, but I found it beneficial to limit my research to two social justice graphic novels (Barter-Storm & Wik, 2020), namely *Kindred* and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration*.

The first graphic novel I have examined is *Kindred* (2017), which has adapted the visual form to tell the trauma of slavery. This text was originally written in 1979 as a novel by the African American writer Octavia E. Butler, who is a leading figure in science fiction and Afrofuturism. The graphic novel version that I analyze in this thesis is adapted by the acclaimed writer Damian Duffy, and illustrated by John Jennings, who engages with Afrofuturist visual work as well. *Kindred* is a speculative graphic novel about a modern-day African American woman named Dana, and how she repeatedly gets transported back in time to the Antebellum South. In turn, the second text I have selected, *The Blue Road; A Fable of Migration* (2019), is written by the Black Canadian writer Wayde Compton and illustrated by the Filipino Canadian artist April dela Noche Milne. In this graphic novel, the reader follows the journey of Lacuna, an orphan girl of color, as she navigates through trials and tribulations when relocating to a new residential area. The graphic novel thus describes experiences of displacement and migration in a multimodal way, centering minoritized populations and knowledges.

Additionally, I here provide a brief elaboration of some of the key terms that are applicable when analyzing graphic novels. Comic theorist Scott McCloud (1993;2000) was the pioneer in establishing a relevant terminology for comic and graphic novel studies. Moreover, English studies scholars Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella (2019),

among others, have continued to use and develop these key terms. These include “panel,” “gutter,” “thought or speech bubble,” “caption,” “motion lines,” “symbols,” “sound effects,” and “closure” (McCloud, 1993). Firstly, a panel refers to “...a basic visual unit comprised of a single image, usually framed by a four-sided outline or border...” (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 215). Secondly, the gutter is a name for the space existing between the panels (Pizzino, 2021). If one sees a white space with text above or close to a character’s head, it usually shows a character’s spoken words or thoughts (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Moreover, a caption often presents the narrator’s voice or the thoughts of a character, and it appears as words in a box within the panel or gutter (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). According to Hintz and Tribunella (2019), motion lines are used in graphic novels to portray movement or feeling. Furthermore, symbol is a term used to refer to visual components that carry culturally specific meanings, for instance how a blue circle on a character’s face communicates sadness to the reader (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Next, onomatopoeias, such as “pow” or “thud”, are commonly used to illuminate sound effects through text (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Finally, closure is connected to how graphic novels can create a complete mental picture, achieved through subsequential panels used to fill in information that is lacking for the reader (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). These terms are used in my analysis and discussion chapter to examine the graphic novels formally. Moreover, this terminology will prove useful in a lower secondary class in the English subject as well.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Similarly to other researchers working in literary and education studies, I want my research to be conducted in an ethically responsible manner. Therefore, it is significant that I consider the validity and reliability of my research. In addition, I am reviewing my position when researching this topic.

3.3.1 Validity and Reliability

Examining reliability is traditionally connected to the potential of replicating the research, which concerns whether the results would be the same if the study was repeated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Atkins & Wallace, 2016). However, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also assert that conducting research within social sciences can complicate this matter, as human behavior is not static. Although the replication of a qualitative study will not necessarily produce the same results, as there can be multiple interpretations of the same data, this does not signal that the results of the study should be discredited (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). On that note, some scholars refer to the term *trustworthiness* regarding whether qualitative research is reliable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that “...a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable” (p. 250). They here emphasize that the data can be considered reliable if it is possible to find consistency between the collected data and the results obtained, and I believe that it is possible to find such cohesion in my research, as I have discussed my data through the use of affect theory in education and CRT in education.

Internal validity concerns whether research findings align with reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that the researcher should question if the findings match what is there and if one measures what is believed to be measured. Furthermore, it can also be beneficial to evaluate the external validity, which is connected to how generalizable the findings of a study are (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

In a qualitative study, the researcher is examining a smaller sample of data, and it is not possible to generalize data in the same statistical sense as in a quantitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Nevertheless, the notion of transferability has been suggested to capture what can be learned from a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Regarding transferability, one is interested in seeing how findings can be applicable in other, similar conditions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Atkins & Wallace, 2016). It is significant that the researcher provides a sufficient description of data so the potential applicant can contemplate if transferability is possible (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). As I have provided a thorough elaboration during my analysis and discussion section, grounded in my theoretical frameworks, I believe my research is transferable.

It is thus relevant to connect questions of reliability and validity to my research. In the methodology chapter of my thesis, I present the two analytical tools that I have applied to my study, and how these are used to collect data. In addition, I describe clearly what I aim to analyze in my thesis. Moreover, I present and investigate the chosen primary texts thoroughly. Lastly, I rely on two recognized theoretical frameworks to explore my corpus of analysis. Taking this into account, I can show consistency, capture reality, and provide descriptions that can make the research transferable. Therefore, I would say my research reflects reliability and validity as well.

3.3.2 Positioning

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have stated that to promote validity and reliability further it is relevant to review the researcher's position or reflexivity. Moreover, they state that this consideration involves a "[c]ritical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation" (p. 258). In other words, I need to contemplate my background, perception of the world, preconceived opinions, and other aspects that can interfere with conducting the research. Situating oneself in relation to one's research is common practice in some of the theoretical traditions this thesis draws from such as critical race theory and Black studies, so I would like to assess my positionality as well.

I am a young white woman who lives in a small, privileged country (Norway) and who is training to be a teacher. Moreover, I understand the need to consider social justice and equity both in the classroom and in society in general, as stated in the Norwegian Education Act (1998) and LK20 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a;2019b). As a future teacher, I think it is imperative to acquire knowledge to promote an ethically responsible and inclusive learning environment. Moreover, in the introduction, I already established some notions I seek to dignify for my thesis, such as critical humility (Cariou, 2020), engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), desire-centered research (Tuck, 2009), survivance (Vizenor, 1998), and the refusal of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010; 2015).

Furthermore, I am aspiring to learn more about being a global, respectful citizen, that can support others with a different background than my own. Also, I want to explore how it is possible to convey such beliefs to my future students as well. In this thesis, I have sought to discover how one can teach two graphic novels in the EAL classroom to contribute to fostering this prosocial behavior in the students. An analysis and discussion of some aspects to focus on in the English subject is thus presented in the following chapter.

4 Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings

In the following section, I provide an analysis of *Kindred* (2017) and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), utilizing the methods of multimodal analysis and narrative analysis, both of which are thoroughly examined in the preceding chapter. Additionally, I discuss my research findings, seeking to answer the following research questions: 1) How are empathy and agency presented in contemporary social justice graphic novels? and 2) What is the potential of emphasizing empathy and agency to promote an inclusive learning environment in Norwegian EAL lower secondary classrooms? The analysis and discussion of research findings are combined in one chapter, as the boundaries between analysis, discussion, and interpretation are sometimes blurred in literary studies. The analysis is conducted based on the two theoretical frameworks elaborated on in Chapter 2: affect theory in education and critical race theory in education.

4.1 *Kindred* (2017)

Kindred (2017) is a graphic novel adaptation of Octavia E. Butler's Afrofuturist award-winning novel (1979) with an identical title. This version was adapted by Damian Duffy and illustrated by John Jennings. Moreover, it was published by Abrams ComicArts. The graphic novel depicts the journey of Dana, an African American woman living in California in the 1970s, who finds herself transported back in time to the Antebellum South on multiple occasions. Dana is forced to enter the system of slavery, and consequently suffers the dehumanized treatment of Black people during that time. She discovers that her time-traveling occurs whenever Rufus, a plantation owner's son, is in mortal danger. Moreover, she feels responsible for making an impact on Rufus so that he does not follow in his father's footsteps and grow up to reinforce systematic violence. *Kindred* (2017) is beneficial to discuss with 8th-10th graders in the English classroom because it introduces topics related to social justice that should be explicitly targeted in schools. Additionally, it does so in a multimodal way (van Leeuwen, 2020) thus allowing students to engage critically and emotionally with the text in different ways. As one can witness quite explicit images of the struggles African American individuals experienced during the times of slavery, the students can gain a larger understanding of how injustice has been present for a long time in society. Furthermore, through witnessing such impactful images and text, as a reader, one can begin to develop feelings for the fictional characters. In addition, the Black fictional characters in *Kindred* are presented with agency and can thus become role models for the students in the EAL classroom.

The graphic novel adaptation of *Kindred* (2017) is divided into 9 main sections, including an introduction, a prologue, an epilogue, and 6 chapters that narrate an incident that takes Dana back in time. To discover how the complex topics of empathy and agency can be employed in the Norwegian EAL classroom, my analysis consists of two parts. This section opens by establishing some potentials that lie within introducing *Kindred* (2017) to the English subject classroom. Secondly, I elaborate on some aspects of the graphic novel that can seem like limitations for including it in classroom but that

turn out to be of importance for the teaching of empathy and agency to 8th-10th graders as well. This section explores how the themes of empathy, compassion, survival, and agency are depicted multimodally in the graphic novel.

4.1.1 *Kindred's* Pedagogical Potential in the Lower Secondary Norwegian EAL Classroom

Kindred (2017) was chosen for this thesis partially because of the emotional response that was evoked in me while I read it during my studies in teacher training. Throughout the graphic novel, the depiction of the hardships the African American characters had to endure made me feel something I could not quite identify. On multiple occasions, I had to take a moment to fully grasp what I had seen because I experienced how graphic novels can enhance an emotional response through the relationship between images and text (Phillips, 2017). In addition, I was left feeling uneasy, while reading it, as I could not help but also feel something for the villain of the story, Rufus. I started questioning if these were feelings of empathy, and how it was possible to experience this from reading, or whether it was a different emotion. Moreover, I noticed there was a larger focus on the community among the Black characters, instead of merely focusing on suffering and misery. Also, it was possible to perceive the intersectional dimension of racism through the panels. The experience while reading *Kindred* (2017) also opened my eyes to the teaching potential of the graphic novel genre as a multimodal one. This section puts forth some key episodes and themes to emphasize when teaching the text in the Norwegian EAL classroom.

4.1.1.1 The Potential that Lies within a Focus on Empathy

First of all, the Black characters are the ones who exhibit compassion and empathy in the story, and that should be of importance to the EAL classroom. For instance, the African American characters in *Kindred* (2017) offer emotional and physical support, understanding, and solidarity to one another while facing their trials. In Appendix 1, one can see how Dana comforts Alice when she learns what happened to her love Isaac, and by seeing the tears streaming down Dana's face, it is possible to understand how she potentially has adapted some of the hurt Alice is experiencing as well. Moreover, they make sacrifices to help others, which can put their own safety at risk. Also, Dana constantly tries to understand different perspectives and is depicted to care more about Rufus than his own parents. The fact that they can maintain their compassion and empathy in the face of such adversity, demonstrates their resilience and strength. Among others, these are examples of how *Kindred* can prove to the students in the English subject that it is not only individuals who hold social privileges that are entitled to be the empathizers (Pedwell, 2014). As the Black characters possess empathy and agency in *Kindred* (2017), damage-centered material does not surface in the EAL classroom when introducing the text (Tuck, 2009; Taylor, 2023). Instead, students in the EAL classroom can acquire important knowledge on the topics of empathy and agency by examining the Black people's courageous acts in *Kindred* (2017).

Due to Dana's consistent ability to look beyond Rufus' poor behavior and potentially feeling empathetic toward him, the students reading the text can learn how empathy is a complex affect with various sides. It is possible to discover that one can feel something for someone whose actions one does not agree with. Therefore, one can witness how the boundaries between good and evil can be blurred when one feels empathetic toward someone. Lobb (2022) raises the concern that it can be destructive if empathy is solely viewed as a good quality to have, so it is an affect that could benefit

from a critical examination, as I argue in this thesis. When one sees that Dana has empathy for Rufus, it is easy for the readers to adopt and mirror some of these feelings that are portrayed. Regarding this, one panel particularly struck me, since it portrays how Rufus attacks Dana, and the images can suggest that he attempts to rape her in addition. Through the use of both thought bubbles and captions, the reader has access to Dana's thoughts: "[f]or a moment we lay there, still [...] [s]lowly, I realized how easy it would be for me to continue to be still... [...] ...and forgive him even this" (Butler et al., 2017, p. 231, see Appendix 2). These passages convey that if Rufus were to execute such an ultimate assault on Dana, she contemplates whether she could potentially still find forgiveness in her. It is an admirable ability (Tuck, 2009) to still have empathy for someone who exhibits these acts of cruelty. However, it is necessary to understand when to distance oneself as well to avoid feeling drained from being too empathetic. Barton and Garvis (2019) contend that cultivating feelings of compassion, as opposed to empathy, can contribute to an individual's well-being and resilience. In cases where one's empathetic ability is taken advantage of, it would be beneficial if one were to recognize that and distance oneself. The ambivalent feelings that are developed when empathizing with someone like Rufus can spark some pedagogical reflections regarding the dual nature of empathy, and the ethical implications it entails.

Students in the EAL classroom can examine the correlation between empathy and the degree of identification with the individuals they empathize with. It is possible to see how the Black characters are compassionate and/or empathetic in *Kindred* (2017) (see Appendix 1), but it can be more difficult for the reader to develop empathy for the Black fictional characters in a similar fashion. Although Gabriella Friedman (2021) argues that *Kindred* (1979) uses sentimental conventions to convey the story to a larger extent than other neo-slave narratives, it is possible to question if these narrative techniques are enough to develop empathy while reading the text. Along similar lines, Jennifer A. Williamson (2014) noted that

Kindred simultaneously employs and critiques sentimentalism. It creates emotional connection across the lines of history to explore the legacy of American slavery while acknowledging the flaws in a system that teaches moral truths through assuming sympathetic identification with an Other whose experiences cannot fully be understood. On the one hand, *Kindred* shows that it is impossible for an individual of privilege to truly understand the suffering of another: an individual with social protection or status is always inhibited and limited by those very benefits from truly understanding the suffering of one without that protection (p. 134)

In making this comment in relation to Butler's 1979 novel, Williamson (2014) reflects on the likelihood of developing emotional responses for a person with a different background than themselves. Furthermore, Irina Popescu (2018) questions how it was possible to empathize with the Black characters in the original *Kindred* (1979), when there was a lack of a comprehensive description of pain and suffering in that version. As the narrative does not generally prolong the portrayals of the brutal treatment of the Black people in the text, it makes it more difficult for the reader to identify with their experiences. On this note, the violence in the graphic novel often occurs "off-panel," or is conveyed through the characters' emotional responses (Milks, 2017). Additionally, Dana tells the story, and the reader thus only gains access through her point of view and thoughts. The reader is more conscious of what Dana is feeling, and it might be simpler to feel compassionate and/or empathetic for her. It can be more challenging, however, to

empathize with the other Black characters in the story since the reader is not aware of what the other characters are thinking in the same measure. However, it is important to note that the graphic novel adaptation of *Kindred* (2017) adds some complexity to Popescu's (2018) remark, as its multimodality enriches the reading experience. The illustrations make it possible for the readers to witness, to a larger extent, the feelings of all the characters, the Black characters included, and thus be more feasible to empathize with them, than if one were to solely read the novel. The graphic novel can then prove to the students that emotional responses can be linked to whether one identifies with another, which again is influenced by how much contextual information one has access to.

Furthermore, *Kindred* (2017) also centers the feelings of Rufus, the coming plantation owner, and it might therefore be more accessible to feel something for him than the Black characters in the story. For instance, on page 223 (see Appendix 3), the reader can access Rufus' feelings after the woman he loves, Alice, takes her own life. Multiple panels show how miserable and upset he is, particularly through the use of close-up shots where Rufus' tears are drawn to be large. Also, one can see how he points a gun to his head. This incident, among others, can make readers pity him in some way, which can also be a starting point in the development of empathy for him. In the meanwhile, Dana speaks rationally and tells Rufus what to do, while he is being helpless. There are other moments where it is possible to feel something for Rufus as well. Firstly, one gets to know him when he is a child, and he is thus possibly granted some innocence. Moreover, he is a product of institutionalized racism, so one can question the amount of agency he possesses. Next, the story shows that he is raised in a malfunctioning family that does not show much love to one another, and the young Rufus is hit and whipped by his father. Later in life, when Rufus is a grown up, the readers also learn that it is illegal for him to love the person he loves. Not only would this interracial relationship be unlawful, but the woman he adores does not love him back. Thus, the reader gets an insight into the distress connected to experiencing unrequited love. I believe empowering the African American characters and portraying the white people of authority as more ruined was intentional on behalf of Butler, Duffy, and Jennings, as they perhaps did not want Black bodies in pain to be the main source of an emotional response for the reader (Popescu, 2018; Ibrahim, 2022).

4.1.1.2 The Possibilities of Emphasizing Agency

The graphic novel's depictions of agency restrictions in the Antebellum South provide insight into how systems of oppression operated historically and how they are perpetuated in the present. In the nineteenth century, being Black meant facing multiple oppressions, thus limiting control over one's circumstances (Weissman, 2020). In *Kindred* (2017) one encounters the constraints of agency from the beginning, starting with how Dana's control of temporality is dependent on the actions of Rufus. Additionally, one can argue and say that her entire existence depends on Rufus, as she discovers that he is her ancestor and that she is not certain of her survival if anything were to happen to him. Next, legal and social norms generally restrict the actions of the Black characters in the story, and they are constantly victims of physical and psychological violence. Being a woman during these times offers additional restrictions on agency. Regarding this, the Black women in the story had a limited say in decisions regarding their lives and their bodies. The students in the EAL classroom can witness these limitations through the depiction of the events in the various panels, and they are allowed to see the frustration that is caused by not having control over one's situation. By discussing *Kindred* (2017)

with a CRT perspective in mind (Ladson-Billings, 2023), one can then examine how systems of oppression operate and are perpetuated. Moreover, this can provide insights into contemporary issues of racism and discrimination in Norwegian society (Nordic Culture Point, 2021; Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021).

Kindred (2017) offers a complex portrayal of the intersections of gender, race, and agency, thus standing as an example of intersectionality (Davis, 2014). *Kindred* displays that being a woman in a patriarchal environment, in addition to being Black, was a supplementary burden during that time, which offered the characters additional hardships and restrictions to their agency. For instance, those in positions of authority were seemingly mostly white, cis, heterosexual men, and when it came to indulging their sexual desires, they believed their whiteness granted them access to Black bodies in this system of uneven power relations. Moreover, one can begin to understand how Black women were systematically dehumanized while simultaneously being exoticized. In addition, female Black characters are frequently depicted as hypersexualized in literature (Ibrahim, 2020). At one point, Dana contemplates the treatment of the women by stating the following: “[t]here was no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one” (Butler et al., 2017, p. 117). In Appendix 4, it is possible to see, through the panels, how a white patroller wishes to sexually assault one of the Black women, and one can perceive the distress that causes her (Butler et al., 2017). Next, Black women would fear being impregnated by the white men in charge, as their babies would then be whipped, worked to death, or sold (Butler et al., 2017, see Appendix 5). Moreover, Alice, the Black woman Rufus is in love with, spends her nights in Rufus’ bedroom against her will. This notion contrasts some assumed beliefs regarding the relationship between “the woman of color and the white man” (Fanon & Philcox, 2008, p. 24). *Kindred* (2017) emphasizes that the Black characters do not perceive a relationship with the slaveowners in this manner and that it is a brutal violation instead. It is then possible to see that the intersection of gender and race contributes to how one is treated (Davis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989). Inspecting the impact intersectionality has in *Kindred* (2017) provides an increased understanding of the adversity faced by the Black female characters in the story. Moreover, this is a valuable teaching point in the EAL classroom, as one can contemplate the effect intersectionality has in the Nordics today more broadly.

It is possible to consider how the Black people in *Kindred* (2017) exercise agency within a system where racism and discrimination are present, and what that can teach the lower secondary students in the English subject. *Kindred* proves that it is possible to exercise agency within oppressive systems by using whatever available tools. For example, Dana is attempting to make an impact during her time traveling through education. She wants to educate the Black characters in the story, so they can gain more control. The slaveowners feared the impact education could have had on their slaves, as education can be an important step to thinking critically. Not only did Dana want to educate the Black characters in *Kindred* (2017), but also Rufus, so he did not end up like his father. Nonetheless, Dana could face severe repercussions if she got caught educating the Black children, which she also ended up experiencing (Butler et al., 2017, p. 97, see Appendix 6). Although she was punished for her teaching efforts and endured the pain of being whipped, she viewed it as necessary to persist and refused to be deterred by fear. Students in the EAL classroom can see the pain that followed the teaching and learning process, and then begin to gain an understanding of the courage it must have taken for her to continue doing so. I argue that the Black characters in *Kindred* are not portrayed as ruined or hopeless, but as courageous and inspiring. It is important to show the students in the EAL classroom that if one witnesses injustice, it is

possible to do something about it. An aspect from *Kindred* that it is possible to further consider with 8th- 10th graders is thus how marginalized groups in Norway exercise agency, in a system where racism and discrimination are present (Harlap & Riese, 2014; Nordic Culture Point, 2021).

While *Kindred* (2017) highlights both African American individuals' constraints and abilities for being agentive, the graphic novel invites further contemplation regarding the process of reconciling with former generations. It has not been uncommon that more contemporary generations of Black people in the US have found it difficult to fathom why their ancestors did not fight the system to a larger extent (See, 2010). However, if one were able to travel back in time, one could question if one would be able to incite uproar against the system. Most people would likely have become a part of the system as well in the same situation. Butler had come to terms with the past and understood the survival strategies employed by preceding generations of African Americans, including her mother (See, 2010). Moreover, Butler recognized how her mother had to endure the humiliation that came with being a maid, for her to eat and live comfortably, and she wanted to write *Kindred* (1979) to make others experience the pain in history as well (See, 2010). The original version (1979) was partially written by Butler to resolve her own feelings (Williamson, 2014). Additionally, she did not want the reader to pity the Black characters, but to emphasize how their survival necessitated strength (Williamson, 2014). Reconciliation is hence a notion that Dana is depicted to reflect on in *Kindred* (Butler et al., 2017, see Appendices 7 and 8). For instance, she questions it by thinking the following: "I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (Butler et al., p. 89, see Appendix 7). Moreover, it is stated in a caption that: "[i]n the militant 60s, [Sarah would] be an idea held in contempt, [Dana] looked down on her [herself] for a while [...] [b]ut pouring brine on Alice's shredded flesh washed away [her] moral superiority" (Butler et al., p. 144, see Appendix 8). In other words, it was difficult for her to judge someone obeying the system, when she experienced the repercussions, one could face when rebelling against it. *Kindred* (2017) can thus spark contemplations regarding the processes of reconciliation in the English subject, which can contribute to a foundation for understanding historical oppressions and injustice in the Nordics (Olsen, 2022; Svendsen, 2022).

4.1.2 Unveiling the Potential and Limitations of Using *Kindred* in the English Subject

There are some aspects to keep in mind when introducing a literary piece such as *Kindred* (2017) in the EAL classroom. The students will develop unique feelings while examining the text, and thus they will also respond distinctively to it. The fact that the text includes the portrayal of brutal events impacts the students and the learning environment in various manners, which can be a foundation for further reflection. Lastly, if it is expected that the students can feel empathetic towards the fictional characters, but this can be difficult to measure; the focus can rather be on whether the feelings developed can be considered an empathetic response, or something else. Additionally, one can then focus on how one can attempt to understand the feelings of another. If the teacher openly addresses some supposed limitations that can arise when teaching *Kindred* (2017), it can contribute to the students' learning outcome regarding empathy and agency.

The diversity within the student body significantly influences the development of different emotional responses when examining *Kindred* (2017). The EAL classroom does

not consist of a homogenous group of students, as each class comprises individuals with unique backgrounds and intersecting identities. Furthermore, a white Norwegian student may, for instance, encounter very different emotions compared to a Black Norwegian student. It is possible that some students can experience feelings of empathy and compassion, while other students can feel discomfort (Zembylas, 2015). The students in the EAL classroom can learn how the development of various emotions can be dependent on a person's identity and background. As some of the Black characters in the graphic novel have agency and can act as models, and not just as victims, the text can help develop Norwegian students' emotional responses while expanding or challenging their preconceived ideas about African American people and contexts. Other materials, such as textbooks in the EAL classroom can sometimes reproduce stereotypes regarding minoritized cultures (Murray, 2023). By employing literature such as *Kindred* (2017) to teach the topics of empathy and agency, Norwegian students can see how the Black characters are empowered and not helpless or ruined, countering damaged-centered research (Tuck, 2009; Taylor, 2023). Moreover, this can, for instance, target how CRT in education aims to reform the structural and cultural aspects of educational contexts that uphold both subordinated and dominant racial positions within the classroom (Harlap & Riese, 2014).

The graphic novel offers multiple opportunities for students to cultivate compassion and/or empathy for the Black characters in the story. Yet, the explicit images in *Kindred* (2017) can have another impact on them as well. The development of empathy for the students can be affected since such depictions of violence in the graphic novel can also leave the reader desensitized. There are some sequences of panels in *Kindred* that include highly graphical depictions of violence, which could potentially overwhelm the reader and make them feel distressed. Consequently, their emotional reaction can therefore diminish (Kim & Han, 2018). The readers can be urged to turn away from the situation, and thus might not necessarily feel much. For example, in the chapter "The Fire," Dana stumbles upon a situation where one of the Black characters is targeted by a group of white patrollers that tie him up against a tree to whip him in front of his family (see Appendices 9 and 10). By using visual elements such as certain colors, extreme close-up shots, motion lines, and closure, for instance, the reader can perceive a more comprehensive picture of what is occurring in the story. In Appendix 9, one can see a close-up of the Black man's cries of agony, the tears streaming down his face, the fresh blood emerging on his back, and the absolute horror channeled in Dana's expression. Moreover, an example of successfully utilizing closure in the graphic novel is displayed through the depiction of a whip followed by an image portraying the pain experienced by the Black man. Additionally, motion lines are applied to demonstrate the velocity and force of the whipping. It is also noticeable that the use of color is carefully considered throughout *Kindred*. For instance, the first panel in Appendix 10 illustrates how there is a difference in color used on the white patroller versus the Black man. The white man is depicted using dark colors, which makes him blend into the background, whereas the colors used to portray the Black man are more attention-grabbing. As a result, this technique can symbolize how the white patroller is an aggressive predator seeking to evade notice, while the Black man is pictured as the prey that will almost inevitably be caught in the white man's hunt. All these factors can contribute to making the graphic novel adaptation appear more unsettling for the reader. The panels that illustrate this racist incident can thus be perceived as highly graphic and distressing for Norwegian 8th-10th graders as well, and one can see how access to another's experience does not necessarily or automatically result in an empathetic response.

Features within *Kindred* (2017) can therefore prompt some reflections regarding its appropriateness for students in lower secondary school. The mature content that it includes, such as depictions of violence and nudity, are reasons why some teachers might be more hesitant about the inclusion of graphic novels like *Kindred* in the classroom. Also, by incorporating racially charged language, like the N-word, the story contributes to a more authentic depiction of the Antebellum South, but some teachers in Norway may fear that they can lose control over the situation when such language is depicted in the classroom (Johannessen & Røthing, 2022). This echoes how a teacher was recently called a racist when introducing a text with the N-word in the classroom (Majid, 2024). In general, teachers in the Nordic context are reluctant to teach topics such as race and racism because it is discomforting (Johannessen & Røthing, 2022; Osler & Lindquist, 2018; Faye, 2021). Therefore, I wonder whether it is considered additionally unsettling to teach the highly graphic depictions of violence in *Kindred* because the mistreated characters are Black. Regarding this, one can conjecture whether social justice teacher training would influence the inclusion of materials like *Kindred* (2017) in the classroom (Murray, 2023). The fact that this is a multimodal novel and not solely written text contributes to this experience for the reader. Dernikos et al. (2020) raised the concern that affective teaching can activate and deactivate individuals in different manners. It is possible that these panels can elicit feelings of grief and anger that can deactivate the students if they are not addressed properly. Furthermore, one can consider how feelings of discomfort are developed when seeing such violent pictures. According to Zembylas and McGlynn (2012), individuals can aspire to make changes in society if their comfort zones are disrupted. Then, teachers could contemplate whether the students in the EAL classroom must be exposed to the graphic depictions of violence in *Kindred* to seek to make changes beyond the classroom and fight for social justice.

While analyzing and discussing a complex text like *Kindred* (2017), it became clear to me how genuine empathy for another can be difficult to fully attain, and that there should rather be other focal points in the EAL classroom. Although the graphic novel adaptation offers aspects that can provoke an emotional response for the reader, it is difficult to know if one embodies the exact emotion of another, and thus has feelings of empathy. Throughout the reading experience, one is left feeling astonished by the depictions of fictional events that could very much have occurred in real life as well. Furthermore, the fact that this is a graphic novel can also enhance the students' emotional response, as pictures alongside the text can facilitate their comprehension of the narrative (Hecke, 2011; Rimmereide, 2021). Moreover, the panels show the character's body language and facial expressions, in addition to seeing what occurs in written form. However, as stated in the theory chapter, distinguishing empathy from other similar terms, like compassion, is connected to how one can feel what appears to be the emotion of another (Pedwell, 2014; Barton & Garvis, 2019). One of the dangers connected to empathy is when the empathy that an individual feels for someone turns out to be a projection of what is experienced (Pedwell, 2014). It is then necessary to acknowledge this for the students in the EAL classroom, so one does not assume that one knows what it must have been like to be Black in this particular historical context. Otherwise, one can question if reading such impactful literature can become a form of racism tourism (Ngo, 2017), where the students can assume that they know what it must have been like to be someone else, and then, through reading, get to enter this world and leave as they wish to. Instead, I would urge teachers to initiate some valuable critical discussions regarding how it feels to see injustice portrayed, whether it is possible to take on another's perspective completely, and how one can be an ally when seeing

injustice in real life as well (Ngo, 2017). Introducing *Kindred* (2017) in the English subject, with a focus on limits of empathy and agency, can thus contribute to some of the objectives established in LK20 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a; 2019b).

4.2 *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019)

The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration is a social justice graphic novel written by the Black Canadian author Wayde Compton, and illustrations are provided by April dela Noche Milne, a Filipino Canadian artist who was once Compton's student. In this sense, it shows the collaborative nature of the work and its pedagogical potential. Compton is an important figure in Black Canadian writing and values intertwining elements of realism and fiction in his pieces (Moynagh, 2022). Moreover, I have found it relevant to note how Compton (2022) once contended that "... for people of colour, the realization of injustice happens before birth, multi-generationally, and with great nuance and personal investment; to bring into the circle the newly-conscious is exhilarating, but it also has an aftertaste of bitterness" (p. 77). The essence of Compton's argument is that people of color become conscious of the inequity in society from infancy, and white people are learning these truths eventually, which can feel a bit disheartening as it often requires brutal events being recorded and disseminated to provoke awareness (Compton, 2022). Portraying real-life injustice through fiction may have been an avenue for Compton to contribute to reaching a larger audience, including allies. In *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), from now spelled as *TBR*, Compton also blurs elements of realism and fiction, like the speculative graphic novel *Kindred* (2017) does as well. Additionally, the word "fable" appears explicitly in the cover, which can forecast the graphic novel being a brief story that conveys a moral or a message. This multimodal text was originally published as a short story in Compton's *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999), with the title *The Blue Road: A Fairy Tale*, and a boy as the protagonist (Odegaard, 2019; Roberts, 2023). In addition, it is relevant to acknowledge that the publisher of *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019) is Arsenal Pulp Press, which has demonstrated exceptional work in platforming BIPOC voices in settler Canada.

The narrative follows an orphan girl of color named Lacuna, who is forced by Polaris, a will-o'-the-wisp, to leave the only home she knows. Her journey is told in a third-person narrative, mostly through caption boxes, which convey Lacuna's thoughts and feelings. At times, however, the narrative is also placed outside of these boxes, seemingly to portray the direct descriptions of the occurring events. Also, Lacuna expresses herself in the first-person singular form, and her dialogues with others are portrayed in speech balloons. On the path to reach Lacuna's arbitrarily chosen destination, the Northern Kingdom, she encounters some challenges she needs to overcome to make it there. Once she finally manages to cross the border to reach her new residential area, she faces obstacles regarding her lack of citizenship. Moreover, to reside there she needs to agree on an unjust treatment, which applies to individuals who have arrived without having citizenship. Lacuna needs to accept carrying around a mirror at all times to see the Kingdom through. Toward the end of the narrative, she discovers that she can create customized glasses, where she can look at the mirror through one eye and the other eye can see society, and thus surmounts the obstacle she is presented with. Regarding structure, Compton and dela Noche Milne divided *TBR* into 8 distinctive sections and an epilogue. Each segment portrays a significant event for the main character Lacuna. This graphic novel portrays several significant tropes, such as showing

care for others, creativity, agency, material and symbolic borders, and migration, all contributing to centering social justice and ethics.

The analysis and discussion of the graphic novel have been done through an examination of how the themes of empathy, compassion, survival, and agency appear in the text. This chapter is then divided into two interconnected sections. First, I present and analyze how empathy and agency appear in *TBR*. Next, I explore and discuss how the graphic novel portrays migration, which can benefit from being addressed properly in the EAL classroom. Overall, I have grounded my discussion in the theoretical frameworks of affect theory in education and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education. I would like to add that many of Norway's inhabitants have experienced the challenges associated with relocating to a foreign nation (Statistics Norway, 2024), so introducing a migration story in an English lesson in Norway can be highly positive, as it can promote an increased understanding of society, foster prosocial behavior, and help nurture an inclusive learning environment. Also, discussing *TBR* can help target LK20's objective that "[s]chool shall promote democratic values and attitudes that can counteract prejudice and discrimination" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a).

4.2.1 Prevalence of Empathy and Agency in the Graphic Novel

While examining *TBR*, I noticed how praiseworthy it is to maintain optimism and resilience despite facing constant obstacles, it is not uncommon to feel defeated and drained instead if one continually encounters barrages of challenges. Lacuna can thus be viewed as an example of a girl who reflects prosocial behavior, and it is inspiring to follow along, as a reader, while she maneuvers through societal constraints. Therefore, I found my own journey exploring this multimodal ensemble an intriguing one, so I hope this text will also offer my future students in the EAL classroom some supplementary perspectives on migration and discrimination within Norwegian society.

Although Lacuna is facing her personal obstacles, she always takes time to feel compassionate and/or empathetic for the creatures and individuals she encounters, which is a remarkable ability to further inspect in the EAL classroom, as previously discussed in relation to *Kindred*. Lacuna continually reflects on how others will perceive her actions and feel about them and thus possesses accountability. Firstly, Lacuna appears to be concerned about whether she tricked and was untruthful to Polaris, the will-o'-the-wisp, which she did to avoid being incinerated (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 11). Even though Polaris was the one who endangered her, Lacuna did not want to make him feel bad. Next, she is attentive to what would happen to individuals who will face Polaris, and questions if there is anything she can do to help them on their journey through the thicket of tickets (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 12). Also, Lacuna takes a moment to contemplate that not all mirror people can afford her innovation (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 13). It was not long ago when she was in that exact position herself, with no money and a need to see the world through a mirror. Moreover, one can see in the graphic novel that she imagines how they might feel, hence showing an empathetic response. Although Lacuna has only tried to make the best out of the obstacles she has faced, she still considers how the mirrorless people perceive all the changes that she has initiated for the kingdom (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019). As Lacuna is considerate regarding others' emotions, she understands that exercising agency comes with responsibility and accountability, and this is beneficial to acknowledge and discuss with 8th- 10th graders.

While the students can perceive Lacuna's emotional responses toward the other characters in the story, it might become challenging for them to develop empathy for the characters themselves. For instance, the graphic novel does not delve too much into Lacuna's adversity. When she is depicted to be lonely in the Northern Kingdom, the reader is only allowed to contemplate this potentially melancholic moment for a total of two pages (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 14). In these panels, Lacuna is situated in her bed, and her entire body is shown in each of them. One can see, in one of the panels, that she is hunched forward, which can signal that she is experiencing sadness or fatigue. However, the reader is not provided a close-up shot that reveals Lacuna's facial expression, in detail. She is not looking directly at the reader, and her eyes are mostly closed when this event is portrayed, making it difficult for the reader to perceive her feelings through her own gaze. The captions are placed outside of the boxes, showing that she is thinking, and what her thoughts concern. However, the reader is not invited to access her full thought process. It is generally difficult to get full access to her emotional state and therefore be able to empathize with her, as a reader. However, due to how the lower secondary EAL classroom that this study envisions consists of a heterogeneous group of students, their responses when examining the text may differ. Statistics Norway (2024) has found that 20,8 % of the Norwegian population are either immigrants or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. Consequently, some of the students in the EAL classroom likely take a part in constituting this data as well. Students can thus have various responses to the text, as there are potentially some who have experienced immigration personally or have family members who have migrated. Furthermore, the multimodality that this graphic novel features can help facilitate all the students' emotional responses, as they get some access to the characters' thoughts and feelings (Hecke, 2011; Phillips, 2017). Nonetheless, one should acknowledge that individuals who are granted social protection or status might never truly understand the feelings of another who has not been the receiver of that process (Williamson, 2014). Students who have not directly encountered the challenges associated with migration may never fully be able to experience the feelings of someone who has, which in this case is Lacuna. Once again, echoing my findings in *Kindred*, it becomes apparent that the probability of the development of empathy for the characters in *TBR* is connected to the amount of identification with the character and the access one has to the character's thoughts and feelings.

Lacuna is a creative and resourceful character, who attempts to do what she can within her societal framework. She reflects with imagination and independence, which are abilities that radiate wisdom and survivance (Vizenor, 1998). Also, Lacuna is not granted an effortless journey to reach the Northern Kingdom, and she thus needs to make significant decisions on her path. For instance, she understands how she can help others who get caught in the thicket of tickets by burning the briar to the ground (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 12). Also, she discovers that she can overcome the border guard's seemingly impossible challenge to dance under the rainbow border by painting the road blue and waiting for a ray of sun to shine through the rain (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 15). By revisiting a dream where she gracefully figure skates, Lacuna discovers how she can alleviate her existence in the Northern Kingdom by creating customized glasses (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 16). These are just a few examples of Lacuna's resourcefulness. Both the author Compton and the illustrator dela Noche Milne are children of immigrants (VanCAF, 2020). Moreover, they contemplated the fact that Lacuna is both a migrant herself and a daughter of migrants, at the same time (VanCAF, 2020). Furthermore, Compton and dela

Noche Milne stated in the same interview (VanCAF, 2020) that they wanted children to be presented with a heroine they could identify with, someone who went through this journey and survives. In addition, when Lacuna is confronted with what her efforts have contributed to the other mirror-people within society, she is grounded and reflects modesty when she states the following: “[b]efore I came here, I was stranded in the Great Swamp of Ink, completely alone. Now look where I am. Look at all these people. I’m so lucky” (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 107, see Appendix 17). As she articulates these reflections she is dressed in the blue border guard uniform, which contrasts her business companion’s dazzling and pretentious silver and gold costume. Moreover, Launa’s humble nature can be examined in the light of Cariou’s (2020) plea for critical humility, when understanding the perspectives of another. As Lacuna is exercising agency, while remaining humble and kind, students in the EAL classroom are presented with a girl of color who serves as a role model to them.

In the text, however, multiple moments depict constraints of agency, which can offer some valuable reflections on aspects of society for the EAL students. Firstly, Compton and dela Noche Milne (2019) present how Lacuna is forced to leave her home, the Great Swamp of Ink. Next, she needs to pass a thicket of tickets that has an agency of its own. Furthermore, Lacuna is not allowed to cross the border to the Northern Kingdom (see Appendix 18), and she needs to always carry a mirror to reside there (see Appendix 19). *TBR* can be read as an allegory of the rigidity faced when crossing the Canada-US border (Roberts, 2023). Additionally, the graphic novel depicts the border policing characters, who are capable of verbal and physical aggression, as the antagonists in the story. Thus, this graphic novel “...mount critiques of Canada and nation-state citizenship by foregrounding inhospitality and territorial usurpation” (Roberts, 2023, p. 134), which can also be contemplated in relation to the hostility observed in the Norwegian society against BIPOC individuals (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Harlap & Riese, 2014).

In the face of continuous obstacles and injustice, as portrayed in the narrative, it would not be startling to feel defeated, and hence become passive. If Lacuna had solely developed feelings of grief and anger on her path, this could have caused deactivation (Dernikos et al., 2020), which potentially could have diminished her resourcefulness. Instead, the reader can, through Lacuna’s gaze, perceive the fire ignited in her. While Lacuna is cleaning one of the individuals’ mirrors, for example, she questions why people have accepted the burden of perceiving themselves through it. As a response, she is told as follows: “[t]he king wants it this way, and this is the Northern Kingdom, right? There’s no point in not understanding something as simple as that. Besides, things used to be much worse than how they are now” (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 84, see Appendix 20). However, Lacuna could not fathom why she should accept such treatment and thus aspired for change, mirroring Dana’s defiance in *Kindred*. Similarly, in Norwegian society, one should not be a passive bystander in the face of racism and discrimination (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Nordic Culture Point, 2021). Furthermore, Compton has noted that it is necessary to introduce contemporary events to children, as they are also able to process political actions and see things or feel the occurrences within society (VanCAF, 2020). As *TBR* provides a fable of an immigrant’s experience, it is possible to acquire knowledge on aspects of society through an engaging story. Stewart (2020) has noted that the telling of a story can be a tool to sustain intellectual exploration, which can also be a foundation for the development of ethical awareness. This notion supports how LK20 establishes a focus on human dignity and asserts that “...human rights are an important part of the foundation of our constitutional

state. They are based on universal values that apply to all people regardless of who they are, where they come from and where they are” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). The students in the EAL classroom can then perceive some constraints of agency an immigrant might face when adapting to a new society, through a graphic novel, and can begin to further question if any actions need to be taken.

Along similar lines, the graphic novel can provide some discussions regarding what counts in society as free will versus how much is socially conditioned, which is also necessary to acknowledge when looking at tendencies within Norwegian society. For instance, the graphic novel depicts how Lacuna increasingly becomes an agent throughout the narrative. Initially, it appears that she is being controlled by her surroundings, to a larger extent, by accepting the demands of others. Over time, she gains greater control of her environment. At first, she agrees to leave her home, the Great Swamp of Ink, and is perhaps slightly more passive. Eventually, she manages to make a significant impact on the Northern Kingdom, which alters society massively. Moreover, it is possible to see how the border guard and the individuals in charge of Lacuna’s citizenship act as instruments to the state. Nonetheless, the border guard is willing to make a bet with Lacuna that can allow her to cross the border (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019), thus readers can question whether he has some authority over who gets to pass through it. Generally, the border guard is portrayed to be more sympathetic than the gatekeeper in the Northern Kingdom (Roberts, 2023). He is depicted as an older, grey-haired man with wrinkles that appears to be lonely, and one can see how he needs to protect the border while depending on only one leg. Perhaps his intersecting identities (Davis, 2014), such as him being elderly and disabled have made him more understanding and compassionate, thus allowing Lacuna the chance to fight for her entry to the Northern Kingdom. The border guard has probably experienced adversity and discrimination himself, which may cause him to wonder if he has the authority to make a positive impact on someone else. The text thus invites readers to explore how much agency an individual has, and which boundaries are put forth by the government and societal norms. *TBR* also displays how preceding generations of inhabitants in the Northern Kingdom attempted to combat the king’s ruthless enforcement of distinguishing wealthy citizens from the poor ones. In Appendix 21, it is possible to see how the fortune teller states how “[p]eople ran away, fought back, resisted” (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 106). Lower secondary students can then learn how the faceless people resisted and begin to understand that contesting societal defects can improve a situation. If it is revealed that constraints within society put forth detrimental tendencies, one should try to make an impact on that through democratic engagements. On this note, working with the graphic novel in the EAL classroom can further help teachers touch upon the importance of participation, protection of democratic values, and ensuring equity in Norwegian society, which are crucial objectives that are established in LK20 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a; 2019b).

4.2.2 Multimodal Portrayals of Migration in the English Subject

TBR portrays a complex migration story through a fantasy lens and illustrations with vivid colors. Through this fable, the reader can see the obstacles someone immigrating can face together with the intersections of socioeconomic status, race, ability, and identity. Consequently, it is possible to gain a larger understanding of how it is difficult to leave the place one knows and is from and adapt to a new society. These notions are depicted through allegories and symbols in the graphic novel symbols. Although the text’s multimodality can enhance the comprehension of *TBR*’s messages, it

can be relevant for the teacher to explain what these allegories and symbols may mean to the students in the EAL classroom, thereby fostering the development of their interpretative skills. The story touches upon migration challenges and opportunities, which can benefit from further elaboration in Norwegian EAL classrooms.

4.2.2.1 Examining Intersectionality, Attitudes, and Reconciliation in the EAL Classroom

When Lacuna feels empathetic towards those who cannot afford her special glasses an example of the intersections of having an immigrant background and socioeconomic status emerges (see Appendix 13), which is of importance to the students in the EAL classroom. Not only can one face discrimination because of not being born in a place, but not belonging to a certain societal class can create some supplementary challenges. This aspect can help the reader consider the effects of intersectionality, as also elaborated on in relation to *Kindred* (2017). For instance, research has shown that parents with a non-Nordic immigrant background might face greater difficulties in following up on their children in schools and providing necessary academic and mental support, due to various factors, including socioeconomic status (Bendixen & Danielsen, 2020). From a CRT focal point, I wonder whether the Norwegian educational system benefits only certain individuals within society (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021). Nonetheless, it is important to note that this can be a highly sensitive topic to consider in the EAL classroom, as there can be students within the class who find this relatable and potentially discomforting to shed light on at school (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012; Zembylas, 2015). One should therefore issue some caution if the topic of displacement is introduced, so anxious feelings regarding this topic do not ultimately weaken the learning outcome, as established in LK20's core curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). In the graphic novel's epilogue, Lacuna decides to watch the Aurora Borealis, with other mirror people, from outside of the Northern Kingdom. The mirror people that she joins are likely the ones who would still need a full-sized mirror to see the festival through. Moreover, as opposed to the original story (1999), where Lacuna avoids looking at the individuals who are not able to afford her glasses, Lacuna is depicted in the graphic novel adaptation as becoming a part of their community (Roberts, 2023). The presence of intersectionality in *TBR* can then provide a foundation for the explicit exploration of privilege versus oppression within society in a classroom setting.

By emphasizing Lacuna's agency, the story can help challenge the prevailing and dangerous attitude that immigrants are not resourceful. As the influx of mass migration has triggered some resentment from individuals within the host population (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021), these notions can also be mirrored by these individuals' children. Therefore, providing students with examples of courageous and inspiring immigrants, such as Lacuna, is beneficial to help challenge these mindsets. *TBR* portrays an orphan girl who takes charge of her life and attempts to make society a better place for all its citizens. When I considered this aspect during my examination of the graphic novel, I kept revisiting some occurrences that took place while I was employed at my first job at 7/11 in the middle of Oslo's city center. Most of my coworkers there were either refugees, immigrants, or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, and I was lucky enough to be told some of their life stories, which sometimes included a description of experiences in their country of origin, their journey to Norway, and how it was to live in this society. I guess nothing surpasses a deep dive into one's innermost personal experiences in between customer service and hot dog flipping. Nonetheless, I noticed that there were multiple occasions where customers wanted me to assist them, while I

was occupied, and meanwhile, my coworkers were available. Of course, some of these instances could be experiences that one should not read too much into, but there were times I felt a sense of unease while these happened. I knew that the people I worked with were very resourceful and great individuals, and sometimes had more experience working there than me, so I started questioning why some people were addressing me instead. As it has been detected that racism and discrimination take place in Norwegian society (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Nordic Culture Point, 2021), teachers need to consider how xenophobia and hostility can be learned already from a young age. Therefore, providing the students in the EAL classroom with authentic stories where refugees and immigrants are depicted as ingenious and courageous, rather than victims and ruined, could contribute to challenging some attitudes that persist in society.

TBR can initiate further reflections and discussions regarding reconciliation with former generations of immigrants, which is of importance to the EAL classroom. While adjusting to a new society, it is possible to risk facing some losses of culture and language in the process as well. In the graphic novel, one can see how Lacuna navigates through systematic constraints, but that she does what needs to be done to survive in a new location (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019). Educational scholars Ragnar Arntzen and Odd Eriksen (2019) reported that students with a migrant background in Norway have experienced that previously accumulated cultural and social capital is devalued in their new society, where they have, for instance, seen how a degree from their country of origin may not be recognized, the language they know no longer functions as a relevant means of communication, and that the cultural codes they are familiar with have lost their significance. As individuals with an immigrant background have reported that their cultural capital has not been acknowledged in Norwegian schools and society (Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019), it is unexpected that they want to adjust to the societal scripts. As a result, assimilation can occur, which is not only a deprivation for an individual family but also a loss for everyone in society. If one is a child born to immigrant parents, it would not be strange to feel frustrated if assimilation has caused a lack of knowledge about one's ethnic identity. However, if one could see the impact of societal constraints, it could be easier to understand their cause. Circling back to the graphic novel, Lacuna also needs to submit to the norms of the Northern Kingdom. Thus, the Kingdom does not display that all of the citizens have equal rights, as put forth as an objective in LK20 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a).

Furthermore, parents frequently make considerable sacrifices for their children when relocating, and these are not always visible. In *TBR* Lacuna's parents fled the Northern Kingdom to create a better life in the Great Swamp of Ink. Lacuna had no memory of having parents who cared for her during her upbringing, but eventually, she is told about their bravery, and love for her, through the fortune teller (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 21). Sometimes it is difficult to fully know what preceding generations have done to make their children's lives better. The illustrator of the graphic novel, dela Noche Milne, stated in an interview (2020) that working on the text was an emotional experience as she was thinking about the journey of her mother, aunt, and grandmother, who came to Canada from the Philippines (VanCAF). Moreover, dela Noche Milne expressed that during the illustration process, she experienced a large amount of gratitude for what they went through for the family (VanCAF, 2020). Through dela Noche Milne's powerful illustrations, it is possible for the reader to perceive and sympathize with her feelings, when maneuvering through this literary piece. I would argue that an exploration of the graphic novel can further offer lower secondary students

in EAL classrooms an introduction to the importance of reconciliation, which resonates with my findings from *Kindred* (2017).

4.2.2.2 Inspecting Norway's Exclusionary Practices through *TBR*

The graphic novel allows the reader to observe the ways in which bureaucracy constrains individuals' agency. *TBR* shows that some of Lacuna's obstacles are connected to the institution's rigidity and impersonal nature. As the reader becomes closely acquainted with Lacuna and all the struggles she has faced to arrive in the Northern Kingdom, it feels frustrating that the guard does not let her automatically cross the border and that she is not granted citizenship without restrictions (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendices 18 & 19). Simply being a person in need of a new place to reside is not enough to be welcomed in the Northern Kingdom. In contemporary society, it is possible to perceive how the world is becoming increasingly vicious and cruel (Barton & Garvis, 2019). Amnesty International (n.d.) has stated how individuals need to "...flee from violence, war, hunger, extreme poverty, because of their sexual or gender orientation, or from the consequences of climate change or other natural disasters" (para. 6). In other words, several individuals need to resettle, which is also noticeable for the Norwegian government. All individuals needing to relocate have their unique stories and backgrounds, but in the system, they are just another name on paper. Discussing these issues with the students through the use of *TBR* can offer some comparative insights into the struggles individuals who enter Norway possibly encounter when attempting to reside in the country. Teachers can then question in the EAL classroom whether there should be increased flexibility in complex situations like these, thus helping students develop their critical thinking skills and ethical awareness.

TBR can prompt an exploration of how a society with an immigrant population operates, which can then spark a critical discussion regarding the inclusivity of all Norwegian citizens. Anders Barstad (2021), on behalf of Statistics Norway, proclaimed that immigrants in Norway experience greater levels of social exclusion and loneliness than other parts of the population. When one encounters a new culture, where the language is also unfamiliar, feeling lonely is thus not a rarity. Amnesty International (n.d.) has also emphasized how some individuals who have had to relocate feel alone and isolated as they have lost crucial support networks, such as their communities, colleagues, relatives, and friends, which are social spheres taken for granted by many. Moreover, it is not uncommon for Norwegian immigrants to be drawn toward other individuals of the same or similar backgrounds, as they may share experiences and, at times, culture, and language. However, one can also question whether this community established with other immigrants is a result of the lack of inclusion within Norwegian society. At one point, in *TBR*, Lacuna reflects upon this matter, while she is depicted all alone in an empty apartment: "[s]he was amazed to realize she felt almost as lonely as she did in the great swamp of ink. Even though here she was surrounded by people" (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 87, see Appendix 14). In addition, the text and illustrations show how Lacuna only interacted with other mirror people after her arrival, as she thinks to herself the following: "[s]he realized that since she had come to the Northern Kingdom she had barely spoken to a mirrorless person. And the only mirror people she knew were those she met while working" (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 87, see Appendix 14). These thoughts can facilitate a conversation about how one may feel as an immigrant in Norwegian society, while avoiding falling into the pitfalls of reinforcing rather than challenging the systems of racial privilege and oppression (Lobb, 2022). Børhaug (2007) found that LK06 reinforced an "us" vs. "them" distinction,

which still lingers in the Norwegian educational system even after the implementation of LK20 (Harlap & Riese, 2014). It might also raise questions about whether the societal framework, including the educational system, is designed to be welcoming to immigrants, which is essential for the students in the EAL classroom to consider if they are to be advocates for equality.

Practices of inclusion and exclusion can be further examined through the fortune teller's explanation of the Northern Kingdom's history, which can be an important allegory to consider in the EAL classroom. The fortune teller elucidates how the Northern Kingdom distinguished between "...the Faceless people and the People with Faces" (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 103, see Appendix 22). Moreover, she conveys how "...the king didn't like to see the faces of the poor. They made him sad and uncomfortable. So he made it so all the servants of the kingdom appeared faceless to the rich" (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, p. 103, see Appendix 22). *TBR's* multimodality (van Leeuwen, 2020; Hecke, 2011) can make the portrayal of the Faceless people appear more chilling, as the illustrations by dela Noche Milne facilitate the reading experience. For instance, the portrayal of the two faceless people embracing each other as an extension of the fortune teller's utterances invites the reader to reflect on the brutality of this enforcement and the need for support from someone who understands the situation. However, the lack of access to the characters' facial expressions makes it even more impossible for the reader, and thus the student in the EAL classroom, to actually understand their feelings. Given how what one assumes someone feels can be a projection of reality (Pedwell, 2014), only an individual who has felt invisible in the same manner can attempt to experience the emotions depicted. Immigrants and individuals who are Norwegian born to immigrant parents can also be seen as invisible to the labor market and to the educational system as they have felt that they do not possess the correct cultural capital (Forthun Hoen, 2024; Arntzen & Eriksen, 2019). Along similar lines, Midtbøen (2014) has found that children of immigrants in Norway have reported feeling that their domestic educational qualifications and linguistic fluency appear invisible to employers, due to attitudes and stereotypes linked to their parents' generation. An immigrant person might need to accept non-relevant employment that disregards their qualifications from their country of origin and/or domestic country (Midtbøen & Rogstad, 2012), and sometimes thus work in fields that are less desirable for the ethnic majority to work within. Through such exclusion, immigrants and children of immigrants might as well appear as invisible, or even "faceless," to other people in society, as represented in the graphic novel.

Concerning this matter, *TBR* can also facilitate a discussion regarding feelings of belonging, which can offer students in the EAL classroom some valuable input. Immigrants in Norwegian society can have multiple identities, and they can, for instance, endorse both their national (i.e., Norwegian) and ethnic (e.g., Kurdish) identities (Martiny et al., 2020). However, as racism and discrimination persist within Norwegian society (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Nordic Culture Point, 2021), some individuals disregard an immigrant person's national identity and belonging, reducing them to simply being different. Despite feeling Norwegian, societal constraints may imply a sense of exclusion from society. Additionally, members within their society of origin can reject belonging to their culture as well, prompting immigrants to question if they fit in anywhere. This is an aspect that is also addressed in the graphic novel (Compton & dela Noche Milne, 2019, see Appendix 23). To be allowed to reside in the Northern Kingdom if one is not granted citizenship from birth, one must always see society through a mirror. Moreover, it is visible to everyone residing there who has immigrated to the Kingdom,

and who is the host population. Lacuna reflects upon this in a caption where it is stated as follows: “[s]everal others held mirrors to their faces. Although the majority of people in the city did not. Those who did not, she knew, were the ones lucky enough to have been born here” (Compton & dela Noche Milne, p. 80, see Appendix 23). The fact that they needed to always carry these mirrors is automatically an extra burden. Nonetheless, the mirror itself can function as a constant reminder of their status as “the Other.” The individuals who have moved there need to glance at their reflections and perceive themselves as being different. Even when Lacuna makes the glasses where the mirror people can see the world through one eye, they still need to look at themselves with the other eye. This can tell the reader that although one is able to adapt to a new society and its restrictions, one can still be forced to always regard oneself as different to some extent. Norwegian immigrants can relate to how people do not always support one’s identity and sense of belonging, which can be important to examine in the EAL classroom, as teachers are required to foster an inclusive learning environment. Both *TBR* and *Kindred* are multimodal ensembles that focus on social justice and can thus be utilized in the English subject to promote ethical awareness, critical thinking, equity, and democratic values, as I further discuss in the concluding chapter.

5 Conclusion

This concluding section incorporates some final remarks regarding my study, particularly around my analysis and discussion of *Kindred* (2017) and *TBR*. Moreover, I include some implications for the Norwegian lower secondary EAL classroom that follow my research. Lastly, I have provided some reflections regarding the limitations of this thesis, and I have established some suggestions for further research related to teaching empathy and agency in the English subject.

5.1 Final Remarks on Research Findings

In the introduction to this thesis, I raised the concern that the term empathy can be employed too lightly, and by merely labeling oneself as empathetic, one does not feel truly obligated to attempt to understand another's emotional state. This lack of genuine effort, regardless of intentionality, might contribute to a failure to perceive injustice occurring in society, making one a passive bystander instead of a needed ally. Consequently, I pondered whether the exploration of two graphic novels in the EAL classroom with a clear social justice focus could affect and engage the students to become aware of the racism and discrimination that prevail in Norwegian society, prompting them to consider their ability to act in the face of ignorance and oppression. Through my thesis, I have sought to answer two research questions: 1) How are empathy and agency presented in contemporary social justice graphic novels? and 2) What is the potential of emphasizing empathy and agency to promote an inclusive learning environment in Norwegian EAL lower secondary classrooms? Through a multimodal and narrative analysis of *Kindred* (2017) and *TBR* (2019), grounded in the theoretical frameworks of affect theory in education and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, I have further discussed some of the opportunities that lie within teaching about empathy and agency to lower secondary EAL students this way.

The first research question concerns how empathy and agency are portrayed in *Kindred* (2017) and *TBR* (2019), and my findings show that both graphic novels include racially marginalized characters that display compassion and/or empathy for other humans and more-than-human beings. Moreover, the Black characters and characters of color are not passive or simply in pain and suffering, but they are empowered, creative, resourceful, and agentive. In other words, the narratives show that these characters possess desirable abilities and exude survivance (Ladson-Billings, 2023; Vizenor, 1998). It is possible to see the learning potential of choosing authentic texts where racially marginalized characters serve as role models for the students. Moreover, it is possible to examine the effects of including texts with characters that are accountable and responsible for the impact of their actions, and that exercise agency while remaining humble and modest, and whether that can further inspire the students in the EAL classroom.

On that note, the second research question is connected to how the focus on empathy and agency can contribute to nurturing an inclusive and equitable learning space. Firstly, I examined the likelihood for the students to develop empathy for the Black characters and characters of color. Pertaining to this, I discovered that the possibility of empathizing with someone is linked to the amount of identification one has

with the other person, which also closely correlates to the access one has to the feelings and experiences of another. Additionally, I weighed whether the multimodality of graphic novels could enrich the reading experience and activate the students' emotional responses (Phillips, 2017). However, I found that the authors and illustrators of *Kindred* (2017) and *TBR* (2019) did not prolong the events that depicted the adversity faced by the Black characters and characters of color, as they did not want pain and suffering to be the source of spectacle and sensationalism (Ibrahim, 2022), and thus be the main attraction of these narratives. Thus, one's access to their feelings is restricted, making it difficult to empathize with the characters. Additionally, as discussed, what one assumes is that the perspective of another can turn out to be a projection, which diminishes the true meaning of empathy (Pedwell, 2014). Then, feeling empathetic toward someone whose life experiences and background differ entirely from one's own could merely be a deep-rooted desire (Ahmed, 2014).

Rather than focusing on the development of empathy for the EAL students, one can have other priorities in the classroom to promote citizenship. For instance, one can see how other affective responses both can activate and deactivate a person's capacity to act (Dernikos et al., 2020). As I do in this study, it is possible to examine how the chosen graphic novels portray constraints of agency and connect it to the prevalence of racism and discrimination in the Norwegian educational context and society in general (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Harlap & Riese, 2014). Also, one can explore the notion and the impact of intersectionality regarding how one is perceived by others (Davis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989). Moreover, *Kindred* (2017) and *TBR* (2019) can prompt reflections regarding processes of reconciliation, which can contribute to validating lived experiences and a foundation for understanding historical oppression and injustice. Additionally, the graphic novels emphasize creativity, a thirst for experimentation, and the power of the imagination. Overall, the chosen graphic novels can initiate reflections regarding multiple aspects of society, such as racism, immigration, and inclusion, which can potentially prompt the students to consider their actions beyond the classroom as well. Furthermore, it is important to have the courage to focus on the topics of race and racism in Norway, so that the students learn what differentiates discussions and awareness of racism from being a racist person (Teachers at Oslo Cathedral School, 2024; Majid, 2024). Essentially, my study invites other researchers and teachers to consider the limits of empathy and to dare to imagine just futures for all.

5.2 Implications for the English Subject

Some educational scholars and teachers believe that developing the students' empathy, through exposing them to engaging texts, will directly shape their actions beyond the classroom. Keen (2007) elaborates thoroughly on how one can empathize with fictional characters by identifying with them. Adding to that, Edgar (2020) argues that students can be urged to take action, or think differently about aspects of society, if the teacher selects texts where they can empathize with the characters, in addition to providing them with historical and cultural contexts. My research, in turn, raises further awareness of the limits of empathy and encourages the students in the EAL classroom to attempt to understand the experiences of minoritized individuals in various contexts by comparing portrayals of injustice in the graphic novels to tendencies within Norwegian society. In doing so, this study can help promote several objectives established in LK20. This thesis attends to features from the core curriculum, such as sections 1.1 Human Dignity, 1.6 Democracy and Participation, and 2.1 Social Learning and Development (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). Also, my research promotes

elements from the English subject objectives. A critical examination of empathy and a focus on societal, cultural, and political structures in Norway matters because if teachers seek to make changes, we need to stop hiding under this shield of empathy. Instead, one can promote a focus on empathetic attunement and listening and shed light on the racism and discrimination that prevail not only in North American contexts but also within Norwegian borders (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Nordic Culture Point, 2021). In addition, the relevance of my research for the EAL classroom becomes apparent in current news, as it has been reported that teachers are afraid of being called racists when racism is discussed in the classroom and that addressing instances of racism, sexism, or other discriminatory practices makes one the problem (Teachers at Oslo Cathedral School, 2024; Ahmed, 2015).

5.3 Limitations, Delimitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

While I have provided a detailed exploration of the themes of empathy and agency in relation to *Kindred* (2017) and *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019), and their possible contributions to the EAL classroom, it is necessary that I also outline the limitations and delimitations for my research. First of all, the limitations of my study are mostly connected to the restricted time frame to explore this matter and the specified length criteria that have been established in the formal MA requirements. If I had had a longer amount of time for my research and been granted an unrestricted word count, I could have provided some supplementary depth to my thesis by including further primary texts or drawing from additional theoretical frames such as adaptation studies or Black studies, among others. Also, I have chosen to focus on one affective response, but I could have offered an analysis and discussion based on related affects, such as compassion and sympathy, but, as I contend, empathy needs a thorough examination.

Furthermore, the delimitations of my thesis are related to the choices I had to make, as a researcher, to narrow it down. Firstly, I chose to do a qualitative multimodal research study, which can prompt one to consider the generalizability of my findings. However, this thesis thoroughly elaborates on the potential of emphasizing empathy and agency in relation to my chosen graphic novels, which can then serve as a foundation to move toward a broader commentary (Riessman, 2008). Next, I decided to delve into the graphic novels. Other transmedia works could also promote an examination of empathy and agency, but due to the scope of my thesis, I felt that I needed to prioritize one genre. I could have centered my thesis around a comparison between the original novel by Butler (1979), and its graphic adaptation. Moreover, it would have been relevant to include other contemporary multimodal texts with an explicit social justice focus, such as *I am Alfonso Jones* (2017), *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020), *Borders* (2021), *It Won't Always Be Like This: A Graphic Memoir* (2022), and *Displacement* (2020), to see if they would have echoed my findings or contributed to supplementary perspectives to explore in the EAL classroom.

As I have needed to make some decisions to provide an in-depth elaboration on my topic, some suggestions for further examination thus become apparent. For instance, it would be possible to extend my research to include additional genres beyond graphic novels, such as film, music, photographs, and visual arts. Next, it would be relevant to compare more than two texts, to see how that adds to this discussion. Moreover, there are other features within society, in addition to the ones mentioned in this thesis, that require an explicit investigation. As an example, I could have focused on other axes of

differentiation, such as religion. I would also have liked to look more closely at the effects of intersectionality on experiences of injustice, due to how many students in the EAL classrooms have multiply marginalized identities that interplay with how they are treated and their learning path. Regarding suggestions for further research, I would like to further state that this study focuses on lower secondary contexts. It would be possible to transfer some of my methods and approaches and consider pedagogical approaches and learning outcomes by looking at middle-grade texts too. Finally, future researchers could use observations and other classroom methods such as surveys or questionnaires to gather responses from the students in the EAL and compare whether the findings I have gathered are mirrored by them. After all, the purpose of this research is to encourage teachers to include complex multimodal texts to foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment that can provide a foundation for prosocial behavior within and beyond the classroom.

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Appendices

Appendices 1-10: Illustrations from *Kindred* (2017) by Octavia E. Butler, John Jennings & Damian Duffy.

Appendices 11-23: Illustrations from *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* (2019) by Wayde Compton & April de la Noche Milne.

Appendix 1: *Kindred* page 152



A few days later, Tom Weylin gave Nigel a new suit of clothes, a new dress for Carrie, and a new blanket.

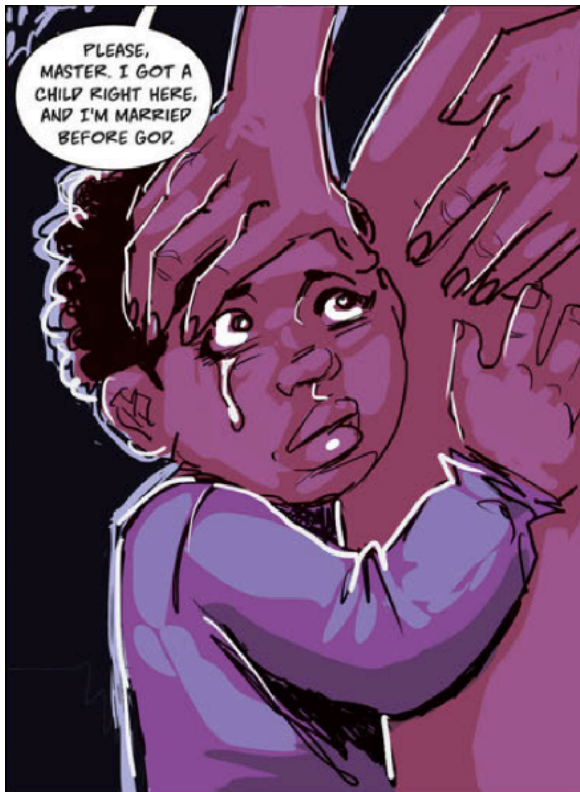
Appendix 2: *Kindred* page 231



Appendix 3: Kindred page 223



Appendix 4: *Kindred* page 44-45



Appendix 5: *Kindred* page 145

Mostly, I chose my own work. It was more freedom than any other slave had, which made me feel a little guilty.



I tried to go where help was needed, and usually that was in the laundry yard, with Tess.

At first, it was because Tess had taken ill, too sick to beat and boil the dirt out of a lot of heavy, smelly clothes.

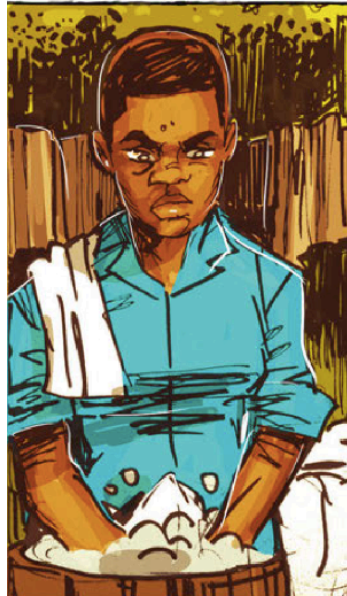


Later, I did most of the laundry myself, when Tom Weylin started casually taking Tess to bed, and hurt her.



Tess was just grateful not to be pregnant.

There were many slave children who looked more like Weylin than Rufus did. Children Weylin would whip, work to death, sell.



Eventually, Weylin got bored, and handed Tess off to Jake Edwards.

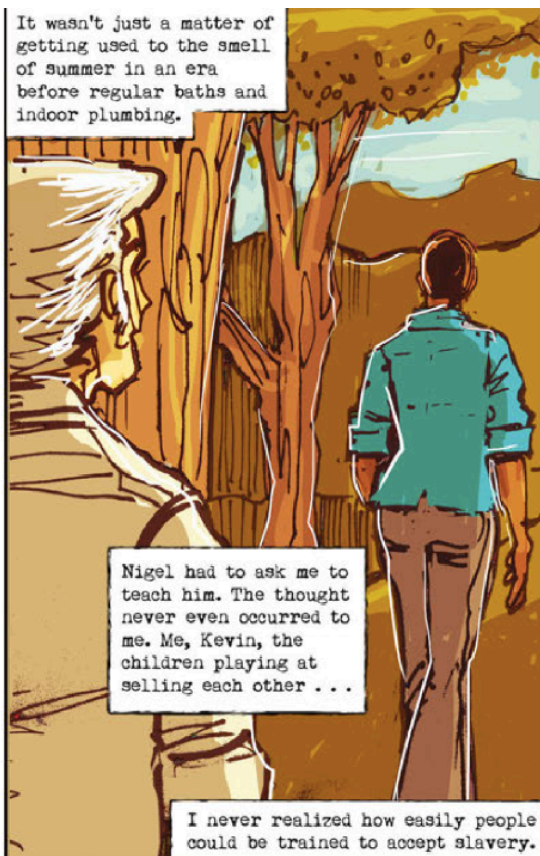


The overseer found new ways to hurt her.

Appendix 6: Kindred page 97



Appendix 7: Kindred page 89



Appendix 8: *Kindred* page 144



Sarah ran the house in Margaret's absence. She spread the work fairly, managed efficiently . . .

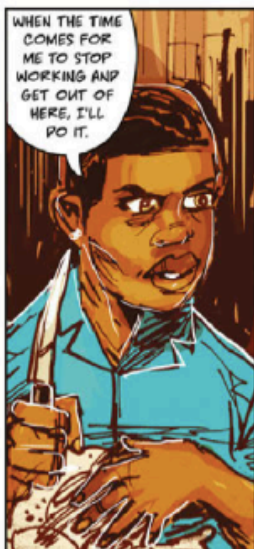
. . . so of course she was resented by slaves who made every effort to avoid jobs they didn't like.

WHY SHOULD THEY WORK HARD? WHAT DOES IT GET THEM?



IT'LL GET THEM THE COWHIDE IF THEY DON'T.

I AIN'T GOIN' TO TAKE THE BLAME FOR WHAT THEY DON'T DO, ARE YOU?



WHEN THE TIME COMES FOR ME TO STOP WORKING AND GET OUT OF HERE, I'LL DO IT.



YOU GOT NO SENSE! JUST TALK ALL OVER YOUR MOUTH!

PEOPLE LISTEN AROUND HERE! AND THEY TALK TOO.

YOU'VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENS TO NIGGERS THEY CATCH AND BRING BACK. STARVING, NAKED, WHIPPER, DRAGGER, BIT BY DOGS . . .



I'D RATHER SEE THE ONES WHO MAKE IT. WHO LIVE FREE.

IF ANY DO.

I'VE SEEN BOOKS BY RUNAWAYS WHO LIVE IN THE NORTH.

Frightened, powerless, and desperate to keep her only child, Sarah did the safe thing--accepted a life of slavery out of fear.



In another house, she'd be called "mammy."

NIGGERS WRITING BOOKS!

FOOLISHNESS!

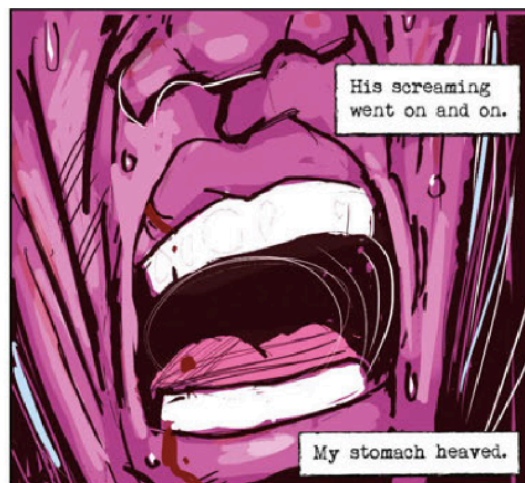
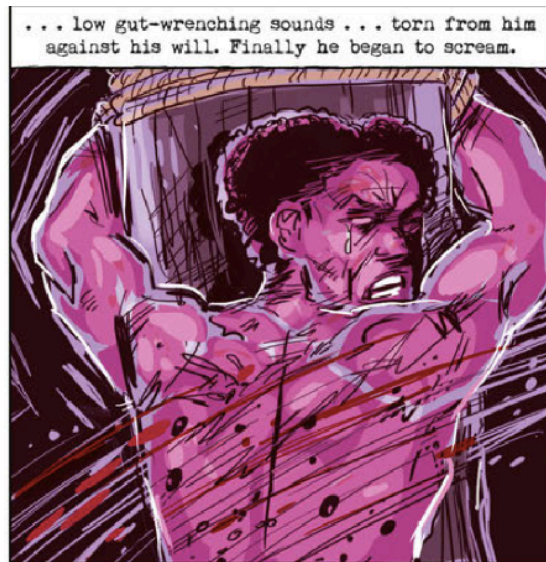
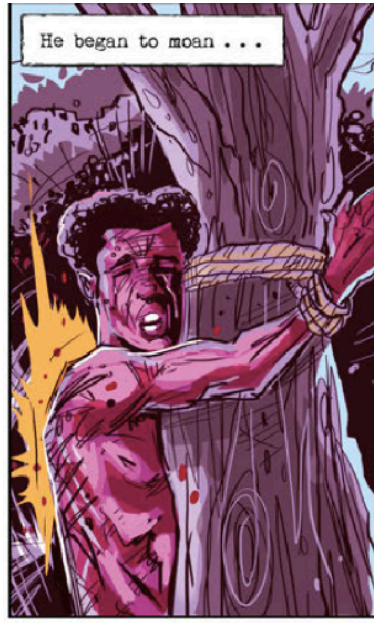
In the militant 60s, she'd be an idea held in contempt. I'd looked down on her myself for a while.



But pouring brine on Alice's shredded flesh washed away my moral superiority.

I GOT THE REST OF THIS. YOU GO ON AND HELP TESS.

Appendix 9: *Kindred* page 42



Appendix 10: Kindred page 43



I forced myself to stay still, to keep quiet.

WHY DON'T THEY STOP!

I had seen people beaten on television, in the movies. I'd seen too-red blood substitute streaked across backs and heard well-rehearsed screams.



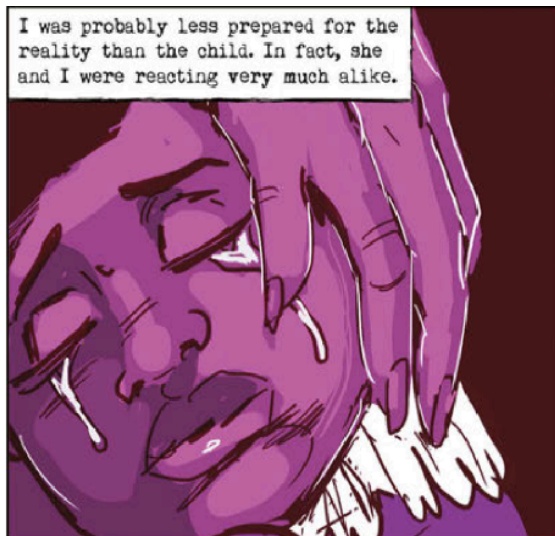
But I'd never smelled their sweat, heard them pleading and praying . . .

PLEASE, MASTER!

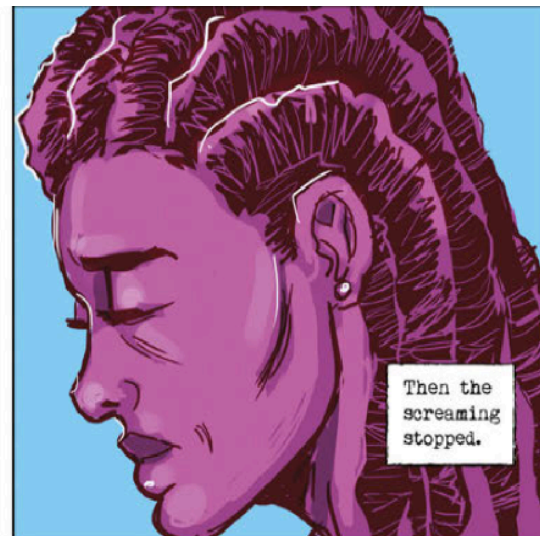
FOR GODSAKE MASTER PLEASE!



. . . shamed before their families and themselves.

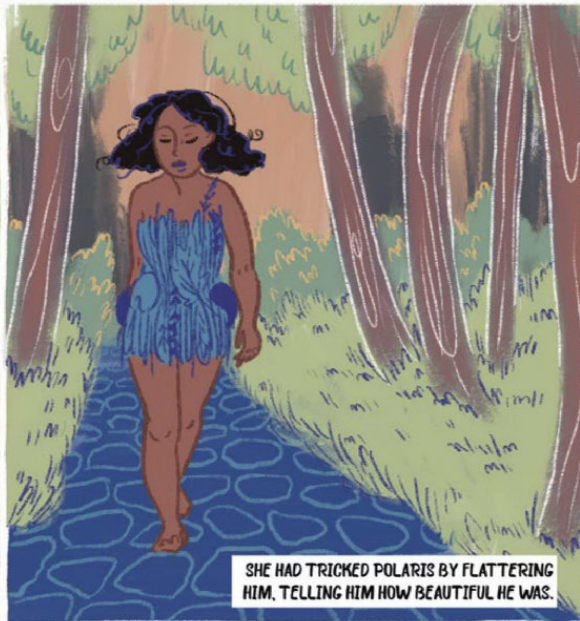


I was probably less prepared for the reality than the child. In fact, she and I were reacting very much alike.



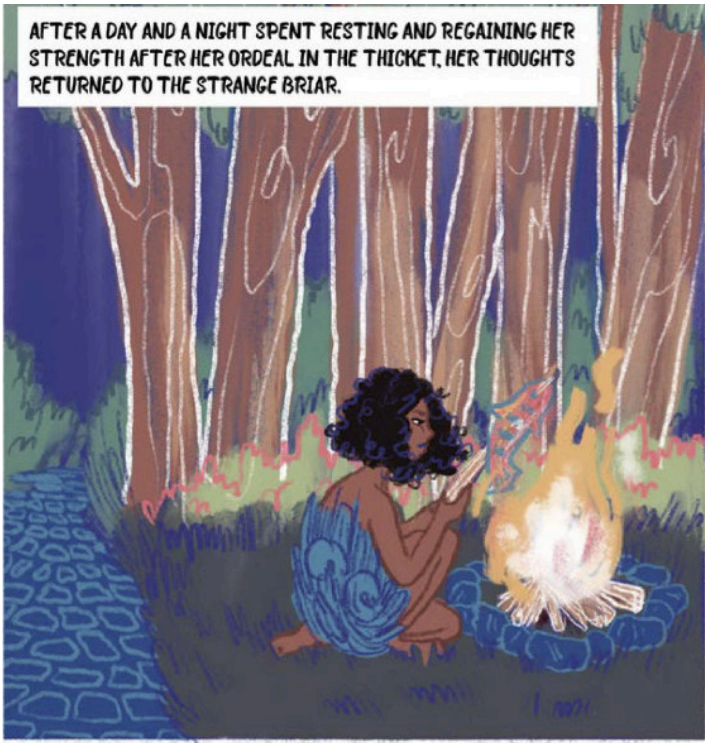
Then the screaming stopped.

Appendix 11: *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* page 38

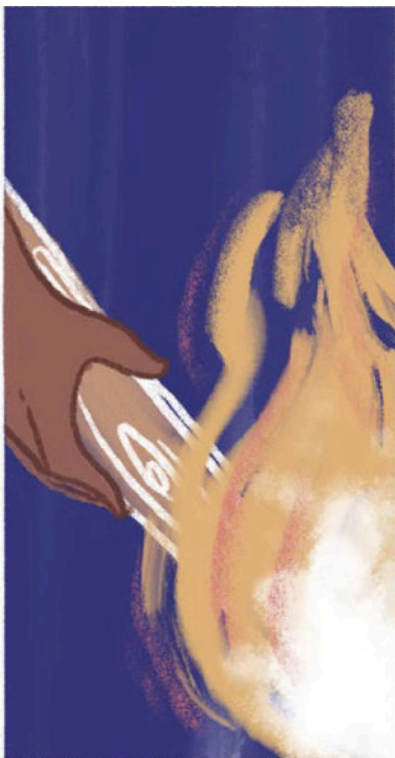
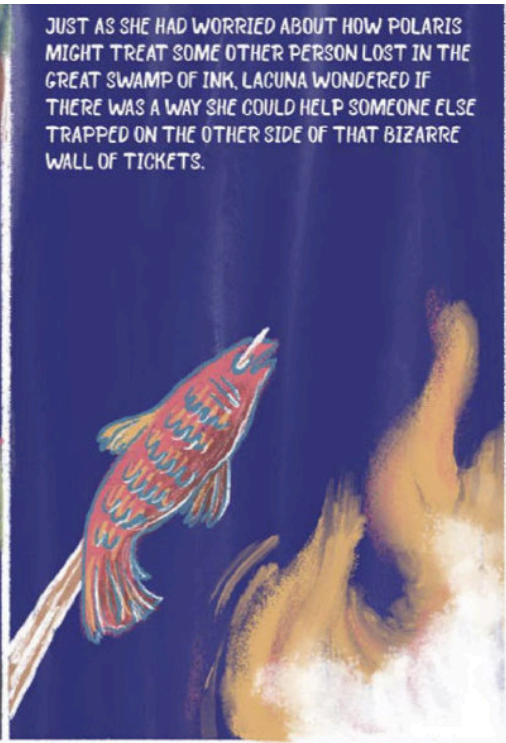


Appendix 12: *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* page 33

AFTER A DAY AND A NIGHT SPENT RESTING AND REGAINING HER STRENGTH AFTER HER ORDEAL IN THE THICKET, HER THOUGHTS RETURNED TO THE STRANGE BRIAR.



JUST AS SHE HAD WORRIED ABOUT HOW POLARIS MIGHT TREAT SOME OTHER PERSON LOST IN THE GREAT SWAMP OF INK, LACUNA WONDERED IF THERE WAS A WAY SHE COULD HELP SOMEONE ELSE TRAPPED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT BIZARRE WALL OF TICKETS.





Appendix 14: *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* page 87

THAT NIGHT LACUNA FOUND IT HARD TO SLEEP. THOUGHTS CIRCLED IN HER HEAD LIKE HER HAND CIRCLED WITH ITS CLOTH WHEN SHE POLISHED SOMEONE'S MIRROR. SHE REALIZED THAT SINCE SHE HAD COME TO THE NORTHERN KINGDOM SHE HAD BARELY SPOKEN TO A MIRRORLESS PERSON. AND THE ONLY MIRROR PEOPLE SHE KNEW WERE THOSE SHE MET WHILE WORKING.



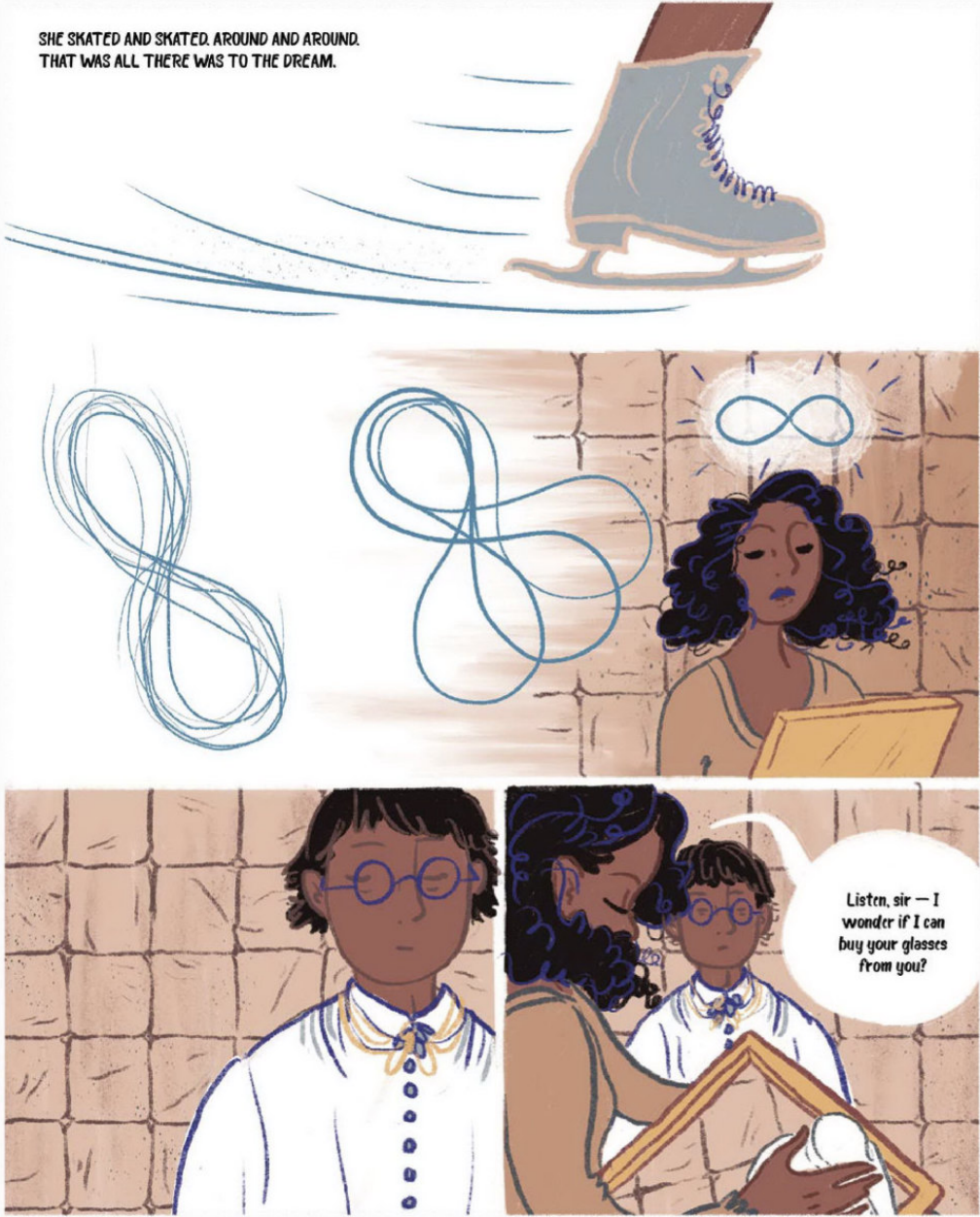
SHE WAS AMAZED TO REALIZE SHE FELT ALMOST AS LONELY AS SHE DID IN THE GREAT SWAMP OF INK, EVEN THOUGH HERE SHE WAS SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE.

SHE HATED CARRYING HER MIRROR AROUND ALL DAY. SOMETIMES IT TOOK ALL HER PATIENCE TO KEEP FROM SMASHING IT WHENEVER SHE THOUGHT ABOUT HOW FOOLISH IT WAS.





SHE SKATED AND SKATED. AROUND AND AROUND.
THAT WAS ALL THERE WAS TO THE DREAM.



Listen, sir — I wonder if I can buy your glasses from you?





That's the border. You can't just up and cross the border like that. Have you lost your mind?

Appendix 19: The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration page 77





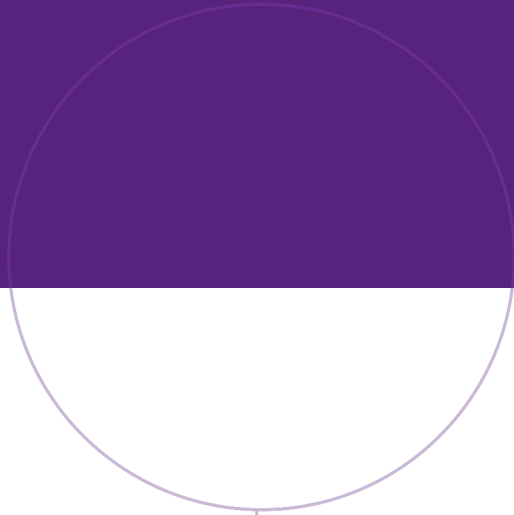
Appendix 21: *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* page 106





Appendix 23: *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration* page 80





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