Singing Louder than a Mockingbird
Analyzing voice, racism and stereotypes in Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird with the aim of engaging Swedish EFL students to be critical towards an ethnic divide within literature

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Abstract

The aim of the present inquiry is to analyze the depiction of racism through given or withheld voice in Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. A thematic analysis of marginalized and commonly occurring voices in the novel reveals discrepancies along an ethnic divide. Applying Critical Race theory affords the analytical tools of voice, ethnicity and stereotypes, while Critical Race Pedagogy provides the grounds for a discussion of how students can learn how to criticize ethnic hierarchies in classic works, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The results of the inquiry show a clear hierarchy in which African American characters are often silenced. The critical lens focusing on voice, ethnicity and stereotypes, enables the reader to reach a more multifaceted examination of the novel by generating an in-depth view of racism. Discussing racist occurrences in a novel often lauded as the epitome of anti-racism in the EFL classroom, can possibly illustrate just how ingrained racism can be. As a result, the students may develop critical tools that, hopefully, empower them to raise their voices against racist acts in today’s society.

Keywords

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1 Introduction

“‘The handful of people in this town who say that fair play is not marked White Only; the handful of people who say a fair trial is for everybody, not just us… The handful of people in this town with background, that’s who they are’” (Lee 316). This quote is from the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* written by Harper Lee and first published in 1960. Since the quote refers to the unjust legal system that favored the white characters, the quote depicts the systematic segregation and mistreatment of people due to the color of their skin. In addition, it highlights the need for criticality towards the mistreatment of humans based on biological factors. The story within Lee’s novel is set in the 1930’s, in a small fictional town named Maycomb situated in the deep south of the United States. Maycomb is an old town where time seems to move slowly, since it does not offer a broad spectrum of activities for its poverty-stricken inhabitants (Lee 6). However, the slow-moving town is rocked when news of a white woman having been raped by a black man spreads like wildfire. The trial, the hatred between people due to skin color and all other surrounding events are focalized through the young character Jean Louise Finch (primarily called Scout) who is the daughter of attorney Atticus Finch.

Living in the era of “fake news”, it is of great significance that students learn critical thinking skills in schools since they otherwise might not apprehend oppressive forces that are trying to impact them (Martin 247). In fact, the Swedish National Agency for Education lists teaching students critical thinking as a task of the school (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 5). The fact that encouraging the development of critical thinking skills is a task considered vast enough that it should be implemented throughout the school, one can imagine the importance of the task. One way to help students’ critical thinking skills is by having the students approach texts with criticality. When using Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) in the classroom, the students can approach
racial inequality and question the ideologies (Zamudio et al. 11). By having the students raise questions regarding the text they will consequently reach another depth and understanding of the text at hand and the values it may exemplify. Once the students understand the values represented in the novel, they can start to question them and possibly draw parallels to today’s society and the sort of society that they find desirable. Ultimately, the goal with CRP is for the reader to be inquisitive and to not passively accept the information put in front of them (Zamudio et al. 11). Having the students intransigent about not blindly accepting information put forth might serve as an equally valuable lesson inside the classroom as outside of it.

Another topic stressed in the Swedish Curriculum for Upper Secondary School is equality. In the fundamental values of the Swedish Curricular documents it clearly states that the equal value of all people should be represented in the education (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4). Furthermore, all cases of xenophobia and intolerance in school must be dealt with (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4). As a preparatory act, working with CRP with its emphasis on equality and ethnicities whilst analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird* might be one way of getting closer to fulfilling the fundamental values and approaching the topic of an ethnic divide with the students. As a desired result, the level of intolerance in the school might reduce.

Using literature in a classroom can be highly productive because it may allow students to understand other people more readily (Johnston and Mangat 22). Moreover, reading novels can help develop empathy and therefore differs from non-fiction reading (Keen 85). The possibility of achieving understanding about people different from oneself, from the comfort of a desk, is an important opportunity that should not be lost easily. The conclusion that literature is an important tool to work with in the classroom could be drawn since it is a part of the syllabus for English level 5, 6 and 7 (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Syllabi”). Furthermore, working with literature allows students to challenge
their own prejudices, change values, as well as learn about themselves and the world they live in (Pirie qtd. in Johnston and Mangat 23). This is in accordance with the previously mentioned parts of the fundamental values in Swedish Curricular documents. A novel that might generate discussions on topics such as racism and equality is *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

As one might imagine, Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been the subject of several interpretations and studies. Examples of such studies are *Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird: New Essays* by Michael J. Meyer, *Reimagining To Kill a Mockingbird: Family, Community, and the Possibility of Equal Justice under Law* written by Austin Sarat and Martha Umphrey, and *Teaching To Kill a Mockingbird Today: Coming to Terms With Race, Racism, and America’s Novel* by Michael Macaluso. Whilst several of these studies have a focus on the unequal justice system, this essay will have voice, the ethnic divide and stereotypes as its focal points. The unjust legal system depicted in the novel will be touched upon but will not be the focal point of this essay.

In this inquiry an analysis of voice in connection to racism and stereotypes will be conducted. The analysis will be divided into three parts. Firstly, the general hierarchy regarding voice and authority amongst the characters in the novel will be analyzed. This analysis will have a focus on structural racism and its factoring role on the characters’ opportunity to have their voices heard. Secondly, the two exceptions from the general ethnic divide will be addressed and analyzed. Finally, the third part of the analysis will discuss and problematize the novel’s use of stereotypes since *To Kill a Mockingbird* is renowned for being antiracist. Furthermore, the correlation between stereotypes and voice in the novel will be discussed.

In order to analyze the reasons behind the silencing of certain characters and authority being given to other character’s speech, Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used. Moreover, CRT was chosen since it “examines the appearance of race and racism
across dominant cultural modes of expression” (Brizee et al.). Since ethnicity will play a factoring role in the analysis of voice in the essay, CRT was found suitable. Furthermore, CRT addresses how ingrained and systematized racism is in society and Western values due to the constant bypassing of ordeals experienced by people of color (Martin 246). The goal with using CRT when analyzing the novel is for it to help the reader go beyond the explicit layers of the story to more implicit layers and consequently start to question and approach the novel with a critical frame of mind. Naturally, CRT and CRP are highly compatible due to them having the same theoretical core.

The aim of this inquiry is to analyze characters’ speech, and its connections to racism in Lee’s canonical novel To Kill a Mockingbird. Furthermore, there is a pedagogical aim with this essay whereas the goal lies in attempting to create critical readers in the classroom by discussing and reading about the separation of ethnicities that can occur in literature and offer the students a chance to acquire a critical stance towards ethnic divides.

This thesis argues that there is a hierarchy regarding voice and authority in Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird where the white characters’ voices have higher authority than the African American characters’ voices. Not only is the African American character Tom reduced to complementing the white hero whilst stereotyped as a criminal, but the voice of African American character Calpurnia is only afforded some authority in the household and thus her voice is subdued in the white society. By working with Lee’s novel and teaching Swedish EFL students to be critical towards an ethnic divide regarding authority associated to voice, it will give the students the opportunity to learn about political, cultural and historical events and attitudes in an English-speaking country as well as give the students the chance to raise their own voice in accordance with the goals in the Swedish Syllabus for English 7.
2 Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Pedagogy

The scope of the essay will be limited to the characters, their opportunities to raise their voices, the marginalization and stereotyping of characters and certain particular events that have a greater effect on the specific characters in the novel. Regarding the pedagogical aspects of the essay the scope will be focused on CRP for Swedish EFL students. The forthcoming pedagogical discussion may also be applicable to other subjects, such as English as a first language, social sciences, history and other foreign languages. All other surrounding events and characters not pertaining to the analyzed subject of voice, ethnic divide and stereotypes will be excluded from the analysis in order to make the analysis as intertwined with the topics of this essay as possible. The same frame of mind has formed the pedagogical scope.

As previously mentioned, CRT was chosen to help gain a deeper understanding of unfair treatment towards certain characters. Moreover, the theory is suitable since *To Kill a Mockingbird* is historically viewed as anti-racist (Saney 60). Although not directly a scholar of CRT but often connected to the theory, Toni Morrison’s book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* will also be used to analyze *To Kill a Mockingbird* because of its critique of racism and the marginalization of African Americans. The choice of CRP derived from the need of a critical approach when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* in an EFL classroom in order to move beyond analyzing the form of literature (Borsheim-Black et al. 131). In order to explain the upcoming theories and their applicability to this essay, a short historical overview will be conducted at the beginning of each section.

The main analytical tools for this essay are voice, ethnicity and stereotypes. The aspect of voice in the upcoming literary analysis is comparable to speech in regards of
how much each character gets to speak in the novel. Hence, voice will not be used in an auditory sense but rather as a representation of given speech. In CRT voice is viewed as multifaceted and the voice of colored people is structured by racism (Delgado 98). Moreover, voice signifies merit and in regard to racial justice “voice – is everything” (Delgado 109-110). In relation to voice as an analytical tool, silence also plays a prominent part of the analysis in which Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb’s book Silence: The Currency of Power has been of assistance. Voice will be analyzed with the characters’ ethnicity in mind. The choice of wording with reference to the word ‘ethnicity’ derives from its representation of a conscious knowledge regarding race being a social construction (Gerster and Zlogar 4). Even though the word ‘race’ is a social construct it is often misused as an objective fact containing ideologies of ethnicities (Zamudio et al. 33). Thus, ‘ethnicity’ is perceived as a more compatible wording for this essay. In the forthcoming analysis a selected number of characters in To Kill a Mockingbird will be analyzed in regard to stereotypes and how their stereotypes relate to given voice. Stereotypes “are cognitive structures stored in memory that represent attributes associated with a social group” (Amodio 12). In order to analyze the stereotyping of certain characters Charles Stangor and Christian S. Crandall’s book Stereotypes and Prejudice has been of importance and has helped the discussion reach a deeper level.

2.1 Critical Race Theory

Taking into account that injustice based on skin color is widely condemned by law as well as societal norms, it begs the question how racism can persevere. This paradox is what CRT concerns itself with (Harris). Moreover, CRT argues that racism is ingrained in institutions and social practices (Harris). One way of grasping this paradox is through Bell’s “interest convergence” hypothesis which “provides a powerful tool for understanding this ebb and flow of social justice” (Delgado 104). In short, this
hypothesis entails that blacks will only accomplish racial equality when it coincides with the interest of white people (Bell “Brown” 22). In fact, Bell goes as far as to argue that racial equality is not a realistic goal and that striving for this unobtainable goal will drive black Americans towards resentment and anguish (“Realism” 302). Bell’s interest convergence dilemma will also be used as an analytical tool in the literary analysis as it is directly applicable to the events surrounding the trial in To Kill a Mockingbird. Moreover, racial inequality can be found in the US legal system where studies show that black defendants are more likely to be found guilty by white jurors than white defendants are (S.L. Johnson 156).

CRT, although a fairly new theory, concerns topics relevant to mankind’s past as well as our present and our future. CRT started in the middle of the 1970’s as a reaction to the diminished effects of the Civil Rights Movements (Delgado and Stefancic “Bibliography” 461). Derrick Bell is considered a pioneer of CRT since his critiques of the judicial system sparked awareness of the unjust treatment of black Americans (Tate 211). Other members considered important for the shaping of CRT are Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Patricia Williams and Mari Matsuda (Bell “Who’s” 898). Developing from a movement that mainly concerned itself with the discrimination of African Americans and other people of color, CRT is nowadays broadening its perspective and also considering the other side of oppression, namely “white privilege”, and the effects it has on white people (Harris).

There is a correlation between race and discrimination in which people of color are in a highly disadvantaged position. Throughout history, black people have been discriminated against due to a belief in black inferiority (Bell “Who’s” 895). The inferior treatment of blacks is a prominent theme in Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird where many of the African American characters are silenced or discredited due to the color of their skin. White supremacy and racism stems from the United States’ history
of slavery in which the oppression towards black people started (Delgado 104). Slavery was abolished, but a feeling of superiority never left (Delgado 104). There were simply not enough white people who acted on their sense of morality to instigate a racial reform (Bell “Brown” 23). Furthermore, Bell argues that discrimination and racist outrage towards black people derive from black success since the challenging of white supremacy oftentimes results in white people executing violent acts and race riots (Bell “Who’s” 895). Whilst the protection of white women repeatedly has been given as the cause for lynching and killing of blacks, there are in fact parallels between successful blacks and the killing of them (Bell “Who’s” 895). Seemingly, losing their non-solicited upper hand over the people that once served them is a recipe for aggravation.

Being able to use people of color as scapegoats provides white people with power. The inferiority of blacks is sometimes used as a means for lower social strata whites to feel better about themselves (Bell “Property” 75). Once slaves from Africa came to America, upper class whites gave poor whites more freedom than prior to the slaves and consequently poor whites lacking property found property in their whiteness (Bell “Property” 75). Thus, a link between race and property with racial oppression has been created (Tate 214). Today, poor whites still tolerate their subordination towards other whites but show hostility towards blacks (Bell “Who’s” 903). And while white people may argue that ethnicities should all be viewed as equal “few are willing to recognize that racial segregation is much more than a series of quaint customs that can be remedied effectively without altering the status of whites” (Bell “Brown” 22). This hesitation to change is showcased by the controversy that surfaces surrounding affirmative action programs in the United States (Bell “Brown” 22). The oppression towards nonwhites has led to the American society nowadays moving towards substantive racism, meaning that nonwhites will be treated as inferior because the
general idea among the white people will be that nonwhites actually are inferior (Delgado 104-5).

Being in the middle of several different forms of discrimination can lead to misunderstandings in regard to the multifaceted oppression. As a means of understanding the outcomes of a convergence between race, class, gender and sexuality CRT feminists created the “intersectionality” concept (Zamudio et al. 37). An example of an especially oppressed group, is black women because of them being discriminated both due to gender and race (Crenshaw “Demarginalizing” 140). Another example of the intersection of oppression can be found in To Kill a Mockingbird where the only maltreatment being discussed is that of a black man and a white woman. Furthermore, black women are often framed as non-normative women and stereotyped as “pathways to disorder and criminality” (Carbado et al. 309-310). However, controversy regarding intersectionality focusing “too much” on black women has been risen from critics (Carbado et al. 309). The response to the critique from CRT scholars is that “[s]uch arguments imply either that Black women no longer face problems of structural power, or that their subjectivity is too particular to be productive in broader efforts to understand and counter contemporary manifestations of subordination” (Carbado et al. 309). Thus, intersectionality puts a spotlight on the complexity of the intersection between several discriminations and the values portrayed when only allowing space for one of the injustice acts to be questioned.

One approach to diminishing racial inequality could be giving a voice to minority groups. In narratives, voices expose authority and legitimacy (Bell “Who’s” 907). The nonwhite voice, which is in fact several different voices, is crowded with experiences of racism (Delgado 98). Nonwhite people speak with distinctive voices that can disclose injustice in a way people who have not experienced discrimination cannot (Matsuda 63). Therefore, rather than being silenced, nonwhite voices need to be heard
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(Delgado 99). This does not, by any means, necessitate an exclusion of white voices but rather encourage an inclusion of colored ones (Delgado 99). Being exposed to new stories can lead to new perspectives, a sharpening of our concern and acknowledgement of systematic injustices that we had no previous idea of (Delgado 109). This could be the reason why storytelling is such a prominent part of CRT (Bell “Who’s” 899). One can conclude that giving the voice back to the nonwhites can lead to racial indiscretions finally being noticed. This, in turn, can result in active means of ending the newly surfaced discrimination. However, nonwhites are in a double bind considering that a white voice sometimes is needed for a colored voice to be heard whilst it can be degrading and discriminating to have to rely on someone else to have their voice heard. Therefore, nonwhite people are in a conundrum that they can never benefit from. As a result, discussing voice and ethnicity in the classroom is of utmost importance and analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird* could be one way of approaching the topic. Storytelling and the urging for a shift in voice from the white one to minorities gives CRT an activist dimension (Bell “Who’s” 906-7; Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 2).

Although this essay does not use postcolonialism as its primary theory, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory of the subaltern is applicable to the forthcoming literary analysis due to its concern with voice. The ambition of using Spivak’s theory is that it will, in combination with CRT, help surface new perspectives of the silencing of minority groups in Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The subaltern will seldom get a chance to have their voices heard. These people are the people considered in the lowest social strata (Spivak 79). The subaltern can differentiate depending on area but are often impoverished (Spivak 79-80). In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak” Spivak questions why there is a continuous othering of the third world by “prophets of heterogeneity and the Other” (67). Moreover, there is an
unceasing desire to keep the subaltern in the shadows (Spivak 75). Essentially, instead of giving the voice to the subaltern, white people are discussing colored people with other white people. Spivak’s view on the silencing of minorities correlates to the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which the black characters are predominantly silent throughout the novel and discussed amongst the white characters. In a colonial context, the subaltern supposedly has no history and can therefore not speak (Spivak 82-83). Especially silenced are people who are poor, black and female (Spivak 90). However, subaltern studies have been criticized for not focusing enough on females (Bannerji 904). An exclusion of females is a pressing matter not to be taken lightly. Nevertheless, in her essay Spivak mentions the unjust position females are given which can be connected to intersectionality within CRT and the silenced female characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Notwithstanding, one must keep in mind that Spivak refers to real-life people whilst the characters in Lee’s novel are fictional.

When ignoring the subaltern one is, in fact, continuing the imperialist project (Spivak 94). Consequently, it is of importance not to overlook or substitute the subaltern but rather learn to read postcolonial discourse with a critical frame of mind (Spivak 91). These critical goggles can be acquired through CRT and considering that this silencing is worsened when the individual is nonwhite, parallels with CRT can be found within the content of the theory as well. Although starting as a theory within the field of law, CRT is now branching out and is a prominent part of many classrooms (Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 3).

### 2.2 Critical Race Pedagogy

CRP was first implemented in education in 1994 (Ladson-Billings “Role” 115). Similar to CRT, CRP addresses racial inequality by analyzing narratives and the structure of society (Zamudio 11). Some of the key elements within CRP are racism, sexism, the
connection between societal and educational inequality, counter narratives and expectations regarding culture and intelligence (Zamudio 92). Counter narratives are stories “told from the vantage point of the oppressed” (Zamudio 5). Due to the present study’s focus on racism and inequality, only racism and to some extent sexism, counter narratives and expectations regarding culture and intelligence of the aforementioned CRP building blocks will be addressed in this essay.

Research in multicultural education reviewed by Gloria Ladson-Billings shows that a teacher’s beliefs in the students impact the education (“Learn” 22). It is therefore problematic when ethnicity plays a factoring role in expectations since teachers have higher expectations of their white students than that of their African American students (Zamudio 110; Ladson-Billings “Learn” 23). When interacting with a student the teacher believes will be successful, the dialogue will be more encouraging and supportive and thereby will increase the odds of the student becoming successful (Zamudio 110). However, a correlation between believed intelligence and results can also be noticed with opposite effect when a teacher converses with a student s/he thinks will not succeed (Zamudio 110). In the Swedish EFL classroom unequal education is strictly forbidden as the fundamental values of the Swedish Curricular documents clearly states that the equal value of all people should be represented in the education (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4). The believed inferiority of blacks has existed in education, in the United States, since the 1800’s when there was an assumed correlation between ethnicity and intelligence (Carter and Goodwin qtd. in Tate 199-200). This false connection resulted in people of color being seen as uneducable (Carter and Goodwin qtd. in Tate 199-200). Considering the repercussions supposed lack of intelligence in students can have and the fact that all education has to be equal in Swedish schools, equality is a vital subject that has to be addressed in the EFL classroom and using CRP could be one way of approaching the subject.
Racial inequality is a pressing issue within CRP and all parts of education should strive for equality. For civil rights workers, racial equality in schools is viewed as “a symbol of the nation’s commitment to equal opportunity” (Bell “Masters” 10). It is therefore of importance that classroom materials convey a realistic portrayal of diverse groups in order for stereotypes not to develop (Ladson-Billings “Learn” 24). Considering that there is zero tolerance for xenophobia and intolerance in Swedish schools, classroom materials and lesson planning need to be viewed critically (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4). Using CRP while analyzing To Kill a Mockingbird can therefore be problematic since some stereotyping does occur. However, criticizing the stereotypical characters in the novel might be beneficial for the students considering a critical analysis of a novel known for its antiracism shows the multitude of possible interpretations of Lee’s novel and how a critical frame of mind can unlock layers of the novel perhaps not noticeable at first glance. Hence, criticizing this novel and uncovering the racist puzzle pieces hidden within might assemble a picture of how hidden and deep-seated racism can be.

To Kill a Mockingbird was chosen for its reputation as anti-racist and due to its canonical status. With this impressive résumé one could assume it would be unproblematic to use in a classroom. The mere fact that the novel is in the American canon represents that the novel is “judged to be worthy of academic study” (D. Johnson 201). However, canonical literature has been criticized for not allowing room for new voices (Godina 544). This debate has reached the classroom since it can be problematic for teachers to incorporate literature outside of the canon in their teaching (Godina 544). Even though Sweden does not have an English literary canon, the American canon could persuade Swedish schools and teachers to favor certain novels above others. This issue is pressing because students should be able to read canonical as well as non-canonical literature since the combination offers “a greater breath of critical
understanding” (Godina 548). One way of giving the students a broad spectrum of criticality could be by working with *To Kill a Mockingbird* in combination with a novel written by an African American author. That way the students gains access to a counter narrative. Thus, a valuable lesson can be made by using CRP and reading Lee’s novel with a critical frame of mind.

According to the Swedish National Agency for Education, teachers should prepare students to become democratic citizens of society (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 5). Allowing students to critically assess and analyze texts via CRP could be one way of preparing them for a democratic society and the values it entails. Considering that CRP concerns itself with critical thinking and racial equality it is relevant to use in English 7 due to the course’s concernment with societal issues and conditions, ethical issues, political-, and historical conditions (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Syllabus”). Furthermore, discussing society as depicted in the 1930’s in Lee’s novel might open up for discussions in regard to how society has or has not changed and what prospects the future holds. Doing this, pupils will have the opportunity to transfer their newly acquired skills for critical thinking from fiction to reality.

However, using CRP can be problematic because of students’ belief in a current post-racial society (Alemán and Gaytán 131). If students believe that racism no longer exists it can be quite hard to encourage students to actively fight it. Another dilemma that may occur is a defiance towards discussing ethnicities since the topic can be “anxiety-inducing” and people have therefore learned to avoid the topic (Alemán and Gaytán 131). Nevertheless, it is imperative that students are made aware of racism’s presence in today’s society and if having the seemingly uncomfortable discussion about ethnicity results in a change in tomorrow’s equality then having the conversation today is far more preferable than choosing the convenient avoidance of the topic.
There are several different pedagogical strategies one can use to discuss racism in the classroom. One strategy is “front-loading” meaning that the teacher makes the students aware ahead of time that they will be dealing with difficult subjects in the near future (Alexander-Floyd 183). Furthermore, the students should be notified that there can be some discomfort but that this discomfort can lay the foundation for knowledge and improvement (Alexander-Floyd 184). Another teaching strategy is “the Socratic teaching method” in which students analyze narratives with accompanied exercises (Alexander-Floyd 184). Students should be asked questions “designed to provoke reflection, as well as synthesis and application of knowledge” (Alexander-Floyd 184). Using questions can encourage students to think critically and find knowledge to reason through issues (Alexander-Floyd 184).

Allowing students to partake in the discussion of racism can lead to the classroom becoming more equal. A progressive approach to education based on criticality, activeness and social teaching will help shape problem-solving students (Zamudio 109). It is of importance to remember that students are not empty vessels but instead they all have bags full of vivid experiences (Zamudio 94). All students need a sense of agency and knowledge that they can make a difference in society (Zamudio 94). Encouraging students to fight racial inequality “begins with helping students develop a critical consciousness which allows them to think judiciously about oppressive ideological orientations, . . . an understanding of how this oppression and resistance is part of their own lived experiences, and a skill set to help them to pursue actions that foster social justice” (Zamudio 94). This correlates with the curriculum for upper secondary school where it is stated that “[s]tudents should develop their ability to think critically, examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives” (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 5). Equipping students with
tools to critically face racism will be valuable during school as well as after school as students should be prepared to be part of society (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 5).

In conclusion, CRT and CRP are intertwined with their goal of criticizing discriminatory acts towards people of color. And whether inside the classroom or outside of it, the focal point of CRT and CRP is to fight racism, and to be able to do that actions need to be taken. This is done in order to give voice to silenced and marginalized people by counternarratives and empowerment through agency.

3 The Reflection of a Given Voice

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter” (King Jr.).

The following analysis concerns itself with the voice of African American characters in Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird. The forthcoming distinctions and observed silencing of black characters might perchance not align with the intentions of author Harper Lee, but are nevertheless present in the novel and the discussion should therefore surmount the silence.

3.1 Silenced Voices

The roles of black characters in American novels are often diminished. The meager space in literature black characters are appointed was a subject reflected upon by Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison as she stated that her “early assumptions as a reader were that black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers” (15). Morrison’s reflections convey the silenced and shrunk space black characters have been given in novels written by white authors. This is especially alarming considering that voices represent authority and legitimacy in narratives (Bell
“Who’s” 907). In fact, the voice of the discriminated is often silenced due to their speech being undervalued and their cognition doubted (Achino-Loeb 45).

In Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the African American alleged rapist Tom Robinson is dependent on his white lawyer Atticus Finch to speak for him despite an absence of any apparent speech defects. This is due to his subdued and silenced role in the novel. Naturally, Atticus as a lawyer should control the conversation in the courtroom but a great deal of Tom’s voice is left to be desired throughout the novel. However, Tom’s dependency on Atticus is both inside and outside of the courtroom. The sole fact that Tom is not allowed room to discuss his own trial, but instead all of the novel’s events are narrated and discussed among white characters, showcases his silenced role in the novel. Instead of the focal point lying on Tom and his experiences, the spotlight is shone on the Finch family and their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Arguably Tom’s role in the novel is to complement Atticus rather than Atticus complementing Tom and his story. Black characters appointed a complementary role to show the power of a white character instead of the leading role is used “as both antidote for and mediation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness – a dark and abiding presence that moves the heart and texts of American literature with fear and longing” (Morrison 33). Thus, the weakened black character is used to strengthen the extraordinary white character (Morrison 33). Atticus as the hero and the center of the novel is further shown at the end of the trial where instead of showing grief over Tom’s lost trial, the African American characters were in awe of Atticus’ job and saluted him by rising from their chairs (Lee 283).

Tom is predominantly silenced and marginalized as though his role does not play a significant part of the story. One incident, in which Tom was silenced even though the surrounding events was related to him, took place after his incarceration and some of the white men in town came to the county jailhouse to hurt him. Atticus saved
Tom by stopping the townsmen and sending them on their way. After the ordeal all we hear from Tom is him asking Atticus “They gone?” to which Atticus responds, “They’ve gone” (Lee 206). Tom’s first sentence in the novel is distinctive as it is spoken in African American Vernacular English, which is often viewed as grammatical incorrectness in popular culture (Jones). It is particularly distinguishable when placed in direct juxtaposition with Atticus’ response. The choice of having Tom speak African American Vernacular English throughout the novel could be an attempt to fight the negative views on the mode of speaking whilst showing that Tom stays true to himself no matter the surrounding events or the consequences of them. On the other hand, the linguistic choice could derive from an indirect desire to stereotype and marginalize Tom. Language appointed to black characters is often unintelligible, misspelled and alien in order to create a divide between people of color and white people (Morrison 52). Furthermore, the deliberate unintelligible language is used to reinforce class distinctions and act as a marker of power (Morrison 52). This is problematic considering that African American Vernacular English is neither incorrect nor unintelligible but rather different from that of standard English. In addition, Tom’s reply came from the darkness without a visual presence of him, linking Tom to the subaltern due to the subaltern often being reduced to the shadows and therefore considered in the lowest social strata (Spivak 75, 79). It should also be noted that it is not until quite a considerably large part into the novel that Tom finally gets to speak. The diminished role Tom is assigned in the novel aligns with Bell’s theory of property being linked to race (Bell “Property” 75). This due to the fact that Tom, even though he is an innocent, kind man, is silenced and put aside whilst other lower strata whites such as Bob Ewell is allowed considerably more lines in the novel. Intrinsically showing that Ewell is worth more time and space in the novel due to his ethnicity.
There is a correlation between ethnicity and authority which sets the premise for given voice in the novel. The sole fact that Ewell can accuse Tom of raping his daughter Mayella and win the trial despite clear evidence contradicting the alleged rape showcases that truth and authority lie within the color of the speaker rather than the indisputable words. This fictional unjust legal system is a mirror of the legal system in the United States where studies show that black defendants are more likely to be found guilty than white defendants are (S.L. Johnson 156). Moreover, the trial illustrates how integrated racism is in institutions and social practices (Harris). The parallels between ethnicity and authority are further visible throughout the novel as the white characters are given considerably more voice than the black characters. The white domination of voice is divided amongst the white characters in accordance to Bell’s theory of property. The Finch family is allowed the majority of voice in the novel considering they are upper-class whites. Secondly, are the lower-class whites, such as the Ewells, as they have property in their whiteness (Bell “Property” 75). Lastly, are the predominantly silenced black characters.

African American characters are expected to conform to the idea of black inferiority. Whilst on the stand with prosecutor Mr. Gilmer for the alleged rape of Mayella, Tom is asked why he did not demand a salary for helping Mayella, to which Tom responded, “’I felt sorry for her, she seemed to try more’n the rest of ‘em’” (Lee 264). Outraged Mr. Gilmer answers, “’You felt sorry for her, you felt sorry for her?’” (Lee 264). Tom’s response created strong emotions because societal norms in Maycomb makes Tom the one to be despised due to his skin color and him showing pity for a white woman therefore aggravates several characters. “Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling. The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortably in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson’s answer” (Lee 264). This quote, as narrated by Scout, tells the reader that Scout has some basic knowledge
regarding racism and what is expected from a black man from the viewpoint of white supremacy and therefore challenges her role as an innocent child. Furthermore, Tom expressing empathy towards Mayella was met with such intense emotions due to his response not being harmonious with the expectations of a silenced inferior character. Similar to Tom’s previous conversation with Atticus, a clear difference in grammar is evident. Tom’s use of contractions is present to make the reader aware once again of Tom’s inferior position to his white co-character (Achino-Loeb 45). Moreover, the feeling of white superiority that is present in today’s United States is also visible in this quote (Delgado 104). Another crucial aspect to consider in this predicament is that Tom only needed to say the ‘wrong’ thing once for the entire courtroom to be outraged and Tom’s fate to be sealed. The conversation between Tom and Mr. Gilmer can be linked to Bell’s thoughts on racial equality being an unobtainable goal as this passage demonstrates the consequences of black characters speaking up (Bell “Realism” 301).

The silencing and lack of details of the African American characters uncover a belief in structural racism. When looking for seats to watch Tom’s trial, Scout and Jem meet African American character Reverend Sykes who brings the children to the black section. Once up in the black section, four black men silently give up their front-row seats for the children (Lee 219). It is astonishing why these men would immediately give up their front-row seats in an over-packed courtroom for the comfort of these white children. However, there is the possibility that the men gave up their seats as a token of respect for Reverend Sykes. Either way, the Finch children’s border crossing is a recurring event when crossing paths with Reverend Sykes as the first time they met was in the African American church (Lee 159). This raises the question if Lee views religion as the answer to equality or if Reverend Sykes and Calpurnia are used as mere scapegoats distracting the reader from noticing the will of the black community bending to fit that of the white. Nevertheless, the silenced black spectator’s sacrifice is beneficial
for the Finch children and has the comfort of the white children in mind. These men perform this formidable act in complete silence and no details are given about them except the color of their skin. It further begs the question if these characters are silent due to them being irrelevant or simply because they did what was expected of them. Morrison argues that “[o]nly with Africanist characters is such a project thinkable: delayed gratification for the pleasure of a (white) child” (27). Furthermore, it displays an expectancy of African American characters as serviceable and silent (Morrison 28).

African American characters speaking up is frowned upon in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When the maid Calpurnia brings the Finch children to the black church, the African American character Lula directly confronts Calpurnia about this and Lula gets told off and comes across as wrong to the reader (Lee 158). This scene can be interpreted in a number of ways and is further complicated by the fact that it is between two black characters. However, keeping in mind that Lee is a white author, signs of white supremacy could be seen in Calpurnia’s action towards Lula. As subsequently discussed, Calpurnia could be seen as a reflection of the white community and her actions in this event could therefor also be a manifestation of the ideals of the white community. On the other hand, it could be argued that Calpurnia shutting down Lula was an act of equality since it was motivated by an inclusive frame of mind. However, the incident could also be examined as yet another instance where an African American character is silenced. Lula is the only black character that is showing resentment towards white characters, and it results in both the black community (channeled through Calpurnia) and the white community (channeled through the Finch children) judging and resenting Lula for it. This silencing is sending an intrinsic message that people of color should be silenced and when speaking too loudly should be shut down. Lula could also be seen as a counternarrative that never truly got a voice. Lee’s contradictory events tie to the fact that many whites consider white people and people of color as
equals in theory, but when it comes down to acting upon the discriminations, practice and theory do not line up (Bell “Brown” 22). Furthermore, it is a testimony that white superiority did not leave when slavery was abolished in the United States (Delgado 104).

Similar to Bell’s interest-convergence theory, in *To Kill a Mockingbird* racial equality is in the hands of the white characters. Interest-convergence theory entails that racial equality only will happen when it coincides with the interest of white people (Bell “Brown” 22). When questioned by Mr. Gilmer in regard to why Tom left the scene of the crime Tom replies that it was not a safe situation for him to which Mr. Gilmer responds “But you weren’t in a fix – you testified that you were resisting Miss Ewell. Were you scared that she’d hurt you, you ran, a big buck like you?” (Lee 265). Tom confesses that he ran because he did not want to be arrested for a crime he had not committed, which infuriates Mr. Gilmer into asking “Are you being impudent to me, boy?” (Lee 265). In this instance, Mr. Gilmer uses the authority that accompanies his whiteness to tell Tom that his skin color had no effect on how he should have acted and that it should not have prevented him from staying. However, previously when Tom showed sympathy for Mayella, Mr. Gilmer was infuriated over Tom crossing the ethnic divide. This further proves that racial equality, like Bell’s theory, is used when appropriate for the whites (Bell “Brown” 22). The use of the words “boy” and “buck” are racist markers signifying the differences in power and authority between Tom and Mr. Gilmer. As with the previous quotes with Tom, there is also a divide in language in which Tom is viewed as inferior. An example of such a language estrangement is Mr. Gilmer’s “have to” juxtaposing Tom’s “hafta” (Lee 265). Furthermore, this quote shows that when not silenced in the novel, the voice of African American characters often is misinterpreted and met with animosity.
In Lee’s novel, there are both hidden and clear attempts at silencing African American characters. Upon discussing Calpurnia’s role in the Finch family, Aunt Alexandria tells Atticus, “‘You know how they talk among themselves. Everything that happens in this town’s out to the Quarters before sundown’ (Lee 210). To which Atticus responded “I don’t know of any law that says they can’t talk. Maybe if we didn’t give them so much to talk about they’d be quiet’” (Lee 210). The interaction between Atticus and Aunt Alexandria exemplifies Atticus’ values which he tries to teach his children and makes Atticus the moral hero of the story. However, in this quote both an extrinsic and intrinsic desire to silence the black community is detectable, much like the desire to silence and other the subaltern (Spivak 75). Aunt Alexandria’s outspoken thoughts on the talkative nature of the black characters, although alien to the space black characters are allowed in the novel, is clear in her wish for silencing. Atticus also shows a longing for a silenced black community when he responds Aunt Alexandria in the previously stated quote (Lee 210). His desire to silence the African Americans would contradict his otherwise equality-driven morals. Nevertheless, Atticus’ response could also be interpreted as a veiled criticism towards whites and the white characters’ lack of morality since they gossip. However, it could be argued that there is a shared idea among the white characters that the already silenced people of color should strive to be even more subdued.

Considering that one of the main topics of Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird is the trial of the African American alleged rapist Tom Robinson, the amount of times Tom gets to speak in the novel does not align with the topic at hand. Similar to the subaltern being kept in the shadows, Tom’s life is discussed amongst white characters instead of allowing Tom room to raise his own voice (Spivak 75). This silencing mirrors the history of discrimination black people have experienced because of a believed black inferiority (Bell “Who’s” 895). Thus, Tom’s black voice, which is unique with its
experiences of racism, is silenced to make room for white narration which cannot make Tom’s story justice (Delgado 98; Matsuda 63). In short, there is a linkage between ethnicity and silence in *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which Tom among most other black characters are marginalized to make room for white characters who has privilege and property in their skin color.

### 3.2 Crossing the Ethnic Divide

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* there are the marginalized and silenced African American characters and the superior white characters. However, there are two characters that break these rules and step out of the generalized character plans. These divide-crossing characters are Calpurnia and Arthur Radley (Boo).

Calpurnia is a reflection of Atticus and a link between the white and black communities due to Calpurnia and Atticus’ shared beliefs in racial equality. Calpurnia’s rejection of the color bar is evident by her bringing the Finch children to the black church. Moreover, Calpurnia and Atticus share authority in the Finch household. As told by Scout in regard to her relationship with Calpurnia, “[o]ur battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side” (Lee 7). The fact that Atticus chooses a black woman over his white child could be because of their similar thoughts and distance to racial inequality. On the contrary, the reason for Atticus siding with Calpurnia could be because of the social norms of adult authority at the time. In contrast to the norm, Calpurnia is considered a part of the family (Lee 209). In addition, Calpurnia’s voice matters to Atticus as he cares about her opinion. This trust in Calpurnia is shown in the following quote in which Atticus is discussing Tom: “He’s a member of Calpurnia’s church, and Cal knows his family well. She says they’re clean living folks” (Lee 100). The use of nickname is a strong contrast to the otherwise blunt manner often used towards servants in the Deep South. Yet another stark contrast
is that of Calpurnia’s valued voice in contrast to the otherwise silenced voices of the African Americans in Lee’s novel. Calpurnia’s valued voice could be a result of her shared opinions with Atticus. However, considering that the conversation regarding Tom was between Atticus and Scout, this is yet another instance in which the subaltern is discussed amongst the whites (Spivak 67).

When put in juxtaposition, there is a distinct difference in how Calpurnia and Tom are treated regarding intimacy. The one thing their treatment shares is that, just like the interest-convergence dilemma, the surrounding white characters are in charge of the black characters’ equality (Bell “Brown” 22). Early in the novel, Calpurnia shows her affection to Scout by kissing her (Lee 38). The reaction to this appreciated kiss differs greatly to Ewell’s horror over the mere thought of any form of relationship between Mayella and Tom. According to CRT, blacks are often killed by whites due to their success (Bell “Who’s” 895). Perhaps Ewell’s frustration stems from Tom’s successful love life and Ewell’s failures in enticing Mayella to his incestuous love. The killing of Tom could therefore be motivated by fear of black success contrary to the protection of a white woman, much like the ideas in CRT (Bell “Who’s” 895). Ewell’s thoughts could be connected to Congressman Thomas Sisson who in the 1920’s said he “would rather the whole black race of the world were lynched than for one of the fair daughters of the South to be ravished and torn by one of these black brutes” (Schneider 177). The connection between Ewell and Sisson shows shared moral ideas between the silencing and killing of fictional Tom Robinson and the treatment of African Americans in US history.

Calpurnia, as a reflection of the white community, exemplifies subtle racism towards African Americans. Once in the black church with Scout and Jem, Calpurnia tells Scout, “‘You’re not gonna change any of them by talkin’ right, they’ve got to want to learn themselves, and when they don’t want to learn there’s nothing you can do but
keep your mouth shut or talk their language”’ (Lee 167). With the repetitive use of the word “they” there is a clear distancing between Calpurnia and the Finch children as a form of “us” versus the black community as a “them”. Stating that the African Americans never will learn standardized English as a form of “correct” English is overflowing with white supremacy and demonstrates the feeling of white superiority that accompanied slavery in US history (Delgado 104). That the majority of the black community speaks African American Vernacular English does not automatically mean that they would not be able to speak standardized English if desired, but rather it could be a form of resistance towards the white community or a way to keep the black community private. It is therefore problematic when Calpurnia indicates that the African American members of the church cannot speak in any other way than African American Vernacular English and trying to teach them would be futile. This strengthen the already existing belief in African Americans as unintelligible and uneducable (Carter and Goodwin qtd. in Tate 199-200). Thus, despite being a part of the black community, Calpurnia reflects white oppressive cognition.

Furthermore, the Finch children are using the language differences between Calpurnia and the majority of the black community to show their superiority. After having noticed that Calpurnia speaks like the rest of the black community when conversing amongst them, the children are taken aback and questions Calpurnia about her change in discourse. With arguments such as “[b]ut Cal, you know better” and “you know it’s not right” the Finch children are using language to create a divide between right and wrong, white and black (Lee 167). Language is a prevalent tool for creating otherness and preserving privilege (Achino-Loeb 45). Furthermore, language is used to create class differences since voice reveals authority (Morrison 52; Bell “Who’s” 907). Having the Finch children ridicule the language of the African American characters
diminishes the credibility of the black community and strips them of their authority. A consequence of this is a further broadening of an ethnic divide.

On the other hand, there is Boo, who despite his pale white skin color, incarnates the marginalization of the African American community due to the treatment he experiences by the rest of the white community. While he is marginalized due to the discriminatory treatment he experiences, his exclusion cannot be equated to the ones that African American characters experience since Boo, despite the discrimination, still has property in his whiteness. Nevertheless, some similarities in the way Boo and African American characters are treated can be found and the discussion should therefore be voiced.

Boo is separated from the remaining characters and described as a malevolent character who only comes out at nighttime and terrorizes the town (Lee 10). Moreover, the general idea amongst the white characters is that Boo prefers the shadows, as shown by this quote of Scout: “[f]eeling slightly unreal, I led him to the chair farthest from Atticus and Mr. Tate. It was deep in the shadow. Boo would feel more comfortable in the dark” (Lee 364). A clear separation is made in the quote between Boo and the remaining white characters (Atticus and Mr. Tate). This separation represents both the abstract and physical ethnic divide in the novel.

Similar to Tom, Atticus speaks for Boo. In the end of the novel when Boo makes a visible appearance and saves Scout and Jem from being murdered by Ewell, Atticus asks “‘[y]ou’d like to say good night to Jem, wouldn’t you, Mr. Arthur?’ ‘Come right in’” (Lee 371). Although the reasons for Boo’s and Tom’s silence differ since Boo is silenced because of him being misinterpreted and Tom is silenced because of racial discrimination, they are both marginalized and silenced nevertheless. Stripping Boo of the opportunity to speak for himself is not the only similarity Boo shares with Tom as Atticus and Scout speak for them the majority of the novel, only allowing them meager
pages in the last half of the novel. This form of silencing is used to show the power of a
great white man in juxtaposition with representations of black characters under utter
control (Morrison 33). The one time Boo does speak, he does so with apparent
weakness as he asks the young Scout to walk him home (Lee 372). Using his voice to
undermine him further, Lee has made both Boo, and the black community he reflects,
even more inferior and dependent on the white community than perceived at first glance
in the story.

Boo being completely silent is to manifest the silencing of the oppressed African
Americans. Silencing often occurs due to an othering (Achino-Loeb 45). Similar to the
black characters, Boo is seen as outside of the norm and it is reflected in the lack of
voice he is given in the novel. However, Boo still has property in his whiteness in
regard to the attention he is given in the novel and his relationship with the legal system
(Bell “Property” 75). From start to finish, Boo is the primary topic of choice for Scout
and Jem. This makes Boo a substantial part of the story, but from the shadows and
discussed amongst the whites, with similarities to the subaltern (Spivak 67). When
younger, Boo got into trouble with the law. However, he was not incarcerated because
“[t]he sheriff hadn’t the heart to put him in jail alongside Negroes, so Boo was locked in
the courthouse basement” (Lee 14). This inferior treatment of black people has
pervaded history (Bell “Who’s” 895). Furthermore, Boo does not receive any
repercussions for murdering Ewell. A clear distinction can be made between Boo’s non-
existing punishment for a crime that he did commit, and the non-solicited punishment
Tom receives for a crime he in fact did not commit. Even though similar treatment is
being applied to Boo as black characters in the novel, Boo still has an advantage in his
skin color. This makes the role of Boo complex considering that he does get
marginalized and silenced like the African American characters, but he still can find
property in his whiteness. A reason for this could be that, like the sheriff, Lee did not
have the heart to fully treat Boo as the black characters. Due to Boo manifesting some of the injust treatment of the African Americans, Ewell being killed by Boo could be seen as poetic justice.

In conclusion, Calpurnia is a rather active character in the novel as she reflects the white community and Atticus via shared opinions. Nevertheless, Calpurnia is never allowed voice to complain or raise issues of concern regarding ethnic injustice. Boo is primarily silenced throughout the novel and allowed only a few sentences. Similar to the white characters’ view on the African American characters, the frightening aspects of Boo most likely are a result of inadequate knowledge given to the reader and the remaining characters in the novel.

3.3 Stereotypical Layers of the Narration

For being known world-wide for its anti-racist message, there are a number of stereotypes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Characters who primarily will be analyzed in relation to stereotypes are Scout and Tom. Moreover, Lula’s disadvantaged position as both black and female will be discussed in connection to intersectionality. Throughout this section, parallels to given speech will be examined in relation to appointed stereotype.

Starting with the narrator Scout, her nickname symbolizes her dismissal of traditional feminine roles and echoes her tomboy nature. Furthermore, she does exemplify some of the racist thoughts shared amongst the majority of white male characters in the novel. This demonstration of white male racism is due to prejudice being a belief shared through cultural socialization and institutions (Pratto et al. 172). Racism towards African Americans is prominent in the legal system and school system in the novel. The judicial injustice is visible through the trial of Tom, and the school system’s skewed view on equality is detectable towards the end of the novel where
Scout’s teacher insists on scrutinizing Germany due to the horrible events surrounding Hitler but not criticizing the way black people are being treated in America (Lee 328). Instead the teacher characterizes America as a democracy and Germany as a dictatorship and therefore sends mixed messages about equality. It furthers the cause that so many of the white characters in the novel are racist and therefore imprints their views on Scout. Thus, Scout has been susceptible to racist thoughts through both institutions and socialization. Scout is therefore not the innocent little girl that one might believe.

An instance in which Scout’s veiled racism surfaces was when discussing Tom with her friend Dill outside of the courtroom and she says: “[w]ell Dill, after all he’s just a Negro” (Lee 266). First of all, her choice of words is unanticipated considering that they are spoken in the middle of Tom’s unjust trial and so far into the novel. Moreover, there is an underlying message of black inferiority as she states that he is just black. This feeling of white superiority stems from the United States history with slavery (Delgado 104). Stereotypes can impact thoughts regarding deservingness (Pratto et al. 170). Scout only considering Tom’s skin color whilst discussing and judging him stereotypes Tom into being simply one among many other black men. In the quote, she further implies that Tom may not be worthy of respectable treatment by Mr. Gilmer due to the color of his skin (Lee 266). Since Tom is viewed as unworthy because of his skin color, Scout’s hidden racism emerges and shows how much can be said in just a sentence. It is therefore problematic that Scout is the narrator and thus given the majority voice to a novel deemed anti-racist.

Because of Scout’s character representing the entire white community, both the anti-racist parts through her innocent appearance and her family and the racist parts via her underlying racist tendencies and tomboy nickname, she is the most privileged and is given the loudest voice in the novel. Scout is given the loudest voice considering
everything is narrated through her. Scout’s narration being deemed as anti-racist should be met with criticality since “[p]eople in positions of authority can control others’ outcomes and can also stereotype” (Pratto et al. 166). Scout shows off her authority differentiating good from bad as she describes Tom by saying “’[h]e seemed to be a respectable Negro, and a respectable Negro would never go up into somebody’s yard of his own volition.’ . . . ‘Tom was a black-velvet Negro’ . . . ‘The whites of his eyes shone in his face, and when he spoke we saw flashes of his teeth.’” (Lee 257). Similar to the previous quote from Scout, her choice of words to describe Tom is seemingly inappropriate considering the surrounding events. Furthermore, Scout’s description of Tom is quite animal-like with a focus and language similar to descriptions of animals such as eyes and teeth. There is also a white versus black theme evident in her description as she discusses his skin and teeth. In this quote Scout is given both the authority and the voice to decide what separates a good African American from a bad one. In this instance, obedience and possibly silence are qualities deemed favorable. Because stereotypes can undermine power and question deservingness, Scout’s distinctions between good and bad blacks could send a wrongful message to the reader (Pratto et al. 170).

Despite compelling evidence supporting his innocence, Tom is stereotyped as a criminal. Stereotyping African Americans as criminals is a reoccurring event motivated by the belief of black unworthiness and thus when black success occurs suspicions of criminality surface alongside it (Pratto et al. 170). Once found guilty for the rape of Mayella, Tom tries to escape from prison and gets shot seventeen times (Lee 315). The news of Tom’s death was met with short interest and further incited derogatory utterings amongst the people of Maycomb as the general opinion was that “Tom’s death was typical. Typical of a nigger to cut and run. Typical of a nigger’s mentality to have no plan, no thought for the future, just run blind first chance he saw” (Lee 322). There are a
number of things worth noticing in the aforementioned quote. It would be amiss to overlook language and word choice as it filled with bigotry. It is quite clear that there is a feeling of white superiority as African Americans are described as incontrollable (Delgado 104). Furthermore, Tom being stereotyped as a “typical” black man leads to a generalization of an entire ethnicity. These forms of stereotypes can lead to legitimizing existing inequality and rationalizing immoral acts towards the discriminated group (Pratto et al. 170).

A further consequence of these stereotypes is vigilance which is exemplified in the attention paid to young African American males in the United States (Pratto et al. 166). Stereotypes can even go as far as to “legitimize violence against subordinate groups” (Pratto et al. 171). Considering the stereotype of a black criminal that Tom has been appointed by most characters in the novel, the stereotype might give reason to the lack of attention paid to the brutal killing of Tom. Instead of gaining sympathy, his death arouses more judgement and racism. These forms of violence towards African Americans are a common occurrence in the United States where many police officers feel justified in apprehending innocent people due to the color of their skin (Pratto et al. 171). In addition to these dire consequences of stereotyping, stereotypes can prevent people from gaining power since they are deemed not worthy of it (Pratto et al. 170). As a result of stereotyping, Tom loses all his credibility which further prevents other African Americans to gain power as they are regarded just as criminal as Maycomb considered Tom.

Tom is silenced in the novel because it suits the white characters. The silencing of black characters is a common theme in American literature as internal conflicts are prescribed to black characters (Morrison 38). These black characters are therefore essential to nuance conflicts (Morrison 6). The silencing of Tom in the novel could perhaps be motivated by his silence turning him into a more compliant object of conflict
even though it contradicts with the theme of anti-racism and Tom’s role as the victim. Considering that Tom is a part of the subaltern, there is a desire to silence him (Spivak 75). Thus, the attention is steered away from the experiences and voice of an African American man to a young white girl’s opinions regarding the experiences of an African American man. This choice of voice reveals opinions in regard to equality, authority and value. This train of thought correlates with Bell’s interest-convergence theory as Scout and other white characters are in charge of racial equality (“Brown” 22). Even Lee, as a white author, impacts the African American characters’ chances of reaching racial equality as her decision to make Tom a criminal by trying to escape prison sends the message that the prejudices that many of the white characters had about black characters were indeed true.

Malcolm X once famously said that “the most disrespected person in America is the black woman”. The intersection of discrimination of gender and race formed intersectionality (Zamudio et al. 37). Particularly silenced are people who are female, black and poor (Spivak 90). In To Kill a Mockingbird all of the attention regarding racial injustice is focused on Tom. Considering his silence in connection to his struggles, black females and their struggles are even more muzzled in the novel. Black females are often discriminated against both due to gender and ethnicity (Crenshaw “Demarginalizing” 140). The one black female character that is given a rather big voice, Calpurnia, never gets to voice her own struggles and in that regard, she is silenced. The insight into Calpurnia’s life is rather superficial as the reader does not get an abundance of information regarding Calpurnia’s private life, potential struggles or her opinions on surrounding racist events. Furthermore, all the information the reader gets about Calpurnia is told from a white character. Connections to contemporary America can be found as #SayHerName urges people to give black female victims of police brutality the same attention they give to black males (Crenshaw “Say”).
Lula is the only black female who raises her voice regarding the treatment of blacks and she is perceived as impudent because of it. Lula questions racial inequality and border crossing by asking Calpurnia why she brought Jem and Scout to the black church (Lee 158). Both Calpurnia’s and the Finch children’s shocked and appalled reaction aligns with the idea that people breaking stereotypes often receive negative reactions and prejudice (Pratto et al. 170). Black females voicing their opinions are therefore often seen as “pathways to disorder and criminality” (Carbado et al. 309-310). Negative reactions can also occur when a person’s needs do not match the assumed needs of the person or group (Pratto et al. 169). When Lula breaks the silence by indirectly addressing her unjust treatment she is silenced due to her desires not matching the presumed desires of Jem and Scout. Not only breaking the role of inferior African American, Lula also breaks the implicit role of silenced female.

There is a clear connection between voice, ethnicity and stereotypes in the novel. Ranging from most silent to loudest are black females, black males and then at the top there is the entire white community. This assigning of voice sends a rather racist message that should be addressed when discussing the novel in a classroom in order to reach the full potential of an implementation of the novel.

3.4 Pedagogical Implications of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Doubts regarding the relevance of teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* in an EFL classroom, with racism as its focal point, will most likely arise due to the fact that Swedish students live in a post-civil rights era with experiences of a black president of the United State. Furthermore, Sweden has not had the same history with slavery as the United States has and thus there might be a level of hesitation in regard to the relevance of discussing racism in a Swedish classroom. However, in addition to the requirement of teaching equality as stated in the fundamental values of the Swedish Curricular documents, EFL
students studying English 7 should learn about “[s]ocietal issues, cultural, historical, political and social conditions, and also ethical and existential issues in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4; “Syllabus”). Therefore, discussing racism in an EFL class is not only relevant to the Swedish school system and their moral agency, but racism in the United States is also compatible with the syllabus. Racial equality in schools is often viewed as a representation of equal opportunity in the entire nation for civil rights workers (Bell “Masters” 10). Moreover, To Kill a Mockingbird in connection to CRT can open up for a critical discussion to whether or not Sweden is as anti-racist as it perhaps is conceived to be due to CRT’s criticality towards structural racism (Zamudio 11). Optimistically, the students will apply anti-racist values, brought up in class, in their own private lives and the way they interact with other people and actively work towards a more equal and accepting society.

One might wonder how Swedish students are positioned to analyze To Kill a Mockingbird considering some background knowledge of American history might be needed to fully grasp the complexity of the novel. However, allowing students access to American history, knowledge about slavery and the Civil Rights Movement is a rather easy fix with potentially astonishing results. Analyzing novels from a historical context is a common strategy in the classroom, but it is also of importance to consider when the novel goes from having historical context to becoming a historical document (Shaw-Thornburg 99). Once having knowledge regarding surrounding historical events, it might therefore be of importance to motivate the students by showing their forthcoming analyses’ relevance to today’s Swedish society as they otherwise might discard the more overarching moral lesson as irrelevant for them and the society they reside in. A given insight to politics in both today’s Sweden and American history will not only aid the students when analyzing the novel, it is also in accordance with the Swedish
Curricular documents’ fundamental values as they advocate students getting an “individual sense of justice...” and the syllabus for English 7 (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4; “Syllabus”). Moreover, an overview of the political arena in today’s Sweden might be all that is needed in order to show parallels to both direct and indirect modes of racism in the novel and in Sweden today.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* might be met with some resistance due to its age, but a juxtaposition of the fictional society set in 1930’s with today’s society might spark awareness and criticality towards structural racism. Initially, students might be hesitant towards the relevance of reading a novel written in the middle of the civil rights movement, with the argument of a drastically changed post-racial society than that of the 1960’s, with Barack Obama as a token of the change (Shaw-Thornburg 99). However, many African Americans are still being mistreated and even murdered in police shootings in today’s US (Macaluso 282). Thus, clear connections between the unjust treatment of Tom and the killings of young black Americans in today’s US can be found. Discussing the correlation between the racist treatment of an African American character set in the United States in the 30’s, even if he is fictional, with the treatment of real African Americans today might spark an interest and awaken a voice of agency within students.

*To Kill a Mockingbird*'s American canonical status calls for criticality in the classroom. *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been placed in the “high school canon” in American schools as well as in the American literary canon and when a novel is deemed canonical it often plays a dominant role amongst other literature (Borsheim-Black et al. 123). Moreover, Lee’s novel is often considered highly pedagogical and an important part of the American school system’s education (Sarat and Umphrey 1). Due to the novel’s high status it might lead to teachers singularly praising the novel in the classroom, only using canonical literature or using the novel’s status as primary
motivation of use (Godina 544). This is problematic since American canonical literature has a tendency to overlook the impact African Americans has had on the United States (Morrison 5). “In other words, TKAM [To Kill a Mockingbird] may have become such a (canonized) part of U.S. culture that we use it to tell a single story about racism and, in the process, essentially ignore or neglect the many other ways racism persists or can persist around us on a regular basis” (Macaluso 285). On the contrary, To Kill a Mockingbird’s canonical status should not prevent its usage in the classroom. However, how we use it in the classroom and the criticality applied when analyzing it is of utmost importance. Furthermore, it might be highly beneficial to complement the reading of Lee’s novel with works written by black authors.

In order to stimulate a more multifaceted discussion, works written by black authors could be used alongside an analysis of To Kill a Mockingbird in order to give voice to the black community. Thereby, students can be offered more perspectives on history, equality and racism. Examples of such literary works are novels such as Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston and The Thing Around Your Neck written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and poems such as Harlem by Langston Hughes. Moreover, counter narratives are a prominent part of CRT and CRP which gives the theories an activist dimension (Zamudio 92; Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 2). Therefore, using counter discourse might provide the students with a deeper understanding of both Lee’s novel and CRT, with all the stories of inequality it entails. This, in turn, will dissolve some of the worries with using this American canonized novel and its single story with suppressed black voices. By shifting the focus from singularity to plurality the silencing of black characters in To Kill a Mockingbird might get noticed, examined and voiced through the criticality of our students.

Critically analyzing To Kill a Mockingbird can help develop students’ empathy. This due to the fact that reading novels can help flourish empathy as opposed to other
forms of reading that does not necessarily give the same desired effects (Keen 85). Arguably, empathy is one of the main themes in the novel and it would therefore be a shame to bypass the opportunity to incorporate an empathy-driven discussion in class. Having a critical and progressive discussion can also lead to problem-solving students (Zamudio 109). Researching the common ways in which *To Kill a Mockingbird* is taught, James B. Kelly noticed that many teachers divert from standard character analysis to discussing morality (Kelly 17). As empathy and morality are reasonably similar values, there is a noticeable likeness in regard to teacher’s train of thoughts concerning important aspects of the novel and even the aim of using the novel. An example of a quote from the novel that could evoke discussions about empathy and morality is when Atticus said that “it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” in which, upon analyzing the quote, one could draw the conclusion that Atticus is stating that it is a sin to kill innocent people such as Tom (Lee 199). The correlation between Tom and mockingbirds is later reestablished as local journalist Mr. Underwood compared Tom’s murder to slaughtering songbirds (Lee 323). With such an outspoken dislike towards Tom’s death, it would be of interest to have a classroom discussion regarding how the hidden and institutionalized cases of racism in the novel affects the reader and how they might even outmaneuver the clear anti-racist messages. It could also be beneficial for teachers to be reminded of structural racism as studies show that teachers’ beliefs in their students impact their education and thus ethnic biases are not favorable (Ladson-Billings “Learn” 22; Zamudio 110).

When discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird* in class it is important to challenge the students to go beyond the “comfortable” topics such as character analysis and plot summary. Whilst both character analysis and plot summary to some extent are needed in order to do a deeper analysis of themes such as voice, racism and stereotypes, it can be a good idea if the reading project does not start and end with them. It can sometimes
be difficult to discuss racism since the topic can be “anxiety-inducing” and people therefore preferably avoid the topic (Alemán and Gaytán 131). There are several strategies of addressing racism such as “front-loading”, “the Socratic-teaching method” and through thought-provoking questions (Alexander-Floyd 184). The goal with using these strategies is to engage and inspire the students into making own conclusions in order to gain the larger lesson regarding equality as in accordance with the fundamental values of Swedish schools (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 4). These deeper analyses based on criticality are vital in order to create a greater lesson in regard to racism, as opposed to using the novel as a form of affirmation and deflection with the aim of discussing racism vicariously through fiction whilst asserting the difference between Ewell’s racism and the teacher’s non-racism (Macaluso 281). Naturally, a teacher in an authoritarian role, which comes along with the profession, ought to set an example by showing a strong belief in equality, but the message will arguably make more of an impact when discovered by the students via analysis than by the teacher simply distancing him-or herself from the racist characters in the novel.

When combined with CRP, *To Kill a Mockingbird* can show both the forthright- and the subtle forms of racism due to CRP’s focus on the marginalization of people of color. As shown in the previous analysis, there are hidden acts of racism in Lee’s novel, but instead of completely discarding the novel for it, teachers can adapt the way they use it and what the focal points of analysis are. Furthermore, the novel shows an ethnic divide that separates the white characters from the black with Calpurnia and Boo as exceptions. Even though Calpurnia and Boo are affected by their ethnicity they do cross the ethnic divide by the way they treat or are treated by other characters. Thus, teachers can use the novel, but they have to reconsider how they are using it, whereas critical thinking is key. Critical thinking is not only suitable for an analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird* but certainly, all students should learn critical thinking skills in school
We need to learn to see the subliminal messages considering how “in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse . . . It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (Morrison 9-10). Therefore, it is of importance to give voice to the discussion so that the marginalized African American voices in *To Kill a Mockingbird* does not translate to silent voices in the classroom. This is especially important since the belief of black inferiority in education has plagued the American school system since the 1800’s and is something worth preventing and abolishing in the Swedish school system (Carter and Goodwin qtd. in Tate 199-200).

In order to avoid spreading prejudice, it is of importance to discuss stereotypes in the classroom. In the fundamental values of the Swedish Curricular documents it states that “[t]he school should actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Students should be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice to gender differences” (Natl. Ag. For Ed. “Curriculum” 5). To fulfill this requirement, it would be beneficial if stereotypes are discussed so that the discussion can lead to students understanding the difference between a generalized stereotype and a more multifaceted reality. If the difference between stereotypes and reality comes as news for the students, it could lead to them gaining new perspectives and knowledge of injustice they had no idea of prior to the discussion (Delgado 109). Examples of stereotypes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as previously mentioned, are Scout, Tom and Lula. Because of the vulnerable position black females are in, due to them experiencing stereotypes regarding both gender and ethnicity, Lula or Calpurnia might be of significant interest to discuss in class.

Considering the limited attention female African American characters get regarding discrimination in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it could be a good idea to address
and discuss intersectionality in class when analyzing the novel. It is equally important to criticize why the marginalization of female blacks never gets voiced as it is to criticize the derogatory treatment of Tom in the novel. Calpurnia could be an example of a character to discuss intersectionality with students, considering that she is discriminated against due to both gender and ethnicity (Crenshaw “Demarginalizing” 140). Although primarily present in the first part of the novel, Calpurnia is restricted to the domestic sphere and her voice is rarely given expression and in that regard she and her opinions are silenced. These occurrences are not limited to the fictional town of Maycomb as black female victims often are silenced to make room for the male ones (Crenshaw “Say”). Thus, if planning to use *To Kill a Mockingbird* in order to teach students equality and to some extent empathy, it is preferably if the lessons are not exclusively centered around men but rather focus on equality across gender and ethnicity.

To summarize, using *To Kill a Mockingbird* in an EFL classroom is not without its problems. However, when done with deliberate and extensive planning, the rewards could be remarkable and highly compatible with the curriculum for Swedish schools. In order to get its full potential, a critical analysis of Lee’s novel voice, racism and stereotypes as the focal points could be discussed in class. Once having noticed the extent to which some characters are marginalized in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, due to the color of their skin, hopefully it will spark curiosity and frustration in the students as to why this is the case. Given the fact that the novel has such high status and its reputation of being anti-racist, such an angle could give an insight to the complexity to racism. As a result, students might raise their own voice and start to actively work against racism.
4 Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to analyze the ways in which ethnicity and racism correlate to opportunity to speak in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The pedagogical aim of the study was to discuss how students can, with the help of critical thinking, analyze and work against an ethnic divide. In order to fulfill the aims set out for the essay, CRT and CRP were chosen. Furthermore, voice, ethnicity and stereotypes were used as analytical tools to help bring the analysis past an extrinsic level.

Results from analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird* with the previously mentioned theories and analytical tools show clear parallels between voice and ethnicity in the novel, which is problematic since it sends the reader the message that African American voices are irrelevant and that it is enough to get a white person’s point of view. As a result from the silencing of African American voices, most of the authority is given to white characters. Furthermore, it could be argued that two characters in the novel reflects the community of the opposing character’s ethnicity and thus adds to the complexity of racism as depicted in the novel. Several stereotypes are also visible in the novel which could lead the reader into believing that the stereotypical characters are an accurate representation of all people sharing the same ethnicity or gender as the character. Moreover, the black characters are, for the most part, marginalized and discussed amongst the white characters, not unlike the subaltern. To avoid the same thing happening in an EFL classroom, counternarratives could be incorporated in the discussion. Although one of the major topics in the story arguably is Tom’s trial and the racial injustice surrounding it, the amount of speech Tom is given does not match with that premise and contradictory leads the reader into focusing on Atticus rather than Tom.
Even more silenced than Tom are the female black characters. Considering the relevance of gender inequality in today’s society and the connection between intersectionality and CRT, the diminished roles black female characters are given is a topic worth discussing in class. Despite Calpurnia having a rather big role in the novel, her opinions are never voiced and, in the novel, she is viewed as more of a maid and a bystander to the Finch family than an independent person capable of own thoughts which, as a result, strips her of authority. Therefore, it is of importance to raise the issue in class and discuss it with criticality in order to prevent students from indirectly absorbing these discriminatory values.

For future research it would be of interest to see empirical results from actual application of CRT and CRP in an EFL classroom whilst teaching and analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This form of empirical study could enlighten teachers to whether or not students learn critical thinking skills and the reasons as to why or why not they do so. As a result of the findings of the study, teachers can adapt and personalize their lesson planning to best suit their students and to give their students the best possible circumstances for learning.

As a teacher it is of importance to keep in mind the impact reading projects can have on students. Even though teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* can be problematic as it is in need of critical thinking skills, the novel does entail several topics worth discussing in class as long as the novel’s American canonical status does not defer the teacher’s ability to view the novel with criticality and curiosity. Criticizing a highly appraised novel known for its anti-racism in class and discussing all the racist parts of it might open the students’ eyes to how engrained structural racism is. Thus, through analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird* via CRT and CRP students might find their agency and together they can raise their voices and help amplify the voice of a silenced mockingbird.
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Appendices

Appendix A Discussion Questions

The forthcoming questions are discussion questions that could be used when analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird* in an EFL classroom.

1. What impacts could the author’s silencing of African American characters have on the reader?
2. In what ways can racism be found in the novel?
3. How is the narration problematic in *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
4. What roles are the female African American characters given in comparison to male African American characters in the novel?
5. What parallels between racism in the novel and in today’s society can you find?
6. What can the novel’s age tell us about changes, or lack thereof, in occurrences of racist acts towards people of color?
Appendix B Lesson Tasks

The following lesson tasks are outlines constructed with the goal of raising awareness to racism and the marginalization of African American characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Adaptations and details should be added to best suit the class.

Task 1 - Contextualization of Bell’s interest-convergence hypothesis
Before reading the novel, students are given a short summary of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and are then supposed to guess the narrator of the novel and give reason to their guess. The students’ guesses should be discussed in class. No matter if the students guess Tom as the narrator due to the story’s concern with his trial or one of the white characters because of knowledge concerning racism and the Civil Rights Movement during the time, a discussion regarding Bell’s interest-convergence dilemma could be suitable. The goal with the task is to make the students critical towards marginalized voices and to guide the students into analyzing the parallels between racism and voice before even reading the novel in order to aid future analyses.

Task 2 – Changing Narration
After having read *To Kill a Mockingbird* the students are given the writing task to change the narration in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and write parts of the story from one of the African American characters’ perspective. The length of the essay should be adapted to the writing abilities of the class but preferably be longer than two pages so that the student can get into the mindset of the character. This task gives voice to the silenced characters and could potentially make the students more empathetic and equality-driven as it might feel more personal.

Task 3 – Role Play
In groups of about three students, the students discuss how it could have been to live in the fictional town Maycomb during the time of Tom’s trial. They then pick a scene from the novel and discuss how they would react if they were present in the scene. This scene will later be discussed and told to one of the other groups. Inspiration for the task derives from a quote in To Kill a Mockingbird where Scout says “Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them” (Lee 374). This task enables the students’ sense of agency, empathy and could spark awareness of the impact they could have in preventing racist acts.