The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and *The Hunger Games*
Implementing critical literacy in the EFL classroom when reading Suzanne Collins’ dystopian novel

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Abstract

The primary aim of this master's thesis has been to examine how the dystopian, young adult novel, *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins could entail depictions of violations against the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The analysis has been conducted based on a theme-based close reading of the novel using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a contextualization device. In addition, the literary analysis has been divided into three sections, namely global, group and the individual perspectives of how incidents in the novel hypothetically violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The division was made in order to delineate the social perspective of how literature can amplify the understanding of human rights and societal issues. Furthermore, the secondary aim of this master’s thesis has been to discuss how upper secondary students, when using a critical literacy lens in the English as a Foreign Language classroom, may establish an awareness about other people’s living conditions and fundamental rights that are present in their immediate social vicinity and in this novel.

Keywords

Human Rights, critical literacy, young adult literature, dystopia, the EFL classroom, education, *The Hunger Games*. 
Table of Content

1 Introduction

2 Critical Literacy
   2.1 Critical Literacy Theory
   2.2 Critical Literacy in the EFL Classroom

3 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games*
   3.1 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games* from a Global Perspective
   3.2 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games* from a Group Perspective
   3.3 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games* from an Individual Perspective

4 Developing Critical Literacy skills by Scrutinizing *The Hunger Games*

5 Conclusion

Works Cited

Appendices
   Appendix A The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
   Appendix B Syllabus for English 7

1 Introduction

Suzanne Collin’s first novel in the dystopian trilogy: The Hunger Games was first published in 2008. The novels in the series have been targeted in plenty of studies and analyzed in multiple ways such as the feminist approach to the female protagonist Katniss Everdeen in “Superkids and Feminism in The Hunger Games and Winter’s Bone” (2015), by Nathalie Larsson. Through an ecocritical approach in “‘Reaping’ Environmental Justice through Compassion in The Hunger Games” (2015), by Brianna Burke and through social and political approaches in David R Dreyer’s “War, Peace, and Justice in Panem: International Relations and The Hunger Games Trilogy” (2016). However, not much research has been done on the relationship between The Hunger Games and human rights issues. The literary analysis of this master’s thesis will be conducted on the first novel of the trilogy through a theme-based close reading with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a contextualization device.

The dystopian society the novel depicts is located in the country of Panem where North America once was (Collins, Hunger 20). Panem contains 12 districts, separated from each other, under the governance of the Capitol and President Snow. Once there were 13 districts but the inhabitants of the 13th district started a rebellion against the Capitol. The uprising was defeated and in turn led to the extinction of District 13 and its inhabitants. The revolt against the Capitol led to the annual Hunger Games which are supposed to be a reminder for the people of the defeat of the rebellions and in turn keep the inhabitants of the districts under control to prevent future uprisings. Every year during the “reaping”, a boy and a girl from each of the twelve districts are chosen to compete in the Hunger Games with their lives at stake until there is only one survivor left in the Games (Collins, Hunger 3, 21, 37).
Furthermore, according to Melissa Ames, the dystopian genre of *The Hunger Games* could help students to engage in issues that concern human rights, social justice and democracy (4). Ames also proposes that dystopian literature might “play upon deep, unresolvable fears from ‘reality,’” which in turn leads the students to confront their “fears and ultimately solve the problems that spawn them” (6). This could be done in the reading process when approaching literature through a critical literacy lens in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom (the EFL classroom). Dystopias such as *The Hunger Games* have touched upon current issues such as “surveillance-ridden societies”, which young adults might feel strongly about (Ames 9). In addition, David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano write that “the worlds of fiction, though, pose fewer risks than the real world, and they present opportunities to consider the experiences of others without facing the potentially threatening consequences of that engagement”, could help the students in their progress of becoming critical readers (378). Moreover, teachers in the Swedish EFL classroom can utilize dystopian literature, like *The Hunger Games*, to let Swedish students engage in topics they might not come across otherwise, and this could also lead to their development in becoming democratic citizens.

Moreover, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky states that it is important to consider the role of the author in order to understand the underlying social and or political context of the text (11; Ames 8). Reflecting on this, Suzanne Collins states in an interview in the Publishers Weekly by John A. Sellers that, “the idea for the brutal nation of Panem came one evening when she was channel-surfing between a reality show competition and war coverage” (Sellers “Interview”). Looking at the underlying spark of interest to write about the horrible events of the Hunger Games the reader could see the connection between the current society and what a dystopian society
based on the current would look like. Collins further states that “even as a kid, I could appreciate how ruthless this was” when she is talking about the Greek myth of Theseus which she was also inspired by, where “Crete was sending a very clear message: ‘Mess with us and we’ll do something worse than kill you. We’ll kill your children’”, when she was writing *The Hunger Games* (Sellers “Interview”). The reader is presented to the information through first-person narration, focalized through one of the tributes in the Games, who is also the main character, Katniss Everdeen.

The Swedish National Agency for Education states in the fundamental values and tasks of the school, that education “should impart and establish respect for human rights and fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based”, and these themes could be highlighted through *The Hunger Games* (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4). The National Agency for Education also emphasizes the importance for Swedish schools to “promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise”, this could be done by the use of literature (“Curriculum” 4). According to Richard Beach, Deborah Appleman, Bob Fecho and Rob Simon, this could be done in the EFL classroom since students might experience some connection to the novel in different areas such as, identification with characters or situations and through the connection also create empathy for the characters in the novel and create an understanding for others (9).

Apart from the ability to empathize with the characters, motivation may be an issue when teaching such a widely read trilogy as *The Hunger Games*. The application of a critical literacy lens in the EFL classroom could work to offer students a chance to revisit their initial reactions to the novel if they have read it before. For instance, Carlin Borsheim-Black, Michael Macaluso and Robert Petrone quote Allan Luke when they say that teaching students, through a critical literacy lens, how texts work and “what
texts attempt to do in the world and to people” could nuance students’ views on
different texts (124). As a result of using a critical literacy lens in the EFL classroom,
the students might be able to “critique and re-construct the social fields in which they
live and work”, and connect this to their critical reading of the novels and in addition,
feel motivated to read the novel again (Luke 453 qtd. in Borsheim-Black et al. 124).

There are film adaptions of The Hunger Games series which may, on the one
hand, constitute a problem for teachers if the students watched the movies instead of
actually reading the novels. On the other hand, teaching novels that are also film
adaptions does not necessarily imply that students would refrain from reading the
novels, on the contrary, students might even develop a greater understanding of the
novels if they get the chance to read them and watch them. Margaret Lee Zoreda and
Javier Vivaldo-Lima explain that students might develop a deeper understanding of a
text if they are able to fully grasp what they are reading and find it meaningful (2). This
is also called comprehensible input which basically means that students should
understand what they read, hear and see. In order to do this, Zoreda and Vivaldo-Lima
quote Stephen Krashen when saying that teachers could “combine interesting
discussions, read alouds, recreational listening, listening to tapes, watching films, all in
one educational program” (Krashen 6 qtd. in Zoreda and Vivaldo-Lima 23). In turn,
students could develop their literacy skills and language acquisition and in the long run
critical literacy skills through increased comprehensible input (Krashen 3).

Moreover, the aim of this master’s thesis is to investigate how incidents in The
Hunger Games violate the articles of the UDHR (see Appendix A). The UDHR was
proclaimed 70 years ago in Paris, by the United Nations General Assembly (UN).
However, not all states in the world are a part of the United Nations. Today there are
193 member states out of 195 states in the world (UN). The exclusions being the State
of Palestine and the Holy See (UN). Even though the Declaration of Human Rights is supposed to be universal, it is not entirely (UN). With this information we can assume that the investigation of how incidents in the novel violates the articles of the UDHR is a topic of which all people around the world should have knowledge of. Furthermore this adds to the potential learning outcomes in terms of human rights and social issues since the object of investigation is young adult dystopian literature which offers a different perspective of society.

This master’s thesis argues that the dystopian novel *The Hunger Games*, in correlation with the analytical tools of theme-based close reading and the UDHR as a contextualization device, can enhance knowledge of human rights and develop student’s critical literacy skills. Furthermore, *The Hunger Games* is applicable in the EFL classroom, not only because of its popularity, genre and of characters whom readers can identify with, but also for the ethical issues depicted in the novel.

2 Critical Literacy

The scope of this master’s thesis will be constrained to the first novel of The Hunger Games trilogy and the events of the novel that might propose violations against the UDHR. The materials used in this literary analysis is the dystopian novel *The Hunger Games*, as the primary source and the UDHR as a contextualization device that enables the identification of passages in the novel that problematize human rights issues in different ways. Consequently, the frequently appearing incidents in the novel that hypothetically violate articles in the UDHR will be demonstrated in the literary analysis. However, other aspects of the novel such as the female hero, historical resemblance or motifs and the ecocritical approach will be excluded from this essay in order to bring coherence with the result of the analysis and the pedagogical view. This
exclusion of other themes that could potentially be analyzed will in turn illustrate the importance of the awareness of human rights in education.

Moreover, the literary analysis is conducted with the analytical tools theme-based close reading divided into themes of global, group and individual perspectives and the UDHR. The UDHR is a suitable contextualization device since many of the characters, especially the protagonist Katniss and the supporting character Peeta, are critical towards how the government treat the inhabitants of the districts in degrading and unequal ways. Therefore, analyzing the novel from a human rights perspective could shed light upon issues concerning violations against them.

Furthermore, The Hunger Games will be the foundation for the pedagogical section in this master’s thesis based on critical literacy in the EFL classroom, with the devotion to develop democratic citizens (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4). The critical literacy approach in the EFL classroom towards the novel could develop students’ understanding of the fictional world and in turn the real one and provide a “vision of literacy as visible social practices with language, text and discourse” (Luke 14), as an attempt to raise interest in human rights. A step-by-step approach to the critical literacy perspective, including scaffolding of the novel, could open up for book talks and critical discussions among students in the EFL classroom.

Dystopian fiction such as The Hunger Games can function as an entrance into zones not yet explored by the reader. Through dystopian literature the readers can distance themselves from the real world and engage in a less threatening one (Kidd and Castano 378). Reading fiction through a critical literacy lens could develop the reader’s understanding of others and not just following the teacher’s agenda (Borsheim-Black et al. 125). For readers to understand others and the social structures of their lives through the aspect of critical literacy, Paulo Freire argues that students need to connect to the
fictional world through distancing themselves from the real world but in turn connect the two worlds to each other (29). According to Maria Nikolajeva, fiction opens the door to what is unattainable in real life such as other people’s unspoken thoughts and opinions and present the opportunity for the reader to learn about others (75). Lastly the critical literacy approach could also help students develop an understanding of how incidents in *The Hunger Games* could be examples of potential violations against the articles in the UDHR.

2.1 Critical Literacy Theory

Critical Literacy, according to Luke, is a way of viewing literacy skills from a social perspective rather than a non-social perspective. Luke explains that we understand language, texts and discourses “inside the human subject” but that we need to develop skills to read from a social perspective (14). Literacy per se can be seen through multiple lenses in terms of understanding the structure of language such as sentence structure and vocabulary, while critical literacy focuses on the understanding of social outcomes of texts. In terms of understanding ourselves and other’s social practices through a critical literacy lens, Ira Shor states that, “we can redefine ourselves and remake society, if we choose, through alternative rhetoric and dissident projects”, this could be interpreted as using language and texts in persuasive and critical ways (1). Shor also states that critical literacy can be used for “questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane”, and it is through the questioning that students will develop their critical literacy skills (1).

The critical literacy perspective will contribute to the reader’s understanding of how incidents in the novel violate the articles in the UDHR and how fictional texts could also work as a means to understanding the real world. Reading critically could also help students in their understanding of a text and meaning making when reading
fiction in-depth. Literacy is portrayed as a weapon for social action and critical literacy in turn is knowing how to use it. In other words, critical literacy is “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson and Irvine 82 qtd. in Shor 2). In addition, Shor writes that critical literacy could be seen as a challenge against the status quo of which he finds the self and the social development of the individual are stuck (1). Therefore, the critical literacy perspective will empower the students in their process of becoming conscious, democratic citizens if they are able to critically engage in texts and make a connection to the current society in which they live. Critical literacy theory is based on the idea of challenging current aspects of literature and in turn connecting these to the individual and the social life.

As aforementioned, literature can be helpful when developing social skills and challenging the status-quo. Nikolajeva adds that literature can enhance knowledge about others and help the reader connect with the characters of the novel in a way they would not have been able to in real life (75). Since fiction gives the reader a distance to the events in the novel it is easier for the reader to connect freely to the characters and situations portrayed. Nikolajeva also describes narrative fiction by quoting Dorrit Cohn in that “narrative fiction is the only literary genre, as well as the only kind of narrative, in which the unspoken thoughts, feelings, perceptions of a person other than the speaker can be portrayed” (Cohn 7 qtd. in Nikolajeva 75). By being able to perceive these, the reader gets the possibility to empathize with the characters and situations in the novel. Connecting the novel to the reader’s individual and social life is essential when it comes to looking at a text through a critical literacy lens (Shor 1).

According to both Luke and Maureen McLaughlin and Gleen DeVoogd, introducing students to critical literacy step-by-step gives them a chance to understand
the concept and what is expected of them before they are presented with a text (2; 55). Luke explains that it is not up to the literacy teacher to enhance “individual growth, personal voice, or skill development,” in students but rather to enable “pedagogic conditions for students to use their existing and new discourse resources for social exchange in the social fields where texts and discourses matter” (2). McLaughlin and DeVoogd express, that the teacher’s role is to help “students to become critically aware” but first, students must begin to understand themselves in order to conduct critical literacy tasks (55). Luke adds that even though critical literacy development could also be seen as social practices in communities, students might also confront relations of social and economic power by juxtaposing texts or in problem posing tasks (4; McLaughlin and DeVoogd 56, 58). Enrooting students’ critical literacy skills and knowledge of themselves could lead to a greater understanding of power relations and social relations in their communities.

Critical Literacy imbeds the potential in the reader to be critical against norms and values of the context of the literary work. Luke explains that reading and writing is an everyday activity and for this to be valuable, readers need to understand the underlying intentions, the context and the prevailing ideologies of the author (6). Luke further claims that working with critical literacy in the classroom means targeting a text from different angles, and through this develop metalanguage skills that would help students decode the context of which the text was written, themes and ideologies of a text and connect these to societies and cultures (7). McLaughlin and DeVoogd add that rather than “accepting an essentialist view, we would engage in problematizing – seeking to understand the problem and complexity”, by reading literature (54). This would result in a deeper understanding of the students’ metalanguage skills. Luke defines the critical literacy focus to “teaching and learning how texts work,
understanding and re-mediating what texts attempt to do in the world and to people, and moving students towards active ‘position-takings’ with texts to critique and reconstruct the social fields in which they live and work” (7). More explicitly, when students are able to use their critical literacy skills when working with texts they will be able to reflect on, and criticize norms and ideologies that surrounds them in their everyday lives.

In conclusion, the pragmatic aspect of critical literacy is essentially directed towards the use of various texts in everyday life and creating tools to decode the contexts from which texts are developed. In other words, “texts are always situated in fields of power, with economic, cultural and social exchange involved,” which students should be aware of when critically examining literature (Luke 9). Luke also describes critical literacy in terms of being the “most important theoretical and practical classroom effect,” by this he means that there has been a “shift in emphasis from the traditional view of literacy as skills, knowledges and cognitions inside the human subject . . . to a vision of literacy as visible social practices with language, text and discourse” (14). Moreover, when readers read from a critical stance as McLaughlin and DeVoogd argue it “expands our thinking, and enlightens our perceptions as we read the word and the world” (55). In a wider perspective, critical literacy would help the reader connect to current events of how governments treat people. In connection to this it is more important for the Swedish students nowadays to understand the underlying meaning of texts and being source critical than just learning the standard ABC since we live in a democratic society and have rights and obligations to participate in ruling the country.
2.2 Critical Literacy in the EFL Classroom

There are various ways of reading literature and using literature to enhance knowledge of social issues, human rights and fundamental democratic values in the EFL classroom. Reading in general can help students in their ability to fantasize, seeing the world from different perspectives and develop empathy for others. In the case of this master’s thesis the students get the chance to analyze how a fictional dystopian society such as the one depicted in *The Hunger Games* could be similar to their own or at least understand the underlying intention of the author and context of the text. Dominik Selzer quotes Lyman Tower Sargent when explaining that a dystopia is a “non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in a time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (Sargent 9 qtd. in Selzer 7). Through this, students might also learn about the existing ideological paradigm of their society and in their progression towards becoming democratic citizens when reading dystopian fiction.

This master’s thesis focuses on reading against a text rather than reading with a text using critical literacy, from the perspective of student readers. Reading with a text is when readers develop an understanding for the plot, characters, understanding the context of the specific text and making personal connections to the characters. While reading against a text “means reading between the lines”, could help the “students question how and why their own beliefs, values, and assumptions are formed” (Borsheim-Black et al. 125). However, reading with a text is the primary goal of reading to comprehend and for the students to be able to eventually read against a text.

In the Swedish syllabus for English 7 (see Appendix B), relevant to this master’s thesis, it is stated that teaching should cover “strategies for drawing
conclusions about the . . . texts in terms of attitudes, perspectives, purposes and values, and to understand implied meaning” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”), this in turn correlates with the critical literacy approach to literature in terms of understanding beliefs, values and meanings of texts. Using literature as a tool in the EFL classroom to develop students’ critical literacy skills can support the learning process both in and outside of school and could also encourage students to partake in various discussions about living conditions, human rights and fundamental democratic values. In the long run, developing critical literacy skills could shed light upon students’ own living conditions and their view of the world which can, with the help of critical literacy skills, transform (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Critical Literacy”).

In order for a transformation of the students’ social environment to occur they must be “working toward social transformation” (Borsheim-Black et al. 124). Using critical literacy in the EFL classroom would be beneficial for the students in order to “participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in global studies and working life” since critical literacy derives from critical social theory (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”; Borsheim-Black et al. 123). Moreover, Wendy Morgan express that critical reading can spark “interest in matters of class, gender and ethnicity” in the students (1). Morgan also describes the poststructuralist theorist Michel Foucault’s way of looking at critical literacy as a dimension of discourse. Since literature is language-based and it is through language that ideologies and social practices are developed, they can also be further constituted through language (2). However, there are different kinds of discourses and teachers are not bound to one of them. In this case, “the aim of teaching is to ‘produce’ a different kind of reading and reader” (Morgan 3). It is nonetheless through discourse that teachers’ values and what kind of knowledge they find most important for their students to acquire are portrayed.
Moreover, when applying critical literacy in education and in the EFL classroom, the Swedish National Agency for Education and it’s regulations must be addressed. The National Agency for Education states that students should develop their values and through education “impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based”, to do this, students will need tools and instructions in term of critical literature pedagogy (“Curriculum” 4). The tools and instructions given by the teacher must be “based on scientific grounds and proven experience”, in order for education to be equal and scientifically defensible (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4).

Furthermore, students should be given the opportunity to read various texts in English in the EFL classroom and relate the content of texts “to their own experiences and knowledge” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”). However, if they struggle to relate to the content they might be able to imagine themselves in the characters’ shoes and therefore be able to relate to the text. According to Luke, students could design their own social futures and pathways through reading literature by developing their critical literacy skills and this might also help them connect to the narrative (13). In addition, Luke’s statement goes hand in hand with Freire’s assumption of critical literacy leading towards social transformation (Freire qtd. in Luke 13). Lastly, Shor writes, “critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development”, which is what teachers and students alike should strive for in education (1).

Moreover, critical literacy can be viewed from several perspectives but this master’s thesis pedagogical focus is on the perspective posed by Freire. Freire expresses the potential for readers to be critical to the current ideologies, cultures and social structures, through literacy skills (29). Freire writes that students should be “encouraged
and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world”, but in order
to do this they need to learn how to be critical and develop an understanding of the
oppressive society in which they live (30). Freire explains how the educational process
of banking, where students receive knowledge from the teacher to memorize and repeat,
further installs the oppressive state of students, making them merely deposits of
knowledge rather than conscious democratic citizens (72). Freire means that via
dialogue, either with people or texts, there is a way out of oppression (32). He further
poses that the educational system is oppressive in a way that it strives to integrate
students into the present system while it should be “the practice of freedom”, where
students engage critically in dialogue about the society (34). Teaching students how to
work in dialogue with texts through critical literacy and developing their skills in the
area could lead to greater engagement of the development of the society and a deeper
understanding of the structure and history of current societies.

The students are the future of the society and therefore it is important that they
get the chance to develop their understanding of the society by letting them “engage in
textual relationships of power” in their education (Luke 2). Developing the students’
understanding of power-relations in texts decreases the risk of exclusion in the reading
process. If the students cannot comprehend underlying intentions or contexts of texts
they might be subjected to exclusion. On the contrary, developing the students’
understanding of power-relations in texts could increase their possibilities of inclusion
and generate critical literacy in the EFL classroom (Luke 2).

The syllabus for English 7 states that teachers should develop the students’
understanding of “how language is used as an instrument to exercise power” (Natl. Ag.
f. Ed. “Syllabus”). Developing students’ critical literacy skills when teaching literature
could help students understand what they are reading on a deeper level and it could
develop their ability to reflect on their own lives and the construction of the society through literature. By using critical literacy in the EFL classroom rather than reader response theory or new historicism, students could encounter and examine ideologies and power-relations in texts and they would be given the opportunity to learn about “equity-oriented sociopolitical action” in the world through literature and the UDHR (Borsheim-Black et al. 123).

Even though there is no Swedish text canon for the EFL classroom students are able to develop critical literacy skills through non-canonical texts (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”). Although, reading canonical texts such as Western Anglo American literature can be useful in terms of plurality i.e. more students read the same texts and can exchange thoughts and opinions on them. The English canonical texts could also enable language learners to acquire the same frames of references as Native Speakers of English. Reading canonical texts could bring forth discussions of how the society is built and what ideologies are flourishing based on teachers’ and schools’ agendas and discourses. However, reading non-canonical literature such as The Hunger Games could benefit students’ ability to understand various contexts. Due to the fact that there is no Swedish English text canon teachers in the Swedish EFL classroom have greater opportunity to take advantage of the increased freedom when it comes to choosing literature for the EFL classroom (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”).

According to the Swedish syllabus for English 7 the students should be given the opportunity to develop their “understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content” and this could be done by reading against the grain of a text. Students should also be able to “discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”). The primary source in this master’s thesis can be
used to give the students the opportunity to reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features of the parts of the world where English is used since the novel is set in what was once North America and to enhance knowledge about the UDHR (Collins, *Hunger 20*).

In conclusion, students in the EFL classroom can learn how to interpret a text and how to understand the underlying ideologies of a text by distancing themselves from the real world. At the same time, they would always connect back to the real world by using critical literacy.

3 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games*

The literary analysis will approach the hypothetical violations against the UDHR made in *The Hunger Games*, using theme-based close reading from a global, group and an individual perspective.

3.1 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games* from a Global Perspective

The first article of the UDHR states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UN). This article is violated through several passages in the novel. The narrator, Katniss Everdeen, makes a remark that the inhabitants of District 12’s rights are being violated since “separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops” (Collins, *Hunger 5*). The quote indicates that the people of District 12 are treated as prisoners. In this way, the reader develops an understanding right in the beginning of the novel that the inhabitants of the districts are not free to leave or travel to other districts.

The fence is said to keep predators out of the districts but there is an underlying implied meaning of the fence according to the narrator. From her perspective the fence
is there in order to keep the people separated from each other (Collins, *Hunger* 16).

Looking at this passage from a global perspective, readers might connect this with events currently taking place in the world. Nikolajeva states that “since fiction is a construction rather than an accurate reflection of facts”, readers must be critical towards the text at hand and broaden their apprehension of the difference between real life and fiction but at the same time create an awareness of their connection (5).

Governments and people have been building fences for ages, however, constructing a fence at the borders of one’s country as we currently can observe is happening in several countries, for example in Hungary and the United States is basically to keep people out of their countries instead of keeping people in. This indicates the opposite of what the protagonist describes as the implied meaning of the fence depicted in the novel would be, i.e. keeping people inside the districts and separating them from the rest of the world (“The New York Times”, “Reuters”). From a reader’s perspective, the people in the real world, who is outside of the fences or walls of the countries could approximate the predators depicted in *The Hunger Games* if looked at it from the global perspective of the Capitol in the novel.

To understand how this might incline unequal treatment, readers need to expand their comprehension of the text and in turn make connections between the UDHR and the novel. The effect of the fence and the underlying meaning of it, could be understood by readers if they incorporate their knowledge of global phenomena of which they themselves are members (Luke 4). Readers could achieve this by, as mentioned, what McLaughlin and DeVoogd argues, juxtaposing texts, in this case including the UDHR and *The Hunger Games* (56). This passage in the novel could lead to discussions on matters of freedom versus borders of countries as matters that are very much present in today’s society (Luke 2).
Furthermore, article 3 in the UDHR, “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (UN) is violated in terms of autonomy, which is not evident in the passage with the fence in the novel. It could suggest the opposite, whereby the inhabitants’ preservation of person is secured by the fence as the Capitol argues. However, being locked inside their districts makes people “subjected to arbitrary arrest” which is a violation against article 9 and 13:1 (UN Art. 9). Article 13:1 states that “everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state,” is violated if the districts where referred to as states since the residents of the districts are not free to reside in other parts within the district than ones designated to them by the Capitol (UN).

Reading *The Hunger Games* through a critical literacy lens enables the reader to view the current political climate of Panem, the ideology of the main character, how the society is built and how this affects the population of the country (Luke 7). For example, Katniss explains that “it’s to the Capitol’s advantage to have us divided among ourselves”, which expresses her thoughts and opinions of the Capitol’s governance of the people of the districts and of the nation (Collins, *Hunger* 16). The protagonist indicates through this quote that the Capitol controls the districts and takes advantage of the division between the districts’ inhabitants. This passage would, in real life, violate article 21:3 in the UDHR stating that “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government”, which is not how Panem is built or governed. In other words: Panem is not a democracy (UN).

Moreover, *The Hunger Games* portrays unfairness both between districts and between the people the districts and the Capitol regarding living conditions. This inequality violates article 25:1 when it comes to “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being”, since the living conditions in nine out of
twelve districts are terrible (UN). There are even differences within the districts in terms of how they are able to support their families and where they work which are all based on where in the district they were born (Collins, *Hunger* 16). This does not only portray the global perspective of unequal treatment of people but how the government divide the people and in turn make the living conditions for the people of some districts deliberately horrible.

It is to the Capitol’s advantage if the people are divided so they cannot gather together and overthrow the government and President Snow (Collins, *Hunger* 21). Article 20:1: “everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association” and 20:2: “no one may be compelled to belong to an association”, are hypothetically violated through the dividing of the people and through the restraint of building a united population among the districts (UN). These two articles are violated through the Capitol’s way of separating people and making them see each other as enemies and creating jealousy among them in order for the Capitol to keep control of them (Collins, *Hunger* 19).

The government should preserve every individual human being’s rights. However, article 22 in the UDHR is violated among other things because the annual Hunger Games infringe upon the social security of person. The article states that:

> everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state, of economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality” (UN Art. 22).

The entirety of this article is violated due to the fact that the tributes in the Games are sent to their possible deaths. The protagonist mimics the Capitol by saying “Look how
we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen” (Collins, *Hunger 21*). The protagonist emphasizes her anger towards the Capitol and at the same time portrays the current ideologies and social structure of the nation (Shor 1). In addition, this also shows that the main character is critical towards the government, this in turn strengthens the argument that it is a violation against article 22 (Luke 6).

3.2 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games* from a Group Perspective

Article 3, including everyone’s right to liberty, is hypothetically violated through the imprisonment of the people in the district without a fair trial if they do not show up to the assembly called for by order from the Capitol. Attendance to the assembly is mandatory for all the inhabitants of the districts and if you do not show up to the meeting the officials of the district will put you in prison (Collins, *Hunger 18*). This incident of imprisonment violates a couple of articles in the UDHR. Imprisoning a person without a fair trial violates article 8 “everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law” (UN). From a group perspective this could be seen as everyone’s obligation to succumb since one person’s death means other people’s suffering in terms of filling the void left at work or provide for the family left behind.

Furthermore, the assembly of the reaping for the annual Hunger Games indicates that the people are totally at the Capitol’s mercy. The annual Hunger Games are supposed to work as a reminder for the people of the uprising causing the destruction of the thirteenth district of Panem (Collins, *Hunger 21*). Once again inhabitants, and in this case children, will be captivated. The narrator explains that “the tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a
burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins”, this indicates violations against articles 8, 9, 10, 12 of the UDHR (Collins, *Hunger* 21). Removing the children from their homes affects more than just their families. It affects the school, their friends, their neighbors and the community as a whole.

Connecting to the group perspective of this passage, the districts might be seen as a group entity because they are being treated like cattle or non-humans since their free will is taken from them and they are hurdled together. This entails violations against article 6 stating that “everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law” (UN Art. 6). The main character also describes the process of being sent to the Hunger Games as “taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy” expressing disgust against the way the governing power treats the inhabitants and especially the children (Collins, *Hunger* 21).

With somewhat dark sarcasm, the main character says “District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety” (Collins, *Hunger* 6). After saying this out loud she worries that someone might have overheard her. Hereby Collins alerts the reader to the level of oppression in the fictitious world through having the protagonist worry that someone might have overheard her complaints, with an undertone of defiance, towards the ruling power. Everyone has the right to speak their mind and the fact that Katniss worries about being overheard indicates that not “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as . . . political or other opinion, national or social origin” (UN Art. 2). This passage could be connected to the real world of the reader, both in the sense of the present surveillance ridden society and to the restriction to express opinions both politically correct and
incorrect\(^1\) by other people or in some cases the government. Incorporating critical literacy and the ability to understand how language and power are related might help the reader to be source critical and critical towards the governing power of their own lives and questioning the ruling power’s motifs.

Moreover, the inhabitants of District 12 are aware of the fact that they are mistreated by their government and the narrator portrays this by explaining what they did during the reaping right after she volunteered for her little sister Prim, who was initially chosen to be a tribute in the Games. As the reaping proceeds it is custom for the audience to applaud the tributes but as the main character portrays it, they are not doing as they are told. She says “I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone. All of this is wrong” (Collins, *Hunger* 27). This action taken by the people could make the reader think critically towards their own government and possibly open up for position-takings of the novel and in their own lives in school (Luke 7).

Consequently, the reader might also question their own freedom of speech and right to opinions in their lives and in education. Considering the cardinal documents of the Swedish school system and the EFL classroom, students should have the opportunity to develop and express their own thoughts and opinions freely and without discrimination, something the characters in the novel cannot (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 10).

Oppressing someone based on their thoughts and opinions is a direct violation of article 18: “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and 19: “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart

\(^1\) Being politically correct refers to someone who “believes that language and actions that could be offensive to others, especially those relating to sex and race, should be avoided.” ([https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/politically-correct](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/politically-correct))
information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (UN). In order to make the connection between the novel and the violations against the UDHR the readers must open up a dialogue either with the text itself or with others (Freire 32). Fiction could help readers understand current ideologies and social structures of their own lives and question them due to the ability literature provide to distance oneself from the real world (Freire 29).

Defying the ruling power through silence as portrayed, is the only thing the people dared to do, if they were to speak up or protest they would have been executed (Collins, Fire 71). However, the crowd did manifest an old token of District 12, occasionally seen at funerals, as a way of saying thanks or goodbye to someone (Collins, Hunger 28). This token appears from time to time throughout the trilogy and consists of a person touching “the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out” (Collins, Hunger 28). The meaning of the token flourish into something of a statement to the government. For instance, in the second novel in the trilogy, Catching Fire, the protagonist is on her victory tour and visits District 11, where her companion in the Games Rue came from. While on stage a man in the crowd “whistles Rue’s four-note mockingjay tune . . . What happens next is not an accident . . . Every person in the crowd presses the three middle fingers of their left hand against their lips and extends them to me” (Collins, Fire 70). This indicates something more than just a thank you or a goodbye because of the protagonist’s new status in being the girl who defied the Capitol, the inhabitants of District 11 show their appreciation to her and in turn they are also defying the Capitol.

Articles 3 and 25:1, in the declaration are violated since everyone does not have the right to life and adequate living standards which includes food (UN). The narrator describes the situation of starvation inside the district by saying that it is “not an
uncommon fate in District 12” (Collins, *Hunger* 32). The narrator further explains that “starvation is never the cause of death officially. It’s always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one”, this implies mistreatment of the inhabitants of at least District 12 (Collins, *Hunger* 32). When reading about the situation of starvation in the district through the protagonist’s depictions it might evoke feelings of empathy in the reader. If readers feel that the protagonists or other identifiable characters of the novel are suffering they are more likely to empathize with them (Keen 71). The starvation of the people could also be seen, as Keen puts it, as “situational empathy”, indicating that the reader might “respond[s] primarily to aspects of plot and circumstance” and not merely the characters (80). This could in turn lead to discussions on how the government treat the people and the reader might connect this to real life events. The mistreatment of the inhabitants could also expand readers’ thoughts and perceptions of their own worlds and living conditions expanding their thoughts and views from egoistic to more altruistic (McLaughlin and DeVoogd 55).

The protagonist mentions that many of the tributes in the Games “have never been fed properly”, this indicates that there are people suffering in more districts than District 12 (Collins, *Hunger* 108). The exceptions being the tributes from districts 1, 2 and 4, whom have had certain advantages when it comes to preparations for the Games. These tributes have been fed and trained their whole lives for the Games which is not fair towards the other tributes since they are not given equal preparations to win the Games (Collins, *Hunger* 109). The fact that the tributes from these three districts have greater chances of winning might lessen the empathetic feelings for them in the reader since they might be viewed as cheaters considering it is forbidden to train for the Games (Keen 81).
Moreover, the main character describes the situation as constructed by and remaining due to the oppressive government. She further implies that “the tesserae are just another tool to cause misery in our district” (Collins, *Hunger* 16), she portrays the tesserae as a way for the government to control the people in the districts by causing mistrust among the inhabitants and making people jealous of each other. This, she means, is “a way to plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper; and thereby ensure we will never trust one another” (Collins, *Hunger* 16). A dystopian novel that depicts social inequality as *The Hunger Games* could enable empathy in the reader in a stronger way than maybe watching the news of war zones since readers’ defense mechanisms are lowered when they read due to the less frightening world of fiction. (Kidd and Castano 378).

Another incident in the novel that represent violations against the articles in the UDHR is when the narrator explains that, “The competition will be far beyond my abilities. Kids from wealthier districts, where winning is a huge honor, who’ve been training their whole lives for this” will have a greater chance of surviving the Games (Collins, *Hunger* 42). This incident violates article 25:1 because it depicts the unfairness and unequal treatment of people in the novel. The main character states similar things now and again, throughout the novel, to emphasize the unfairness between the districts.

In conclusion, having readers reflect on the living conditions and unfairness experienced by the characters in the novel can help them connect their reflections and emotions with real life situations and people’s living conditions. Through a group perspective the mistrust against one another should be reduced since they are all dependent on each other, however, the government controls the districts with an iron fist and makes sure that the mistrust among the inhabitants remain.
3.3 Human Rights in *The Hunger Games* from an Individual Perspective

Several articles of the UDHR have already hypothetically been violated through specific incidents of the novel as presented above. In the following passage a couple of articles in the UDHR are being violated in terms of inhumane treatment of the inhabitants of the districts. Stating that “all human beings are born free”, as article 1 in the UDHR is not really true for the people in the districts of Panem (UN). The supporting character Peeta Mellark, who is also a tribute in the Hunger Games, says that he wishes he could think of a way “‘to show the Capitol they don’t own me. That I’m more than just a piece in their Games’” (Collins, *Hunger* 165). In accordance, the main character says that only birds are free and safe and that they are “the very opposite of me” (Collins, *Hunger* 168). Both Katniss and Peeta show awareness of where the problem of their non-existing security and freedom of person lies. Katniss explains in anger how she hates the Capitol for doing this to them (Collins, *Hunger* 276).

Moreover, article 5 in the UDHR is violated since subjecting someone to “degrading treatment” is a violation towards his or her human rights (UN). The incident that violates this article is when or if the people of the districts are caught with weapons they would be “publicly executed for inciting a rebellion” (Collins, *Hunger* 6). The quote springs from the main character when she describes her father’s craftsmanship in making bows and selling them in order for others to hunt and in turn be able to feed their families. This passage brings forth an interesting juxtaposition in the reader in terms of who is right and who is wrong and what crime has been committed. The passage also shows how the individual could not take care of themselves even if they wanted to in the districts.
Reading this passage could also position the reader in a sort of problem posing task as Mc Lauglin and DeVoogd describe, by looking at the supposed crime and the penalty from both sides (56, 58). In this case the suspected criminal is being executed without a “fair and public hearing”, that every human being is entitled to according to the UDHR (UN Art. 10). Further, the supposed criminal should be charged for his crimes by “an independent and impartial tribunal”, which none of the supposed criminals in the entire novel or trilogy are (UN Art. 10).

When it comes to the right to your own opinion, as stated in article 2, referring to when the main character sees her servant for the first time and recognizes her she understands that something must be wrong. The servant is a so called Avox, a traitor to the Capitol who has had her tongue cut out by the government so she could not speak anymore (Collins, *Hunger* 89). This further violates article 19, “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression”, something the Avoxes are not able to (UN). The reader can empathize with the main character when she expresses remorse towards her non-existing actions to help the Avox girl. Katniss says “I’m ashamed I never tried to help her in the woods. That I let the Capitol kill the boy and mutilate her without lifting a finger”, when she encounters them in the woods, trying to flee the Capitol (Collins, *Hunger* 98). In this passage the main character feels remorse for something she had no control over and she feels sorry for other human beings whom she did not really know in person.

Moreover, there has been a debate going on in the Sweden in terms of to what extent a person should stretch when it comes to aiding other people in need. Prosecutor Barbro Jönsson argues that, embracing civil courage is about taking social responsibility for one another (Larsson “Göteborgsposten”). However, this might infringe on the individual right to choose to act or not in case of emergency, as the
protagonist chose not to do (Nilsson 30; Collins, *Hunger* 98). Nonetheless, the feelings portrayed by the main character can evoke empathy for both her and the defenseless characters she did not help. This could also pose questions in the reader in terms of humanitarian help and aiding people in need (Keen 99).

Article 25:2 “motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection”, is violated via incidents in the novel in regard to the reaping that takes place (UN). The young adult characters of the novel from the 12 districts between 12 and 18 years, the protagonist Katniss being 16 years old, must enter their names in the pool of tributes every year until they turn 19 (Collins, *Hunger* 15). Two names, one boy’s and one girl’s name, from each district will be drawn on the day of the reaping to become their districts tributes in the annual Hunger Games (Collins, *Hunger* 15, 21). Placing children in a contest of life and death is a violation against article 25:2 in regard to the safety and social protection of the children. The fact that the children of the districts are entered into the pool of tributes, often involuntarily apart from district 1, 2 and 4, adds to the violation against the social protection they are entitled to according to the UDHR.

The readers of *The Hunger Games*, who might also be teenagers could connect even stronger to the events and the characters’ suffering through identification with them since they are of the same age (Nikolajeva 83). Identification and feeling empathy for characters in the novel, however frightening it might be, could develop the reader’s critical literacy skills. Nikolajeva explains that “the understanding of other people’s minds is an essential social skill”, as is empathy and both can be developed through fiction (77; Luke 14).
The children in the novel are also able to enter their names more times into the pool of tributes to get tesserae and by doing so help their families who might be poor and starving. The tesserae include oil and grain for one person for one year. For the protagonist who enters her name in the pool for tesserae three times each year, and once as obligated to become a tribute, the risk of becoming a tribute in the Hunger Games increases manifold. The increasing risk is based on children’s and their family’s living conditions. The narrator explains this in the novel by saying:

Say you are poor and starving, as we were. You can opt to add your name more times in exchange for tesserae . . . So, at the age of twelve, I had my name entered four times. Once because I had to, and three times for tesserae for grain and oil for myself, Prim and my mother (Collins, Hunger 15).

Ever since the main character Katniss’ father died when she was 11 years old she has been the provider for her family even when she herself was in danger of starvation and almost gave up on life she had to pull through for her mother and her sister (Collins, Hunger 31, 35). If a child were to provide for their entire family in the real world this would be a violation against article 25:1 and 25:2 since families should be given social protection and special care according to the UDHR.

Another incident that violates the UDHR occurs when the reaping is done and the tributes are about to leave the stage. The protagonist explains that “the moment the anthem ends, we are taken into custody. I don’t mean we’re handcuffed or anything, but a group of Peacekeepers marches us through the front door of the Justice Building” (Collins, Hunger 39). This could be seen as them being treated like cattle and not humans since as is a violation against article 6 because they are literally marched and taken into custody in order not to escape from their inevitable deaths (UN).
Lastly, the suggested meaning of the fence as stated by the protagonist, to keep people separated from each other, indicates violations against article 13:2 in the UDHR (Collins, Hunger 16). This article states that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country”, this is not possible in Panem because even “trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties”, connoting the severest penalty being execution of the person who does not obey the law (UN; Collins, Hunger 6). Executing someone for trespassing could be seen as a diminishing of a person’s right to live and to leave a country.

4 Developing Critical Literacy skills by Scrutinizing The Hunger Games

The focus in this part of the master’s thesis is on how to read critically and how to develop critical literacy skills among students in the EFL classroom. The curriculum for upper secondary school in Sweden, in terms of norms and values, states that “the goals of the school are that all students individually: can consciously determine their views based on knowledge of human rights and fundamental democratic values, as well as individual experiences”, which students in the Swedish EFL classroom can learn about through critical literacy (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 10).

Even if reading could develop students’ respect for other people, it is important to give them the right tools and conditions to do so (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 10; Nikolajeva 5). By reading The Hunger Games through a critical literacy perspective the students may engage in various matters concerning the real world even though the world in the novel is a dystopian one. The fact that The Hunger Games depicts a dystopian society can help students resolve hypothetical problems since the fictional world allows them some distance from reality (Ames 6; Kidd and Castano 378).
Engaging with a text through a critical literacy lens will help the students question their own lives and living conditions at first hand and thereafter develop an understanding of others by scrutinizing literature (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Critical Literacy”).

Students could begin by learning how to read with and against a text. Having the students read with a text would help them see their world from the writer’s perspective, i.e. looking at plot and characters and connecting to them to the real world (Bartholomae and Petrosky 11). On the contrary, having students read against a text mean that they would need to go back and ask questions to the text and the underlying intentions by “reading between the lines” (Borsheim-Black et al. 125). The students would also need to find examples that contradict the author’s version of events or statements in the text and be critical towards their own reading of a text when they are reading against it (Bartholomae and Petrosky 11). The dystopian genre of the text analyzed in this essay might work accordingly since distance from the actual events in the text is possible for readers and in turn they might be able to analyze the author’s intentions and implied meaning of a text.

Reading against a text primarily requires the student reader to be able to understand the vocabulary and be somewhat proficient in the English language, which could be expected of a student in the English 7 course in upper secondary school in Sweden. The exercise included when reading against a text and interpreting the underlying meaning, the context and the author’s intentions is difficult enough for advanced readers, however, if they do possess enough prior vocabulary knowledge and reading skills the task of reading against a text is not insurmountable.

As aforementioned, Freire stresses the importance of encouraging and equipping students to respond critically to their own living conditions (30). He also portrays the banking process in education as oppressive against the students. The students should,
according to Freire interpret texts without any input from the teacher (72). However, students must first learn how to read with a text in order to go deeper and read against a text since reading against the text is undoubtedly a difficult task (Borsheim-Black et al. 124; Bartholomae and Petrosky 12).

Furthermore, Swedish students might be considered novice readers since they might have what Nikolajeva describes as “limited life experience of emotions” (79). Novice readers in the EFL classroom who might struggle to understand a text fully, could at first learn how to identify with or feel empathy for characters in the text and later expand their thoughts and critical literacy skills towards texts. This since their feelings might be enhanced by their experiences, such as their own cultural or social circumstances (Keen 81). Fiction can “offer vicarious emotional experience for readers to partake of, long before they may be exposed to it in real life”, this in turn enables the learning process to proceed without students’ real life experiences (Nikolajeva 79).

Novice readers in the EFL classroom who struggle with their reading and comprehension might be aided through other media. In the case of The Hunger Games trilogy there are film adaptations of all the three novels that could help the students overcome some of the obstacles, such as vocabulary shortage or comprehension hardship. By using both the novel and the film adaptation, the novice reader might get a deeper emotional experience of a text due to the increased understanding of the plot, characters or themes. Moreover, Nikolajeva states that “this vicarious experience is possible since our brains can simulate responses to fictional emotions just as if they were real”, this strengthens the claim to use both the novels and the film adaptations in the EFL classroom (79).

In terms of supporting novice readers, Lundahl writes that “[w]hen it comes to fiction the reader needs to enter the text world, get acquainted with the milieu and the
author’s language, get to know the characters and take part of the problems they encounter. That many find this laborious explain the series popularity”, and since The Hunger Games is a trilogy, students might find it easier to continue reading the second and third novel after completing the first one (Lundahl 269, my translation). Using the film adaptation of The Hunger Games could be seen as a means to scaffolding. In other words, helping the student reader to get a good start to the reading process. Examples of scaffolding could be to activate the students through preparatory activities such as conversations about what they know already or via pictures or free writing (Lundahl 269). For students to be included in the reading process, whether they are novice or advanced readers, is vital for their inclusion in the social interactions in the classroom discussions and in real life and therefore they need to develop a comprehension of what they are reading.

In an attempt to adhere to the criteria specified earlier in this essay and in the syllabus for English 7, a focus on reading strategies would be desirable. Students need to acquire “strategies for drawing conclusions about the . . . texts in terms of attitudes, perspectives, purposes and values, and to understand implied meaning” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus”). One way of establishing strategies is to take charge of the text and not let the author’s voice become the reader’s by asking questions to the text (Bartholomae and Petrosky 10; Lundahl 265). When reading critically, student readers might advance in the strategy of drawing conclusions by asking for example “[w]hy did the author write about this? . . . [w]ho is the implied reader of this text?” (Lundahl 265). In other words, the reader could reflect on attitudes, perspectives, purposes and values depicted in the literary work by merely asking questions when reading the text.

The analytical tools used in this essay, such as the theme-based close reading of literature, could also help the students focus on a specific theme. Through a theme-
based close reading of *The Hunger Games* the students can learn how to approach a text from a specific point of view from the beginning. If the students were to closely read a text from a human rights perspective, they would need pre-knowledge of the UDHR. After they have obtained certain awareness of the UDHR they can examine the novel thoroughly by looking for clues of how characters are treated and treat each other and how incidents might violate the articles. However, a theme-based close reading such as this one does not mean that all of the students come up with the same answers. Bartholomae and Petrosky write that, “Each of us will come to his or her sense of what is significant, of what the point is, and the odds are good that what each of us makes of the essay will vary from one another” (2). What is important to incorporate here is the element of discussion for the students to broaden their view of the content of a text and what it can mean to others.

When there is a progression in critical literacy among the students in the EFL classroom, they could engage in discussions encompassing criticality against current social issues that the students potentially frequently face. Bartholomae and Petrosky describe reading “as a social interaction – sometimes peaceful and polite, sometimes not so peaceful and polite” indicating that there might be a debate on matters that are important for the readers (1). Despite the fact that students might be on different levels of proficiency in critical literacy, there is potential in the social interaction and discussions to improve their skills in communication and cooperation with peers. It is thus important for the teacher to frame the reading for the students to make it comprehensible and attainable to all of them.

Moreover, to support the students in the best possible way, an understanding of both the novel and the UDHR is beneficial for the EFL teacher. It is essential that students fully understand what they are reading and in order to do so they can make
notes as they go, supporting their claims (Bartholomae and Petrosky 7). Knowledge about the UDHR can help students recognize infractions against humanity in literature and in real life. However, readers might be blind to what kind of restrictions of freedom there is. There are difficulties with using literature and to have the students discuss it since there are as many thoughts and opinions of a novel as there are students. It is important for students to get the opportunity to interact with one another, for example through book discussions, in order to enhance a greater understanding of other people’s opinions or actions, and in addition do an introspection into their own lives (Luke 14). Using literacy as a weapon for social action and in turn critical literacy as a means to providing new experiences, the students might learn more about the existing power relations in their own lives (Shor 2).

Reading about other people’s lives and living conditions can spark empathy in the reader, even though empathy is not the main goal when reading critically. Through empathetic feelings towards characters in texts, students might feel the urge to help others and interact with others regardless of culture, religion and history and defeat oppressing and “degrading treatment” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 10; Keen 99). Since the main and supporting characters of The Hunger Games are of the same age as the students in upper secondary school who partake in the English 7 course they could identify with them and therefore empathize even more with them (Nikolajeva 83; Keen 81). According to the National Agency for Education, students should practice their ability to “empathize with and understand the situation of other people, and develop a willingness to act with their best interests at heart” (“Curriculum” 10). Empathy is compatible with literacy in terms of understanding language and sentence structures and what is said in the text. However, empathy is not entirely compatible with critical
literacy since critical literacy entails the understanding of social outcomes of texts and how a text reflects the context of which it is written (Luke 14; Keen 90-91).

In conclusion, in order to develop critical literacy skills step-by-step, taking advantage of the identification and empathy evoked in the reader can help students reach beyond reading with a text towards reading against it. With the aid of literature, the teacher could open up for discussions with the students and “analyse different values, views and problems, and the consequences of these” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 11). Students might also “engage in textual relationships of power”, since as aforementioned, literature is language-based and it is through language that ideologies and social practices are developed (Luke 2; Morgan 2). The National Agency for Education states that “teachers should: make clear the fundamental democratic values of Swedish society and human rights, and together with the students discuss conflicts that can occur between these values and rights and actual events” (“Curriculum” 11). In other words, reading can evoke thoughts and feelings in students who then might be able to elaborate on those in cooperation with peers and discuss their values in social interaction and thereby expanding their knowledge of society.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this master’s thesis was to identify in what ways the UDHR was hypothetically violated through incidents in Suzanne Collins dystopian novel *The Hunger Games*. The pedagogical purpose of this essay was to investigate to what extent students in the EFL classroom might develop and engage in critical literacy and in addition enhance awareness of human rights and democratic values. Moreover, the analytical tools used in this paper consisted of a theme-based close reading of the novel and the UDHR as a contextualization devise.
The close-reading of the novel in this master’s thesis contributed to plenty of evidence regarding how incidents in the novel hypothetically violate several articles of the UDHR. Since the analysis was conducted on a dystopian novel, students would have to be somewhat advanced readers of English in order to be able to make the connection between the events taking place in the fictional world and the real world or the future. However, the study shows that young adult novice readers of *The Hunger Games* could develop critical literacy skills with the help of scaffolding of structures, such as the use of other media and through social interaction with others who have read the novel.

Furthermore, the aim of the pedagogical section of this essay was to analyse how and in what ways students could develop critical literacy through deeper understanding of current events, the relation between power and language, as well as human rights and democratic values in their society when analysing *The Hunger Games* through a human rights lens. Moreover, the aim was also to explore the potential of how students might or might not connect fiction to the real world and widen their conception of the connection between them. However, there might be students who do not want to commit to critical literacy but only want to engage in immersive reading. This could in turn lead to difficulties for the teacher in terms of increased levels of differentiation among students when discussing the incidents in the novel. Nonetheless, it does not mean that it would be a disadvantage when it comes to the outcome of the discussions. Students who only want to engage in immersive reading might need this in order to be able to develop their train of thought and eventually, step-by-step, their critical literacy skills, but in the mean time they might partake in dialogue with the text itself at least.

Future research in this field would be interesting to conduct regarding readers’ potential critical literacy outcome from scrutinizing *The Hunger Games*. Studies could
be done through action research in the EFL classroom during a reading project that focuses on the development of critical literacy and knowledge of human rights. In addition, it would also be interesting to conduct research on how students acquire knowledge of human rights through literature and accommodate their newly attained knowledge to real life events. Further research that would be interesting to embark on is a literary analysis the complete The Hunger Games trilogy through the contextualization of the UDHR and through a critical literacy lens.

The literary analysis in the present study together with the critical literacy theory provided an insight to how the dystopian genre and *The Hunger Games* could contribute to much needed distancing for students in the reading process. This distancing from reality could help them in their developing of critical literacy since the novel depicts a dystopian future and something that has not happened but hypothetically could.
Works Cited


[link](file:///C:/Users/Mattias/Downloads/war_peace_and_justice_in_pan.pdf)  


[link](https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/literatureandthebrain/files/2017/01/Kidd13.pdf)  

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Appendices

Appendix A The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1.
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2.
Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3.
Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4.
No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5.
No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6.
Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7.
All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8.
Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9.
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10.
Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.
(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12.
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13.
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14.
(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15.
(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16.
(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17.
(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18.
Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in
community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19.
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20.
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21.
(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22.
Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23.
(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24.
Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25.
(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.
Article 26.
(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27.
(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28.
Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29.
(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30.
Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.
Appendix B Syllabus for English 7

English 7
ENGENG07

English 7
The course English 7 covers points 1–5 under the heading Aim of the subject.

Core content
Teaching in the course should cover the following core content:

Content of communication
- Theoretical and complex subject areas, also of a more scientific nature, related to students' education, chosen specialisation area, societal issues and working life; thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; cultural expressions in modern times and historically, such as literary periods.
- Societal 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.

Reception
- Spoken language, also with different social and dialect features, and texts, including complex and formal texts which relate, discuss, argue, report, describe and investigate, also via film and other media.
- Coherent spoken language and conversations of different kinds, such as debates, in-depth reports and lectures.
- Contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama.
- Texts of different kinds and for different purposes, such as agreements, in-depth articles and scientific texts.
- Strategies to take in and structure information in larger amounts of text or longer sequences of spoken language.
- Strategies for drawing conclusions about the spoken language and texts in terms of attitudes, perspectives, purposes and values, and to understand implied meaning.
- How oral and written communications in different genres are built up. How stylistics and rhetorical devices are used for different purposes and how language is used as an instrument to exercise power.

Production and interaction
- Oral and written production and interaction in different situations and for different purposes where students argue from different perspectives, apply, reason, assess, investigate, negotiate and give reasons for their views.
- Oral and written communications in a chosen specialisation area.
- Strategies for using different types of sources, with source-critical awareness and established ways of citing sources within the chosen specialisation area and in other areas.

- Strategies and modern technology to participate in, lead and document conversations and written communications in various media, such as in work processes and negotiation situations related to social and working life.

- Use of basic stylistic and rhetorical concepts.

- Processing of language and structure in their own and others' communications, in formal and complex contexts, and to create adaptation to genre, style and purpose.